

1 **OVERTURE 7** from Evangel Presbytery (to CCB and OC)

2 “Amend *BCO* 9-7 to Specify that Persons Who Assist Deacons  
3 May Not Be Ordained”  
4

5 **Whereas**, the biblical office of elder was instituted by a divine commandment, “Then the  
6 Lord said to Moses, ‘Gather for me seventy men whom you know to be elders of the  
7 people and officers over them and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them  
8 take their stand with you. And I will come down and talk with you there. And I will  
9 take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the  
10 burden of the people with you so that you may not bear it yourself alone.” (Numbers  
11 11:16-17. See also I Timothy 5:17 and Hebrews 13:7-17); and  
12

13 **Whereas**, this plurality of elders was continued in the development of synagogues into the  
14 Second Temple Era and into the New Testament; and  
15

16 **Whereas**, Scriptures specify that Elders are set apart and necessary for every local church  
17 and the broader Church, 1) Acts 14:23: “And when they [Paul and Barnabas] had  
18 appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed  
19 them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” 2) Titus 1:5: “This is why I left you  
20 in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every  
21 town as I directed you...” (See also Acts 11:30; 13:1; 15:2, 4, 22; 20:17; I Timothy  
22 4:14; James 5:14; I Peter 5:1-2; and Philippians 1:1); and  
23

24 **Whereas**, the Presbyterian Church in America *Book of Church Order*, in obedience to  
25 Scripture, therefore, requires a plurality of elders for the particularization of a local  
26 church (*BCO* 5-9) and for the ongoing functioning of a local church (*BCO* 12-1); and  
27

28 **Whereas**, the office of elder is that of spiritual and ecclesiastical governance, “Let the elders  
29 who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in  
30 preaching and teaching” (I Timothy 5:17). (See also Acts 20:28; [*BCO* 12-5]); and  
31

32 **Whereas**, the New Testament office of deacon was established, not by the direct revelation  
33 of a divine command, but by apostolic prudence, and not in a governing office but as  
34 an office of service, Acts 6:2 – 4 ““It is not right that we should give up preaching  
35 the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you  
36 seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to  
37 this duty.”; and  
38

39 **Whereas**, Scripture establishes standards for deacons, 1 Timothy 3:8: “Deacons likewise,  
40 must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for  
41 dishonest gain.”; and  
42

43 **Whereas**, Scripture reveals that only the churches of Philippi (Philippians 1:1), Ephesus  
44 (I Timothy 3:8-13) and Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-6) are specified as having deacons, though  
45 Phoebe in the church at Cenchreae was called a deacon by Paul in Romans 16:1:

1 “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant [Greek: *diakonos*] of the church at  
2 Cenchreae...”; and,  
3

4 **Whereas**, the diaconal ministry is that of sympathy and service, not of spiritual and  
5 ecclesiastical governance, and any authority that may be attached to the office of  
6 deacon is a derivative authority, with plurality of elders serving as the final authority  
7 in a local church (*BCO* 9-1; 9-2; 9-6); and,  
8

9 **Whereas**, though the office of deacon is “ordinary and perpetual” (*BCO* 9-1), it is not one  
10 that is an absolute necessity for the particularization (*BCO* 5-10) or ongoing ministry  
11 (*BCO* 9-2) of a local church; and,  
12

13 **Whereas**, in the PCA, individuals at all levels of the church, including missionaries, vacation  
14 Bible school workers, Sunday school teachers, Women in the Church officers, and  
15 countless other church workers (both men and women) have been commissioned  
16 throughout the entire history of the PCA<sup>1</sup> and the Reformed Presbyterian Church,  
17 Evangelical Synod; and,  
18

19 **Whereas**, upon completion of Joining and Receiving (J & R), the RPCES practice of  
20 commissioning deaconesses was carried over to the PCA (*Minutes of the Ninth*  
21 *General Assembly, PCA*, 1981, p. 305); and,  
22

23 **Whereas**, the RPCES had conducted a detailed study of the issue of deaconesses during the  
24 period 1974-8 and adopted the following resolution:  
25

26 *Resolved: that in light of the action of the 155<sup>th</sup> General Synod, we do not*  
27 *recommend allowing each particular church within the denomination to*  
28 *determine whether its diaconate shall include men as well as women, nor*  
29 *that they be allowed to ordain a woman as a deacon. We also remind*  
30 *churches that they are free to elect Spirit filled women as deaconesses and*  
31 *to set them apart by prayer (156<sup>th</sup> General Synod Minutes of the RPCES,*  
32 *1978, pp. 133-134, see Attachment.) [For the full 1976 study report, go to*  
33 *<http://www.pcahistory.org/findingaids/rpces/docsynod/390.html>] and,*  
34

35 **Whereas**, in connection with J & R, the PCA acknowledged the practices of denominations  
36 so received by stating, “In receiving these denominations, the Presbyterian Church in  
37 America recognizes the history of the respective denominations as part of her total  
38 history and receives their historical documents as valuable and significant material  
39 which will be used in the perfecting of the Church (*Minutes of the Ninth General*  
40 *Assembly, PCA*, 1981, p. 305); and,

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<sup>1</sup> The *Minutes of the First General Assembly*, 1973, item 1-56, p. 37 report that the Assembly commissioned six missionaries [two were ministers, one was a Ruling Elder, and three were women] at a worship service on December 5, 1973.

