

Overtures Analysis & Recommendations for the 53rd General Assembly

Introduction, Methodology, and Fallibility

The 53rd General Assembly faces an unusually heavy docket, with more than eighty overtures submitted for consideration. That volume requires careful work from commissioners. When so many constitutional and procedural changes are before the church at once, the burden should rest on each overture to demonstrate not only that it addresses a real concern, but that its proposed language is necessary, clear, and unlikely to create greater difficulties than the problem it seeks to solve.

Morton Smith's observation is worth keeping in mind as we approach this docket: when a system of church government seems to operate with friction or error, "it is not necessarily the fault of the system, but of those seeking to implement it." That does not mean the BCO should never be amended. It does mean that commissioners should distinguish carefully between defects in our constitutional language and failures in wisdom, discipline, courage, or ordinary Presbyterian practice.

My aim in these notes is not to be needlessly negative. It is to be cautious in the proper sense. The peace, purity, and good order of the church are not served by hasty amendment, imprecise drafting, or constitutional language that answers one problem by creating several others. Even well-intentioned overtures can produce unintended consequences if their terms are unclear, overbroad, underdeveloped, or in tension with existing provisions of the Book of Church Order.

I have tried to evaluate each overture according to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in America. I have also consulted the report of the Committee on Constitutional Business, Morton Smith's commentary on the BCO, and notes from other PCA presbyters.

In preparing these notes, I sought to stress-test each proposal for ambiguous wording, constitutional tension, overbreadth or underbreadth, procedural confusion, and possible unintended consequences. Where I believe an overture addresses a legitimate concern but contains curable defects, I have suggested amendment strategies for the Overtures Committee to consider.

In a docket this large, it is possible to miss a procedural nuance, a constitutional implication, or a pastoral consideration. If you believe I have misread a provision of the BCO, misapplied the Standards, overlooked a relevant precedent, or failed to see how an overture could be amended constructively, I would be grateful to hear from you.

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TL;DR: Overtures to the 53 General Assembly

	Description	Rec Answer	Rationale
1	Lowering thresholds for assistant/associate pastor succession.	Negative	The heightened threshold protects congregations by ensuring internal succession proceeds only with overwhelming unity.
2	Voting rights for members in mission churches before a pastor is called.	Negative	The proposed language lacks precision and appears to import too much of BCO 25 into BCO 5.
3	Mandating specific procedural paths and witness interviews in judicial cases.	Negative	The amendments overcorrect for procedural deficiencies and undermine the discretion ordinarily entrusted to lower courts.
4	Adding a time of prayer to the General Assembly docket.	Affirmative	While it could have been a simple request to the Stated Clerk, the author is prepared to approve it.
5	Prohibiting more than one person from the same Presbytery on the AC	Negative	It elevates geographical representation over the Assembly's liberty to elect the most qualified presbyters.
6	Restricting the ability of individual commissioners to pull items from omnibus.	Negative	It shifts the balance too far away from the deliberative rights and oversight responsibilities of individual commissioners.
7	Expanding authority for the Committee on RPR.	Negative	It assigns a function belonging to a court or commission to a committee, potentially conflicting with BCO 40-5.
8	Moving the deadline for floor nominations to Tuesday afternoon.	Negative	A Tuesday deadline prevents commissioners from responding to new information received during the Assembly itself.
9	Requiring floor nominations to explain contributions to proportionality.	Negative	The overture introduces procedural uncertainty by failing to define what constitutes a "sufficient" explanation.
10	Boundary change regarding Pittsburgh and Ohio Presbyteries.	Affirmative	It is a boundary change request with necessary consent provided by a companion overture.
11	Requiring annual reporting from MNA on church-planting data.	Affirmative	Regular reporting will help commissioners evaluate MNA's work with better objective data and less guesswork.
12	Lowering educational requirements for Teaching Elders.	Negative	Lowering standards to an Associate's degree or GED introduces subjectivity and departs from the ideal of a learned ministry.
13	Establishing quorum standards for Session commissions.	Affirmative, as amended	The suggested amendment restores a Session's discretionary power to determine the quorum of its own commissions.
14	Restricting staff titles and roles that imply ordained authority.	Negative	The proposed language is too expansive, subjective, and likely to generate more confusion than clarity regarding staff roles.
15	Clarifying the 30-day deadline for filing appeals and complaints.	Negative	Deleting existing language removes the legal mechanism that allows courts to treat notice as having occurred at a definite time.
16	Relocating the prohibition against circularizing the court.	Affirmative	This relocation clarifies that the rule is needed for neutrality in higher courts while allowing godly conversation in lower courts.
17	Extending BCO 25-10 property protections to mission churches.	Negative	It blurs the distinction between mission and particular churches, creating potential confusion over the control of assets.
18	Allowing mother church Sessions to issue direct calls to church planters.	Affirmative	It provides a cleaner process for mother-daughter church planting relationships without weakening Presbytery oversight.
19	Higher-court representation for mission churches.	Negative	This creates procedural problems as mission churches lack the permanent governing bodies required for such representation.
20	Establishing a process for "transitory Sessions" in struggling churches.	Affirmative, as amended	Amendments are needed to ensure explicit congregational consent and regular annual review by the Presbytery.
21	Refining transfer examination requirements for Teaching Elders.	Affirmative	This aligns constitutional language with actual practice while maintaining high standards for receiving ministers from other branches.
22	Streamlining the process for churches transferring between Presbyteries.	Affirmative	This is a common-sense amendment that removes redundant procedural requirements for transferring churches.
23	Reorganizing BCO 14 for easier citation and use.	Affirmative	The reorganization makes the chapter more intuitive to use and results in shorter, cleaner citations.
24	Clarifying the conduct of "final trials" for ordination.	Negative	The phrase "final trials" is ambiguous and the proposal may unintentionally narrow discretion already granted by the BCO.

25	Restructuring examination requirements for candidates and ministers.	Affirmative	This restructuring provides a clearer, better-organized framework that reduces redundancy and improves consistency.
26	Changing the amendment threshold to two-thirds of <i>voting</i> Presbyteries.	Negative	This would lower the threshold for constitutional change and undermine the stability of the denomination's foundational documents.
27	Making General Assembly assumption of original jurisdiction optional.	Negative	Weakening this mandatory protection would make the Assembly's responsibility to address serious scandals merely optional.
28	Right of members to complain against Presbytery actions on local matters.	Negative	The BCO already secures the right for members to complain against any court to whose jurisdiction they are subject.
29	Clarifying the suspension of a judgment during the appeal process.	Affirmative, as amended	The overture's two-step structure helpfully ensures that immediate temporary suspension is eventually tied to a formal filing.
30	Presbytery responsibility for ministers in transfer.	Affirmative	A minister should remain the responsibility of his original Presbytery until the receiving Presbytery formally receives him.
31	Revision of the Directory for Worship.	Refer Back	This should be referred back due to concurrent work being done by an Ad-Interim Committee on the same topic.
32	Broadening requirements for reviewing governing and operating documents.	Affirmative, as amended	The language should be broadened to cover all relevant bylaws and manuals while limiting pre-Assembly mailings to minutes.
33	Limiting minority reports from the RPR.	Negative	This could restrict the right of a committee minority to bring substantial disagreements on broader policy matters before the Assembly.
34	Mandating the establishment of a diaconate.	Negative	The language creates confusion regarding the election of deacons and disrupts existing fallback arrangements for small churches.
35	Establishing a 90-day deadline for filing an indictment.	Affirmative, as amended	A reasonable deadline protects both the purity of the church and the rights of the accused from indefinite delay.
36	Preserving distinctions between ordained office and unordained service.	Negative	The proposal does not adequately account for existing provisions for unordained assistance and uses overly subjective language.
37	Permitting local Sessions to ordain women as deacons.	Negative	Local Sessions do not have the authority to redefine constitutional qualifications for ordained office for the whole denomination.
38	Permitting unordained persons to use the title "deacon".	Negative	This separates the title from the office, creating constitutional confusion and destabilizing the vocabulary of church office.
39	Requiring assistant pastors to be considered for associate status after five years.	Negative	This mandate is too rigid for the variety of healthy pastoral relationships and may force congregations into unnecessary dilemmas.
40	Mandating a six-month transition period for denominational coordinators.	Negative	Mandatory extensions for coordinators who have lost the Assembly's confidence could create instability and conflict.
41	Requiring a supermajority vote for electing denominational executives.	Negative	A supermajority requirement could produce deadlocks and leave agencies without necessary leadership.
42	Restoring an accidentally omitted phrase to BCO 29-1.	Affirmative, as amended	This should be treated as an editorial restoration by the Stated Clerk rather than a substantive constitutional amendment.
43	Related to coordinator terms.	With Ref to 77	This overture is addressed by the recommendation for Overture 77.
44	Establishing the Arkansas Presbytery.	Affirmative	This represents years of labor and will provide better regional oversight and care for the involved churches.
45	Restricting floor nominations to previously submitted names.	Negative	This shift in power away from the Assembly itself relies on an ambiguous definition of "previously submitted".
46	Defining public accusations as probable offenses.	Negative	The sweeping language could interfere with investigation duties and pressure courts toward process without proper inquiry.
47	Related to floor nominations.	With Ref to 45	This overture is addressed by the recommendation for Overture 45.
48	Prohibiting titles that "imply the authority" of ordained office.	Negative	The language is too subjective for objective application and introduces a needlessly accusatory tone into the BCO.
49	Increasing Ruling Elder representation for congregations.	Negative	A flat increase does not address the actual vocational and financial obstacles that limit Ruling Elder attendance.
50	Recommending a season of prayer and fasting.	Affirmative	This fits within the Directory for Worship and offers an opportunity for unity in repentance and supplication.

