

FOOTHILLS OVERTURE #1

Overture:

Foothills Presbytery overtures the 222nd General Assembly (2016) to amend paragraph G-3.0503 of the Book of Order as follows, adding language in italics:

The General Assembly shall hold a stated meeting at least biennially. *Each General Assembly shall be organized around one of the Six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304), taken up in succession in the order listed in F-1.0304. The main business of each General Assembly shall be to discuss and to explore ways to enable Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) congregations and councils to fulfill more faithfully and effectively the Great End which is the theme for that General Assembly. Every third General Assembly shall depart from the rotation of the Six Great Ends and instead be called together to consider all amendments to the Constitution that have been properly submitted. All overtures to amend the Constitution, in order to be considered by the General Assembly for Constitutional Change, must have the endorsement of no fewer than 15% of the Presbyteries in the PC(USA). Overtures that receive two-thirds endorsement of the Presbyteries may be considered at any General Assembly following the achievement of the two-thirds endorsement.* The moderator, or in the event ... [the rest of G-3.0503 continues unaltered from this point];

And amending section G-6.04 by striking certain words, adding others as follows, and re-lettering paragraphs b, c, d, and e:

G-6.04 AMENDING THE *BOOK OF ORDER*

Amendments to the Book of Order shall be made only *at a General Assembly for Constitutional Change (every third Assembly, as required by G-3.0503) and only if all the following steps are completed:*

a. All overtures to amend the Constitution must have the endorsement of fifteen percent of the presbyteries to be considered by the General Assembly. Overtures that achieve endorsement of two-thirds of the presbyteries may be considered at the next session of the General Assembly, regardless of the Assembly rotation (G-3.0503).

~~a.~~ *b. All proposals requesting amendment of the Book of Order are communicated in writing to the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly no later than 120 days prior to the convening of the next session of the General Assembly at which they will be considered.*

Rationale:

The General Assembly exists to serve the individual churches which make up the PCUSA, and not the churches to serve the General Assembly;

The General Assembly “constitutes the bond of union, community, and mission among all its congregations and councils, to the end that the whole church becomes a community of

faith, hope, love, and witness” (G-3.30501);

The Six Great Ends of the Church are *“the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world” (F-1.0304);*

In actual result, recent General Assemblies have produced the opposite of a *“bond of union, community, and mission”* among its member congregations – but instead have produced strife, division, and dysfunction; and thereby greatly distracted PCUSA congregations from their central work of pursuing the Six Great Ends in their mission and ministry;

The central focus of recent General Assemblies has not been on *“providing that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard . . . that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received . . . [and the nurture of] the covenant community of disciples” (G-3.0501a-c)*, but rather has been centered upon the consideration of constitutional amendments – effectively turning the meetings of the General Assembly into biennial Constitutional Conventions;

A Constitution is not a manual of operations, but is a deeper document expressing shared and unifying principles and values which establish the general framework for governance, and therefore should not be easily amended without thoughtful consideration and widespread consensus regarding these fundamental principles and values;

General Assembly meetings of the PCUSA must return to their rightful purpose of supporting and building up the congregations of our denomination as defined by the Book of Order – enabling them, individually and together in church councils, to more faithfully and effectively fulfill the Six Great Ends of the Church.

FOOTHILLS OVERTURE NO. 2

Overture:

Foothills Presbytery overtures the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to adopt the following position concerning the process for addressing issues of social justice, economics, and politics:

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) hereby reaffirms the importance of and supports engagement of Presbyterians in issues of social justice, economics and politics. Following the example of Jesus Christ, Christians should engage in matters of social justice, economics and politics, in addition to matters of the church and theology.

