

PCA General Assembly Overtures
The Christian Faith and Contemporary Challenges
June 27, 2021

“Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.” – Rom 12:17

“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” – Rom 13:1

I. Review: Contemporary Challenges and the Christian Faith

- The Word-centered mission of the Church
- “5 Great Calls” of the Christian Life
- Creation
- Fall
- Redemption
- Modernism
- Rousseau, Hegel, and Nietzsche
- Karl Marx and Frankfurt School
- Postmodernism
- Navigating the Social Justice Wave
- Critical Race Theory
- Transgenderism
- Homosexuality and Same-Sex Marriage
- Christian Nationalism

II. The Polity of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)

- A. Presbyterians’ “Favorite” Verse: *“But all things should be done decently and in order.”* (1 Cor 14:40)
- B. The Book of Church Order (the “BCO”) – Form of Government (ch. 1–26), Rules of Discipline (ch. 27–46), Direction for the Worship of God (Ch. 47–63)
- C. The Three Church Courts: Session, Presbytery, and General Assembly
 1. “The church **Session** consists of the pastor, associate pastor(s), if there be any, and the ruling elders of a church.” (BCO 12-1) – “[Elders] must exercise government and discipline, and take oversight not only of the spiritual interests of the particular church, but also the Church generally when called thereunto.” (BCO 8-3)
 2. “The **Presbytery** consists of all the teaching elders and churches within its bounds that have been accepted by the Presbytery.” (BCO 13-1)
 3. “The **General Assembly** is the highest court of this Church, and represents in one body all the churches thereof ... The General Assembly, which is a permanent court, shall meet at least annually upon its own adjournment. It shall consist of all teaching elders in good standing with their Presbyteries, and ruling elders as elected by their Session.” (BCO 14-1)
 - a) “The Assembly permanent committees are the Administrative Committee of General Assembly, Committee on Discipleship Ministries, Committee on Mission to North America, Committee on Mission to the World, and Committee on Reformed University Fellowship.” (BCO 14-1) – (Plus, the PCA “Agencies”: Covenant College, Covenant Theological Seminary; Ridge Haven Conference Center; PCA Foundation; PCA Retirements & Benefits, Inc.)
- D. Overture: a request sent from a lower assembly to a higher assembly of the church.

III. PCA General Assembly (St. Louis, MI – June 28–July 2, 2021)

- A. Overture 16 from Westminster Presbytery: *“Amend BCO 7 by Addition to Disqualify Same-sex Attracted Men from Ordination”* (note the flawed title!)

“We affirm that those in our churches would be wise to avoid the term ‘gay Christian.’ Although the term ‘gay’ may refer to more than being attracted to persons of the same sex, the term does not communicate less than that. For many people in our culture, to self-identify as ‘gay’ suggests that one is engaged in homosexual practice. At the very least, the term normally communicates the presence and approval of same-sex sexual attraction as morally neutral or morally praiseworthy. Even if ‘gay,’ for some Christians, simply means ‘same-sex attraction,’ it is still inappropriate to juxtapose this sinful desire, or any other sinful desire, as an identity marker alongside our identity as new creations in Christ.

Nevertheless, we recognize that some Christians may use the term ‘gay’ in an effort to be more readily understood by non-Christians. The word ‘gay’ is common in our culture, and we do not think it wise for churches to police every use of the term. Our burden is that we do not justify our sin struggles by affixing them to our identity as Christians. Churches should be gentle, patient, and intentional with believers who call themselves ‘gay Christians,’ encouraging them, as part of the process of sanctification, to leave behind identification language rooted in sinful desires, to live chaste lives, to refrain from entering into temptation, and to mortify their sinful desires.”

– “Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality” (to be delivered to 48th GA)

- B. Overture 37 from Eastern Pennsylvania Presbytery: *“Amend BCO 21-4 and 24-1 Clarifying Moral Requirements for Church Office.”*
- C. Overture 36 (*“Appoint Study Committee re White Supremacy”*) and Overture 47 (*“Form a Study Committee on Critical Race Theory”*) from Chesapeake Presbytery.