51	Related to transitory Sessions.	With Ref to 20	This overture is addressed by the recommendation for Overture 20.
52	Prohibiting the creation of extra-constitutional offices.	Affirmative	This provides a necessary clarification that church offices are governed by Scripture and the Constitution, not local invention.
53	Prohibiting RPR members from debating their own recommendations.	Negative	This would prevent the only men who have seen the primary evidence from participating in floor debate.
54	Clarifying the right of appeal for those in contumacy.	Negative	The overture either strips rights from the convicted or is redundant with existing protections in the BCO.
55	Related to assistant pastor status.	With Ref to 39	This overture is addressed by the recommendation for Overture 39.
56	Restricting judicial representatives to ordained officers.	Negative	This restriction is too narrow and could deprive parties of competent lay counsel, such as legally trained laymen.
57	Requiring Sessions to submit records of congregational meetings.	Affirmative	It is reasonable for Presbyteries to access official records of congregational actions to fulfill their duty of oversight.
58	Requiring all church court clerks to be ordained elders.	Affirmative	The role involves exercising joint power and should be reserved for those bound by vows.
59	Administrative deletion for members with conscientious objections.	Negative	This would allow Sessions to bypass diligent pastoral care in favor of administrative convenience.
60	Requiring deacons to distribute elements of the Lord's Supper.	Negative	Logistical means of distribution should not be elevated into mandatory constitutional requirements for worship.
61	Commending the Danvers Statement as a pastoral resource.	Affirmative	The statement is a useful, non-binding resource that faithfully echoes the PCA's existing complementarian principles.
62	Establishing the Smoky Mountain Presbytery.	Affirmative	Dividing the presbytery better enables elders to gather, deliberate, and shepherd effectively in that region.
63	Giving preference in debate to commissioners who separate items.	Affirmative, as amended	Objecting commissioners should have the initial opportunity to explain why they pulled an item for separate debate.
64	Allowing retired ministers to choose their court of membership.	Negative	This would effectively remove retired ministers from ordinary constitutional accountability and discipline.
65	Mandatory mechanisms for testing the repentance of the accused.	Negative	The proposed standard is too rigid and risks creating a coercive mechanism that could compromise court impartiality.
66	Recommending prayer for the propagation of the gospel.	Affirmative	It calls the churches to pray according to concerns already reflected in Scripture and the Standards.
67	Adding language regarding "credible reports" for higher court action.	Negative	Existing BCO language already requires courts to evaluate the credibility and gravity of reports before acting.
68	Making nine Administrative Committee members nonvoting.	Negative	This creates significant administrative confusion regarding quorum and the AC's civil corporate capacity.
69	Harmonizing language regarding the record on appeal.	Affirmative	Clear, consistent rules for assembling records serve both the appellant and the reviewing court.
70	Supporting Korean Language Presbyteries.	Affirmative	This practical measure supports the growth and orderly connectionalism of these specific presbyteries.
71	Creating substitute unordained diaconal structures.	Negative	This risks weakening the congregation's constitutional authority to elect its own deacons as ordained officers.
72	Requiring annual recording of Session and Diaconate composition.	Affirmative, as amended	This provides Presbyteries a clearer picture of the officer health and diaconal development of their churches.
73	Related to executive elections.	With Ref to 41	This overture is addressed by the recommendation for Overture 41.
74	Formal commissioning for unordained persons.	Negative	Creating a formal rite of commissioning risks adding new quasi-offices that the Constitution does not define.
75	Partial amendments regarding "notice of appeal".	Negative	Partial amendments are dangerous; changes to the Rules of Discipline should be comprehensive and consistent.
76	Related to prayer for the propagation of the gospel.	In Ref to 66	This overture is addressed by the recommendation for Overture 66.

77	Establishing four-year terms for the Stated Clerk and coordinators.	Affirmative	Longer terms provide necessary vocational stability and bring these roles into alignment with Agency leadership.
78	Related to electronic meetings.	With Ref to 79	This overture is addressed by the recommendation for Overture 79.
79	Formally authorizing electronic meetings.	Affirmative	This is a practical update that allows committees and commissions to conduct business efficiently between gatherings.
80	Establishing a study committee on Critical Theory.	Affirmative	The proposal addresses an urgent pastoral and theological issue facing the churches with careful, confessional analysis.
81	Mandating wine for the Lord's Supper at General Assembly.	Negative	A mandate may imply that congregations using grape juice offer a deficient expression of the sacrament.
82	Allowing a single elder to receive new members.	Negative	This grants jurisdictional power to an individual elder, which is contrary to the principle of joint power.
83	Requiring theology teachers to be ordained and accountable.	Affirmative	It is reasonable to ensure those teaching doctrine to future leaders are ordained and ecclesiastically accountable.
84	Requiring annual theological view checks for officers.	Affirmative	This operationalizes existing vows and helps courts fulfill their responsibility to guard sound doctrine.
85	Organizing dissents, protests, and objections into separate chapters.	Affirmative	This improves the structure and usability of the BCO while clarifying the specific function of objections.
86	Replacing the term "complaint" with "inquiry".	Negative	Softening the name without changing the adversarial nature of the process creates more confusion than clarity.
87	Boundary change regarding Ohio and Pittsburgh Presbyteries.	Affirmative	This mirrors Overture 10 and includes the necessary consent from both parties.
88	Administrative mandates for CDM.	Refer Back	These concerns are better addressed through direct communication than an inflexible Assembly mandate.
89	Related to prayer for the gospel.	With Ref to 66	This overture is addressed by the recommendation for Overture 66.

Overture 1 - Negative

The overture would remove the requirement of a four-fifths congregational vote by secret ballot and lower the Presbytery's required approval from three-fourths to two-thirds. The rationale argues that the current threshold unduly restricts congregational rights. I would argue the opposite: the heightened threshold protects the congregation by ensuring that an internal succession proceeds only when there is overwhelming unity.

The BCO already recognizes the danger of pressing forward with a pastoral call when a large minority is opposed. BCO 20-5 and 24-5 instruct the moderator to seek to dissuade a majority from prosecuting a call in such circumstances. If that principle applies in ordinary elections, it is even more important in the unusual circumstance of an assistant or associate pastor succeeding a senior pastor.

The rationale also notes that the PCA has not seen the feared abuse under the current rule. That may be evidence that the current rule is doing its work. High thresholds do not exist because every church is likely to abuse the process, but because the damage caused by a mishandled pastoral succession can be severe and long-lasting. I do not believe the case has been made for lowering this bar.

Overture 2 - Negative

I am sympathetic to the concern behind Overture 2. It seeks to provide voting rights for members who are already present in a mission church before a pastor is called. That is a real pastoral and procedural concern. The difficulty is that the proposed language appears to import too much of BCO 25 into BCO 5.

BCO 5-5.a deals primarily with members joining a mission church where a pastor is already in place, while this overture addresses a different situation: members who are part of a mission work before a pastoral call has been issued.

The phrase "according to BCO 25" needs more precision. If the overture means that the principles of congregational consent in BCO 25 should apply by analogy, that should be stated more carefully.

Overture 3 - Negative

Overture 3 seeks to address procedural deficiencies identified in a recent SJC case, but the proposed amendments appear to overcorrect. The result would be a more rigid process that may undermine the discretion ordinarily entrusted to the lower court.

The central concern is the proposed movement from "should consider" to "shall consider," along with the requirement of particular witness interviews before dismissal. BCO 39-3.3 already teaches that higher courts should ordinarily show great deference to lower courts in matters of discretion and judgment, including judgments about the comparative credibility of conflicting witnesses.

The problem identified by the overture may be real, but it does not follow that the BCO should mandate a single procedural path for every case. A poor use of discretion in one case is not necessarily proof that discretion itself should be removed. Our courts need clear constitutional rules, but they also require spiritually mature presbyters who know how to apply those rules wisely.

Overture 4 - Affirmative

Luke 15:6-7 ... *'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.*

I am prepared to answer this overture in the affirmative, but it could have been an email to the Stated Clerk requesting a time of prayer be added to the docket.

Overture 5 - Negative

The proposed language elevates geographical representation over the Assembly's liberty to elect the most qualified presbyters. The overture's rationale relies heavily on BCO 14-1.9, which states that General Assembly committees are to include proportionate representation of all presbyteries "wherever possible". By strictly prohibiting the election of more than one person from the same Presbytery to the Administrative Committee, the proposed amendment to RAO 5-1.a transforms a flexible, prudential constitutional principle into an absolute administrative mandate.