In carrying out this responsibility as a denomination, the PC(USA) shall cease taking divisive, up-or-down, yes-or-no positions on partisan issues of social justice, economics and politics at the national level. Instead, the PC(USA), when such matters are properly before the General Assembly, shall call to the denomination's attention the importance of the issue, explore the various dimensions of the issue, and implore its members to learn about and pray about the issue and to become engaged according to one's conscience and views at the local church and presbytery level. The PC(USA) shall also develop the schedule and agenda for the General Assembly so that the time allocated for education on such issues in committees, on the floor, and with all other aspects of the General Assembly is not disproportionate with the fact that social justice, economics and politics relate primarily to just one of the six great ends of the church.

Specifically, Foothills Presbytery overtures the 222nd General Assembly to amend the Standing Rules of the General Assembly regarding Plenary Meetings by adding the following new paragraph F.5.c. and re-lettering existing paragraphs c, d, e, f, and g:

c. Any social witness policy statement or resolution to be proposed at the General Assembly shall first have the concurrence of one-third of the Presbyteries. On any such issue, as an alternative to establishing a potentially divisive policy by a yes/no vote, the Assembly shall seriously consider calling the denomination's attention to the issue to explore its various dimensions, and imploring its members to learn and pray about the issue and become engaged at the local church and presbytery level. In developing the docket of plenary and committee meetings, the docket framers shall be mindful that social witness policy relates primarily to only one of the six great ends of the church and not give disproportionate attention to this one.

Rationale

- Jesus was born into and lived in the real world of politics, economics and social injustice;
- The ministry and life of Jesus demands that Christians engage not just in matters of the church and theology, but also in the real world by attempting to right wrongs and combat injustice;
- At times the church has not engaged in matters of social justice, economics and politics, and, in those situations, has perpetuated injustice in the world;
- Presbyterians are a diverse Christian denomination with a wide range of views on matters of

social issues, economics and politics;

- Presbyterians favor open and respectful debate about matters of social justice, economics and politics and how the Christian faith impacts such issues;
- The General Assembly of the PC(USA) has taken positions as a denomination on a wide range of partisan issues on matters of social justice, economics and politics about which there is diversity of viewpoints among the denomination;
- Taking yes or no positions on partisan issues has caused and continues to cause division within the denomination and loss of members.
- Foothills Presbytery believes there is a better way to fulfill the church's obligation to engage in matters of social justice, economics and politics, but avoid at the national level taking unnecessary positions on controversial issues that have the adverse effects described above.
- The makers of this overture understand social witness “policy statements” and “resolutions” according to the definitions adopted by the 205th General Assembly (1993) in the report entitled “Why and How the Church Makes a Social Witness Policy.”

FOOTHILLS OVERTURE NO. 3

Overture

Foothills Presbytery overtures the 222nd General Assembly (2016) to temporarily set aside its Guideline and Policy for “Forming Social Policy” found in the appendix to the Standing Rules of the General Assembly. This section pertains to the role of the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy. Foothills Presbytery recommends the following to temporarily take its place:

For the next three General Assemblies (223, 224, and 225) the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) shall focus its attention on generating discussion in the presbyteries about any social witness policy concerns that arise. The aim of these discussions will be to work toward forming consensus in the broader Church regarding social witness.

For this time period, the ACSWP shall not on its own propose any Social Witness Policy to the General Assembly, synods or presbyteries, but shall allow any social witness policy proposals to arise from the presbyteries in the form of overtures.

For this time period, the ACSWP shall not serve its usual role as a clearing house or editor for all social witness policy proposals written by any other entity.

Rationale:

The Social Witness Policy of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has been decided at General Assembly by up or down votes, sometimes by narrow margins, without first generating a sense of the will of Christ from the broader Church. This form of decision making has often led to deep divisions in the Church. By spending time and effort at generating conversation and moving toward consensus, Social Witness Policy can be formed that better reflects the wisdom and discernment of the whole Church.

As much as possible, these conversations with presbyteries should be held through electronic means or regional meetings to minimize the expense. Any funds that would have been spent to bring ACSWP to its own committee meetings should be redirected toward the presbytery conversations.

In doing this, the ACSWP will be fulfilling the task force policy in section 3.c. of “Forming Social Policy” to develop a plan in which the whole church can participate in the formation of social witness policy.

