

THE OVERTURE PROCESS

A. DEFINITION

An overture is an official communication from a lower governing body to a higher governing body requesting the latter to take a particular action or approve/disapprove or endorse a particular statement or resolution. An overture can originate from

1. a local church Session to the Presbytery,
2. a Presbytery Committee to the Presbytery,
3. a Presbytery to the Synod,
4. a Presbytery to the General Assembly.

B. ASSUMPTIONS

1. It is our opportunity and privilege, as part of the connectional church, to raise issues that are of concern to a particular governing body or to the denomination as a whole. Concerns may be given in the form of an overture when specific action is desired.
2. The Presbytery will provide for a consideration of the issues in the overtures which is as fair and balanced as possible so that the Presbytery members can make informed decisions.
3. It is essential that members of the Presbytery who will be voting should understand the issues in the overtures as clearly as possible. Quite often because of their complexity, some issues take time and study to understand fully.
4. Sessions submitting overtures have the responsibility of considering the potential impact on the Presbytery and the church at large. Care should be taken to follow principles of Presbyterian polity, protecting the integrity of conscience and avoiding personal character attacks.
5. A realistic amount of docket time should be provided for the study and discussion of the overtures.

C. PREPARATION OF OVERTURES

1. A Session or Presbytery Committee considering submitting an overture shall research the *Book of Order* to determine if said overture is in keeping with the polity and principles of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). If changes to Presbyterian polity and principles are intended by the overture, these shall be stated as clearly as possible.
2. A Session or Presbytery Committee considering submitting an overture shall research the *Minutes of the General Assembly* of the immediate past two years to determine if a similar overture has already been passed so that duplication of action can be avoided. It is also advisable to research the issue raised in the overture with the Office of the Stated Clerk of the governing body to which the overture will be directed.

3. Copies of the *Book of Order* and *General Assembly Minutes* are available in the Presbytery Office.

D. PRESENTATION OF OVERTURES

1. All overtures received by the Stated Clerk's office shall be referred to the Polity and Records Committee of the Presbytery and other committees of Presbytery that are involved for study and response.
2. The Session or Presbytery Committee submitting an overture shall designate one of its members to act as an advocate to provide information on the background and intent of the overture to the Polity and Records Committee and to the other involved committees.

E. CONSIDERATION OF AN OVERTURE

1. The Polity and Records Committee shall have the responsibility of studying an overture referred to it by the Stated Clerk, and with the guidance of the Stated Clerk shall process its presentation to the Presbytery for consideration and action.
2. The Polity and Records Committee shall confer with committees of the Presbytery whose responsibilities deal with the issues raised in the overture to receive their insight and to review the background, intent, and impact of the overture.
3. The Polity and Records Committee, after consultation with appropriate committees, shall recommend to the Presbytery one of three actions on the overture: affirmative vote, negative vote, or no action. The recommendation shall be based on an examination of the proposals in the light of Scripture and on a careful consideration of the principles of Presbyterian polity, *Book of Order*, G-4.0301.
4. Copies of the proposed overture shall be mailed to all presbyters.
5. If the issues raised by the overture are of such a nature that they require thoughtful study by the Presbytery, the Polity and Records Committee shall request a pre-Presbytery gathering the day of the Presbytery meeting that will consider the overture in order to study and analyze the issues.

F. THE DISPOSITION OF AN OVERTURE

The Presbytery's response to an overture shall be one of three actions: an affirmative vote, a negative vote, or no action.

1. **Affirmative Vote:** An affirmative vote signifies that the Presbytery has given its approval to the overture.

An overture approved by the Presbytery shall be forwarded through the office of the Stated Clerk to the appropriate governing body and the Stated Clerk shall inform the Session or Presbytery Committee submitting the overture of this action.

When an overture is forwarded to a higher governing body, the Presbytery shall designate a commissioner or some other person in attendance at the meeting of the higher governing body who shall be the advocate for the overture and shall be available to the higher governing body to provide information on the background and intent of the overture.

2. Negative Vote: A negative vote signifies that the Presbytery has rejected the overture.

When an overture is rejected by the Presbytery, the Stated Clerk shall notify the Session or Presbytery Committee submitting it of the action taken.

3. No Action: No action signifies that the Presbytery wishes to let the issue drop without taking either a positive or negative stand.

When the Presbytery takes no action on an overture, the Stated Clerk shall notify the Session or Presbytery Committee submitting it of this decision.