If a single Presbytery has two exceptionally qualified men suited for the complex administrative, financial, and logistical work of the AC, the Assembly would be constitutionally barred from electing both.

Overture 6 - Negative

The concern for efficiency is understandable. Still, the proposed rule would shift the balance too far away from the deliberative rights of individual commissioners.

The General Assembly is not merely an administrative gathering. It is a church court, and every commissioner, whether teaching elder or ruling elder, has a responsibility to participate in its judgments. A single commissioner may notice a constitutional or procedural issue that others have missed. The present ability of one commissioner to pull an item from an omnibus report preserves that possibility.

Overture 7 - Negative

Overture 7 raises concerns similar to Overture 6. It seeks to save Assembly time, but it does so by limiting the ability of commissioners to review and act on matters that properly belong to the court.

The most serious concern is its possible conflict with BCO 40-5. The overture appears to permit the Committee on Review of Presbytery Records to determine whether a presbytery's response to an exception of substance is satisfactory and, if not, to cite the presbytery to respond again to the committee.

That is a significant grant of authority. Under BCO 40-5, the first step in addressing a delinquency or unconstitutional proceeding is citation before "the court having appellate jurisdiction, or its commission." RPR is a committee, not a commission. If RPR is given authority to cite a lower court and judge the sufficiency of its response, the Assembly will be assigning to a committee a function that belongs to the court itself or to a properly constituted commission.

The desire to save time is understandable, but it should not come at the expense of the Assembly's responsibility to exercise review and control in a constitutionally proper way.

Overture 8 - Negative

Committees of Commissioners meet on Monday and Tuesday, and their reports may not be available until Wednesday. If a Wednesday report raises a significant concern about a Permanent Committee or Agency, the proposed Tuesday deadline for floor nominations would already have passed. That would prevent commissioners from responding to new information received during the Assembly itself.

The proposed deadline may also disadvantage first-time commissioners and those who are not connected to existing networks of denominational influence. The first twenty-four hours of General Assembly are often disorienting. Requiring floor nominations by Tuesday afternoon favors those who arrive with a preexisting plan rather than those who become persuaded during the course of the Assembly's work.

Finally, the overture would remove the written nomination option. Even if nominations are now normally submitted electronically, retaining a written option provides a simple constitutional backup in the event of a technological failure.

Overture 9 - Negative

Overture 9 would require a floor nomination to include an explanation of how the nomination contributes to geographic proportionality.

The difficulty is that the overture does not define what counts as a sufficient explanation or who has authority to judge its sufficiency. Would a brief sentence satisfy the requirement? Could the Stated Clerk or Moderator reject a nomination as incomplete? If so, on what basis?

The overture introduces procedural uncertainty into the nominations process. A principle that should guide the Assembly's wisdom may become a point of confusion on the floor.

Overture 10 - Affirmative

Pittsburgh Presbytery has submitted a companion overture, Overture 87, which mirrors this request and provides the necessary consent.

Overture 11 - Affirmative

Overture 11 would amend RAO 4-21.d to require annual reporting from MNA regarding assessment and church-planting data.

The Assembly's oversight of its committees and agencies should be grounded in clear, objective information. Regular reporting of this kind will help commissioners evaluate MNA's work with better data and less guesswork.

Overture 12 - Negative

Overture 12 is animated by a commendable desire: to broaden access to the ministry without lowering theological requirements. But the proposal introduces significant subjectivity into the ordinary educational requirements for Teaching Elders. (What exactly constitutes credible evidence of vocational work experience?) Historically, the PCA has maintained a high standard for a learned ministry, requiring both a broad liberal arts foundation and specialized theological training. Lowering the standard to an Associate's degree or GED, even with additional vocational requirements, would represent a significant change in our ordinary expectations for the office.

The BCO already contains a mechanism for unusual cases. BCO 21-4 allows Presbyteries to consider men who do not meet the ordinary educational requirements but whose gifts, experience, and circumstances warrant exception. In other words, the Constitution already gives Presbyteries flexibility without redefining the ordinary standard.

Overture 13 - Affirmative, as amended

The overture is intended to resolve a supposed ambiguity, but in doing so it removes a Session's discretionary power over its own commissions.

Currently, BCO 15-2 grants Presbyteries the flexibility to dictate the quorum of their commissions, stating that “the Presbytery at the time of the appointment of the commission shall determine what the quorum shall be”. By failing to include a similar provision for Sessions, Overture 13 traps local churches in a one-size-fits-all quorum standard, functionally giving Sessions less flexibility than Presbyteries possess when establishing commissions. I suggest adding the phrase “unless otherwise determined by the Session” to the end of the proposed addition to BCO 15-2, so that the proposed change reads: “Every commission appointed by a Session shall consist of at least two elders, with any combination of teaching or ruling elders. The quorum for such a commission shall be the greater of two elders or one-half of the membership of the commission, unless otherwise determined by the Session.”

Overture 14 - Negative

Overture 14 is motivated by a legitimate desire to safeguard the distinct nature of ordained office. That concern is important. As drafted, however, the overture attempts to solve the problem with language that is too expansive and too subjective for constitutional use.

The proposed amendment to BCO 9-2 may offer a helpful clarification of ordained responsibility. But the additional changes to BCO 7-3, 7-4, and 9-7 risk turning the Constitution into a detailed list of prohibited titles, appearances, and implications.

Several concerns stand out.

First, the overture would prohibit unordained persons from using titles that include “minister.” While I generally favor reserving “minister” for Teaching Elders and would advise churches to avoid loose usage, titles such as Youth Minister, Music Minister, Children’s Minister, or Campus Minister are widely used in non-technical ways. The overture would immediately render a large number of ordinary staff titles constitutionally suspect.

Second, the proposed BCO 7-4 would prohibit placing unordained persons into roles that “appear to exercise a general authority over adults in the congregation.” That language is too subjective. What appears to be general authority to one member may appear to another as administrative leadership, staff coordination, or gifted teaching under Session oversight.

Third, phrases such as “might reasonably communicate or imply” and “appear to exercise” would invite complaints and reports over disputed perceptions. Constitutional language should be clear enough to guide churches and courts. This language would likely generate more confusion than clarity.

Fourth, the proposed amendment to BCO 9-7 would forbid assistants to the deacons where there are no ordained deacons. But BCO 9-2 already states that, in a church without deacons, the duties of the office devolve upon the ruling elders. If the Session must carry those duties, it seems unwise to forbid them from appointing unordained men and women to assist in that work.

The overture is stronger in concern than in draftsmanship. I would answer in the negative unless substantially narrowed and clarified.

Overture 15 - Negative

Overture 15 seeks to clarify when the thirty-day deadline for filing an appeal or complaint begins. That is a worthy goal. Unfortunately, the proposed changes may remove the very legal clarity needed to establish that deadline.

The present language includes the phrase “shall be deemed to have occurred.” That phrase is important because it creates an objective point from which the thirty days can be counted. Without it, higher courts may face factual disputes over whether written notice was actually received, whether an email went to spam, whether a letter was opened, or when the party became aware of the decision.

The rationale says the amendment would create a clearer starting point. But the proposed deletions may have the opposite effect. They remove the legal mechanism that allows the court to treat notice as having occurred at a definite time.

Overture 16 - Affirmative

Overture 16 helpfully moves the prohibition against circularizing the court from BCO 43-2 to BCO 43-3. That relocation clarifies where the rule is actually needed: in higher courts hearing complaints on appeal.

When a complaint is first filed in the originating court, the court itself is already receiving the complainant’s reasons (BCO 43-2). It is difficult to see why members of that same court should be prohibited from discussing those reasons before the complaint is formally heard. In fact, if reconciliation is one of the purposes of the process, godly conversation among the members of the court should ordinarily be encouraged rather than chilled.

The prohibition against circularization makes sense in a higher court, where the court is acting as an arbiter between parties and must preserve its neutrality. In that context, the rule protects the integrity of the appellate process.

Getting the rules right matters, but the rules should serve truth, righteousness, reconciliation, and peace.

Overture 16 is a useful clarification toward that end.

Overture 17 - Negative

The concern is understandable, but the overture blurs the constitutional distinction between mission churches and particular churches.

A mission church is not yet a particular church. BCO 5-1 describes a mission church as lacking a permanent governing body and therefore being governed or supervised by others. That temporary and developmental status has real constitutional implications.

The most serious practical concern involves church-planting property and assets. Mission churches are often funded, subsidized, or owned by a planting Presbytery or mother church. If a Presbytery determines that a mission work has failed and must be dissolved, extending BCO 25-10 protections to the mission church could create serious confusion over who has authority over the property and assets.

A small number of members in a failed mission work could claim the right to withdraw from the PCA with property or funds supplied by the Presbytery or mother church. That could prevent the planting body from recovering resources and redeploying them for future mission work.

