

1 **OVERTURE 39** from Westminster Presbytery (to OC)
2 “Affirm Overture 6 Regarding Child Protection in the PCA – with
3 Supporting Documents”
4

5 **Whereas** Georgia Foothills Presbytery has sent an overture to the 42nd General Assembly
6 calling on the General Assembly to speak to the issue of child sexual abuse
7 (Overture 6: “Child Protection in the PCA”); and
8

9 **Whereas** Westminster Presbytery believes that child sexual abuse is an issue to which the
10 General Assembly should speak; and
11

12 **Whereas** Westminster Presbytery endorses the substance of Overture 6 from Georgia
13 Foothills Presbytery on child sexual abuse;
14

15 **Therefore, be it resolved,** that Westminster Presbytery urges the 42nd General Assembly to
16 answer in the affirmative Overture 6 from Georgia Foothills Presbytery on child
17 sexual abuse.
18

19 *Approved by Westminster Presbytery at its stated meeting on April 12, 2014.*
20 *Attested: /s/ TE Daniel J. Foreman, Stated Clerk*
21
22

23 **Supporting Documents:**
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- 25 I. The Georgia Foothills overture which is being endorsed by the Westminster JC overture.
 - 26 II. Some background on the Georgia Foothills overture by TE Mike Sloane.
- 27

28 **I. Georgia Foothills Overture Being Endorsed**
29

30 **OVERTURE 6** from Georgia Foothills Presbytery (to OC)
31 “Child Protection in the PCA”
32

33 **Whereas** our Lord Jesus demonstrated his righteous anger at his own disciples, rebuking
34 those who would do anything to prevent children from coming unto him, saying “to
35 such belongs the Kingdom of God,” (Mark 10:14) and condemning those who would
36 harm children, saying “it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened
37 around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6); and
38

39 **Whereas** an epidemic of child sexual abuse exists in our culture, with the vast majority of
40 such children being harmed by someone they know and trust, wounding children
41 physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually with lifelong ripple effects;
42 and
43

44 **Whereas** the silence of the church – when we fail to appropriately address “rape, incest,
45 sodomy and all unnatural lusts” (WLC 139) by not reporting disclosures of child
46 sexual abuse, or not caring for those who disclose child sexual abuse, or not

1 proactively taking steps to prevent child sexual abuse – is a fundamental failure of
2 servant leadership, rendering the church complicit and culpable before the Lord,
3 driving people away from the safety, healing and hope of Jesus Christ; and
4

5 **Whereas** Scripture warns leaders against the “careless exposing, or leaving [those in their
6 care] to wrong, temptation, and danger” (*WLC* 130), and every jurisdiction
7 acknowledges that child sexual abuse is a serious felony and has its own mandated
8 reporting laws;
9

10 **Therefore, be it resolved** that we exhort all church leaders to become informed and to take
11 an active stance toward preventing child sexual abuse in the church by screening
12 staff and volunteers, training them in child protection, and actively maintaining child
13 protection policies pertaining to our obligations to love our children and protect their
14 rightful interests as God’s image-bearers from the devastating actions of abusers
15 (*Matthew* 18:5-6; *WLC* 129-130); and
16

17 **Be it further resolved** that we remind all churches that the heinous crime of child sexual
18 abuse must be reported to duly appointed, God-ordained civil authorities, and that we
19 must cooperate with those authorities as they “bear the sword” to punish those who
20 do evil “in such an effectual manner as that no person be suffered . . . to offer any
21 indignity, violence, abuse, or injury to any other person whatsoever” (*Romans* 13:1-
22 7; *1 Peter* 2:13-14; *WCF* 23.3); and
23

24 **Be it further resolved** that we urge all church leaders to use their influence for the
25 protection of children, by any and all godly means, including preaching and teaching
26 against the heinous sin of child sexual abuse, warning anyone with knowledge of
27 these sins to “take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose
28 them” (*Ephesians* 5:11), and by supporting victims who often suffer in silence and
29 shame without the vocal and compassionate support of the church; and
30

31 **Be it further resolved** that we direct the Permanent Committees and Agencies of the
32 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America to review their policies,
33 procedures and practices in the area of child protection, including their response to
34 child sexual abuse disclosures, their faithfulness in reporting child sexual abuse to
35 duly appointed God-ordained civil authorities, their care for survivors of child sexual
36 abuse, and their future plans to help educate the PCA on child sexual abuse, and
37 report back to the 43rd General Assembly; and
38

39 **Be it finally resolved** that the 42nd General Assembly urge all members of the PCA to
40 renew our allegiance to our Lord Jesus by loving our children as he loves our
41 children, “for to such belongs the Kingdom of God” (*Mark* 10:14).
42

43 *Adopted by Georgia Foothills Presbytery at its stated meeting, January 18, 2014*

44 *Attested by /s/ TE Charles Garland, stated clerk*
45

1 **II. Statement Regarding Overture 6 by TE Mike Sloan:**

2
3 1. Background

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5 Most of you know that the short statement on child sexual abuse brought by the Overtures
6 Committee to the floor of the 41st General Assembly in Greenville, SC, was sent back to the
7 Overtures Committee to be reconsidered at the 42nd General Assembly in Houston. In
8 Greenville, the sentiment on the floor was that this statement was not nearly strong enough
9 because it did not even encourage our churches to report this horrific sin to the civil
10 authorities. With all due respect to my dear fathers and brothers on the Overtures
11 Committee, it was clear to me that very few in the room had any education or training in
12 child sexual abuse awareness and prevention. This year has given me time to seek out more
13 input from PCA experts on this issue. Ten of us gathered back in December in Sarasota, FL,
14 to work on a strong statement that would help churches understand the current situation and
15 encourage them to lead in protecting children:

- 16
17 Amy Aldrich, PCA Member, Sarasota, FL
18 Advocate for victims of child sexual abuse
19 Ken Aldrich, PCA Teaching Elder, Sarasota, FL
20 Senior Pastor, Covenant Life Presbyterian Church
21 Advocate for victims of child sexual abuse
22 Steve Collins, PCA Member, Gainesville, GA
23 Founder and Executive Director of *Adults Protecting Children*
24 Beth Hart, PCA Member, Sarasota, FL
25 Trained Facilitator of *Stewards of Children* Abuse Prevention Training
26 Dr. Diane Langberg, PCA Member, Philadelphia, PA
27 Author, International Speaker, Counselor of 35 years working with trauma
28 survivors (including victims of child sexual abuse and pastors who have
29 abused
30 Chair of the Executive Board of the American Association of Christian
31 Counselors
32 Adjunct Professor of Practical Theology, Westminster Theological Seminary
33 Dr. Duncan Rankin, PCA Teaching Elder, Houston, TX
34 Associate Pastor, Christ Church PCA
35 Adjunct Professor of Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary
36 Board member of *GRACE* (Godly Response to Abuse in a Christian Environment)
37 John Robertson, PCA Teaching Elder, Lawrenceville, GA
38 PCA Administrative Committee Business Administrator
39 Mike Sloan, PCA Teaching Elder, Duluth, GA
40 Associate Pastor, Old Peachtree Presbyterian Church
41 Trained Facilitator of *Stewards of Children* Abuse Prevention Training
42 Dr. Roy Taylor, PCA Teaching Elder, Lawrenceville, GA
43 Stated Clerk of the PCA
44

1 Boz Tchividjian, PCA Ruling Elder, Lynchburg, VA
2 Founder and Executive Director of *GRACE* (Godly Response to Abuse in a
3 Christian Environment)
4 Professor at Liberty University School of Law
5 Former Assistant State Attorney, Seventh Judicial Circuit, Chief Prosecutor,
6 Sexual Crimes Division
7

8 Some of us have expertise in the area of child sexual abuse as professional counselors or
9 consultants or legal experts. Some of us have practical ministry experience walking
10 alongside victims of child sexual abuse. All of us personally know victims of child sexual
11 abuse. Some of us have family who are survivors of child sexual abuse. Some of us are
12 survivors of child sexual abuse. The ten of us love the PCA and our heart for the PCA is that
13 together we would see more clearly the great need of the current situation and lead in
14 creating an environment of protection for kids in our churches. The spirit in our discussions
15 was not one of self-righteousness or blame, but of concern for kids in the PCA who need
16 protecting. A statement of this nature can always be tweaked a little more but careful
17 thought from these PCA experts went into each word.
18

19 2. Why do we need a statement? 20

21 Why do we need it if the Bible already speaks to it? Should we pass a statement against
22 every sin? Of course not, but there are times when the current situation calls for a timely
23 statement. Think of Ezra and the issue of intermarriage with non-believers. That was clearly
24 addressed in the Torah, and yet Ezra spoke boldly and prophetically before all of the people
25 because of the situation. We the PCA have done this on many occasions, speaking on
26 Abortion, Divorce, and Pornography to give a few examples. A statement like this is in
27 conformity with our grassroots polity. A statement of this nature is simply urging churches
28 to engage and take measures in line with the Scriptures and our standards. This is not a
29 mandate, it can't be. It is a timely exhortation to the brothers.
30

31 Speaking clearly and publicly helps bring deeds of darkness into the light (Ephesians 5:11)
32 and it tells the victims of child sexual abuse – and there are many in our pews – that this is
33 not their fault and we are committed to protecting children. If we know there is an ox
34 capable of goring and we don't do something about it, the God clearly says we are culpable
35 (Exodus 21:29). In our day, given what we have learned in the past few years about child
36 sexual abuse, we cannot pretend that we do not know there are oxen capable of goring. Let's
37 speak up for the little ones Jesus loves (Mark 10:14).
38

39 3. