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## 52<sup>ND</sup> GENERAL ASSEMBLY OVERTURES

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Preliminary, Personal Assessments by Dr. David F. Coffin, Jr., **Revision 2**

### PLEASE NOTE:

For the sake of conscience, a word of explanation about this review: I prepare these materials for myself, as a discipline to help me reflect on the business of the Assembly beforehand, and also, so that in the press of Assembly business on the floor, I can quickly reorient myself to the issues. In no sense is this material prepared for the purpose of encouraging a party spirit, or a pre-committed voting bloc. Although these views reflect my current convictions, I am not even sure that I will vote as specified, because I am committed to listening to the debate, and if compelling arguments are set forth contrary to my current views, to change my position in light of our deliberations.

I hope that all can agree that such a stance is essential to the functioning of the deliberative Assembly that biblical Presbyterianism sets forth, as liable to direction both through reasoned, biblical argument and by the immediate work of the Holy Spirit. The only reason I distribute this material is because it has proven helpful to others to stimulate their prayerful reflections in preparation for the debate. Should you be interested in some thoughts on the consideration of Overtures, see the Appendix.

Finally, I note that I am a member of the Standing Judicial Commission of the General Assembly. According to the requirements of the “Operating Manual of the Standing Judicial Commission” (OMSJC), I am committed to “perform the duties of [my] office with impartiality and shall be diligent to maintain the impartiality of the Commission” (OMSJC 2.10). Thus, I am not permitted to make “any public or private statement that might reasonably be expected to affect the outcome of a pending matter or impending matter in any court of the church” (OMSJC 2.5). That notwithstanding, I am permitted to “make public or private statements in the course of [my] duties as a presbyter . . . with respect to biblical teaching, confessional interpretation, the principles of the form of government and discipline. . . .” (OMSJC 2.6). Nothing I have said in this review is intended to intimate, hint, or suggest which party should prevail in any case that might come before me under our current *BCO*, or under any proposed amendments, should they be adopted.

You are free to distribute my summary as you will, but only with the above disclaimer attached. I should note: the intelligibility of my terse comments depends upon one having carefully read the overture in question! Find the full text of the overtures at: <https://pcaga.org/resources/#overtures/> So too, space limits anything but direct speech, so please forgive a dearth of polite expression in what follows.

### OVERTURE STATISTICS

50 Overtures submitted to the 52<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly  
41 Overtures referred to OC (#s 1, 3-16, 19, 22-27, 29-34, 37-40, 43, 47-50)  
28 Overtures referred to CCB for advice (#s 1, 5-10, 12-16, 19, 22-25, 29-34, 37-40, 43)  
11 Overture to AC (#s 3, 4, 11, 26, 27, 35, 41, 42, 44, 47, 48, 49)  
8 Overtures to MNA (#s 2, 17, 20, 21, 28, 36, 45, 46)  
1 Overture to RUF (# 18)  
5 Overtures to all 10 CCs (#s 9, 11, 27, 30, 49)  
26 proposing amendment to *BCO* (#s 1, 5-10, 12-16, 19, 22-25, 29-33, 37-40)  
7 presbyteries & boundaries (#s 2, 17, 20-21, 36, 45-46)  
7 erect various ad interim committees (#s 3-4, 26-27, 47-49)  
2 proposing amendment to RAO (#s 34, 43)  
2 directions to the AC (#s 41, 44)  
1 request to demand MNA apology & dismiss (#28)  
1 proposing RUF Manual approval (#18)  
1 request that AC study meeting sites (#35)  
1 request that everyone study bitcoin (#11)  
1 direction to the Stated clerk (#42)  
1 proposing encouragement with respect to immigrants (#50)  
26 Presbyteries, and 1 individual submitting

## OVERTURES SUBMITTED TO THE 52<sup>ND</sup> GA

#	SUBJECT	POSITION	PRESB	COC
1	Amend <i>BCO</i> 32-2 to Clarify that a Court May Investigate When Charges are Filed	<p>NEGATIVE</p> <p>Though doubtless with good intention, this Overture will do more harm than good. First a minor concern, but perhaps indicative of what is to come: How much investigation does it take to determine whether a “personal or general offense”?</p> <p>Slightly more substantial, the Mat. 18 requirement is redundant. Cf. <i>BCO</i> 31-5. So too, “level warranting judicial process” is unhelpfully vague.</p> <p>Of greater concern: How shall the court know if the accuser is liable to the descriptions in <i>BCO</i> 31-8? To assert any but “who is himself under censure or process” would have the court convict and censure a person without a trial (in passing please note, Ramsay is uncharacteristically insensitive to the issues raised by this provision in this comments).</p> <p>The old system held that a voluntary prosecutor was itself evidence of a strong presumption of guilt. Cf. <i>BCO</i> 31-9. Further, what is the difference between a “strong presumption of guilt” and an expectation that it “can be proven through judicial process”?</p> <p>This provision is likely to cause confusion, e.g., does this apply to <i>BCO</i> 31-2? Finally, another minor matter: the Ramsay citation in the Rationale, taken in context, is not to the point.</p> <p>CCB argues that the proposal is in conflict with <i>BCO</i> 29-1 and 31-9.</p> <p>NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i>, 371, item A.</p>	Northern New England	OC, CCB
2	Expand Boundaries of South Florida Presbytery	<p>AFFIRMATIVE, if approved by Committee of Commissioners.</p> <p>MNA recommends affirmative <i>CH</i>, 707, item 4.</p>	South Florida	MNA
3	Erect Ad Interim Committee on Christian Nationalism	<p>NEGATIVE</p> <p>In general, to paraphrase a US President, study committees are not the solution, they are the problem. The matters that occasion their appointment seem to be lagging just slightly behind the latest hot topics in the news cycle and tend to reduce the Assembly to a mere interest group clamoring among a crowd of competing voices, rather than uphold its stately position as “the bond of union, peace and correspondence among all its congregations and courts,” a grand agent of the Great Commission.</p> <p>Folks tend to use study committee reports to the neglect of (or to undermine) the Constitution of the PCA. Historically study committees have been proposed as a stealth way to give minority views a greater hearing</p>	Arizona	OC, AC