The desire to protect members is right. But this overture risks assigning to mission churches rights that belong properly to particular churches.

Overture 18 - Affirmative

Overture 18 is a helpful clarification for mother-daughter church planting relationships.

The mother-daughter model is often a fruitful and appropriate way to plant churches. Under the current language of BCO 5-4, however, a mother church that identifies a church planter may be forced into an awkward workaround. The Session may call the man as an assistant pastor of the mother church and then send him to serve the mission congregation, even though the mission work is the field of labor he is actually called to shepherd.

Overture 18 resolves that difficulty by allowing the Session of the mother church to issue a direct call to the church planter to serve the mission work. This fits naturally with BCO 5-3.b, which already recognizes the mother-daughter relationship as a valid way to provide temporary government for a mission church.

The overture also preserves Presbytery oversight. The call must still be approved by Presbytery, just as other pastoral calls must be. This provides a cleaner process without weakening connectional accountability.

Overture 19 - Negative

Whether intended or not, the proposed change could extend higher-court representation to mission churches before they are particularized.

That creates a serious procedural problem. If a mission church lacks ordained ruling elders, it cannot send a constitutionally qualified representative to Presbytery. If the evangelist or temporary governing commission is intended to represent the mission work, those men already have standing in Presbytery by virtue of their own office and membership in the court.

The rationale claims that the absence of a permanent governing body does not diminish the rights of the congregation or the members of the mission church. That statement is too broad. Members of a mission church certainly have rights, but the mission church itself does not yet possess all the rights and capacities of a particular church. It does not yet govern itself through its own permanent Session, nor does it send its own representative elders to Presbytery.

Overture 20 - Affirmative as amended

Overture 20 addresses a real and difficult problem: what should be done when a particular church loses the ability to function through its own governing body? That situation needs clear constitutional guidance. As drafted, however, the overture needs amendment to protect congregational consent and to ensure ongoing Presbytery accountability.

The most significant concern is BCO 16-2, which states that no man may be placed over a church in any office without the election, or at least the consent, of that church. Proposed BCO 5-11 would allow the Presbytery to appoint a transitory Session “at its discretion.” If the congregation’s consent is not required, the provision risks placing rulers over a church without the church’s consent.

That concern can be addressed by replacing “at its discretion” with language requiring the explicit consent of the congregation.

Suggested amendment: Replace “at its discretion” with “with the explicit consent of the congregation.” If consent is required before a transitory Session is appointed, then the later language in proposed BCO 5-12 about seeking concurrence after the fact becomes unnecessary and should be removed.

A second amendment should provide regular review. Temporary remedies should not become permanent arrangements by inertia. The PCA already requires regular review in other temporary situations, including

ministers without call, ministers laboring out of bounds, and stated supply arrangements. A transitory Session should receive similar annual review.

Suggested addition to proposed BCO 5-11: The Presbytery shall review the status of the transitory Session at least annually and shall record its actions and determinations in its minutes.

Overture 21 - Affirmative

The proposed refinement to BCO 13-6 brings the constitutional language into better alignment with actual Presbytery practice while maintaining the PCA's high standards for the office of Teaching Elder. Transfer examinations must be serious and substantive, but our language should also reflect the particular nature of receiving a minister who has already been ordained in another branch of the visible church.

Overture 22 - Affirmative

Overture 22 is a common-sense amendment that removes redundant procedural requirements for churches transferring from one Presbytery to another.

The transfer of a church from one Presbytery to another already requires proper ecclesiastical oversight and consent. This overture appears to streamline that process without weakening the connectional responsibilities of either Presbytery.

Overture 23 - Affirmative

By reorganizing the material, the chapter becomes easier to cite, easier to teach, and easier for commissioners and clerks to use.

The overture rationale shows that adopting this proposal allows for more intuitive citations, replacing cumbersome strings like BCO 14-1.12.b.4 with the cleaner BCO 14-3.2.d. I am not convinced that "BCO 14-3.2.d" is less cumbersome, but it is shorter.

Overture 24 - Negative

As drafted, however, the overture introduces ambiguity and may conflict with existing constitutional provisions. The central problem is the phrase "final trials." BCO 21 requires a multi-faceted process of examination, including written theological work, exegetical work in the original languages, and oral examination in several areas. The overture does not clearly define which parts of this process constitute the "final trials." Does it refer to the final vote of Presbytery? Does it require the full Presbytery to evaluate written papers? Does it affect the preaching of the candidate's sermon? The phrase needs precision before it can function as constitutional language.

The overture also places a broad requirement concerning ordination examinations into BCO 15, a chapter dealing with commissions. If the Assembly wishes to clarify the conduct of ordination trials, BCO 21 is the more natural and appropriate location.

There is also a possible conflict with BCO 21-4, which permits certain parts of the ordination trial, such as the preaching of the sermon, to occur before a committee upon the required vote of Presbytery. A blanket statement that the examination "must be sustained before the Presbytery itself" may unintentionally narrow a discretion the BCO already grants.

Finally, the rationale seems to imply that the current language permits a commission to conduct the entire examination for ordination. But BCO 15-2 already states that when the ordination of a minister is committed to a commission, “the Presbytery itself shall conduct the previous examination.” The Constitution already prevents a commission from conducting the whole examination.

Overture 25 - Affirmative

Overture 25 offers a helpful restructuring of the examination requirements for candidates and ministers.

As one who serves in Credentials Committee work, I believe this kind of restructuring can genuinely assist Presbyteries. A clearer, better-organized framework reduces redundancy, improves consistency, and makes the requirements easier for candidates, committees, and courts to follow.

(For those who desire to preserve the nearly *fifty* years of historical comments that rely on BCO 21 as it is, I suggest we take a longer view. Better to make BCO 21 beautiful in the early years of the PCA and not wait until we have *one hundred and fifty* years to correct.)

Overture 26 - Negative

Overture 26 would add the word “voting” to BCO 26-2, thereby changing the threshold for constitutional amendments from two-thirds of the Presbyteries to two-thirds of the voting Presbyteries.

The current language establishes a high threshold based on the total number of Presbyteries in the denomination. That protects the stability of the Constitution by requiring broad, active consent from the church. Adding “voting” would lower that threshold by excluding non-reporting Presbyteries from the denominator.

That could produce serious consequences. If a controversial amendment were sent down to the Presbyteries and only a small number submitted timely votes, the Constitution could theoretically be amended by two-thirds of that small group (even just one presbytery!) rather than by two-thirds of the Presbyteries as a whole. The amendment process would shift from requiring the documented advice and consent of the denomination to requiring only a supermajority of those who report.

The rationale appeals to Robert’s Rules of Order regarding ordinary voting calculations, but constitutional amendment thresholds are not ordinary floor votes. The BCO uses a higher standard here precisely because constitutional change should require more than the approval of those who happen to vote.

Overture 27 - Negative

Overture 27 proposes several changes to BCO 34-1. I have significant concerns with both the substance and the possible consequences of those changes.

First, the current language states that if the constitutional threshold is met, “the General Assembly shall do so,” meaning that the Assembly shall assume original jurisdiction. The proposed language changes this to “may assume original jurisdiction.” That weakens a mandatory protection for the purity of the church. If the required number of Presbyteries formally alleges that a Presbytery has failed to act in a case of serious doctrinal or moral scandal, the Assembly’s responsibility should not become merely optional.

Second, the rationale argues that the original threshold represented a much larger percentage of the denomination at the PCA’s founding than it does today. That observation is mathematically true, but it does not settle the polity question. The formal action of even two Presbyteries is not a casual opinion poll. It represents the deliberative judgment of church courts and should be treated with gravity.

Third, changing “refusing to act” to “fails to indict” is a significant alteration. “Refusing to act” describes a delinquent court neglecting its duty. “Fails to indict” could include a Presbytery that has investigated the matter and concluded that there is no strong presumption of guilt. Those are very different situations.

Finally, if the General Assembly were effectively to force a Presbytery to indict a man whom that Presbytery has already determined should not be indicted, the resulting trial would be deeply compromised. The court responsible to prosecute the case would be the very court that had already judged the indictment unwarranted.

Overture 28 - Negative

Overture 28 appears to address a right that the BCO already secures.

BCO 43-1 states that any communing member in good standing may make complaint against any action of a court to whose jurisdiction he is subject. If a Presbytery assumes a reference from a Session and then acts on a local church matter, a member affected by that action is subject to the Presbytery’s jurisdiction with respect to that action. Consequently, that member already has the right to complain against the Presbytery’s decision under BCO 43-1.

Overture 29 - Affirmative, as amended

Overture 29 provides a helpful clarification regarding the suspension of a lower court’s judgment during the appeal process. The overture creates two levels of suspension.

First, verbal notice of appeal would suspend the judgment of the lower court for thirty days.

Second, the formal filing of the appeal would continue that suspension until the case has been finally decided by the higher court.

A two-step structure ensures that temporary suspension is granted immediately, but that ongoing suspension is tied to the appellant actually filing the written appeal.

