

# Proposed Additions to the Suggested Forms for the Book of Discipline

## VIII The Public Imposition and Removal of Censures

(This document was prepared for the use of sessions of local congregations. Presbyteries using it shall make appropriate adaptations.)

### A. The Manner of Imposing Censure

The power which the exalted Christ gives the rulers of his church is for edification, not destruction. Therefore, when a member is found guilty of a fault deserving censure, the session shall proceed with all tenderness and in the spirit of meekness, each considering himself lest he also be tempted, with the hope of reclaiming or gaining the offender. They should impose censure with great solemnity so that all might fear, so that it may be a means of impressing the offender's heart with a proper sense of his sin, and so that by God's gracious blessing it may lead him to repentance. They should do all this in accordance with the provisions of the *Book of Discipline*.

### B. Indefinite Suspension

1. When the judicatory has passed sentence indefinitely suspending an officer or a member of the church from privileges, it is fitting that when the sentence is announced, it be in a gathering of the congregation.

2. The one making the announcement may begin by setting forth the teaching of Scripture concerning God's fatherly discipline (cf. Hebrews 12:7-11), the church as God's instrument in discipline (cf. Matthew 18:17 ff.) and the obligation upon the church to fulfil this role (1 Corinthians 5:1-13).

3. He may then announce the censure using the following or similar words:

"Whereas [name] has been found guilty by [his/her] own confession, or by sufficient proof (as the case may be), of the sin of [here name the particular offence], we have suspended [him/her] from the privileges of church membership (and/or, as appropriate, the privileges of his office), until [he/she] gives satisfactory evidence of repentance."

4. To this the judicatory shall add such advice, admonition, or rebuke, as it may judge necessary; and it shall conclude the whole with prayer to Almighty God, that he would accompany this act of discipline with his blessing.

5. The indefinite suspension of an officer or other member of the church shall be announced to the church in which membership or office is held.

6. After a person has been thus suspended, the minister and elders should frequently converse with him, as well as pray for him in private, that it would please God to grant him repentance. And, especially in connection with celebrating the Lord's Supper, they should offer up public prayers for any who have shut themselves out from this holy communion.

7. When the judicatory is satisfied as to the reality of the repentance of any such suspended member, it shall permit him to profess his repentance, and restore him to fellowship (and/or, as appropriate, the privileges of office) in the presence of the church.

8. If a suspended person fails to manifest repentance for his offence, and continues in impenitence, it may become the duty of the judicatory to excommunicate (and/or, as appropriate, depose him from office) without further trial.

56  
57  
58  
59  
60  
61  
62  
63  
64  
65  
66  
67  
68  
69  
70  
71  
72  
73  
74  
75  
76  
77  
78  
79  
80  
81  
82  
83  
84  
85  
86  
87  
88  
89  
90  
91  
92  
93  
94  
95  
96  
97  
98  
99  
100  
101  
102  
103  
104  
105  
106  
107  
108  
109  
110  
111

### C. Excommunication and Deposition

1. When the judicatory has passed sentence imposing excommunication, with or without previous suspension, it is fitting that when the sentence is announced, it be in a gathering of the congregation.

2. The minister should then make a brief statement of the several steps which have been taken, with respect to the offender, announcing that the session has found it necessary to excommunicate him. He should begin by showing from Scripture (for example, Matthew 18:15–18 and 1 Corinthians 5:1–5) the power of the church to cast out unfaithful members. He should briefly explain the nature, use, and consequences of excommunication.

3. He shall then announce the censure. He may use the following or similar words:

“Whereas [name] has [by (his/her) own confession, or by sufficient proof, as the case may be] been found guilty of [here name the particular offence], and after much admonition and prayer refuses to hear the church and manifests no evidence of repentance; therefore, in the name and by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, [he/she] has been excluded from the communion of the church.”

4. He may instruct and warn the congregation in the following or similar words:

“Beloved congregation, [name] may no longer use the sacraments. [He/she] has no part any more in the spiritual blessings and benefits which Christ bestows upon his church. As long as [he/she] persists in sin, let him/her be to you as an unbeliever. We exhort you, beloved Christians, do not wash your hands of [him/her]. On the contrary, pray for [him/her] with lamentation. Try to evangelize and warn [him/her] as you would a lost sheep. But do not associate with [him/her] as a fellow-believer, that [he/she] may be ashamed and be brought to repentance. This excommunication, beloved, is a warning for us all. Let us fear the Lord and be cautious, for he who thinks he stands must take heed lest he fall. Continue in the true fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, and also with all faithful believers, so that we may obtain eternal salvation. ‘Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.’”

5. He should then lead the congregation in prayer for the conviction and reclaiming or gaining of the excommunicated person, and for the establishment of all true believers.

6. When an officer is to be deposed, these provisions should be appropriately modified.

### D. Readmission of an Excommunicated Person

1. When an excommunicated person is so affected by his state that he is brought to repentance and desires to be readmitted to the privileges of the church, the session of the church which excommunicated him, being satisfied of the evidence of his repentance and contrition, shall proceed to readmit him. It is fitting that the sentence of restoration be openly pronounced by the minister in a service of public worship on the Lord’s Day.

2. It is well that the elders stand with the minister before the congregation.

3. The minister may address the congregation in the following or similar words:

“[Name] was excluded from the communion of the church, but he/she has now given satisfactory evidence of repentance to the session. Therefore, in the name and by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, we declare him/her absolved from the sentence of excommunication, and we do

112 restore him/her to the communion of the church, that he/she may be a partaker of all the benefits  
 113 of the Lord Jesus, to his/her eternal salvation.”

114

115 4. The minister may then address the restored believer in these or similar words:

116

117 “Beloved brother/sister, be assured in your heart that the Lord himself has received you in grace.  
 118 Be diligent to guard yourself against the subtleties of Satan, the wickedness of the world, and the  
 119 folly of the flesh, lest you again become entangled in sin. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit again. I  
 120 charge you to continue steadfastly in the confession which you have made, humbly relying upon  
 121 the grace of God by the diligent use of the means of grace—especially the Word of God, the  
 122 sacraments, and prayer.”

123

124 5. The minister may then address the congregation in these or similar words:

125

126 “Beloved Christians, receive this brother/sister in love. Rejoice and be thankful, for this  
 127 brother/sister was dead and is alive. He/she was lost and is found. Rejoice with the angels, for our  
 128 Lord Jesus said, ‘I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that  
 129 repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance’ (Luke 15:7).  
 130 Do not look on him any longer as a stranger, but as a fellow citizen with the saints and a member  
 131 of the household of God.”

132

133 6. The congregation should then be led in prayer. It is well in such prayer to thank and praise God for  
 134 granting repentance and restoration to the one who has been restored; that he/she may grow in assurance  
 135 and joy; that he/she may walk faithfully, and that just as he/she has previously caused grief, so now may  
 136 he/she be the cause of great joy and edification; that God may graciously enable us to forgive and receive;  
 137 and that he would enable us all to persevere in faith, hope, and love.

138

139

140

#### **E. Other censures**

141

142 Censures, other than indefinite suspension from church privileges, or deposition, or excommunication,  
 143 shall be imposed in such manner as the judicatory may direct.

144

145

146

147