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		<p>than they deserve. So too, they are sometimes a means to avoid the difficult labor required to pursue debate and resolution with people, we suppose to be opponents, face to face.</p> <p>Such committees are quite expensive, their work-product is widely varied in value, and if committee members cannot agree, the effect of the conflict between a committee report and a minority report can be divisive. It has not been uncommon in Presbyterian history that the fruit of such labors is either a sentimentalizing collection of platitudes that compromise Scripture teaching, or a hammer-and-tongs majority vs. minority report that divides the Assembly.</p> <p>There are a few legitimate, and Constitutionally safe, grounds for appointing study committees, e.g., when the Assembly has determined that a change in the Constitution is desirable and seeks an able and broadly representative committee to study the best means to that end, to prepare a recommendation, and to prepare a rationale for the church. Such was the case, for example, with the Ad Interim Committee on Judicial Procedures. Rarely such committees may be needed to bring Scripture light to some novel and complex matter that is a threat to the whole body, for example, the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality.</p> <p>In the main, however, the best resources for our folk are not Assembly study committees, but the intellectual and spiritual wealth we have in our ministers, teachers, and scholars through academic institutions, conferences, publications, broadcasts, recordings, journals and magazines.</p> <p>AC takes no position but provides a funding mechanism in case GA approves <i>CH</i>, 405, item 3.</p>		
4	Erect Ad Interim Study Committee on Christian Nationalism	<p>NEGATIVE</p> <p>See comments on Overture 3.</p> <p>AC takes no position but provides a funding mechanism in case GA approves <i>CH</i>, 405, item 3.</p>	South Texas	OC, AC
5	Grant <i>BCO</i> 60-63 Full Constitutional Status	<p>NEGATIVE</p> <p>There is no apparent connection between the “Whereas” observations and the “Therefore”; therefore, there is no reason to be persuaded.</p> <p>That being said, the chapters proposed are themselves wanting. For example, <i>BCO</i> 60 insists that “when persons are sick, their minister, or some officer of the church, should be notified. . . .” Do we really mean that? Any time anyone is sick? Further, how will the pastor minister to a person’s “physical, mental, and spiritual welfare”? Again, if there were not “varying circumstances of the sick” would the minister be freed from the obligation of “discretion”?</p> <p><i>BCO</i> 61 strikes me as trite. Much more could be said but suffice to say that in my judgment these chapters are not ready for prime time.</p>	Calvary	OC, CCB

#	SUBJECT	POSITION	PRESB	COC
		NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS NOT</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i> , 372, item B.		
6	Amend <i>BCO</i> 18-2 to Allow Flexibility on Applications to Come Under Care	<p>AFFIRMATIVE, as amended</p> <p>A simpler alternative: “Every applicant must file his application with the clerk of the Presbytery <del>at least one month before the meeting of the Presbytery.</del>” Why should the <i>BCO</i> specify a time? Leave the matter to the administrative discretion of the Presbyteries.</p> <p>NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS NOT</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i>, 372, item C.</p>	Rocky Mountain	OC, CCB
7	Amend <i>BCO</i> 34-1 Regarding Advisors and Original Jurisdiction in Process Against a TE	<p>AFFIRMATIVE, as amended</p> <p>An alternative: Restore the text to the elegant simplicity of 1879, “Process against a Minister shall be entered before the Presbytery of which he is a member.” The current language of the <i>BCO</i> fails as to due process and an evidentiary standard, while the proposed amendment only exacerbates the matter. The right of one presbyter to file a Complaint that can finally be brought to the SJC is a sufficient safeguard. (A note aside: The same applies to <i>BCO</i> 33-1.)</p> <p>NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS NOT</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i>, 372, item D.</p>	Missouri	OC, CCB
8	Amend <i>BCO</i> 24-1 To Require REs and Deacons to State Confessional Differences	<p>NEGATIVE</p> <p>The language being replicated is fraught with Constitutional perplexities (as I have shown before). Leave bad enough alone.</p> <p>NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS NOT</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i>, 372, item E.</p>	Nashville	OC, CCB
9	Amend <i>BCO</i> 14-1 to Make AC Members Appointed by Committees and Agencies Non-voting Advisory Members	<p>NEGATIVE</p> <p>The Overture offers no <i>evidence</i> that the current scheme has caused any difficulties. Leave well enough alone!</p> <p>AC—negative, <i>CH</i>, 406, item 4.  CC—negative, <i>CH</i>, 1507, item 7.  CDM—negative, <i>CH</i>, 606, item 8.  CTS—negative, <i>CH</i>, 1627, item 10.  Geneva—negative <i>CH</i>, 1706, item 1.  MNA—affirmative <i>CH</i>, 707, item 6.  MTW—negative, <i>CH</i>, 815, item 7.  PCAF—negative, <i>CH</i>, 1803, item 3.  RH—negative, <i>CH</i>, 1903, item 4.  RUF—negative <i>CH</i>, 906, item 4.</p> <p>NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS NOT</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i>, 372, item F.</p>	James River	OC, CCB, and all permanent committees & agencies