The proposed language should be clarified slightly. I recommend changing “of the court’s decision” to “following notification of the court’s decision.”

Overture 30 - Affirmative

Under BCO 46-3, a church member remains under the care of the original Session until he forms a regular connection with another church. The same principle should apply to ministers transferring between Presbyteries. A minister should remain the responsibility of his original Presbytery until the receiving Presbytery formally receives him.

Overture 31 - Refer back to the Westminster Presbytery

I recommend that Overture 31 be referred back to Westminster Presbytery based on the concurrent work of the Ad-Interim Committee on Revision of the Directory for Worship.

Overture 32 - Affirmative, as amended

I support the general aim of the overture, but the language should be clarified.

First, the phrase “standing rules or manuals” should be broadened to ensure that all relevant governing and operating documents are covered.

Replace “standing rules or manuals” with “all bylaws, standing rules, and operational manuals.”

Second, the overture proposes changing “minutes” to “records” in the second sentence of RAO 14-3. A better solution would be to keep the mandatory pre-Assembly mailing requirement limited to minutes, while requiring the broader set of records to be made available to the Committee of Commissioners for review.

Overture 33 - Negative

Overture 33 would limit minority reports from the Committee on Review of Presbytery Records in a way that may unintentionally restrict legitimate Assembly debate.

Under RAO 16-7.d, RPR may bring “any other recommendation to the Assembly.” Such recommendations are not always directed at a single Presbytery. They may involve broader procedural, constitutional, or policy matters arising from the committee’s work.

If Overture 33 is read strictly, a minority of RPR could be prevented from filing a minority report on such a recommendation simply because the recommendation does not concern a “Presbytery as a whole.” That would unnecessarily narrow the right of a committee minority to bring a genuine disagreement before the Assembly.

Minority reports should not be multiplied needlessly, but neither should they be restricted in a way that prevents the Assembly from hearing substantial concerns about recommendations placed before it.

Overture 34 - Negative

Overture 34 seeks to clarify that congregations should ordinarily establish a diaconate rather than indefinitely assigning diaconal work to the Session or to other members of the church. That is a worthy concern. As drafted, however, the overture creates confusion regarding Presbyterian principles of office and election.

The first problem is terminology. Deacons are not appointed by a Session. They are elected by the congregation and ordained to office. Any constitutional language addressing the establishment of a diaconate should preserve that distinction clearly.

The second problem concerns churches without ordained deacons. BCO 9-2 already states that when a church has no deacons, the duties of the office devolve upon the ruling elders. BCO 9-7 also allows the Session to appoint godly men and women to assist the deacons. The overture unintentionally disrupts this fallback arrangement by creating uncertainty about whether unordained assistants may help with diaconal work in the absence of ordained deacons.

The Assembly should indeed encourage churches to seek qualified men for the office of deacon. But the Constitution should also preserve workable provisions for developing, small, or struggling congregations that do not yet have men qualified or available to serve.

Overture 35 - Affirmative, as amended

Overture 35 addresses an existing gap in the Rules of Discipline. BCO 31-2 provides the framework for investigation and the institution of process, but it does not specify a timeframe for the filing of an indictment once a court has determined that there is a strong presumption of guilt.

A reasonable deadline would protect both the purity of the church and the rights of the accused. The church should not allow serious charges to drift indefinitely, and an accused person should not be left under an open-ended cloud of suspicion without the process moving forward.

I agree with the basic direction of the overture, but I would support the amendment suggested by RE Donahoe, extending the filing deadline from sixty days to ninety days and clarifying the consequence if the prosecutor neglects to file.

Suggested amended language:

If such investigation, however originating, should result in raising a strong presumption of the guilt of the party involved, the court shall institute process, and shall appoint a prosecutor to prepare the indictment and to conduct the case. The prosecutor shall draft the indictment promptly, and the indictment shall be filed with the clerk of the court within ~~sixty (60)~~ **ninety (90)** days following the meeting of the court, **or the charges shall be dropped.** This prosecutor shall be a member of the court, except that in a case before the Session, he may be any communing member of the same congregation with the accused. ~~If the prosecutor neglects to file an indictment, he shall receive proper rebuke by the court and shall be dismissed from his duties as the prosecutor of the case, and the court shall appoint a new prosecutor to prepare an indictment and to conduct the case.~~

This gives the prosecutor sufficient time to prepare carefully while preventing unnecessary delay.

Overture 36 - Negative

Overture 36 addresses a legitimate concern about preserving the distinction between ordained office and unordained service. I share that concern. As drafted, however, the proposed language does not sufficiently account for existing BCO provisions that already allow unordained persons to assist in the work of the church under proper oversight.

The proposed BCO 8-11 does not adequately account for BCO 12-5, which gives the elders oversight of worship, or for BCO 50, which permits certain non-ordained participation in public worship, including the public reading of Scripture under the direction of the Session. The BCO also recognizes the public service of licentiates, interns, and candidates in appropriate ways.

The proposed BCO 9-8 raises similar concerns. BCO 9-7 allows assistants to the deacons to help with diaconal work. BCO 9-2 also provides that, where there are no deacons, the duties of the office devolve upon the ruling elders. The overture should not create confusion about whether those existing provisions remain valid.

The phrase “in any manner that implies parity with or equivalence to” ordained officers is also too subjective for constitutional language. Would appointing a woman to coordinate a meal train or food pantry imply parity with a deacon? Would a staff member leading an administrative ministry imply parity with an elder? Without clearer definitions, the proposed language could invite complaints over ordinary local-church decisions made under Session oversight.

The Assembly should guard ordained office. But this overture, as written, would create more confusion than clarity.

Overture 37 - Negative, as amended

Overture 37 would fundamentally alter the PCA’s doctrine and practice regarding the office of deacon. I strongly oppose it.

As written, the overture may not present the question in its clearest form. If the Assembly is going to consider the issue, I believe the better course would be for someone to propose an amendment that presents the strongest version of the position, so that the Assembly may debate and reject the real question directly.

Such an amendment might read: BCO 9-3. To the office of deacon, which is spiritual in nature, shall be chosen members of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly spirit, warm sympathies, and sound

judgment. The Session of each congregation shall determine, in accordance with Scripture and the Standards of this Church, whether qualified women members shall be eligible to serve in the office of deacon.

In this stronger form, the proposal should be rejected.

The PCA is a connectional church. An ordained officer in one congregation is recognized throughout the denomination. If the BCO were amended to permit the ordination of women as deacons at the discretion of local Sessions, every Session, Presbytery, and General Assembly would be required to recognize the validity of female ordination to that office. That would bind the consciences of officers and courts who (rightly) believe Scripture restricts ordained office to qualified men.

The rationale appeals to the PCA's grassroots character and argues that local Sessions should be trusted to make decisions regarding congregational ministry. But this confuses administrative flexibility with constitutional standards for ordained office. Local Sessions have wide latitude in many matters of ministry administration. They do not have authority to redefine the qualifications for ordained office.

Overture 38 - Negative

Overture 38 seeks to permit local Sessions to structure diaconal ministry in one of several ways, including the use of commissioned or appointed men and women who are not ordained officers but may bear the title "deacon."

First, the rationale appeals to Christian liberty to defend local flexibility in the structure of the diaconate. But the definition of church office is not a matter of local preference. The offices of the church are constitutional and biblical matters, not merely administrative arrangements.

Second, the overture redefines the term "diaconate." The PCA understands the diaconate to consist of ordained and elected men serving in the office of deacon. To permit a "diaconate" composed partly or entirely of unordained persons would detach the term from its established constitutional meaning.

Third, the overture introduces "commissioning" without defining it. The result would be a new category of church leadership with unclear vows, undefined authority, uncertain accountability, and no uniform process across the denomination.

Fourth, by separating the title "deacon" from the office of deacon, the overture creates confusion throughout the BCO. When the Constitution refers to deacons, would it mean ordained officers, unordained commissioned persons, or both? Would the disciplinary provisions for officers apply? Would the election and ordination provisions of BCO 24 apply? Could commissioned persons called "deacons" serve on Presbytery or General Assembly committees under provisions that refer to deacons?

The overture attempts to create peace by allowing local diversity, but it would do so by destabilizing the constitutional vocabulary of office.

Overture 39 - Negative

The proposal creates significant practical and constitutional difficulties.

First, it may force a congregation into an unnecessary dilemma. A church may love and value its assistant pastor in that role while not desiring to elect him as an associate pastor and member of the Session. Under this overture, after five years the congregation could be forced either to elevate him to a different office relation or see his call end. That is too rigid for the variety of healthy assistant pastor relationships in our Church.

Second, the use of "ordinarily" is unclear. In the BCO, exceptions to ordinary rules are usually governed by some defined process or threshold. This overture does not state who determines whether a situation is

extraordinary or how such an exception is granted. A Session or Presbytery could claim that a longer initial term is extraordinary and thereby bypass the overture's intent.