1 **OVERTURE 16** from Westminster Presbytery (to CCB, OC)
2 "Amend *BCO* 7 by Addition to Disqualify Same-sex Attracted Men
3 from Ordination"
4

5 **Whereas** God created Adam and Eve and ordained the first marriage and family consisting
6 of one man and one woman in sexual union, establishing the context for the biblical
7 sexual ethic (Gen. 1:27-28; 2:24; 4:1); and
8

9 **Whereas** God has established the one flesh sexual union between a husband and wife, as a
10 great mystery in reference to Christ and his Church (Eph. 5:25; 31-32); and
11

12 **Whereas** the Holy Scriptures declare that the sexual union and desire between one man and
13 one woman, in the covenant of marriage, is righteous and holy, and all other sexual
14 activity is unrighteous and sinful, including homosexuality, which the Holy Scriptures
15 describe as "degrading passions" (Rom. 5:18-19; Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6 9-11;
16 Eph. 5:3-5; Heb. 13:4, *WCF* 24:1 & 2; *WLC* 138,139); and
17

18 **Whereas** the application of the 7th Commandment forbids the sins of homosexuality,
19 unnatural lusts, and unclean affections, affirming that homosexual acts and the desires
20 to commit those acts are both sinful (Matt. 5:27-28; *WLC* 139); and
21

22 **Whereas** the Biblical qualifications for a church officer require him to be "above reproach"
23 and the "husband of one wife," officers and candidates for office must conform their
24 lives to Biblical sexual ethics, which include denying and mortifying all sexual
25 passions and desires toward anyone to whom they are not married (1 Tim. 3:2); and
26

27 **Whereas** identification as a "homosexual," is sinful and against nature itself, is something
28 God detests, and is not fitting for an officer of the Church of Christ (Lev. 18:22;
29 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:5-6); and
30

31 **Whereas** the Christian's identity is rooted in Christ so that he is a "new creation" in Him, his
32 identity cannot be defined by sexual and/or any other desires or lifestyles that are
33 contrary to the Holy Scriptures; for the Christian there is a clear distinction between
34 self-conception ("this is who I am") and their remaining indwelling sin ("this is what
35 I must daily mortify") (Rom 6:1-14; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 3:1-5); and
36

37 **Whereas** the sexual revolution and LGBTQ+ movement are infiltrating many quarters of the
38 Church and causing no small amount of confusion; and
39

40 **Whereas** the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood's Nashville Statement on
41 biblical sexuality, affirmed by the 47th General Assembly of the PCA as a biblically
42 faithful declaration, states in Article VII, "We deny that adopting a homosexual or
43 transgender self-conception is consistent with God's holy purposes in creation and
44 redemption";

1 **Therefore** be it resolved that Westminster Presbytery overtures the 48th General Assembly of
2 the Presbyterian Church in America to amend *The Book of Church Order*, Chapter 7,
3 such that a new clause, *BCO 7-4*, be added which reads as follows (new words
4 underlined):

5
6 7-4. Men who identify as homosexual, even those who identify as
7 homosexual and claim to practice celibacy in that self-identification, are
8 disqualified from holding office in the Presbyterian Church in America.
9

10 *Adopted by Westminster Presbytery at its stated meeting March 14, 2020*

11 *Attested by /s/ TE Mark Blalack, stated clerk*

OVERTURE 37 from Eastern Pennsylvania Presbytery (to CCB, OC)
“Amend *BCO* 21-4 and 24-1 Clarifying Moral Requirements for Church Office”

Whereas the character of a candidate for ordination is as important as his doctrine (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1: 6-9) and specific areas and means of inquiry into doctrine, views, and ability are enumerated in the *BCO* (*BCO* 21-4; 24-1); yet little emphasis or elaboration is given to the examination of the candidate’s character (*BCO* 21-4.a.1; 24-1.a); and