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10	Amend <i>BCO</i> 22 to Affirm the ‘Consent of the Governed’ Regarding Assistant Pastors	<p>NEGATIVE</p> <p>Though I have served as an assistant pastor, I have only the faintest support for the office. However, as the assistant pastor clearly does not govern, he need not have the consent of the not-governed to that end.</p> <p>CCB notes that the proposed amendment does not address how to treat men who are currently serving as Assistant Pastors should it be approved.</p> <p>NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS AMBIGUOUS</b> (fatally?). <i>CH</i>, 372, item G.</p>	Central Florida	OC, CCB
11	To Study Incorporating Bitcoin into Session, Presbytery, and Committee & Agency Balance Sheets	<p>NEGATIVE</p> <p>Hmm. Shall we study the gold standard as well? Here’s a thought: “[M]oney is power. The possession of power naturally begets the desire to use it. The permanent endowment of religious societies is, therefore, if it becomes inordinate in amount, dangerous to free government. It tends to convert the clergy, who should be servants of all, into political usurpers. . . . [T]he duty of the Church is clear. She should conduct her evangelical operations with the least possible of hoarded wealth. She should rely, as largely as possible, upon current gifts fresh from the hearts of the people. When a continental diplomatist ventured to remark to Queen Elizabeth upon the smallness of her exchequer, she replied: ‘My exchequer is in the hearts of my people!’—an answer worthy of ‘Glorious Queen Bess.’ It would be still nobler for a spiritual commonwealth. The people of God should, on the one hand, be encouraged to give liberally for his service, and the rulers of the Church should distribute as liberally. The Church, after receiving lavish gifts of sanctified wealth, should still be poor in this world’s goods, and rich only in generous deeds and glorious charities.”</p> <p>AC—negative <i>CH</i>, 407, item 5.  CC—negative <i>CH</i>, 1508, item 8.  CDM—negative <i>CH</i>, 607, item 9.  CTS—negative <i>CH</i>, 628, item 11.  Geneva—negative <i>CH</i>, 1706, item 2.  MNA— ? <i>CH</i>, 000, item 00.  MTW—negative, <i>CH</i>, 815, item 8.  PCAF—negative <i>CH</i>, 1804, item 4.  RH—negative, <i>CH</i>, 1903, item 5.  RUF—negative <i>CH</i>, 907, item 5.</p>	South Texas	OC and all permanent committees & agencies
12	Amend <i>BCO</i> 58-5 to Specify Only Officers May Distribute the Lord’s Supper	<p>NEGATIVE</p> <p>The Overture evidences a godly concern that all of the elements of public worship be founded, expressly or by implication, in the Word of God. However, it is in danger of neglecting to recognize those “circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence. . . .” (CF 1.6)</p>	Providence	OC, CCB

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		<p>To administer is not the same thing as to distribute, while standing or sitting seems entirely circumstantial. When under cancer treatment I was seated when I administered the Supper, while in partially empty rows non-ordained people stood up to take and hand the elements to others seated in the middle. Were we violating the rule of Christ in worship? Our DFW says nothing about the Minister's posture, or its significance, one way or another.</p> <p>NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS NOT</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i>, 373, item H.</p>		
13	Amend <i>BCO</i> 25-1 to Specify Only Members in Good Standing May Vote	<p>NEGATIVE</p> <p>These provisions are not inconsistent, as they are addressing two different matters.</p> <p><i>BCO</i> 24-3, "All communing members in good and regular standing, but no others, are entitled to vote in the election of church officers. . . ." This provision is specifically defining who <i>among the communing members</i> of the congregation may vote, i.e., those in good standing.</p> <p><i>BCO</i> 25-1, "The congregation consists of all the communing members of a particular church, and they only are entitled to vote." This provision is specifying that the congregation is made up of communing members, and only they, <i>as opposed to non-members or non-communing members</i>, may vote.</p> <p>It is worth noting that both of these provisions were in the PCUS <i>BCO</i> of 1925 and that since their adoption at that time, and since their continuance in the <i>BCO</i> of the PCA, no one has supposed they were inconsistent.</p> <p>CCB finds a possible conflict with <i>BCO</i> 25-7 and 25-11.</p> <p>NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>MAY BE</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i>, 373, item I.</p>	Great Lakes	OC, CCB
14	Amend <i>BCO</i> 38-1 to Indicate Ways a Court May Interact with an Offended Party	<p>NEGATIVE</p> <p>The Moderator or his designee cannot inform the offended person of what the court deems pertinent unless the court has so deemed. Provision for such is absent in the proposal.</p> <p>Overall, the court is finally the responsible party for meeting all the standards of <i>BCO</i> 38-1, but the court is free to act through a variety of means, as appropriate; there is no need for detailed instructions. For example, the court under the current language, can deem what is pertinent, and appoint the Moderator, or a committee chairman, or some other person, to communicate the same to the offended person(s).</p> <p>NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS NOT</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i>, 373, item J.</p>	Great Lakes	OC, CCB