Third, the appeal to Preliminary Principle 6 should be handled carefully. The congregation does possess the power to elect its officers. But when the Session calls an assistant pastor to assist in its work, the Session acts as the congregation's duly elected body of rule. The assistant pastorate is not identical to the pastoral relation of a senior or associate pastor called by the congregation.

Overture 40 - Negative

I am sympathetic to the concern behind the overture. A sudden transition in denominational leadership can be personally difficult and administratively disruptive. A six-month transition period may appear more humane and stable.

The difficulty is that the overture would require a Committee or Agency to continue under the leadership of a coordinator who has publicly failed to receive the confidence of the Assembly. That could create unnecessary instability, confusion, or conflict during the transition period.

The better solution is not to constitutionalize a mandatory extension of service, but for Committees and Agencies to adopt wise employment and transition policies. Severance arrangements, transitional contracts, and financial planning can provide appropriate care for outgoing executives without requiring the church to keep an unelected coordinator in office for six additional months.

Overture 41 - Negative

Denominational executives hold positions of significant influence, and it is reasonable to desire that they command broad confidence across the church. A supermajority requirement would ensure that such men serve with more than a narrow majority of Assembly support.

The difficulty is practical. If the Assembly is divided over a candidate, a two-thirds requirement could produce a stalemate in which no nominee is able to secure election. That would leave a permanent Committee or Agency without an executive leader and could force an emergency provisional appointment.

The PCA already has mechanisms for accountability through annual elections, committee oversight, and the Assembly's power not to re-elect. I am not persuaded that the benefit of a supermajority threshold outweighs the risk of instability and deadlock.

Overture 42 - Affirmative, as amended

Overture 42 proposes to restore the phrase "as interpreted in these Standards" to BCO 29-1, so that an offense is defined as anything contrary to the Word of God "as interpreted in these Standards."

If the rationale is correct that the omission of this phrase was accidental, the Assembly should treat the matter as an editorial restoration rather than a substantive constitutional amendment. The Overtures Committee could amend the resolution to direct the Stated Clerk to include the phrase in future printings of the BCO, while making clear that the action does not require the advice and consent of the Presbyteries under BCO 26-2.

This would restore the intended wording without unnecessarily treating an editorial omission as a new amendment to the Constitution.

Overture 43 - With reference to the answer given to Overture 77

Overture 44 - Affirmative

As a member of Covenant Presbytery, I have seen the prayer and labor involved in the effort to establish an Arkansas Presbytery. This overture represents the fruit of that work and would provide better regional oversight and connectional care for the churches involved.

Answer this overture in the affirmative and give thanks to the Lord for His faithfulness.

Overture 45 - Negative

The first problem is the phrase “previously submitted.” Does this mean submitted for the current General Assembly cycle, or submitted at any point in the past? Without a limiting modifier, a commissioner might argue that a nominee is eligible because his Presbytery submitted his name years earlier. That ambiguity undermines the stated goal of a clear and fair standard.

The second problem is that the overture would restrict floor nominations to men who have already passed through the Nominating Committee process and were not selected. That shifts too much practical power away from the Assembly itself. The Nominating Committee is an important screening body, but the Assembly must retain meaningful freedom to elect its own servants.

The rationale compares this proposal to RAO 11-10, which prevents personal resolutions from being brought to the Assembly unless they were first rejected by a Presbytery. But that is not a close analogy. A personal resolution initiates new business for the whole denomination. A floor nomination concerns the Assembly’s ordinary authority to elect men to serve on its own committees and agencies.

Overture 46 - Negative

The desire to discourage public accusation, slander, and disorderly process is commendable. The proposed language, however, is too broad and would interfere with the ordinary operation of BCO 31-2.

Under BCO 31-2, a court must investigate to determine whether there is a strong presumption of guilt before instituting process. Overture 46 risks bypassing that careful inquiry by defining certain public statements as probable offenses in advance. That would pressure courts toward process before they have properly examined the circumstances, truthfulness, necessity, and context of the statement.

The rationale appeals to WLC 144 and 145, and those commandments are certainly relevant. But they must be applied in full. WLC 145 forbids slandering, backbiting, detracting, and tale-bearing; WLC 144 also requires appearing and standing for the truth and freely and clearly speaking the truth. There may be circumstances in which public truth-telling is not a violation of the ninth commandment but a moral duty.

The BCO already provides mechanisms for dealing with false, malicious, or disorderly accusations. Overture 46, as written, is too sweeping.

Overture 47 - With reference to the answer given to Overture 45

Overture 48 - Negative

The phrase “imply the authority” is difficult to apply objectively. Without clearer definition, churches and courts would be left to determine whether a title, role, or ministry arrangement implies authority belonging to an ordained office. That could lead to complaints over ordinary local-church language and staff structures.

The phrase “any other pretended office” is also unhelpful as constitutional language. It may describe a real concern, but it introduces a needlessly accusatory tone into the BCO. The Constitution should correct error clearly without using language that may turn ordinary pastoral or administrative mistakes into unnecessarily inflammatory disputes.

Overture 49 - Negative

The desire for greater Ruling Elder participation is commendable. The difficulty is that the constitutional cap is probably not the main factor limiting Ruling Elder attendance. In many cases, the larger obstacles are vocational, financial, and practical. Many Ruling Elders have work and family obligations that make travel to General Assembly difficult, even when they are constitutionally permitted to attend.

If the Assembly wishes to address representation, I believe a more targeted approach would be preferable. Rather than a flat increase for every congregation, the Overtures Committee might consider a dynamic formula that accounts for the number of Teaching Elders called by a congregation.

For example: Each congregation is entitled to two (2) ruling elder representatives for the first 350 communing members, plus one (1) additional ruling elder representative for every Teaching Elder called by that congregation beyond the first.

That approach would better connect additional Ruling Elder representation to the number of Teaching Elders already connected to the congregation.

As written, however, I am not convinced Overture 49 addresses the main causes of low Ruling Elder attendance.

Overture 50 - Affirmative

I believe this is a timely and appropriate overture. The Directory for Worship provides guidelines for corporate fasting and special seasons of prayer. Overture 50 appears to fit comfortably within those constitutional provisions and offers the Assembly an opportunity for unity in repentance and supplication.

Overture 51 - With reference to the answer given to Overture 20

Overture 52 - Affirmative

Overture 52 would clarify that church courts may not invent new ecclesiastical offices, vest ordained church power in unordained persons, or impose extra-constitutional offices through popular election, vows, or other practices not authorized by the Constitution.

This is a helpful and necessary clarification. The offices of the church are not matters of local invention. They are governed by Scripture and by the Constitution of the PCA. A congregation or court may not create new offices, attach officer-like authority to unordained persons, or bind the consciences of members through vows and structures not warranted by the church’s constitutional standards.

This overture also protects liberty of conscience. Westminster Confession of Faith 20.2 teaches that God alone is Lord of the conscience and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men in matters contrary to or beside His Word. Preliminary Principle 7 similarly states that no church judicatory may make laws to bind the conscience. When a church invents new offices or requires submission to unordained office-like structures, it risks binding consciences where Christ has not bound them.

Overture 53 - Negative

While Overture 53 seeks to mirror the “Overtures rule” (RAO 15-8.f) to save time and prevent committee-level rehashes, the nature of the information at stake is categorically different. In the Overtures Committee, the business under discussion is published in the Commissioner Handbook and accessible to every man on the floor. However, in RPR, the business involves the original minutes and records of all the Presbyteries. These original records are not mass-distributed to the Assembly; only the members of the RPR committee (and the clerks of the respective Presbyteries) have actually examined the primary evidence behind a recommended exception. By prohibiting RPR members from participating in debate, the General Assembly effectively ensures that the only men permitted to speak on the floor are those who have not seen the original documents being debated.

Overture 54 - Negative

The overture does not clearly distinguish between two different uses of “contumacy.” One is procedural contumacy, where a person refuses to appear or participate in a trial. The other is substantive contumacy, where a person is formally charged, tried, and convicted of the sin of rebellious refusal to submit to the church’s authority.

If the overture applies to a person formally convicted of contumacy after a regular trial, it would appear to strip that person of the ordinary right of appeal. That would be a serious problem.

If, however, the overture applies only to a preliminary procedural finding of contumacy under circumstances where a person refuses to submit to trial, then the amendment seems unnecessary. BCO 42-2 already states that “the only parties entitled to an appeal are those who have submitted to a regular trial.” A person who refuses to submit to trial already lacks the right of appeal under the existing language.

Overture 55 - With reference to the answer given to Overture 39

Overture 56 - Negative

The overture intends to ensure that representatives understand the Rules of Discipline and can assist parties responsibly. That concern is reasonable, but the proposed restriction is too narrow.

One practical problem arises when a case moves from Session to Presbytery. A member tried before his Session may have selected a trusted and competent lay representative. If the case is appealed, this overture would require him to replace that representative with an ordained officer. That could deprive the party of continuity of counsel precisely when the case has become more complex.

The overture also assumes that only ordained officers possess the knowledge and judgment needed to represent a party well. That is not always the case. A legally trained layman, a ruling elder candidate, or another mature communing member may be better equipped in a particular case than an available officer.

