

**Sovereign Grace Churches Council of Elders Meeting
Orlando, Florida, October 1-2, 2018**

This document is a summary of the latest SGC Council of Elders meeting.

1. **Call to Order.** Mark Prater (Mark), executive director, called to order the meeting on Monday, October 1, 2018 in Orlando, Florida at 12.30pm.
2. **New Churches Recognized.** Mark Prater recognized new churches joining Sovereign Grace: Wilmington, DE; Bozeman, MT; Newark, DE; Des Moines, IA; Kingston, Jamaica; and Ndola, Zambia.
3. **Roll Call.** Mark conducted a roll call. 80 of 84 total delegates were present, representing a quorum.
4. **State of the Union of Sovereign Grace Churches.** Mark gave the annual State of the Union address for Sovereign Grace Churches.
5. **Recognize Rules Committee.** The Rules Committee has three members from the Polity Committee. The members for this meeting were Marty Machowski, Shawn Powers, and Daniel Baker. Mark also reviewed The Modern Rules of Order approved in 2017 for debate.
6. **Affirmation vote for Polity Committee members.** The following elders were affirmed by written ballot to fill open positions the Polity Committee: Devon Kauflin, Aaron Law, and Shawn Powers.
7. **Affirmation vote for Court of Appeal members.** The following elders were affirmed by written ballot to fill open positions on the Court of Appeals: Adam Campbell and Ed O'Mara.
8. **Vote for Executive Committee members.** The delegates voted by written ballot on two open positions for the Executive Committee from the following four candidates: Greg Dirnburger, Ken Mellinger, Dave Odom, and Brendan Willis. Elected on the first ballot were Ken Mellinger and Dave Odom.
9. **Statement on Child Sexual Abuse.** The delegates voted to approve this statement (*attached*) which is also available on our website.
10. **Executive Committee Update.** Jon Payne, Chairman, gave an update from the Executive Committee.
11. **Polity Committee Update.** Phil Sasser, Chairman, gave an update from the Polity Committee.
12. **Proposed Amendments to the Book of Church Order (BCO).** Mark moderated the presentation of proposed amendments to the BCO. Amendments to the BCO are governed by Section 15.3.3 and require a simple majority vote to be adopted. The BCO, as amended is available on our website. ***The approved amendments are attached.***
13. **Theology Committee Update.** Jeff Purswell, chair, gave an update from the Theology Committee including a reminder of the process for approval of the re-write of the Statement of Faith. Based on

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this process, Sections 7-10 were provisionally approved by unanimous voice vote. The BCO now requires $\frac{3}{4}$ of the church regions to approve these sections. The Theology Committee hopes to present the final three sections review and approval at the 2019 CoE meeting.

14. **End of Meeting on October 1.** The CoE ended their session and agreed to reconvene the next morning, October 2, 2018, at 9am.
15. **Roll Call on October 2.** At 9am on October 2, 2018, the CoE reconvened. Mark conducted a roll call. 70 of 83 delegates were present, representing a quorum.
16. **Working Group to Study Extra-Local Leadership.** The delegates approved a new business motion asking the Leadership Team to appoint a working group to study extra-local leadership and how it is expressed in the BCO and to present a report at the 2019 CoE Meeting.
17. **Proposed Amendments to the Book of Church Order (BCO).** Additional Amendments to the BCO were presented and approved (see point 12 of these minutes). The BCO, as amended, is available on our website.
18. **New Business Motion on Ordination Process.** Aaron Law presented a motion asking the Polity Committee to work with the Leadership Team to develop language on ordination process for church planters. The motion was approved by voice vote.
19. **Vote to Affirm Sovereign Grace FYE August 31, 2019 Budget.** Mark presented the FY19 budget for affirmation by the CoE. The Executive Committee approved the budget on July 19, 2018. The budget was approved by voice vote.
20. **Executive Director Update.** Mark updated the CoE on current priorities of the Leadership Team.
21. **Meeting Adjourned.** The meeting was adjourned on Tuesday afternoon.

Sovereign Grace Statement on Child Sexual Abuse

Background

Child sexual abuse is a terrible reality in our fallen world. Sexual abuse in any form is grieving, because abuse is committed against people made in the image of God. Therefore, it constitutes a sin against God himself. Child sexual abuse is widespread in our world today, with as many as 1 in 5 women and 1 in 10 men worldwide reporting having been sexually abused as children¹. Further, child sexual abuse survivors often bear this heavy burden alone, dealing with the effects of sexual abuse for the rest of their lives.

The prevalence of sexual abuse means that churches are not exempt from the reality of sexual abuse among us, and survivors of abuse are an important part of our lives and our churches. As a family of churches, we must be prepared to minister to survivors of abuse in a manner that honors Christ and promotes justice, and to protect children to the best of our ability.