Whereas the qualifications for a church officer particularly require that he be above reproach and blameless (1 Tim. 3:2, 10; Tit. 1:7); and

Whereas scripture itself singles out sexual immorality as being worthy of particular note in the context of the church operating in the world (Acts 15:20); and

Whereas the Presbyterian Church in America has sought consistent and clear responses to questions of homosexuality throughout its history; and

Whereas recently the language of sexual and gender identification has caused much confusion, leading to the formation of a study committee and its helpful report; and

Whereas still other forms of actual sin and desire raise similar concerns, and new issues will likely arise in the future; and

Whereas the Christian’s identity is rooted in Christ so that he is a “new creation” in Him, his identity cannot be defined by any desires or lifestyles that are contrary to the Holy Scripture; for the Christian there is a clear distinction between self-conception (“This is who I am”) and remaining indwelling sin (“This is what I must daily mortify”) (Rom. 6: 1-14; 1 Cor. 6: 9-11; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:1-5); and

Whereas some men may have experienced various struggles with sin in a manner that would have disqualified them from church office, yet through God’s work of sanctification they have been faithfully and consistently, although imperfectly, mortifying this sin with its desires to the point where they may be qualified; and

Whereas all Christians should expect to experience progress in the Christian life (*WLC* 75; *WSC* 35) as a work of grace by the Holy Spirit and in time to be enabled more and more to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness; and

Whereas the mortifying of sin includes not only actual sins committed but also the battling of all sinful passions and desires that remain (*WLC* 78; *WSC* 35); and

Whereas the “Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality” offers the clarifying distinction that “we name our sins, but are not named by them”; and

1 **Whereas** the answer to contemporary debates is better made with biblical and confessional
2 language rather than the introduction of contemporary terms which cause confusion;
3 and
4

5 **Whereas** there is precedent for amending the *BCO* to address emerging cultural issues;
6

7 **Therefore be it resolved** that, for the examination of Teaching Elders, *BCO* 21-4 be amended
8 to add a new sub-paragraph 21-4.e, as follows, with the subsequent sub-paragraphs
9 [21-4.e-h] re-lettered [to be 21-4.f-i]:
10

11 **BCO 21-4.**

12 e. In the examination of the candidate's personal character, the
13 presbytery should give specific attention to potentially notorious
14 concerns, such as but not limited to relational sins, sexual immorality
15 (including homosexuality, fornication, and pornography), addictions,
16 abusive behavior, and financial mismanagement. Careful reflection
17 should be given to his practical struggle against sinful actions, as
18 well as persistent sinful desires. The candidate shall give clear
19 testimony of his reliance upon his union with Christ and the benefits
20 thereof by the Holy Spirit, depending on this work of grace to make
21 progress over sin (Psalm 103:2-5, Romans 8:29) and to bear fruit
22 (Psalm 1:3; Gal. 5:22-23). While imperfection will remain, he
23 should not be known by reputation or self-profession according to
24 his remaining sinfulness (e.g., homosexual desires, etc.), but rather
25 by the work of the Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 6:9-11). In
26 order to maintain discretion and protect the honor of the pastoral
27 office, the presbytery may empower a committee to conduct detailed
28 examination into these matters and to give prayerful support to
29 candidates.
30

31 **Be it further resolved** that, for the examination of Ruling Elders and Deacons, *BCO* 24-1
32 be amended by the addition of a second paragraph (addition underlined):
33

34 **24-1.** Every church shall elect persons to the office of ruling elders and
35 deacon in the following manner: At such times as determined by the
36 Session, communicant members of the congregation may submit
37 names to the Session, keeping in mind that each prospective officer
38 should be an active male member who meets the qualifications set forth
39 in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. After the close of the nomination period
40 nominees for the office of ruling elder and/or deacon shall receive
41 instruction in the qualifications and work of the office. Each nominee
42 shall then be examined in:

- 43 a. his Christian experience, especially his personal character and
44 family management (based on the qualifications set out in
45 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9),

- b. his knowledge of Bible content,
- c. his knowledge of the system of doctrine, government, discipline contained in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in America (*BCO* Preface III, The Constitution Defined),
- d. the duties of the office to which he has been nominated, and
- e. his willingness to give assent to the questions required for ordination (*BCO* 24-6).