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15	Amend <i>BCO</i> 36-4 to Add Language for the Administration of Definite Suspension from Office	AFFIRMATIVE A sensible proposal wisely employing language consistent with the other parts of the chapter. NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS NOT</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i> , 373, item K.	Mississippi Valley	OC, CCB
16	Amend <i>BCO</i> 36-5 to Conform the Language to <i>BCO</i> 37-3 re Suspension from Office	AFFIRMATIVE A sensible proposal wisely employing language consistent with the other parts of the chapter. NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS NOT</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i> , 373, item L.	Mississippi Valley	OC, CCB
17	Change the Boundaries of Covenant and Mississippi Valley Presbyteries	AFFIRMATIVE, if approved by Committee of Commissioners. MNA recommends affirmative <i>CH</i> , 707, item 7.	Mississippi Valley	MNA
18	Direct RUF to Update “Campus Ministry Manual” for GA Approval	NEGATIVE Although not all of the arguments against this overture are persuasive, the committee’s rationale in opposition is sufficient to lead to an answer in the negative. RUF recommends negative, <i>CH</i> , 907, item 6.	Gulf Coast	RUF
19	Amend <i>BCO</i> 57-5 to Revise the Membership Vows	NEGATIVE The Overture does not make a compelling case for revision. With any such change the question arises, what of those who affirmed only the old questions? Must there be a public affirmation of the new question and the revised terms? Or, perhaps, an assumed assent? What is to be done with those who do not care to revise their profession? Whatever is gained in the new language seems slight in the face of such complexities. If there is to be a new first question, surely the language should be consistent with what follows, i.e., not “agree”, but rather “acknowledge”. Further, I should think the word “created” is to be preferred over “made.” Further, the allegation that the third question, “Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?” mentions nothing of the love of God is somewhat disconcerting (John 15:13). NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS NOT</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i> , 373, item M.	Eastern Carolina	OC, CCB
20	Change the Boundaries of Covenant and Mississippi Valley Presbyteries	AFFIRMATIVE, if approved by Committee of Commissioners. MNA recommends affirmative <i>CH</i> , 707, item 7.	Covenant	MNA

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21	Change the Boundaries of Covenant and Hills & Plains Presbyteries	AFFIRMATIVE, if approved by Committee of Commissioners.  MNA approves?, <i>CH</i> , 000, item 00.	Covenant	MNA
22	Amend <i>BCO</i> 20-3, 24-3 and 25-1 to clarify “Regular Standing” re minimum voting age	<p>AFFIRMATIVE</p> <p>The rationale is clear, comprehensive and compelling. QED.</p> <p>Historic Presbyterian doctrine holds that children of believers are members of the church by birthright. As such, they <i>have</i> all the rights and responsibilities of church members; these rights are not a grant of our <i>BCO</i>. However, the <i>exercise</i> of these rights and responsibilities is rightly related to their intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual maturity. A child of believers has a right to baptism. But that right is not exercised in the delivery room; it is exercised when the child has physically matured enough to be publicly exposed to others without a threat to its health. This truth is implicitly recognized in our practice of “communicant” membership. A child member has the right to communion, but does not have the exercise of that right, until the child can make a credible profession of faith. We grant that a child member might have been subject to the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit from a very young age. Yet to make a credible profession of faith, and to participate at the Table responsibly, the child must have matured intellectually, emotionally, physically, and spiritually.</p> <p>However, there is nothing about making a credible profession of faith that signals the proper exercise of other rights of membership, rights that typically take further maturation before reasonable competence—intellectual, emotional, physical and, spiritual—has been achieved. Voting for church officers, serving as a church officer, exercising the right to complain of Session actions, bringing charges against an allegedly erring brother or sister, being yourself subject to formal disciplinary procedures, all require a maturation that a young communicant typically does not have, particularly while living in the household of one’s parents. There is nothing about a credible profession of faith that implies competence, or necessitates the exercise of these rights, and they may well be reasonably regulated by age regulations.</p> <p>This should not surprise us. Confession of Faith 1.6. teaches us that,</p> <p>The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added . . . Nevertheless, we acknowledge . . . that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered</p>	Pacific Northwest	OC, CCB



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		<p>by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.</p> <p>What do circumstances concerning the government of the church, common to human actions and societies, ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, teach us? Children are by birthright citizens of the country of their parents. As such, they <i>have</i> all the rights and responsibilities of citizens, these rights are not a grant of the civil government. However, the <i>exercise</i> of these rights and responsibilities is rightly related to their intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual maturity. And all good governments set age-appropriate restrictions on the exercise of those rights (e.g., voting, driving, subjection to draft, taxation, subjection to criminal prosecution, right to work, service in military, running for office) for the sake of the child and the good of the community. I further note that the fact that <i>BCO</i> allows for age restrictions if the state requires it, demonstrates that the question is one of prudence, not principle.</p> <p>CCB finds the proposal in conflict with PP6 but this is a category mistake; PP6 has nothing to do with the question at hand, as it speaks on of the rights of a <i>society</i>, not the society's regulation of the exercise of its member's individual rights. Neither is <i>BCO</i> 6-4 to the point. As above, entitlement to a right does not mean entitlement to the exercise of that right.</p> <p>NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i>, 373, item N.</p>		
23	Amend <i>BCO</i> 41-3 to Allow Supplemental Judges for a Session Trial	<p>AFFIRMATIVE</p> <p>A reasonable solution to a serious quandary.</p> <p>NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS NOT</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i>, 374, item O.</p>	Pacific Northwest	OC, CCB
24	Amend <i>BCO</i> 24-1 to Clarify a Session's Role in Examining Officer Nominees	<p>NEGATIVE</p> <p>In my judgment, both cases allow for what is effectively an act of discipline without due process, and thus are profoundly unjust. Consistency in this case is "confusion worse confounded." Better to "leave bad enough alone."</p> <p>NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS NOT</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i>, 374, item P.</p>	Evangel	OC, CCB
25	Amend <i>BCO</i> 46-4 to Add a Class of Associate Membership for Honorably Retired TEs	<p>NEGATIVE</p> <p>The proposed language is confusing, and the resulting circumstances would lead to considerable complication.</p> <p>Potomac Presbytery's Committee on the Minister and the Ministry of the Word is assigned this responsibility in the Bylaws:</p> <p>"The CMMW shall report to the Presbytery annually at the September meeting, regarding the general well-</p>	Northwest Georgia	OC, CCB