Biblical Basis for Our Response

The gospel of Jesus and the example of our Savior must shape our response to the reality of child sexual abuse. The church and its shepherds are charged with imitating the Chief Shepherd in these attributes:

Compassion: As a compassionate and loving Savior, Christ grieves at the effects of sin, and our churches should grieve with anyone who has been sinned against as a victim of abuse (Romans 12:15).

Justice: As a just ruler, Christ hears the cries of the oppressed (Exodus 22:21–24) and delegates authority to government to punish evildoers and promote righteousness (Romans 13:4). We must cooperate with God-given governmental authorities for the promotion of justice.

Healing: As the great Redeemer, Christ heals the terrible effects of sin (Isaiah 53:4–5) and will one day wipe away every tear through his plan to restore all things in him (Rev 21:4). Our churches are called to be places where every survivor of abuse finds hope on a path toward healing in this life, even as they look forward to the complete restoration and redemption of all things.

Protection: As head of the church, Christ uses his strength to protect his flock (Isaiah 40:10–11). We must strive to be a place of safety for children and abuse survivors alike.

¹ *Child Maltreatment* Fact Sheet. World Health Organization. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs150/en/>. Updated January 2014.

Sovereign Grace Statement on Child Sexual Abuse

Affirmations

Given the prevalence of child sexual abuse and our Savior's example, we affirm these convictions as a union of churches:

Compassion

- We affirm that our churches must be places of compassion and love for survivors of abuse, thereby imitating our compassionate Savior.

Justice

- We affirm that anyone aware of child sexual abuse or allegations of abuse—whether occurring inside or outside the church—must report such abuse or allegations to duly appointed, God-ordained civil authorities. We exhort each of our churches to make all members aware of this responsibility before God to defend the oppressed and punish evildoers. We believe this course of action fulfills legal and moral responsibilities to protect children, thereby promoting justice that honors Christ.
- We affirm that our churches must proactively cooperate with all law enforcement efforts to bring perpetrators of abuse to justice, thereby protecting children and promoting justice that honors Christ.

Healing

- We affirm that our church leaders must give special attention to the care of victims of sexual abuse with sensitivity, skill, and compassion. In this care, we desire to point abuse survivors to the ultimate restoration found in Christ. Each of our churches should take advantage of opportunities to use resources or counselors with special training in the area of child sexual abuse.

Protection

- We affirm that our churches must maintain robust child protection policies, implementing effective safety systems designed to protect children or youth, thereby striving to protect children involved in church programs as Christ protects the church.

With the affirmation of these convictions, we urge our churches to the faithful fulfillment of this task, conscious that at the final judgment, each one's work will be tested and each will answer to Christ. While our churches are diverse and distinct, we stand united in seeking to proactively protect children from sexual abuse. May our efforts be aided by God's grace and undertaken for his glory.

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Approved BCO Amendments

BCO AMENDMENTS APPROVED

AMENDMENT TO BCO SECTION: 1.4

PRESENTER: Marty Machowski

PROPOSAL:

RATIONALE: As currently written, BCO 1.4 describes elders as the "primary" but not sole governance structure in a local church. Changing the word "primary" to "sole" more accurately reflects our polity, where Elders uniquely govern the church and prevents any misinterpretation. The first redundant sentence is also removed. A reference to BCO 9.5 was added for churches without elders.

APPROVED WORDING:

1.4 The elders of each local church have sole responsibility to govern its affairs under the Lordship of Christ and the authority of Scripture.

AMENDMENT TO BCO SECTION: 9.7 and 9.3.6.1

PRESENTER: Daniel Baker

PROPOSAL: Add the phrase "of an elder" in the closing sentence of BCO-9.3.6.1 and the opening sentence of BCO-9.7.

RATIONALE: This addresses the authorial intent of the BCO section, which was not written to address all church discipline situations within our churches but only those involving elders.

APPROVED WORDING FOR BOTH:

Ordination and discipline of an elder in any Sovereign Grace church is valid and recognized by all other Sovereign Grace churches.

AMENDMENT 3 TO BCO SECTION: 15.1 and 15.1.1

PRESENTER: Daniel Baker

PROPOSAL: This clarifies the confusion currently in the BCO about what the Council of Elders is: Is it a meeting or a group of elders? It is both.

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Approved BCO Amendments

RATIONALE: Currently the BCO speaks of the Council of Elders only in terms of its being a meeting but not a governing body. This amendment clarifies that the CoE is also a standing body that can act throughout the year as needed. Also, we want churches to be able to freely designate which elder is a part of that body. These are thus "designated representatives" from member churches.

APPROVED WORDING:

15.1 Formation

A designated representative from the eldership of each church will form the Council of Elders. Churches whose membership exceeds 500 adult (18 or more years old) members may designate an additional representative elder.

15.1.1 Each Sovereign Grace church whose elders have signed the Partnership Agreement and has been accepted and approved by its Regional Assembly of Elders is a qualified member of the Sovereign Grace Churches and may send its representative elder(s) to the Council of Elders meeting.