FOOTHILLS OVERTURE #4

Overture

Foothills Presbytery overtures the 222nd General Assembly (2016) to amend the Standing Rules of the General Assembly by ~~striking~~ certain words and *adding* others as follows:

Under the section B “Commissioners, Delegates and other Participants at the Meeting,” Subsection 2. “Advisory Delegates,” Paragraph b, “Categories”:

Categories b. There shall be ~~four~~ *five* categories of advisory delegates: youth, theological student; missionary, ecumenical and *executive presbyter*. The expenses of each of *the first four* advisory delegates shall be paid by the General Assembly (see Standing Rule I.3.) on the same basis as the expenses of commissioners (see Standing Rule B.2.f.(2) below for exception). *The expenses for the executive presbyter advisory delegate shall be paid by the presbytery on the same basis as expenses for commissioners.*

Add a Paragraph “h” under subsection 2 “Advisory Delegates” as follows

Presbyter Advisory Delegates: For each General Assembly, twenty percent of the presbyteries may elect an Executive Presbyter Advisory Delegate (EPAD) who shall ordinarily be the presbytery executive (or person operating as the chief executive of the presbytery by any other title) to be an advisory delegate to the General Assembly. The Committee on the Office of the General Assembly shall design a rotation system among the presbyteries to accomplish this.

Rationale

Presbytery executives have a unique perspective, seeing intimately into the lives of congregations and closely into the life of the General Assembly at the same time.

This perspective gives them a view of the whole church in a way that few others have.

They care deeply about the life of the congregations and pastors they serve, and they care about the mission of the General Assembly as the whole Church ministers to the world.

The voice of presbytery executives has been systematically diminished for over thirty years because they have no say at General Assembly meetings unless they are elected a commissioner. This might happen only once in an executive’s career because of the method commissioners are chosen. This important voice is effectively minimized at the Assembly.

The voice of presbytery executives is very much needed at the Assembly to keep the whole church in perspective and to prevent the Assembly from seeming like an “other.”

Paragraph c would not be changed, so Executive Presbyter Advisory Delegates would have the same privileges as other advisory delegates. That is, they would serve on a committee with voice and vote and would have voice on the floor of the Assembly.

Presbyteries would cover the expenses of Executive Presbyter Advisory Delegates, so financial implications to the Assembly would not be a concern.

FOOTHILLS OVERTURE #5

Overture:

Foothills Presbytery overtures the 222nd General Assembly (2016) to amend G-6.04e by striking the following language:

e. The Stated Clerk receives written advice that a proposed amendment to the *Book of Order* has received the affirmative votes of a majority of the presbyteries. ~~The proposed amendment so approved shall become effective one year following the adjournment of the assembly transmitting the proposed amendment.~~

and by replacing the language with the words in *italics* to read:

e. The Stated Clerk receives written advice that a proposed amendment to the *Book of Order* has received the affirmative votes of *a two-thirds majority* of the presbyteries. *The proposed amendment, if approved and enacted by the next General Assembly, shall become effective at the close of that General Assembly meeting.*

and by engaging the following approval process:

The thusly amended Book of Order, along with whatever other Book of Order amendments approved by the 222nd General Assembly will be sent out to presbyteries for a vote, and upon achieving a two-thirds majority, the 223rd General Assembly shall vote to ratify this change.

Rationale:

Constitutions are social documents that assert and affirm the core beliefs, values, principles and appropriate rules to express the given identity of a people. As such constitutions are core social identity documents and should be stable across extended periods of time. In our American political experience this has been the case. The United States has only amended the Constitution a total of twenty-seven times across its near two and a half centuries (and only 17 times since the original first ten amendments).