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		<p>being of each of its honorably retired Teaching Elders. This report shall include information concerning:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The TE's spiritual health and continued connection to the body of Christ;</li> <li>2. His physical, emotional, and financial well-being; and</li> <li>3. Any recommendations for appropriate administrative actions relevant to such Teaching Elders and the Presbyteries within which they live or labor." <p>This plan has proven effective over many years of experience.</p> <p>CCB notes that the proposal is in conflict with <i>BCO</i> 13-1 and 13-2, while expressing other concerns.</p> <p>NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i>, 374, item Q.</p> </li></ol>		
26	Erect Ad Interim Committee to Revise the Directory for Worship for Authoritative Use	<p>NEGATIVE</p> <p>See comments on Overture 3.</p> <p>AC takes no position but provides a funding mechanism in case GA approves <i>CH</i>, 407, item 6.</p>	Northwest Georgia	OC, AC
27	Erect Ad Interim Committee to Receive Suggestions for Permanent Committee and Agency Operations, Resources, and Expenses	<p>NEGATIVE</p> <p>See comments on Overture 3.</p> <p>AC—negative or refer to 53<sup>rd</sup>, <i>CH</i>, 407, item 7.  CC—negative <i>CH</i>, 1508, item 9.  CDM— ? <i>CH</i>, 000, item 00.  CTS—negative, <i>CH</i>, 1628, item 12.  Geneva— ? <i>CH</i>, 000, item 00.  MNA—negative <i>CH</i>, 707, item 8.  MTW—? <i>CH</i>, 000, item 00.  PCAF—negative <i>CH</i>, 1805, item 6.  RH—negative, <i>CH</i>, 1903, item 4.  RUF—negative <i>CH</i>, 909, item 7.</p>	Northwest Georgia	OC and all permanent committees & agencies
28	Demand Mission to North America (MNA) to Apologize and Terminate Personnel	<p>NEGATIVE</p> <p>While laudable are the reminders of Scriptural and Confessional teaching concerning the blessings and duties of believers, this Overture is, for all intents and purposes, a bill of attainder, i.e., a legislative declaration concluding a disciplinary judgment that has not been found by due process. Preliminary Principle 8 asserts that "ecclesiastical discipline . . . can derive no force whatever, but from its own justice, the approbation of an impartial public, and the countenance and blessing of the great Head of the Church." A bill of attainder is a notorious offence among justice-loving folk<sup>1</sup> and as such,</p>	Northwest Georgia	MNA

<sup>1</sup> A bill of attainder, legislation that imposes punishment on a specific person or group of people without a judicial trial, is twice forbidden in the United States Constitution, i.e., Article 1 Section 9, and Article 1 Section 10. The Framers adopted the constitutional prohibitions on bills of attainder unanimously and without debate. In the Federalist No. 44, James Madison

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		<p>it could not be seen to be just by an impartial public. No such act of a court of the church could know the countenance and blessing of the great Head of the Church.</p> <p>Consideration of this Overture should be ruled out of order.</p> <p>MNA recommends negative <i>CH</i>, 707, item 9.</p>		
29	Amend <i>BCO</i> 15-5.c to Clarify the Handling of an SJC Minority Decision by GA	<p><b>AFFIRMATIVE</b></p> <p>Best would be to eliminate altogether the provision for a minority report in SJC cases. The provision allows a <i>judicial</i> procedure founded on evidence, due process, and deliberation of a reasonable number of judges, to be transformed into a <i>political</i> procedure, wherein hundreds of commissioners, without having seen the evidence or heard the pleadings, freed from rules of due process, and the demands of deliberation, will decide the case.</p> <p>Apart from elimination of the provision, however, the Overture provides significant improvement to the minority report process and is thus worthy of support.</p> <p>NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS NOT</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i>, 374, item R.</p>	Houston Metro	OC, CCB
30	Amend <i>BCO</i> 8-4, 20-1, 21-1, 21-12, and 23-1 re the Calling and Dissolution of TE Relationships for Needful Works	<p><b>AFFIRMATIVE</b></p> <p>The Overture consolidates and coordinates consistently matters that are now somewhat scattered throughout the Form of Government. Though the Overture is necessarily involved, it will bring clarity to an important part of PCA polity.</p> <p>CCB finds the proposal ambiguous and contrary to the <i>BCO</i> in general concerning presbytery authority.</p> <p>AC—refer back to HM or 53<sup>rd</sup>, <i>CH</i>, 408, item 8.  CC—refer back to HM or 53<sup>rd</sup>, <i>CH</i>, 1508, item 10.  CDM— ? <i>CH</i>, 000, item 00.  CTS—refer to 53<sup>rd</sup>, <i>CH</i>, 1628, item 13.  Geneva— ? <i>CH</i>, 000, item 00.  MNA— ? <i>CH</i>, 000, item 00.  MTW— ? <i>CH</i>, 000, item 00.  PCAF— ? <i>CH</i>, 000, item 00.  RH— ? <i>CH</i>, 000, item 00.  RUF—refer to 53<sup>rd</sup>, <i>CH</i>, 909, item 8.</p> <p>NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i>, 374, item S.</p>	Houston Metro	OC, CCB and all permanent committees & agencies

observed that bills of attainder are contrary to the first principles of the social compact, and that their prohibition was a “bulwark in favor of personal security and private rights”. [https://constitution.congress.gov/browse/essay/artI-S9-C3-1/ALDE\\_00013186/](https://constitution.congress.gov/browse/essay/artI-S9-C3-1/ALDE_00013186/)