AMENDMENT TO BCO SECTION: 15.3.1.2 and 15.3.1.4

PROPOSAL: Need to clarify when term limits begin (and end) for the Polity, Theology, Nominating, and Executive Committees. This amendment covers the executive committee, making 17.3.3 and 17.3.5 redundant. Thus, 17.3.3. and 17.3.5 will be removed if this Amendment is approved. Further, this amendment proposes moving the clause regarding the mid-term replacement from 15.3.1.4 (in the Theology Committee section) to 15.3.1.2 as it applies to all committees.

RATIONALE: This amendment brings clarity as to the effective start date for terms and when the terms of replacement committee members begin. It also provides details for the removal of a committee member by the Council of Elders.

PRESENTER: Marty Machowski

APPROVED WORDING:

15.3.1.2 Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee of the Council of Elders (BCO- 16.3) will nominate candidates to the committee. All committee candidates must be Sovereign Grace elders, although they need not be members of the Council. The candidates must each be confirmed by a simple majority vote of the Council of Elders.

15.3.1.2.a Terms of service will begin January 1.

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15.3.1.2.b If a committee member is unable to complete his term, his committee will elect a replacement who will serve until the Council of Elders can meet to elect someone to a regular term.

15.3.1.2.c Upon recommendation of the committee or three members of the council of Elders, committee members may be removed from office by a simple majority vote of the Council of Elders, effective immediately.

15.3.1.2.d The Chairman of each Committee has authority to introduce business relevant to his Committee in meetings of the Council of Elders, even if he is not a member of the Council.

15.3.1.4 Theology Committee

The Council of Elders will also create a Theology Committee. This Committee will be chaired by the Director of Theology and Training and shall consist of 6 additional members whose terms will be 3 years each. There will be no limit on the number of terms that an elder may serve. The mandate of the Theology Committee will be to review the *Statement of Faith*, to propose amendments to it if necessary, to advise the Council on amendments to the *Statement of Faith* which may be proposed by other Council members (cf. BCO-15.3.2), to propose and amend Ordination Standards, and to fulfill whatever theological needs that Sovereign Grace Churches may have, as deemed so by the Council of Elders.

AMENDMENT TO BCO SECTION: 15.3.3.2.e.5

PRESENTER: Daniel Baker

PROPOSAL: Determine that it is a $\frac{3}{4}$ vote that is required for revising SoF sections.

RATIONALE: The section did not specify the kind of vote required to approve the revised section. This fixes that issue. The $\frac{3}{4}$ majority vote is consistent with the rest of the BCO stipulations on Statement of Faith issues.

APPROVED WORDING:

15.3.3.2.e.5 Once all proposed changes have been debated and voted upon, a three-fourths majority vote is required to approve the newly revised (individual) section.

AMENDMENT TO BCO SECTION: 15.3.3.2.g

PRESENTER: Paul Buckley

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RATIONALE: The length of time a Regional Assembly has to adopt the statement of faith needs to be established. One year seems a reasonable window for a Regional Assembly to consider and vote on a new section to the Statement of Faith. It allows enough time should they have difficulty meeting while keeping it from being unnecessarily delayed.

APPROVED WORDING:

15.3.3.2.g Sections that receive a three-fourths vote are then sent to the Regional Assemblies to be ratified within one year. At least three-fourths of the Regional Assemblies must approve the new sections by a simple majority vote.

AMENDMENT TO BCO SECTION: 18.4.1.4

PRESENTER: Paul Buckley

RATIONALE: Currently, the Executive Director is allowed to designate a special chair for Council of Elders meetings. We also need a provision for choosing a special chair if the Executive Director is somehow incapacitated or unable to attend.

APPROVED WORDING:

18.4.1.4 Serve as Chair for the Council of Elders, overseeing official meetings and coordinating all its key functions. He may temporarily appoint a Special Chair of his choosing to serve in his stead. Should the Executive Director be unable to appoint a Special Chair when needed, the Executive Committee will appoint one of their choosing;

AMENDMENT TO BCO SECTION: 24.6.6

PRESENTER: Phil Sasser

PROPOSAL: This amendment attempts to bring clarity regarding public pronouncements in the discipline process of an elder. An eldership can publicly inform the church after a Panel makes its recommendation.

RATIONALE: In 2016 the Council of Elders amended the BCO to allow pastors to issue public statements to be made after a panel had issued its decision without waiting until an appeal is made. We failed to also appropriately amend this section in 2016. This amendment corrects that failure.

APPROVED WORDING:

24.6.6 Due process must be followed and a presumption of innocence granted until judgment is rendered by the Panel. Public pronouncements

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about a pastor's qualifications must not be made until after the Panel issues its decision.

