

Recommendations for Handling Accusations Arising from one Outside the OPC

Mandate from the Presbytery (Fall 2023): *That the presbytery task the judicial committee with generating recommendations for the best practice to follow for handling accusations of a member within the presbytery arising from one who is not a member of the church and present these recommendations to the presbytery at the spring stated meeting.*

In view of this mandate, the judicial committee offers the following biblical principles, recommended procedures, and additional resources for consideration:

Biblical Principles

1. Minimize Slander
 - a. **Proverbs 20:19** Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with a simple babbler.
 - b. **Psalms 15:2-3** He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart; who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend;
2. Promote justice and hear the cry of the afflicted
 - a. **Lam. 3:35-36** to deny a man justice in the presence of the Most High, to subvert a man in his lawsuit, the Lord does not approve.
 - b. **Proverbs 21:13** Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered.

Recommended Procedure to follow when a presbyter receives accusation against a fellow presbyter from one not a member of the church:

1. Consider whether the exhortations of Matthew 18 would be required (i.e., a private offense between equals) or would be fitting and helpful (cf. BD.III.5 and Dr. Alan Strange's commentary on BD.III.5) and if so ensure or encourage, as appropriate, this step to be taken first before proceeding further.
2. Encourage the person to review BD.III (Steps in the Institution of Judicial Process), drawing attention to the solemn warning issued to anyone presenting a charge (BD.III.6).
3. Direct complaint to the proper place and see it is put in proper form
 - a. The presbyter may assist the person to put the communication/accusation in proper form (BD.III.3) and then direct him to send correspondence to the Clerk, Assistant Clerk, and Moderator. Or...
 - b. The presbyter may inform the person to direct his correspondence to the Clerk, Assistant Clerk, and Moderator.
 - i. The Clerk, in consultation with Moderator and Assistant Clerk, will determine the following: a) if it is indeed a correspondence for the presbytery and b) if it is fit to distribute:
 1. If it is indeed correspondence for the presbytery AND fit for distribution: the Clerk shall assign it to the proper committee (visitation, judicial, etc.) and post to the web.
 2. If it is correspondence for the presbytery but NOT fit for distribution: the Clerk shall return it to the sender with recommendations/guidelines for making it fit for distribution. Any of the following may be offered:
 - a) Refer them to BD.III.3.
 - b) Provide a suggested form (template) consistent with BD.III.3, such as: We petition the presbytery of Ohio to investigate whether or not a trial should be instituted or other pastoral action taken with regard to a charge of _____ (here list the specific charge/offense) against _____ (minister) or _____ (session) based on the following grounds: (here list specifications of time, place, circumstance of the alleged offense and provide the names of any witnesses and the titles of documents, records, or recordings to be produced).
 - c) Identify any inflammatory or slanderous language that would need to be eliminated before distribution.
 - d) If the plaintiff needs help putting charge in proper form, he may be directed to the judicial committee for assistance.

3. If it is NOT correspondence for the presbytery, the Clerk may inform the sender of such and direct him to address his communication elsewhere or nowhere.
- c. Or if the aggrieved party is unwilling to take these steps, but the presbyter is persuaded that the situation warrants further exploration, the presbyter ought to consider going to the brother, whose character has been impugned, to discuss the matter. If he fails to receive a satisfactory explanation, he may petition presbytery to investigate the matter for the sake of the purity of the church and the good name of his brother.

Additional Resources

- Commentary on the Book of Church Order by the Rev. Dr. Alan Strange which has been serialized in *Ordained Servant* and is available here: https://opc.org/news.html?news_id=414. The Commentary on the Book of Discipline, Chapter 3 and 4 is of particular relevance.
- PCA Book of Church Order, Rules of Discipline, Chapter 31 and 34, available here: <https://www.pcaac.org/bco/>