#	SUBJECT	POSITION	PRESB	COC
31	Amend <i>BCO</i> 31-10 to Require Vote of the Entire Court to Suspend an Officer's Official Functions during Process	<p>AFFIRMATIVE</p> <p>The Overture would correct an inadvertently created occasion for the possibility of injustice in judicial proceedings.</p> <p>NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS NOT</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i>, 375, item T.</p>	Houston Metro	OC, CCB
32	Amend <i>BCO</i> 36 to Provide for Elevation of a Censure without an Entirely New Trial	<p>AFFIRMATIVE</p> <p>The Overture addresses the question: What is necessary to move from the censure of indefinite suspension from sacraments or office to the censure of excommunication or deposition? Our current Rules provide no explicit guidance.</p> <p>Clearly the elevation of censure does not comport well with an act by mere legislative fiat. In any other circumstance, a majority vote of the court to censure a person apart from due process (stated charges, plea, right to face accuser, right to a defense, right to a record that would provide the basis for an appeal to a higher court, etc.) would be <i>illicit</i> and <i>unjust</i>.</p> <p>Just as clearly the elevation does not comport well with a <i>de novo</i> process under the ROD. The court itself has been intimately dealing with the accused for some time. The court's judgment of guilt, presumably for a "gross crime or heresy" (<i>BCO</i> 30-4),<sup>2</sup> and finding unrepentance, now must progress to finding the convicted person "incorrigible and contumacious". This is a new finding, and must be supported by due process considerations, but the finding itself is completely dependent upon the process that has already begun, and had reached an intermediate stage in its progression, before this new, unhappy, proposed conclusion.</p> <p>The standard, a judgement of incorrigibility and contumacy, does not present a new <i>matter</i> before the court. On the contrary, before the court is the same <i>matter</i>—the sin with respect to which the subject was found guilty—now in a new <i>manner</i>, i.e., contumaciously and incorrigibly.<sup>3</sup> The first censure with respect to the matter/sin was indefinite suspension, because the manner was unrepentance. Now the court takes up that same matter/sin, and adds the manner of incorrigibility and contumacy, which requires a decision to end the censure of indefinite suspension and to begin the censure of excommunication or deposition.</p> <p>The Overture provides explicit due process regulations to this end.</p>	Houston Metro	OC, CCB

<sup>2</sup> That presumption is vindicated in that the sin leading to indefinite suspension must be liable to elevation to excommunication.

<sup>3</sup> One can see this distinction between *matter* and *manner* clearly at work *BCO* 33-2: "When an accused person is found contumacious (cf. 32-6), he shall be immediately suspended from the sacraments . . . for his contumacy. . . . The censure shall in no case be removed until the offender has not only repented of his contumacy but has also given satisfaction in relation to the charges against him."

#	SUBJECT	POSITION	PRESB	COC
		NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS AMBIGUOUS</b> (fatally?). <i>CH</i> , 375, item U.		
33	Amend <i>BCO</i> 57-2 re the Examination of Young Persons for Admission to the Sealing Ordinances	AFFIRMATIVE The Overture provides some Scriptural and common-sense guidance for Sessions in the examination of a young person seeking admission to the Lord's Table.  NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS NOT</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i> , 375, item V.	TE Fred Greco	OC, CCB
34	Amend RAO 16 to Require Reporting on Session and Diaconate Membership and Duties	NEGATIVE The Overture would transform the collection of data into an investigative tool for possible disciplinary proceedings. There must first be some provision in the <i>BCO</i> to this effect, before it can have a proper place in the RAO. CCB finds a conflict with <i>BCO</i> 9-2.  NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i> , 375, item W.	Savannah River	OC, CCB
35	Request AC to Study and Report on GA Meeting Locations	AFFIRMATIVE The Overture raises some interesting concerns that it seems likely the AC would be happy to address.  AC recommends affirmative <i>CH</i> , 408, item 9.	Pacific Northwest	AC
36	Change the Boundaries of Georgia Foothills and Metro Atlanta Presbyteries	AFFIRMATIVE, if approved by Committee of Commissioners.  MNA recommends affirmative <i>CH</i> , 708, item 10.	Georgia Foothills	MNA
37	Amend <i>BCO</i> 12-3 so that a Session May Elect One of Its Members as Moderator in Judicial Cases	AFFIRMATIVE A minor matter, but a sound observation, leading to a just correction.  NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS NOT</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i> , 376, item X.	Southeast Alabama	OC, CCB
38	Amend <i>BCO</i> 30-4 to Require a New Case with Process for Elevation of Indefinite Suspension to Excommunication	NEGATIVE See comments on Overture 32. CCB supposes the proposal is in conflict with <i>BCO</i> 32-6, 33-2, -3, and 34-4, provisions that allow for excommunication for acts "not necessarily" a "gross crime or heresy". The easy reply is that incorrigible contumacy is a gross crime.  NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i> , 376, item Y.	Southeast Alabama	OC, CCB