AMENDMENT TO BCO SECTION: 9.1, 9.6 & 9.7.4

PRESENTER: Joel Peabody

PROPOSAL: Add guidance for both the local eldership and the region about what to do if a man already ordained has significant new exceptions to the Statement of Faith or BCO that are not resolved. The current language seems to require some unspecified action impacting a man's ordination status just as it would have prevented him from being ordained during his initial evaluation.

RATIONALE: Just as exceptions to the Statement of Faith and to the explicitly mandated practices of the Book of Church Order may prevent a region from approving a man's ordination within Sovereign Grace Churches, significant new exceptions that are not resolved may require a region to revoke the man's ordination status within Sovereign Grace Churches. To provide clear guidance, we propose to adjust the language in 9.1, 9.6 and 9.7. There is a more specific rationale below for each section.

RATIONALE FOR CHANGES TO 9.1: To provide clear guidance on revoking ordination status within SGC, this amendment helps by providing a clear definition of what ordination is and how it is maintained within our family of churches.

APPROVED WORDING:

9.1 Introduction

Ordination in Sovereign Grace churches is that act by which men are set apart to the office of elder (Acts 14:23). It is the church's solemn approval of and public attestation to a man's inward call, his gifts, and his appointment to pastoral ministry. Before a man becomes ordained to the office of elder, he has been first called, gifted, and chosen through divine initiative (Acts 20:28, Eph. 4:11). In Sovereign Grace, appointing a man to the office of elder involves a collaborative effort between the elders and members of a local church and the Regional Assembly of Elders.

The purpose of a process for ordination is to simply appoint men to this office who resemble the New Testament criteria for the office (especially 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). We are not omniscient and do not know the future, but a process helps us not to miss obvious deficiencies in a man who desires this office.

A man ordained by a Sovereign Grace church retains his ordination status in Sovereign Grace unless the Regional Assembly of Elders revokes it his status as a result of discipline or significant exception to the Statement of Faith or explicitly mandated practices in the Book of Church Order. An ordained man not currently

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serving as an elder may perform sacerdotal duties with the approval of an elder in a Sovereign Grace church.

RATIONALE FOR CHANGES TO 9.6: If an elder takes exception to the Statement of Faith and/or to the explicitly mandated practices of the Book of Church Order, both the local eldership and the region need guidance on how to examine the man's exceptions and address his ordination status within SGC, should significant exceptions be unresolved. Because revoking a man's ordination status is a weighty matter, this action will require a three-fourths vote.

APPROVED WORDING OF 9.6:

9.6 Taking New Exceptions to the Statement of Faith or the explicitly mandated practices of the Book of Church Order

Any time that an elder registers new exceptions to the *Statement of Faith* or the explicitly mandated practices of the *Book of Church Order*, he must inform his eldership and the Regional Assembly of Elders. These exceptions must be submitted in writing, and the elder's exceptions shall be kept on record with the local eldership, the Regional Assembly of Elders, and Sovereign Grace.

The local eldership shall first investigate the exception(s) before presenting the elder's exception(s) to the Regional Assembly of Elders. The Regional Assembly of Elders shall then determine the significance of the elder's exception(s). If the Regional Assembly of Elders determines that the exception is trivial or semantic and not substantively different from any doctrine in the *Statement of Faith* or explicitly mandated practices in *The Book of Church Order*, then that decision shall be kept on record with the elder's exceptions. However, if it is determined that the elder substantially disagrees with any of the doctrines of the *Statement of Faith* or any explicitly mandated practices of *The Book of Church Order*, the Ordination Committee shall recommend to him a course of study on the relevant doctrines and principles, if the elder is willing, in the hopes that his exceptions might be overcome.

If the elder's exceptions are not overcome, the Regional Assembly of Elders shall vote to revoke his ordination status by three-fourths vote and determine the timing of the revocation. The elder is thereby removed from the local eldership.

RATIONALE FOR CHANGES TO 9.7: If an ordained man in consideration for eldership submits exception to the *Statement of Faith* and/or to the explicitly mandated practices of the *Book of Church Order*, both the eldership receiving him and their region need guidance on how to examine the man's exceptions and address his ordination status within SGC, should significant exceptions be unresolved.

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The changes to 9.7.1 provide clarity that it is the receiving eldership and its region who much examine the man's exceptions.

The changes to 9.7.4 guide the receiving Regional Assembly of Elders to refer the matter back to the man's local eldership to address unresolved exceptions as described in BCO 9.6. In addition, the word "candidate" has been replaced by ordained man for consistency and the word "scruples", which may be archaic, has been replaced with the word "exception" for clarity.

APPROVED WORDING OF 9.7.1 and 9.7.4:

9.7.1 The elders review the man's qualifications as much as they can determine.

The local eldership bears primary responsibility for confirming that the life and doctrine of any ordained man they seek to install as an elder continues to meet the biblical character qualifications (cf. BCO-3) and continues to agree with the Sovereign Grace Churches' *Statement of Faith* and the explicitly mandated practices of the *Book of Church Order* (cf. BCO-9.3.6 above). Elders will solicit input from those who know the man and pay special attention to his previous service as an elder. Appropriate counsel may be sought from the Sovereign Grace Regional Leader(s), Regional Ordination Committee(s) and other elders across the region(s).