Courts should be able to guard against disorderly or incompetent representation, but this overture excludes too many potentially qualified representatives. I would answer in the negative.

Overture 57 - Affirmative

Congregational meetings often involve highly consequential actions, including the election of ruling elders, deacons, and pastors. Those actions are governed by the BCO and should be recorded clearly. Since Presbytery has the duty under BCO 13-9.b to review the records of church Sessions, redress what may have been done contrary to order, and take care that churches observe the Constitution, it is reasonable for Presbytery to have access to the official record of congregational actions.

Overture 58 - Affirmative

This proposal reinforces our foundational Presbyterian polity and safeguards the peace and purity of the church against future jurisdictional confusion.

First, RAO 3-5.a already mandates that the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly must be a teaching or ruling elder. Extending this requirement to all church courts ensures a consistent standard for those entrusted with the custody of official ecclesiastical records.

Second, the role of a clerk is not merely mechanical but involves the exercise of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Under BCO 10-4, the clerk is responsible for authenticating extracts of records which then serve as “evidence to any ecclesiastical court”. Because the exercise of church power is a “joint power, to be exercised by presbyters in courts,” it is proper that the officer responsible for the court’s official testimony be an ordained presbyter himself.

Third, requiring clerks to be elders ensures they are bound by ordination vows and subject to the direct accountability and discipline of the court. While smaller Sessions may occasionally utilize lay assistance for minute-taking, the formal office of Clerk should be reserved for those vetted by the church for spiritual integrity and committed to our Standards.

Overture 59 - Negative

First, BCO 38-3.a already provides an orderly, non-punitive process for members in good standing who are actually transferring their membership to another faithful branch of the visible church.

Second, for the specific cases where a member develops “conscientious objections” and wishes to leave without having a new church home, BCO 38-4 is the correct and sufficient tool. When a member makes it known that they have “no intention of fulfilling the church vows” to the PCA, the Session is already mandated to exercise “pastoral discipline”. This existing process requires the Session to visit the member, remind them of their covenant, and attempt to resolve their disappointments. If the member persists, their name is “erased from the roll” as an “act of pastoral discipline... without process”. This is not a “punitive” judicial action, but a formal recognition that the member has renounced their covenantal obligations.

Third, the proposed amendment inadvertently undermines the shepherding duty of the Session. Currently, BCO 38-4 and its supporting guidance in Appendix I encourage Sessions to “assist the member in locating a church of like faith and practice” before removal. Overture 59 would allow a Session to simply bypass this vital shepherding work by administrative deletion as soon as “intent” is expressed. We should not trade a standard that mandates diligent pastoral care for one that prioritizes administrative convenience.

Overture 60 - Negative

Overture 60 is motivated by a proper desire to protect the solemnity of the Lord's Supper. I share that concern. As drafted, however, the overture appears to elevate a logistical circumstance of distribution into a constitutional requirement.

The Westminster Standards and the BCO reserve the authoritative administration of the sacrament to the lawfully ordained minister. That includes prayer, blessing the elements, setting them apart, and declaring the words of institution. The physical act of carrying trays through the aisles is different in kind. It is a logistical means of distribution, not the authoritative ministerial act of administration.

I do not prefer the optics of unordained persons distributing the elements, and Sessions should think carefully about the practice. But constitutional language should not dogmatize every circumstance of worship.

The modern practice of carrying trays through the aisles is shaped by architecture, seating, and local custom. It should not be read back into the Constitution as though Scripture or the Standards require a particular logistical arrangement.

Overture 61 - Affirmative

Supporting Overture 61 means commending the Danvers Statement as a highly useful, non-binding pastoral resource that faithfully echoes the complementarian principles already embedded in the PCA Constitution.

Overture 62 - Affirmative

When a division better enables churches and elders to gather, deliberate, examine, shepherd, and exercise review and control, it should ordinarily be supported. This overture appears to further those ends for the churches in Tennessee and Georgia.

Plus, "Smoky Mountain Presbytery" sounds pretty cool.

Overture 63 - Affirmative, as amended

The basic principle is sound. If a commissioner objects to an item being handled in gross and that item is separated for debate, the objecting commissioner should ordinarily have preference in recognition for the initial opportunity to speak to the separated recommendation. That allows the Assembly to hear why the item was pulled and helps focus the debate.

I would support the overture with a clarifying amendment to the proposed RAO 19-4.f:

Notwithstanding any other rule of recognition, when a commissioner objects to the inclusion of an in gross recommendation, including an overture, as provided in RAO 14-9.d or RAO 15-8.b, the objecting commissioner shall have preference in recognition *for his initial opportunity to speak* when debating the separated recommendation.

This preserves the purpose of the overture while making the language cleaner and easier to apply.

Overture 64 - Negative

Overture 64 would change the language regarding retired ministers from "shall" to "may." That change appears small, but it creates a serious ecclesiastical problem.

Teaching Elders are members of Presbyteries, not local churches. If a retired minister may choose not to hold membership in a Presbytery, he may be left without a court of original jurisdiction. That would effectively remove him from ordinary constitutional accountability and discipline without any formal process.

Retirement from active ministerial labor should not mean retirement from ecclesiastical jurisdiction. A minister may no longer hold a call, but he remains a minister of the gospel and should remain under the oversight of a Presbytery.

Overture 65 - Negative

The overture risks misunderstanding the nature of the PCA's judicial process. A court must remain impartial as it determines whether charges are proven, whether repentance is credible, and what censure is appropriate. The proposed language appears to put the court in the position of pre-judging repentance in a way that could compromise that impartiality.

The overture also risks creating a coercive mechanism for testing repentance. Genuine repentance must be carefully evaluated by the court, but constitutional procedure should not pressure an accused person to confess in a particular way merely to satisfy a procedural expectation. Nor should the BCO create a standard that is so rigid that courts cannot exercise pastoral and judicial wisdom in complex cases.

The goal is right: false repentance must not be allowed to defeat discipline. But the proposed mechanism is too dangerous.

Overture 66 - Affirmative

Overture 66 calls the Assembly to recommend prayer for the propagation of the gospel and for the church to be countenanced by the civil magistrate.

BCO 14-6.k gives the General Assembly authority "to recommend measures for the promotion of charity, truth and holiness through all the churches under its care." This overture fits within that authority. It does not bind the conscience unlawfully or alter constitutional doctrine. It calls the churches to pray according to concerns already reflected in Scripture and in the Westminster Larger Catechism's exposition of the Lord's Prayer.

The church should pray that Christ's kingdom would advance, that the gospel would spread throughout the world, and that civil authorities would not hinder but countenance the church in her lawful and spiritual work.

Overture 67 - Negative

BCO 40-5 already requires a higher court to receive a "credible report" concerning an "important delinquency or grossly unconstitutional proceedings" before taking action. Those words already require the court to evaluate both the credibility of the report and the gravity of the alleged delinquency.

The Assembly should avoid adding words to the Constitution where the existing language already does the needed work.

Overture 68 - Negative

The CCB noted that the corporate bylaws of the PCA identify the members of the Administrative Committee as the Board of Directors. If the overture makes nine members of the AC nonvoting in their ecclesiastical capacity, it does not clearly address whether those same men would remain voting directors when the AC acts in its civil corporate capacity.

The overture also creates uncertainty regarding quorum. BCO 14-1.12 and RAO 5-1 state that the AC consists of twenty members. If nine of those members become nonvoting, do they still count toward the quorum? Or is quorum calculated only from the eleven voting members? That uncertainty could create significant administrative confusion.

Overture 69 - Affirmative

Overture 69 provides a useful clarification regarding what must be assembled and delivered to the reviewing court in an appeal.

The current language in the Rules of Discipline uses differing terms in various places, creating unnecessary work for clerks and higher courts as they determine what exactly belongs in the record on appeal. This overture would help harmonize that language and reduce confusion.

Clear rules for assembling the record serve both the appellant and the reviewing court. They help ensure that appeals are reviewed on the proper materials and that clerks are not left to reconcile inconsistent terminology under pressure.

Overture 70 - Affirmative

Overture 70 is a practical measure that supports the orderly connectionalism and continued growth of the PCA's Korean Language Presbyteries.

Overture 71 - Negative

The CCB has identified several conflicts, and those concerns are substantial. BCO 9-1 identifies the office of deacon as ordinary and perpetual in the church. The absence of deacons may be tolerated where qualified men cannot be secured, but it should not be normalized as an ordinary alternative structure.

The overture also risks weakening the congregation's constitutional authority to elect its own deacons. Under Preliminary Principle 6 and BCO 24-1, the power to elect officers belongs to the congregation. A structure that allows the Session to appoint unordained persons to carry out the diaconal ministry may functionally substitute Session appointment for congregational election.

There is also tension with BCO 9-2 and 9-7. BCO 9-2 provides that, where there are no deacons, the duties of the office devolve upon the ruling elders. BCO 9-7 permits godly men and women to assist the deacons.

Overture 71 appears to move beyond assistance and create a substitute diaconal structure through unordained appointees.