#	SUBJECT	POSITION	PRESB	COC
39	Amend <i>BCO</i> 34-8 and add <i>BCO</i> 33-5 to Clarify the Process for Elevating Suspension from Office to Deposition	AFFIRMATIVE The Overture provides well-drafted provisions (where possible using the present language of the <i>BCO</i> ) that fulfill a lacuna in the Rules of Discipline.  NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS NOT</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i> , 376, item Z.	Southeast Alabama	OC, CCB
40	Amend <i>BCO</i> 35-9 to Require Recording All Parts of a Trial	AFFIRMATIVE In my judgment, such a recording is already required, by implication from a number of passages of the <i>BCO</i> . However, making the matter explicit may help clear up confusion, however unwarranted.  NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS NOT</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i> , 376, item AA.	Southeast Alabama	OC, CCB
41	Direct the AC to Collect & Report Each Congregation's Public Worship Service Times	NEGATIVE The Committee plausibly argues that service times will more likely be up-to-date on the congregation's website for which the AC's Church Directory provides a link.  AC recommends negative, <i>CH</i> , 408, item 10.	Calvary	AC
42	Direct the Stated Clerk Not to Collect Statistical Data Pertaining to Age or Ethnicity	NEGATIVE The Committee plausibly argues for the usefulness of such data collection, and notes that it is following directives from earlier Assemblies in so doing.  AC recommends negative, <i>CH</i> , 411, item 11.	Calvary	AC
43	Amend RAO 4-11 regarding Data on Age and Ethnicity	NEGATIVE The Committee notes that that data collected with respect to age or ethnicities "have nothing to do with statistics determining partnership shares," and then repeats the information offered in response to Overture 42.  AC recommends negative, <i>CH</i> , 413, item 12.  NOTE: CCB reports the proposed amendment <b>IS NOT</b> in conflict with other parts of the Constitution. <i>CH</i> , 376, item BB.	Calvary	OC, CCB, AC
44	Transition byFaith to a Pres-Release-Based Publication	NEGATIVE The "Whereas" propositions of the Overture are largely made up of assertions without evidence and thus are not persuasive. The Committee provides a robust defense of byFaith's mission, practices, and outcomes in its recommendation.  AC recommends negative, <i>CH</i> , 415, item 13.	Pee Dee	AC
45	Change the Boundaries of Covenant and Hills & Plains Presbyteries	AFFIRMATIVE, if approved by Committee of Commissioners.  MNA recommends ? <i>CH</i> , 000, item 0.	Hills & Plains	MNA

#	SUBJECT	POSITION	PRESB	COC
46	Change the Boundaries of Georgia Foothills and Metro Atlanta Presbyteries	AFFIRMATIVE, if approved by Committee of Commissioners.  MNA recommends ? <i>CH</i> , 000, item 0.	Metro Atlanta	MNA
47	Erect Ad Interim Committee on Christian Nationalism	NEGATIVE See comments on Overture 3.  Likely: AC takes no position but provides a funding mechanism in case GA approves <i>CH</i> , 000, item 00.	Great Lakes	OC, AC
48	Erect an Ad Interim Committee for a Pastoral Letter on Christian Citizenship and Church-State Relations	NEGATIVE Free pastoral advice from our great, great, great grandfathers provides clear path. A word to the wise. . . . <sup>4</sup>  A RESOLUTION That said Presbyteries invite the attention of the General Assembly, to certain slanderous reports extensively circulated against the Presbyterian and other denominations, involving the charge of an attempt on the part of these denominations to unite Church and State, and thus subvert the civil institutions of our country, and intimate their desire that this Assembly would take order on the subject, and by some public act disabuse themselves and their constituents of such unfounded and injurious imputations. THE COMMITTEE REPORT In the opinion of your committee no public act is necessary on the part of this Assembly to refute a charge wholly unsupported by testimony and facts; nor any exposition of their principles in relation to civil magistracy and the claims of the church demanded, other than that contained in our acknowledged ecclesiastical standards, and published to the world. For the better information, however, of any who may be in danger of imposition from unfounded statements, the Assembly would refer to the following exhibition of their principles as contained in the accredited constitution of the church. . . . <sup>5</sup> Such are the constitutional principles of the Presbyterian church in these Linked States. They were our fathers' principles before and during the revolution, which issued in the consummation of our liberty and independence, and <i>under</i> the influence of which they prayed, and fought, and bled by the side of the father of our country. They have been the principles of their descendants ever since. They are <i>our</i> principles still, adopted from conviction, to whose support we have pledged ourselves under the most solemn sanctions, and by the preservation of which we believe that the common interests of evangelical religion and civil liberty will be most effectually sustained.	Tennessee Valley	OC, AC

<sup>4</sup> "Statement of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America on Union of Church and State, 1830," from *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America From A. D. 1821 to A. D. 1835 Inclusive* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication. No. 265 Chestnut Street), pp. 299-300.

<sup>5</sup> The text of Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter XXIII, "Of the Civil Magistrate," chapter XXXI, "Of Synods and Councils," §IV, and *The Form of Government*, "Preliminary Principles," §I follow.

#	SUBJECT	POSITION	PRESB	COC
		In closing this statement, the Assembly would affectionately and earnestly exhort the members of their communion, that in the fulfillment of their civil and religious duties, they watch against all unhallowed feelings, and that they suffer reproach meekly, not rendering railing for railing, nor evil for evil, but by patient continuance in well doing, they commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.		
49	Erect an Ad Interim Committee on AI	NEGATIVE See comments on Overture 3.  Likely: AC takes no position but provides a funding mechanism in case GA approves <i>CH</i> , 000, item 00.	Pacific Northwest	OC and all permanent committees & agencies
50	Encouragement to Discernment and Compassion Regarding Immigrants	AFFIRMATIVE A remarkable proposal. Whether affirmed or no, much good will have already been accomplished by its publication in the <i>CH</i> . Recall that the “whereas” paragraphs are not before the Assembly for affirmation; they set forth the argument of the Presbytery. Thus, disagreement with a “whereas” need not bear fruit in a negative conclusion. For example, I am doubtful about the propriety of addressing (but not the truth of) the final “whereas”. Nonetheless, the “resolved” paragraphs, as proposed, should be affirmed. To that end, consider a contribution from Calvin concerning the Sixth Commandment, “You shall not kill.” <sup>6</sup>  <i>39. The commandment</i> The purpose of this commandment is: the Lord has bound mankind together by a certain unity; hence each man ought to concern himself with the safety of all. To sum up, then, all violence, injury, and any harmful thing at all that may injure our neighbor's body are forbidden to us. We are accordingly commanded, if we find anything of use to us in saving our neighbors' lives, faithfully to employ it; if there is anything that makes for their peace, to see to it; if anything harmful, to ward it off; if they are in any danger, to lend a helping hand. If you recall that God is so speaking as Lawgiver, ponder at the same time that by this rule he wills to guide your soul. For it would be ridiculous that he who looks upon the thoughts of the heart and dwells especially upon them, should instruct only the body in true righteousness. Therefore this law also forbids murder of the heart, and enjoins the inner intent to save a brother's life. The hand, indeed, gives birth to murder, but the mind when infected with anger and hatred conceives it. See whether you can be angry against your brother without burning with desire to hurt him. If you cannot be angry with him, then you cannot hate him, for hatred is nothing but sustained anger. Although you dissimulate, and try to escape by vain shifts—where there is either anger or hatred, there is the intent to do harm. If you keep trying to evade the issue, the	Chesapeake	OC