In the examination of each nominee's personal character, the Session should give specific attention to potentially notorious concerns, such as but not limited to relational sins, sexual immorality (including homosexuality, fornication, and pornography), addictions, abusive behavior, and financial mismanagement. Careful reflection should be given to his practical struggle against sinful actions, as well as persistent sinful desires. Each nominee shall give clear testimony of his reliance upon his union with Christ and the benefits thereof by the Holy Spirit, depending upon this work of grace to make progress over sin (Psalm 103:2-5; Romans 8:29) and to bear fruit (Psalm 1:3; Gal. 5:22-23). While imperfection will remain, he should not be known by reputation or self-profession according to his remaining sinfulness (e.g., homosexual desires, etc.), but rather by the work of the Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 6:9-11). In order to maintain discretion and protect the honor of church office, the Session may empower a committee to conduct detailed examinations into these matters and prayerful support to nominees.

If there are candidates eligible for the election, the Session shall report to the congregation those eligible, giving at least thirty (30) days prior notice of the time and place of a congregational meeting for the elections.

If one-fourth (1/4) of the persons entitled to vote shall at any time request the Session to call a congregational meeting for the purpose of electing additional officers, it shall be the duty of the Session to call such a meeting on the above procedure. The number of officers to be elected shall be determined by the congregation after hearing the Session's recommendation.

Adopted by Eastern Pennsylvania Presbytery at its stated meeting, April 20, 2021

Attested by TE Thomas Keane, stated clerk

1 **OVERTURE 36** from Chesapeake Presbytery (to OC, AC)
2 "Appoint Study Committee re White Supremacy"
3

4 **Whereas**, all of mankind, men and women, are made in the image of God (Gen. 1.27) and
5 all fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3.23); and
6

7 **Whereas**, Jesus invites all to come unto him (Matt 11.28); and
8

9 **Whereas**, there is no man, woman, Jew, Gentile, but are one in Christ (Gal 3.28); and
10

11 **Whereas**, the Apostle James teaches that the Church should not be governed nor guided by
12 partiality, even more so that such partiality is a sin (James 2.1, 9); and
13

14 **Whereas**, racism, more generally, and white supremacy, more particularly, are forms of the
15 sin of partiality, and creates a constructed hierarchy that is not found anywhere in
16 Scripture, and wrongly cultivates castes of superiors and inferiors; and
17

18 **Whereas**, we have position papers on groups like freemasonry, relationships between the
19 spheres of the church and state, and frameworks like theonomy; and
20

21 **Whereas**, we have more recent papers presented by ad interim committees on women in the
22 church, race and reconciliation, and human sexuality; and
23

24 **Whereas**, our denomination's history traces its lines through this difficult and complex issue
25 in the United States of America; and
26

27 **Whereas**, our recent national events reveal both the ripples of, existing tensions between, and
28 deep wounds within; and
29

30 **Whereas**, the historical roots and current tensions within families, churches, and communities
31 are causing disruption and discord in congregations; and
32

33 **Whereas**, we lack a cohesive theological exposition and clear pastoral advice on this topic for
34 the churches in our Assembly; and
35

36 **Whereas**, previous study reports encouraged presbyteries and sessions to consider how to
37 make progress toward racial reconciliation within their contexts; and
38

39 **Therefore, be it resolved** that the 48th General Assembly authorize the Moderator to appoint
40 a study committee, comprised of teaching and ruling elders, that would consider the
41 relevant biblical and theological materials and consult with knowledgeable persons
42 such as historians and social scientists, in order to:
43