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**Whereas**, the PCA *Book of Church Order*, (since its First Edition, published in 1975, and continuing to the present in the Sixth Edition) authorizes its church Sessions to appoint “godly men and women of the congregation to assist the deacons in caring for the sick, the widows, the orphans, the prisoners, and others who may be in any distress or need” (*Emphasis added*);

**Now, be it therefore resolved**, that Evangel Presbytery hereby overtures the 38<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America to amend *Book of Church Order* 9-7 to include the following sentence to be placed at the end of the section:

“These individuals who assist the deacons, selected by means determined by each Session, are not subjects for ordination.”

The entire section 9-7, therefore, would read:

“9-7. It is often expedient that the Session of a church should select and appoint godly men and women of the congregation to assist the deacons in caring for the sick, the widows, the orphans, the prisoners, and others who may be in any distress or need. **These individuals who assist the deacons, selected by means determined by each Session, are not subjects for ordination.**”

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**Overture 7: Attachment**



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5 ***Documents of Synod: Study Papers and Actions of the***  
6 ***Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod--1965***  
7 ***to 1982***  
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10 **From Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod, Documents of Synod,**  
11 **Minutes of 156th General Synod, June 16, 1978, pp. 133-34.**

12  
13 **BILLS AND OVERTURES COMMITTEE REPORT**  
14

15 Rev. Charles B. Holliday, Jr. presented the report indicating that Overture N would be  
16 considered first.

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18 **OVERTURE N: RECONSIDERATION OF WOMEN DEACONS**  
19

20 Whereas the 155th General Synod of the RPCES did not affirm that the Scriptures by an  
21 express injunction forbid the ordination of women to the office of deacon, but rather that the  
22 office be limited to men on the grounds of "the absence of any compelling evidence to  
23 support the ordination of women to the special office of deacon," and  
24

25 Whereas there is a significant body of opinion within the RPCES which holds that in view  
26 of the distinction between the office of elder, to which alone is committed the  
27 ruling/teaching function, and the office of deacon, to which is committed only the delegated  
28 authority of the serving function (see *Minutes*, 155th General Synod [RPCES], p. 110),  
29 women are not excluded from the latter on the grounds of the role relationship which  
30 excludes them from the former; and further, that in view of the inclusion of women in Paul's  
31 list of qualifications for persons holding recognized positions in the church in 1 Timothy 3,  
32 and his commendation of Phoebe as a *diakonos* of the church at Cenchrea in Romans 16:1,  
33 that there is sufficient Biblical evidence to warrant the setting apart of women as well as  
34 men to the diaconate.  
35

36 Therefore, the Michigan-Northern Indiana Presbytery respectfully overtures the 156th  
37 General Synod of the RPCES to affirm the prerogatives of each particular church within the

1 denomination to determine whether its diaconate shall include women as well as men, and  
2 whether they shall be ordained or unordained, and whether they shall be called "deacons" or  
3 "deaconesses."  
4

5 ***RESPONSE:***  
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7 Resolved: That in light of the action of the 155th General Synod, we do not recommend  
8 allowing each particular church within the denomination to determine whether its diaconate  
9 shall include women as well as men and that they not be allowed to ordain a woman as a  
10 deacon. We also remind churches that they are free to elect Spirit-filled women as  
11 deaconesses and set them apart by prayer.  
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13 ***DISCUSSION AND ACTIONS:***  
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15 A substitute motion was presented, i.e.:

16  
17 Resolved: That the 156th General Synod of the RPCES affirms the prerogative of each  
18 particular church within the denomination to determine whether its diaconate shall include  
19 women as well as men, and whether they shall be ordained or unordained, and whether they  
20 shall be called "deacons" or "deaconesses. "In accordance with Robert's Rules of Order re.  
21 substitute motions, the Committee's response was amended so as to read:  
22

23 Resolved: That in light of the action of the 155th General Synod, we do not recommend  
24 allowing each particular church within the denomination to determine whether its diaconate  
25 shall include women as well as men, nor that they be allowed to ordain a woman as a  
26 deacon. We also remind churches that they are free to elect Spirit-filled women as  
27 deaconesses and set them apart by prayer. At 4:30 p.m., the orders of the day were called.  
28 Elder Emerson Russell closed the sessions with prayer.  
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30 [*Documents of Synod*, pages 156-157.]  
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34 **Note:** For the full 1976 RPCES study report, go to [www.pcahistory.org](http://www.pcahistory.org), click on  
35 RPCES Documents, click on Women, Role of in Church.