Finally, the proposal may create competing spheres of responsibility. If one-fourth of the congregation calls for an election of deacons under BCO 24-1, and deacons are then elected, how would their authority relate to the already-appointed unordained persons carrying out the work?

Overture 72 - Affirmative, as amended

Overture 72 offers a practical tool for denominational health and connectional care by requiring Sessions to record annually the composition of the Session and Diaconate.

This kind of annual record would help Presbyteries understand the officer health of the churches under their care. It would also provide a clearer picture of churches that lack a diaconate and may need encouragement, assistance, or oversight in developing qualified men for that office.

I would support the overture with a clarifying amendment. In the absence of a diaconate, the duties of the office devolve upon the Session according to BCO 9-2. The minutes should therefore indicate not only the absence of a diaconate, but also how that absence is being addressed constitutionally.

Suggested amended language: BCO 12-8. Every Session shall annually record in its minutes a list of all persons who comprise the Session and the Diaconate. If the local church has no Diaconate, then the Session's minutes shall indicate why, ~~and whether the duties have devolved upon the Session according to BCO 9-2.~~

Overture 73 - With reference to the answer given to Overture 41.

Overture 74 - Negative

The PCA already has clear categories for ordained office and for unordained service under the oversight of the church's officers. Churches may appoint members to serve in many useful ways, and Sessions may recognize and encourage faithful service. But creating a formal rite of commissioning for unordained persons risks adding a new quasi-office or official ecclesiastical status that the Constitution does not define.

That would create confusion rather than clarity. What vows, authority, accountability, or disciplinary status would attach to such commissioning? How would this commissioned status differ from ordinary appointment to service under Session oversight? Without careful definition, the overture risks creating a new ecclesiastical category while insisting that it is not doing so.

Overture 75 - Negative

BCO 32-18 and BCO 40-3 would continue to rely on "notice of appeal." As the CCB noted, that leaves uncertainty about whether the remaining references should be read as references to the written appeal itself, or whether "notice of appeal" remains a distinct concept elsewhere in the Constitution.

That kind of partial amendment is dangerous. If the Assembly wishes to clarify the distinction between verbal notice, written notice, and the appeal itself, it should do so comprehensively and consistently throughout the Rules of Discipline.

Overture 76 - In reference to Overture 66

Overture 77 - Affirmative

This change addresses several pressing practical concerns regarding the administrative health of the denomination.

First, providing longer terms is a matter of basic fairness and pastoral care for our executive leaders and their families. These roles often require officers to relocate to be near the PCA's administrative offices, a life-altering decision that is difficult to justify when employment is technically subject to an annual popularity test. A four-year term provides the stability necessary for these families to labor effectively without the burden of constant vocational volatility.

Third, this amendment brings the election process for these coordinators into closer alignment with the leadership of our Agencies. The Rules of Assembly Operation do not currently require the presidents or executive directors of our five Agencies to face annual re-election by the Assembly. Overture 77 removes this

inconsistency and recognizes that the Stated Clerk and program coordinators occupy roles of similar gravity and executive responsibility.

Finally, adopting four-year terms does not insulate leadership from accountability. In the rare instance where a man needs to be replaced for cause during his term, the respective Permanent Committee retains the authority to recommend such action to the General Assembly.

Overture 78 - With reference to the answer given to Overture 79

Overture 79 - Affirmative

Overture 79 provides a practical administrative update by formally authorizing electronic meetings where appropriate.

The Assembly already functions under recognized parliamentary authority, and modern circumstances often make electronic meetings useful for committees, commissions, and other bodies that must conduct business between stated gatherings. Properly authorized electronic meetings can save time and travel expense while allowing the work of the church to proceed in an orderly way.

Overture 80 - Affirmative

The General Assembly should ordinarily be cautious about erecting Ad Interim study committees. Such committees require significant time, attention, and denominational resources, and they should not be created unless the need is substantial.

Overture 80 presents a compelling exception. The proposal to establish a committee to study Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory addresses an urgent pastoral and theological issue facing the churches. These questions have generated confusion, disagreement, and concern across the broader evangelical world and within Reformed churches. The PCA would be well served by careful, constitutional, confessional, and pastoral analysis.

Overture 81 - Negative

The rationale speaks of wine as providing a “fuller expression” of the sacrament. If that language becomes the basis for a denominational mandate, it may imply that PCA congregations serving only grape juice are offering a lesser or deficient expression of the Supper. That could needlessly trouble consciences in local churches.

Finally, the current arrangement already allows those responsible for Assembly worship to exercise prudence. The host presbytery and those planning the worship service may decide what is wise for the Assembly without a rigid administrative mandate.

Overture 82 - Negative

The Committee on Constitutional Business determined that Overture 82 is not technically in conflict with the Constitution, but the overture raises serious ecclesiological concerns that commissioners should weigh carefully.

The most significant problem concerns proposed BCO 12-1. The overture would allow a single remaining ruling elder, who expressly does not constitute a Session, to receive new members. The CCB rightly notes that receiving members into the communion of the church is an act of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Under the PCA

Constitution, jurisdiction is exercised jointly by presbyters in courts, not severally by an individual elder acting alone.

Granting a single ruling elder authority to receive members would give him a kind of jurisdictional power that the BCO does not ordinarily assign to an individual ruling elder. It would also resemble certain powers of an evangelist, but without the limitations and safeguards attached to that office in BCO 8-6.

The overture also appears to diminish Presbytery's connectional authority by conditioning certain Presbytery actions upon local consent. In cases where a church lacks a functional Session, Presbytery must retain the ability to exercise proper oversight under the Constitution. The proposed language may make that oversight more difficult.

The situation addressed by the overture is real, but the proposed remedy gives too much authority to a single elder and too little clarity to Presbytery's role. I would answer in the negative.

Overture 83 - Affirmative

Overture 83 presents some execution difficulties, but I believe its underlying concern is sound.

The overture affirms the PCA's commitment to biblical complementarianism and seeks to ensure that institutions responsible for theological instruction reflect the church's doctrine and polity. Scripture does not permit women to teach or exercise authority over men in the church, and the PCA Constitution reflects that conviction by limiting ordained office to qualified men.

It is therefore reasonable for the denomination to ask whether those teaching Bible and theology in institutions connected to the church should be men who are ordained and ecclesiastically accountable. Ordained elders subscribe to the Westminster Standards and are subject to the oversight, review, and discipline of the church courts. That accountability matters, especially where instruction concerns Scripture, doctrine, and the formation of future ministers and church leaders.

I recognize that the overture may raise practical questions about implementation. Still, its basic theological and ecclesiastical concern is legitimate and important.

Overture 84 - Affirmative

Overture 84 would require courts to ask officers annually whether their views remain unchanged. This would operationalize the vows officers have already taken and would encourage transparency in the handling of theological differences.

The proposal fits within the ordinary responsibilities of Sessions and Presbyteries. Courts are charged with maintaining the spiritual government of the church, guarding sound doctrine, and watching over those under their care. Requiring officers to disclose changes in their views helps courts fulfill that responsibility in an orderly and uniform way.

This overture also supports the PCA's practice of Good Faith Subscription. If an officer's views have changed, the court should know that and be able to determine whether the change is acceptable, requires clarification, or constitutes a difficulty with his vows.

Overture 85 - Affirmative

Overture 85 is a useful organizational improvement to the Rules of Discipline.

At present, BCO Chapter 45 groups dissents, protests, and objections together. The overture rightly recognizes that objections function differently from dissents and protests and should be treated with greater clarity. Moving these provisions into the currently vacated Chapter 44 would improve the structure and usability of the BCO. The overture also serves a practical purpose. The PCA's Preliminary Principles recognize the importance of allowing elders to give public expression to matters of conscience. Clarifying the use of objections gives a member of a court a way to record disagreement and the reasons for it without necessarily initiating more burdensome judicial process.

Overture 86 - Negative

Overture 86 proposes replacing the term "complaint" with "inquiry." The goal appears to be a more collegial and less adversarial process. That goal is understandable, but the proposed change creates more confusion than clarity.

In ordinary English, an inquiry is simply a question or request for information. But BCO 43-1 describes something more formal: a written representation against an act or decision of a court, seeking redress and review by a higher court. Renaming that process an "inquiry" may obscure its actual constitutional function. The overture also does not remove the adversarial structure of the process. The proposed language still requires the lower court to defend its action and identifies the lower court as the respondent. In other words, the substance of the process remains a complaint even if the title is softened.

The church should encourage charitable and brotherly conduct in all complaints. But changing the name of the process without changing its nature is unlikely to accomplish that goal and may make the BCO less precise.

Overture 87 - Affirmative

Ohio Presbytery has submitted a companion overture, Overture 10, which mirrors this request and provides the necessary consent.

Overture 88 - Refer back to Siouxlands Presbytery

Those concerns may be worth considering, but they are better addressed through direct communication with the Office of the Stated Clerk and CDM than through an inflexible Assembly mandate.

Overture 89 - With reference to the answer given to Overture 66