The ordained man must reaffirm in writing the statement in BCO-9.3.6.3. If the man has any reservations with or takes exception to the *Statement of Faith* or the explicitly mandated practices of the *Book of Church Order*, he must inform the eldership calling him and their Regional Assembly of Elders. The local eldership receiving him shall first investigate the exception before presenting the ordained man to the Regional Assembly of Elders. These exceptions must be submitted in writing, and each elder's exceptions shall be kept on record with the eldership receiving him, their Regional Assembly of Elders, and Sovereign Grace.

9.7.4 Approval by the Regional Assembly of Elders

If the ordained man is not a current member of the Regional Assembly of Elders, the local elders will put forth the ordained man to the Regional Assembly of Elders who, with input from the Regional Ordination Committee, will vote to affirm the transfer of his ordination status with a simple majority.

The Regional Assembly may only reject the transfer of ordination because of either heterodoxy (i.e., deviation from the Sovereign Grace *Statement of Faith*), scandalous or serious sin (BCO-9.3.6.5), or significant exception to the explicitly mandated practices of the *Book of Church Order*

If the ordained man has registered any new exceptions to either the *Statement of Faith* or the explicitly mandated practices of the *Book of Church Order*, the

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Regional Assembly of Elders shall determine the significance of the man's exceptions. If the exception is a trivial or semantic and not substantively different from any doctrine in the *Statement of Faith* or explicitly mandated practices in the *Book of Church Order*, then the man may sign the above statements and be put forward for a vote on the transfer of his ordination status. However, if it is determined that the ordained man substantially disagrees with any of the doctrines of the *Statement of Faith* or explicitly mandated practices in the *Book of Church Order*, his ordination transfer may not be approved. The Ordination Committee shall recommend to him a course of study on the relevant doctrines and principles, if the ordained man is willing, in the hopes that his exceptions might be overcome. If his exceptions are not overcome, the Regional Assembly of Elders shall refer him back to his current eldership to address the new exception(s) as described in BCO-9.6.

AMENDMENT TO BCO SECTION: 9.9 (new section).

PRESENTER: Phil Sasser

PROPOSAL: To match the ROP-3.1.30, add a new section in BCO-9 about an elder resigning for non-disciplinary reasons. This would require that a Moderator of JC be appointed to make sure it was fair and just.

RATIONALE: To ensure that every voluntary resignation is fairly and freely agreed upon. This amendment will discourage the "changing of the reasons" which sometimes occurs after resignations.

APPROVED WORDING:

9.9 The Voluntary Resignation of an Elder from Office

Circumstances may arise such that an elder chooses to resign from office willingly, whether confessing to serious sin, acknowledging significant doctrinal disagreement, or for personal reasons.

9.9.1 Resignation Agreement: A written Resignation Agreement must be created, which defines the terms and conditions of the elder's resignation (e.g., timing, reason, severance). This agreement is between the local elders and the resigning elder. The resigning elder, the local eldership, the Regional Leader, the Chairman of the Regional Judicial Review Committee, and the Sovereign Grace Director of Church Development all must receive a copy of the Resignation Agreement.

9.9.2 While this is a local church situation, a Moderator of Just Cause appointed by the Regional Judicial Review Committee must review the matter to determine whether or not the resignation is fair and mutually agreed upon.

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9.9.3 The review must be in keeping with Rules of Procedure, addressing the issues found there. The following questions must be answered.

9.9.3.1 Are each party's reasons for the resignation clearly stated in the Resignation Agreement?

9.9.3.2 Is there a clear understanding on the part of both parties regarding the implications and conditions of the Resignation Agreement?

9.9.3.3 Is the standing of the resigning elder's ordination status clearly stated and agreed upon in the Resignation Agreement?

9.9.3.4 Is the Resignation Agreement in keeping with the stipulations of the Sovereign Grace Churches Book of Church Order, especially BCO-9 and BCO-24?

***The new BCO-9.9 will be added as a cross-reference where "any resignation agreement" is mentioned in the last paragraph of BCO-24.1: "any resignation agreement (BCO-9.9)."

AMENDMENT TO BCO SECTION: 12.3

PRESENTER: Shawn Powers

PROPOSAL: BCO-12.3 was approved at the 2017 CoE, but it was also felt that "endorse gender changes" was too vague and we needed tighter language. See the Nashville Statement for possible wordings.

RATIONALE: Given the significance of issues connected to marriage, it seems essential to add clear language in our most important policy document about it. Amendment 12 does not cover all matters related to marriage, many of which are covered by the Statement of Faith. Instead, it seeks to make clear who an elder of Sovereign Grace can and cannot marry. Because of the fluid nature of sexuality in culture, it is likely that this proposed amendment (if ratified) will need updating in the future as new definitions and terms about sexuality and marriage emerge.