- 44 a. Provide biblical and theological exposition relevant to the topic of White
45 Supremacy;

- 1 b. Consider the historical background and impact regarding this topic;
2
3 c. Report to the 49th General Assembly the conclusion of their work and present any
4 relevant recommendations for the understanding and use of sessions and
5 presbyteries in the PCA;
6
7 d. Set the budget for the study committee at \$15,000/year and that funds be derived
8 from gifts to the Administrative Committee designated for that purpose, of which
9 Columbia Presbyterian Church will contribute \$1000 toward that proposed budget.
10

11 *Approved by Chesapeake Presbytery at its stated meeting March 13, 2021*

12 *Attested by /s/ RE Timothy M. Persons, stated clerk*

1 **OVERTURE 47** from Chesapeake Presbytery (to OC, AC)
2 “Form Study Committee on Critical Race Theory”
3
4 **Whereas**, all of mankind, men and women, are made in the image of God (Genesis1:27) and
5 all fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23); and
6
7 **Whereas**, Jesus invites all to come unto Him (Matthew 11:28); and
8
9 **Whereas**, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male
10 nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28); and
11
12 **Whereas**, the Apostle James teaches that the Church should not be governed nor guided by
13 partiality, and that such partiality is a sin (James 2:1,9); and
14
15 **Whereas**, the Scriptures teach that we are not to boast in anything but the LORD (Jeremiah
16 9:23-24), and that we are not to judge ourselves as better than any other because of our
17 group identity (Galatians 6:3-5); and
18
19 **Whereas**, racism and racial supremacy are forms of the sin of partiality and create a
20 constructed hierarchy that is not found in the Scriptures as an example for the people of
21 God to follow; and
22
23 **Whereas**, there is a particular philosophical system known as “critical race theory,” which
24 appears to advocate the judgment of individuals by an assumed group identity based
25 on the color of their skin; and
26
27 **Whereas**, this particular philosophical system contains an interpretation of the history of the
28 human race that may be out of line with the biblical principles of Providence (*WCF* 5,
29 *WSC* 11, *WLC* 18); and
30
31 **Whereas**, this particular philosophical system is increasingly influencing the governance of
32 the nation in which we live and serve, as well as the academic institutions where our
33 covenant children may be educated; and
34
35 **Whereas**, expertise in the vast range of secular philosophies necessary to rightly understand
36 this particular philosophical system may not be possible for every elder in the PCA,
37 thus requiring many to rely on the study and expertise of those they should be able to
38 trust; and
39
40 **Whereas**, there are elders in the PCA who have been actively promoting the value of this
41 particular philosophical system, and we know that “The first one to plead his cause
42 seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him.” (Proverbs 18:17); and
43
44 **Whereas**, the flock of Jesus Christ gathered in the PCA need to know how to glorify God in a
45 world that embraces this particular philosophical system as a way to understand reality;

1 **Therefore, be it resolved** that the 48th General Assembly authorize the Moderator to appoint
2 a study committee, comprised of at least 4 ordained teaching elders and 3 ruling elders,
3 with each member from a unique presbytery, to consider the relevant biblical,
4 theological, philosophical, and historical materials, including living experts in those
5 fields of study, in order to:

- 6 • Provide biblical and theological exposition relevant to the topic of preferential
7 treatment based on skin-color, or “race”;
- 8 • Provide historical information as to the origins of “critical race theory” and the
9 overarching impact of that system of philosophical thought on the church and
10 Christ’s mission for her;
- 11 • Report to the 49th General Assembly the conclusion of their labor and present a
12 recommendation as to the value of this philosophical system to the end of the
13 edification of Christ’s bride;

14 **Be it further resolved** that the budget for the study committee be set at \$15,000 and that funds
15 be derived from gifts to the AC designated for that purpose;

16
17 *Adopted by Chesapeake Presbytery at its stated meeting, May 11, 2021*

18 *Attested by /s/ RE Timothy Persons, stated clerk*