In the formation of the PCUSA the Church chose to dilute its understanding of Constitution by creating a Book of Order that was a hybrid of a constitution and manual of operations. In doing so the democratic principle ("majority rule") was raised above the constitutional principle ("supermajority to amend"). This choice led to not only a loss of a stable understanding of our core identity, but it also promoted factionalism within the denomination. The passage of this amendment will appropriately restore stability to our core identity document, reassert the constitutional principle and aid the church in regaining an appropriate understanding of engaging in patient discernment of the Will of Christ for His Church.

FOOTHILLS OVERTURE #6:

Overture:

Foothills Presbytery overtures the 222nd General Assembly (2016) to amend the Book of Order, Chapter 3, “Councils of the Church,” by adding to G-3.0105:

Point c: A presbytery may register as “Abstaining” when voting on General Assembly proposals recommending constitutional changes.

Rationale:

- The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is called to work for peace, unity, and purity, and its member congregations are committed to reducing any factors that obscure Christian unity;
- Church unity depends solely on Jesus Christ and not an unlikely if not impossible unanimity on the range of particular and partisan issues we encounter in society and culture;
- The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) continues to press votes on divisive issues which have disrupted the peace, unity, and purity of the Church and diminished membership and mission momentum.

When abstaining on constitutional matters, a presbytery decision to abstain will not be recorded as a “no” vote. However, a majority of presbyteries will be required to vote “yes” for a constitutional amendment to pass.

A presbytery decision to register as abstaining may be accompanied by that presbytery’s rationale for abstaining. The abstaining presbytery, for instance, may abstain from conviction that a vote to change the constitution at that time is inadvisable, divisive, and that further prayer, discussion, and discernment will benefit the Church.

FOOTHILLS OVERTURE #7

Overture

Foothills Presbytery overtures the 222nd General Assembly (2016) to amend Section L of the Standing Rules of the General Assembly as found in the Manual of the General Assembly. Foothills Presbytery recommends the following words to be added (*in italics*):

SECTION L

Recommending Amendments to the Standing Rules

1. In consultation with the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly, the Stated Clerk shall recommend to the next session of the General Assembly any changes in the Standing Rules of the General Assembly deemed necessary. The Stated Clerk shall consult with the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly before proposing to the General Assembly any amendment to the standing rules.

Amending the Standing Rules

2. Presbyteries and Synods may submit overtures to amend or suspend the Standing Rules. The Committee on the Office of the General Assembly (COGA), in consultation with the Stated Clerk, may offer their advice on any such overtures in the same way that the Advisory Committee on the Constitution (ACC) offers advice on amendments to the Constitution.

3. The Standing Rules of the General Assembly may be amended by a majority vote of the commissioners present and voting. A motion to amend the rules is debatable.

Suspending the Standing Rules

4. A motion to suspend the standing rules is not debatable and shall require a two-thirds vote of the total enrollment of the commissioners.

Rationale

1. A fundamental principle of Reformed polity is that the people shall have a vote in the way they are governed. The Standing Rules govern the meetings of the General Assembly in much detail, and the structure of these meetings has a great impact on synods, presbyteries, churches and church members.
2. The Committee on the Office of the General Assembly, together with the Stated Clerk, constitute a body much too limited to adequately represent the broader church in structuring General Assembly meetings.

FOOTHILLS OVERTURE #8

Overture:

Foothills Presbytery overtures the 222nd General Assembly (2016) to amend G-3-05 by inserting a new section, G-3-0502 and renumbering section G-3.0502 as G-3.0503 and section G-3.0503 as G-3.0504. The new section shall read:

G-3.0502 Organizational Review

The General Assembly has the responsibility to regularly review the Manual of the General Assembly. Presbyteries and Synods may submit overtures to amend, delete or suspend sections of the Manual of the General Assembly.

Rationale

1. A fundamental principle of Reformed polity is that the people shall have a vote in the way they are governed. The General Assembly Manual of Operations and standing rules govern the meetings of the General Assembly in much detail, and the structure of these meetings has a great impact on the synods, presbyteries, churches and church members.
2. Both church and secular history show that bureaucracies, once established, have a tendency to become entrenched, isolated and self-perpetuating far beyond their original purpose and function. As there has been a revolution in communications and as the rapidity of social and political change shows no sign of abating, it is important for us to have structures that are nimble and adaptable. Therefore, it is important for the Body of the General Assembly to regularly address and review the operations of the Church.