APPROVED WORDING:

12.3 Solemnization of Marriage

12.3.1 Marriage is an institution designed and ordained by God though not a sacrament of the church.

12.3.2 The biblical definition of marriage is the exclusive sexual, procreative, and lifelong covenantal union of one person born biologically male and one person born biologically female.

12.3.3 Sovereign Grace Churches prohibits its elders from officiating and affirming any marriage outside of the biblical

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definition of marriage set forth in BCO-12.3.2—including but not limited to same sex-marriages or unions, polygamous marriages, transgender marriages, or marriages where one or both individuals have undergone a gender change. Sovereign Grace Churches believes there is a God-ordained link between one's biological sex and one's self-conception as male or female.

AMENDMENT 13 TO BCO SECTION: 12.4

PRESENTER: Marty Machowski

PROPOSAL: Clarify that pastors are mandatory reporters in SG.

RATIONALE: While the mandatory reporting laws differ from state to state, pastors have a higher moral obligation toward the protection of children from sexual abuse. This amendment ensures that all cases of sexual abuse are reported and that every church in Sovereign Grace trains their staff and volunteers in child sexual abuse awareness. This proposed amendment is presently undergoing multiple legal reviews. The findings of these reviews will be presented to the Council of Elders before this amendment is formally considered.

APPROVED WORDING:

12.4 Reporting the Sexual Abuse of a Child (or a minor under 18 years of age).

Sovereign Grace churches and their elders have a moral obligation to protect children.

While reporting requirements related to child abuse vary from state to state, a Sovereign Grace elder who, in the course of his ministry involvement in a Sovereign Grace Church, has cause to believe that a child is the victim of sexual abuse then he must report such abuse to the appropriate child protection or law enforcement authorities.

This obligation exists whether the incidence occurs outside or inside the church or ministry. (Example of an 'outside' incident: a child or teen reports that he or she has been sexually abused by a family member or friend. Example of an 'inside' incident: a child or teen reports that he or she has been sexually abused by a church staff member or volunteer.)

In addition, if a Sovereign Grace elder has cause to believe from an adult who was a victim of sexual abuse as a child that another child is currently at risk for sexual abuse by the same perpetrator, then the elder must notify the appropriate child protection or law enforcement authorities.

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Each Sovereign Grace church must train church staff members and children's ministry workers to promote sexual abuse awareness and the safety of children involved in ministry programs and is solely responsible for the content and participation in such training.

By this we hope to protect children and promote justice in all our churches .

AMENDMENT TO BCO SECTION: BCO 15.2.2

PRESENTER: Paul Buckley

PROPOSAL: This specifies that the BCO can be changed at a special meeting of the CoE but that SoF changes must be made at the annual meeting of the CoE. It also specifies the time-tables for such a special meeting.

RATIONALE: Currently there is no language under the section describing a special meeting that allows BCO amendments or SOF amendments to be addressed. These are only addressed under the annual meeting described in BCO 15. It would be reasonable to interpret, currently, that these amendments must only be addressed at the annual meeting. This seriously inhibits our ability to act as needed via a special meeting of the Council of Elders. This proposal allows special meetings of the Council of Elders to address BCO amendments. It continues to restrict SoF changes to the annual Council of Elders, due to the more detailed process necessary for their approval. It uses an accelerated time table for Special Meetings, given their inherent urgency.

APPROVED WORDING:

15.2.2 Members of the Council of Elders may move to hold other meetings if they are necessary. If one fourth of the Council of Elders calls for a Special Meeting of the Council of Elders. Those elders initiating the request must present a unified agenda to the Executive Committee along with their petition for the meeting. The Executive Committee must schedule the Special Meeting of the Council of Elders within sixty days of the request. The Executive Committee will send the proposed agenda and any supporting documentation to all Council members at least thirty days prior to the Special Meeting if the agenda does not involve any amendments to the BCO. If the agenda involves proposed amendments to the BCO, the elders initiating the request must submit the agenda along with the proposed amendments to the Executive Committee 45 days ahead of the meeting. The Executive Committee will then send them to the Council of Elders 30 days ahead of the meeting. Amendments to the Statement of Faith shall only be presented at the annual Council of Elders meeting.

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15.2.4 The Executive Committee, by a majority vote of the Committee members, may call a Special Meeting of the Council of Elders if it deems it necessary. Notice of the Special Meeting will be sent to all Council members thirty days prior to the meeting with a detailed agenda of the Special Meeting and any supporting documents pertinent to the Council's business if the agenda does not involve any amendments to the BCO. If the agenda involves proposed amendments to the BCO, the Executive Committee will send them along with the agenda to the Council of Elders 30 days ahead of the meeting. Amendments to the Statement of Faith shall only be presented at the annual Council of Elders meeting.