<sup>6</sup> *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1559 edition (Battles trans.), volume 1, book II, p. 404-405.



#	SUBJECT	POSITION	PRESB	COC
		<p>Spirit has already declared that “he who hates a brother in his heart is a murderer” [1 John 3:15 p.]; the Lord Christ has declared that “whoever is angry with his brother is liable to judgment; whoever says ‘Raca’ is liable to the council; whoever says ‘You fool’ is liable to the hell of fire” [Matt. 5:22 p.].</p> <p><i>40. The reason for this commandment</i></p> <p>Scripture notes that this commandment rests upon a twofold basis: man is both the image of God, and our flesh. Now, if we do not wish to violate the image of God, we ought to hold our neighbor sacred. And if we do not wish to renounce all humanity, we ought to cherish his as our own flesh. We shall elsewhere discuss how this exhortation is to be derived from the redemption and grace of Christ. The Lord has willed that we consider those two things which are naturally in man, and might lead us to seek his preservation: to reverence his image imprinted in man, and to embrace our own flesh in him. He who has merely refrained from shedding blood has not therefore avoided the crime of murder. If you perpetrate anything by deed, if you plot anything by attempt, if you wish or plan anything contrary to the safety of a neighbor, you are considered guilty of murder. Again, unless you endeavor to look out for his safety according to your ability and opportunity, you are violating the law with a like heinousness. But if there is so much concern for the safety of his body, from this we may infer how much zeal and effort we owe the safety of the soul, which far excels the body in the Lord’s sight.</p>		

## APPENDIX

### Some Thoughts on the Consideration of Overtures<sup>7</sup>

In considering an Overture before the General Assembly, the Elders of the Church have a high privilege and responsibility, before our Lord, before the Lord’s people, and before a watching world. The calling to uphold the will of the Lord of the Church as revealed in Scripture, to love for the brethren, to reasonable engagement in a collegial spirit, and to seek not the good of a party, but the good of the church, would be hopelessly burdensome but for the promise of our Lord to work in and through our efforts at faithfulness.

Over many years of pursuing this calling, I have been guided by a number of principles that I offer for the encouragement of my brothers in this labor.

1. Providence prevails—the Lord orders our business, and though we know not for what particular end, we do know that it comes as a summons to trust, obey, and rejoice, knowing that all is for one’s spiritual and eternal good.

<sup>7</sup> For thoughts on the nature and practice of debate see my “Twenty Principles of Effective argumentation,” <https://newhopefairfax.org/resources/<Articles><Recent Authors>.”>

2. Concerning majority rule—The Presbyterian Church does not hold “the theory that majorities are wise and should rule, but that the Church comes to see together the mind of Christ by counseling together in love. While, from practical necessity, the majority prevails when there is a difference of judgment, this difference of judgment, after deliberation, is simply a failure of men to work out the rule of Christ. And the members of a majority ought to grieve more over the difference of judgment than rejoice over carrying the decision their way.”<sup>8</sup>
3. Look to the Word of Christ, as delivered in the Scriptures, as the rule for settling all substantial matters; exercise prudence and good sense in all matters merely circumstantial; and have the wisdom to so distinguish.
4. Those who overture the Assembly are “Fathers and Brethren” and should be treated as such with dignity and kindness.
5. Proposals should be considered with a sense of fair play, integrity and charity, putting aside selfishness, pride or party spirit, in order to glorify Christ in His Church and edify His people.
6. The burden of proof is on the proposer: To prevail a proposal must offer evidence and a rationale that is compelling, while displaying the virtues of “brevitas et claritas”.
7. *The Book of Church Order* is not a detailed collection of rules and regulations covering every circumstance, nor are amendments to the same a means for settling all controversies in the church. The *BCO* is a document of governmental structures and principles, in all that is necessary rooted in Scripture, while “there are some circumstances concerning the . . . government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.” (CF 1.6.)
8. There is a general objection to any proposed change in *The Book of Church Order*: Any new language will include undiscovered ambiguities that might well have disastrous unintended consequences, consequences that will only appear when the provisions are tested in cases by sharp and contending minds seeking possible meanings to their advantage. Thus, unless the change proposed is clearly necessary, the old language is to be preferred, because it has already been long-tested in cases, and persuasive precedents guide the church as to its meaning.

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<sup>8</sup> F.P. Ramsay, *An Exposition of the Form of Government and the Rules of Discipline of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* (Richmond: The Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1898), p. 92.