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## THE 21<sup>ST</sup> GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PCA

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### *On the Necessity of Church Membership in Order to Participate in the Lord's Supper*

That Overture 25 . . . [requesting amendment to *BCO* 58-4 to allow non-church members to the Lord's Table] be answered in the negative, and instruct the Stated Clerk to communicate the following grounds. . . :

- a. In recognition that this is the "Lord's table," 1 Corinthians 10:21, not the table of one church only, *BCO* 58-4 permits "open communion," that is, allowing members in good standing of any evangelical church to partake; and "close communion," which permits only those members of other churches who have been examined and approved by the Session to partake. (It does not permit "closed communion," the practice of excluding all but members of the particular congregation).
- b. In the judgment of charity, we believe that other evangelical churches have examined and found credible the faith of their members and, on the basis of this presumed approval, in "open communion" we invite members of other churches to the Lord's table in our midst. In "close communion," the Session of a particular church itself determines the credibility of a visitor's profession of faith. There is no such available assessment in this life for members of the Invisible Church.
- c. Baptism is into a community of believers, that is a church. Unbaptized people certainly should not be permitted to come to the Table. Of course unbaptized people credibly professing faith in Christ and seeking admittance to the Table should be baptized with all proper speed, and thereupon admitted to the Table. At this point, these communicants are baptized members of a visible church.
- d. One cannot love Christ and eschew His bride. The credible profession of persons unwilling to unite to Christ's Church must be questioned. Any sinful unwillingness to unite with Christ's people should be addressed pastorally (Hebrews 10:25; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17). Those unwilling to unite to Christ's Church are outside the visible body of Christ.
- e. One cannot be subject to Christ and not be subject to the government He has appointed in His Church. Believers become subject to the government of the Church through their covenantal vows of membership (Ephesians 4:11-12; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).
- f. Church discipline is necessary for properly maintaining the Lord's Table; such discipline is unavailable apart from membership in a visible church.

g. This overture implies that there is no biblical ground for the keeping of a roll of members of the visible church, and therefore of people who may partake of the church's sacrament. However, the clear evidence of Scripture is that the church should keep a roll of members. The supreme model for our membership roll is the membership roll of heaven (Exodus 32:32,33; Daniel 12:1; Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 13:8; 20:12,15). The Biblical pattern is for new believers to be "numbered" or "added to" the rolls of the local church (Acts 2:41,47; 6:7; 1 Timothy 5:9). Members could be taken away from the roll (1 Corinthians 5:2)—this indicates more than being physically barred, since even unbelievers could attend Christian worship (1 Corinthians 14:23)—or reinstated (2 Corinthians 2:6-7); it is impossible to have coherent discipline without such a roll. There was a widow's roll for diaconal purposes (1 Timothy 5:9). Elders are to know their sheep, and are accountable for the care of the flock entrusted to them—this demands knowing who they are; that is, it demands a list or roll (Hebrews 13:7,17-19; 1 Thessalonians 5:11-14; 1 Peter 5:2; Acts 20:28). The apostolic church utilized letters of transfer or commendation (Acts 18:27; Romans 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 3:1; 8:23-24); examples of these letters include Philemon and 3 John. Interchurch business was conducted by people with reference letters (1 Corinthians 16:3; 2 Corinthians 8:16-24). We conclude therefore that requiring professed believers to be enrolled as members of an evangelical church as a condition for taking the Lord's Supper is consistent with sound Biblical practice.

*Minutes of the Twenty-First General Assembly*

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