AMENDMENT TO BCO SECTION: 18.3.1

PRESENTER: Jared Mellinger

PROPOSAL: Clarify the mandate of the Leadership Team.

RATIONALE: Recognizing that the Council of Elders (CoE) is the highest governing extra-local authority in Sovereign Grace, they, according to section 18.1 in *The Book of Church Order* (BCO), appoint and empower the Leadership Team "for the expressed purpose of providing leadership that is Biblical, humble, faith-filled, discerning, and gospel-centered." Therefore, the CoE delegates the authority and responsibility to the Leadership Team to lead our family of churches. Section 18.1 affirms, "Leadership is a gift from the Lord and is to be honored and cultivated in our ecclesiastical union." The purpose of these amendments is to further clarify the nature and scope of Leadership Team responsibilities, including times of challenge and crisis, so that leadership is honored and cultivated in our ecclesiastical union and so the Leadership Team can continue to provide the inspiring, influential, discerning, and efficient leadership that our BCO envisions and our union of churches needs.

There is some confusion and disagreement on whether the actions of the Leadership Team ought to be strictly limited to those items explicitly stated in the BCO, and whether they are in violation of the BCO if they take actions that are not explicitly mandated by it. The goal of this amendment is to make clear that this list is not a comprehensive description of Leadership Team activity, and therefore should not be used as the exclusive grounds to determine whether there has been a failure to uphold or submit to the BCO. This is in keeping with 1.13, which states, "Subscription to The Book of Church Order requires elders to comply with what it explicitly mandates and refrain from what it explicitly forbids, while operating in Biblical wisdom according to Sovereign Grace values in all other matters."

PROPOSAL: Add the statement below to 18.3.1.

APPROVED WORDING:

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To facilitate and lead as a team in executing the central aspects of our mission according to the values of Sovereign Grace under the oversight of the Executive Committee in partnership with our churches, their elders, and the Regional Leaders. The following list represents the primary responsibilities of the Leadership Team, but is not intended to be an exhaustive description of their actions. Members of the Leadership Team must comply with what The Book of Church Order explicitly mandates and refrain from what it explicitly forbids, while operating in Biblical wisdom in all other matters.

AMENDMENT TO BCO SECTION: 18.3.3, 18.3.4

PRESENTER: Jared Mellinger

PROPOSAL: Clarify the mission of the Leadership Team

RATIONALE: There is some confusion and disagreement on whether the BCO precludes or encourages recent actions and statements by the Leadership Team. Our union of churches would therefore benefit from clearer statements in our BCO regarding the scope of Leadership Team responsibilities and appropriate actions. The goal of these amendments is to ensure that our ecclesiastical union continues to benefit from the gift of leadership during times of controversy and crisis.

APPROVED WORDING:

18.3.3, "With respect to doctrine and values," to add the following statement as a new section: "To help the pastors of Sovereign Grace process controversies and current events with wisdom and biblical discernment."

18.3.4, "With respect to partnership," to add the following statement as a new section: "To provide leadership in concert with the Executive Committee when timely actions or statements are needed to serve the churches of Sovereign Grace, and to handle the immediate needs that arise."

AMENDMENT TO BCO SECTION: 18.3.4.4

PRESENTER: Paul Buckley and Jared Mellinger

PROPOSAL: To bring more clarity to the role of the Leadership Team with respect to communicating on behalf of SG in different contexts.

RATIONALE: There has been some lack of clarity on the nature and scope of the Leadership Teams responsibilities related to communicating to the broader world. This has led to confusion and dissension amidst crises. To avoid this in the future and further strengthen our union, we need to be as clear as possible on the nature and scope of the Leadership Team. This amendment is written from the conviction that the highest

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authority in SG is the Council of Elders but the CoE has delegated and commissioned the Leadership Team to communicate under their authority according to the explicit statements of the BCO.

APPROVED WORDING:

18.3.4.4 To communicate, as they deem necessary, on behalf of Sovereign Grace Churches to the broader world in regards to the shared values, beliefs, policies, and standards of Sovereign Grace Churches contained in the *Statement of Faith* and the *Book of Church Order*. They may also communicate, concerning matters such as our practices, history, operations, pastoral conduct, and denominational priorities as well as current or emerging needs.

AMENDMENT TO BCO SECTION: A new 20.4.

PRESENTER: Phil Sasser

PROPOSAL: This amendment is a rewrite of an amendment that was sent back to (the Polity) committee at the 2017 Council of Elders Meeting. The proposal is to create a process by which a Regional Assembly can remove a church from SG if it is in the best interests of all involved.

RATIONALE: Since the Regional Assembly is the body that determines whether or not a church is received into Sovereign Grace Churches, then it should also be the body that determines that a church should be removed. In this amendment, the basis for the church's removal is for reasons not found in the existing language of the BCO such as heterodoxy and scandalous sin. Still there are many possible reasons why it would be unsuitable for a church to remain in Sovereign Grace. The BCO could not possibly anticipate all of the possible reasons. This amendment provides a means for removal of a church that significantly departs from Sovereign Grace vision, mission, values, and practices of Sovereign Grace Churches. It is intentionally broad and unspecific to allow the Regional Assembly greater latitude. The safety for the church is the super-majority required for removal and the appeal provision to the Council of Elders.

APPROVED WORDING:

20.4 The Regional Assembly of Elders, under the guidance of the Regional Leader and in consultation with the Sovereign Grace Director of Church Development, may vote to remove a church from the Region. Such a removal may be wise should the church significantly depart from the vision, mission, values, or practices of Sovereign Grace Churches. Removal involving heterodoxy or scandalous sin is covered by the process mandated in BCO-25.2.10.5.a.

20.4.1 The Process

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The Regional Leader must appoint two elders from the Regional Assembly of Elders to investigate and make assessment of the church. Their assessment must be shared with the church's elder(s) and opportunity given for the church to make appropriate changes. Should sufficient change not occur, the assessing elders shall make recommendation to the Regional Assembly of Elders to remove the church. Removal would require a three-fourths majority vote of the Regional Assembly of Elders. The Regional Assembly of Elders must give a written basis for its decision.

20.4.2 An Appeal

The removed church may appeal this decision to the Sovereign Grace Council of Elders at its next regularly scheduled annual meeting. Each party must present their position in writing to the Council of Elders representatives 30 days prior to the Council of Elders Meeting. The Council members may ask question of the parties. A two-thirds majority vote shall be required for the Council of Elders to overrule the decision of the Regional Assembly of Elders.

AMENDMENT TO BCO SECTION: 24.13

PRESENTER: Phil Sasser

PROPOSAL: This amendment creates a new 24.13.1 for times when an elder might be removed for non-judicial reasons (deficiencies in his job performance and/or practical needs of the church).

RATIONALE: This amendment is intended to protect the local church from ineffective pastoral leadership. It gives the authority and a process to a Regional Assembly of Elders to remove or reposition an elder on non-judicial grounds. The current section 24.13 gets renumbered to 24.13.1 and following.

APPROVED WORDING:

24.13 Removal of an Elder(s) for Deficiencies

While not a situation that falls under the jurisdiction of discipline, an eldership may remove one its members from his position (not removing his ordination) for deficiencies in the performance of his duties. In particular, a man may be removed if he is shown to be deficient in the areas of leadership, care, or teaching. These grounds for removal are not of a moral nature and do not represent any deficiency of character, per se, and therefore do not impinge upon his ordination.

24.13.1 By His Local Eldership

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24.13.1.1 The grounds for such removal or repositioning include significant deficiencies in the performance of his duties, significant deficiencies in leadership, pastoral care, teaching and preaching, incompetence, or incapacitation and not on the grounds of scandalous sin or heterodoxy.

24.13.1.2 The local eldership shall work with the Regional Leader to evaluate the elder's opportunity for improvement before proceeding.

24.13.1.3 An elder who is so removed or repositioned, will maintain his ordination status within the Sovereign Grace Churches.

24.13.1.4 Right of Appeal

24.13.1.4.a. If the elder believes the local eldership sinned against him, he will have the right to appeal to the Regional Judicial Review Committee.

24.13.1.4.b. If the elder believes the elders did not follow the procedure outlined above, he has the right to appeal to the Regional Judicial Review Committee.

AMENDMENT TO BCO SECTION: 24.2.2.1

PRESENTER: Leadership Team

PROPOSAL: Expand 24.2.2.1 to make it clearer how a non-member is to bring evidence contributing to a charge against an elder.

RATIONALE: Rationale: Currently, a credible witness from outside of a Sovereign Grace church can bring forward evidence that can be reviewed in determining if a charge should be brought against an elder in a Sovereign Grace church. However, there isn't sufficient clarity as to where, or to whom the witness brings the evidence. Therefore, this amendment seeks to clarify where a non-member brings their evidence that pertains to alleged criminal activity or scandalous sin committed by an elder.

APPROVED WORDING:

24.2.2.1 A credible witness, who is not a member of a Sovereign Grace church, can bring forward evidence of alleged criminal activity or scandalous sin that will be used in evaluating whether a charge should be brought against an elder in a Sovereign Grace church. The witness should bring their evidence to a member or elder of the local church where the accused elder currently serves. If there is only one elder in that local church, then the witness can bring their evidence to the Regional Judicial Review Committee. Contact information for the Regional Judicial Review

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Committee should be provided by the local church or the Regional Leader. If a credible witness, who is not a member of a Sovereign Grace church, doesn't believe sufficient attention was given to their evidence, they should contact the chairman of the Regional Judicial Review Committee to register their complaint. After the evidence is reviewed, and if a charge is to be brought against an elder, it must be leveled by a member, and/or elder in good standing of a Sovereign Grace church.