FOOTHILLS OVERTURE #9:

Recommendation:

Foothills Presbytery overtures the 222nd General Assembly (2016) to create a General Assembly Reform Coordinating Committee with the aim to reform, renew and refresh the practice of our Reformed polity for the 21st century, centered in the koinonia of our shared participation in Jesus Christ, the true Head of the Church (F-1.02). The General Assembly Reform Coordinating Committee will:

1. Coordinate with Synod and Presbytery Stated Clerks and Executives to organize regional gatherings of the commissioners to the 222nd and subsequent General Assemblies, plus Ruling Elders, Teaching Elders, Deacons, Educators, Presbytery and Synod Staff persons and lay persons, to come together to study the core principles of our historic polity, to reflect upon the sweeping religious, political, cultural and social changes in which we find ourselves, and advise the GA Reform Coordinating Committee regarding the content and organization of the Constitution, the creation of a strategic ten year shared denominational mission plan, and to devise the most effective structures to faithfully and boldly uphold our Reformed polity and practice.
2. Study and devise a strategy to most effectively use the modern communication that is afforded to us through the internet and social media.
3. Receive, organize and report to the 223rd and subsequent General Assemblies faithful summaries of the regional gatherings.

Rationale:

Foothills Presbytery, affirming G-3.0501 that, *The General Assembly constitutes the bond of union, community, and mission among all its congregations and councils, to the end that the whole church becomes a community of faith, hope, love and witness,* has submitted eight overtures with the aim of engaging our denomination in the sustained work of reform, renewal and modernization. These individual overtures represent key strategic changes in our recent practice that we believe will instigate the Church to enter a new era of reform. Binding these diverse overtures together are the following principles:

1. **Stability of Identity:** The PC(USA) needs a stable Constitution that is undergirded by renewing the Constitutional Principle above the Democratic Principle. (Overture 007)
2. **Change through Building Broad Consensus:** The PC(USA) needs to move away from seeking change by legislation, and rather move to broad consensus building in and between the Councils of the Church. (Overture 003)
3. **Holistic Witness:** Through a balanced focus upon *The Great Ends of the Church* (F-1.0304) at the Meetings of the General Assembly, the PC(USA) needs a more holistic and faithful practice of living out the breadth of our Calling. (Overture 003)
4. **Focus and Depth:** The PC(USA) needs to improve and deepen its commitment to and practice of meaningful social witness by moving away from the practice of pushing “yes/no” votes on highly partisan issues at the biennial Meetings of the General Assembly, and rather work to engage every congregation and every Council of the Church to find deep and rich consensus. (Overtures 004 and 005)
5. **Mutual Interdependence:** As Presbytery administrative leaders are in the unique position of relations between congregations and all higher Councils, the PC(USA) needs

their wisdom and perspective as Advisory Delegates to the Meetings of the General Assembly (Overture 006)

6. **Adaptability and Nimbleness:** As the world of the 21st Century is rapidly changing and as bureaucratic structures, once established and funded, tend towards outliving their original purpose, the PC(USA) needs the regular input of presbyteries into the issue of best practices and most fitting structures of the national Church. (Overtures 009 and 010)
7. **More than Yes or No:** As complex and multifaceted issues are often made simplistic by simple “yes” or “no” choices, the PC(USA) needs to create a third category of voting that allows for the message, “no, not now.”

Believing the whole Church and every level of Council in the Church must be engaged in this work of reform, renewal and refreshment, the creation of a GA Coordinating Committee is the best method to engage in serious season of reform that is neither too hasty nor too tardy, but will help the PCUSA reform, renew and modernize its practice in a manner that is upholds the venerable standard, “let it be done decently and in order.”

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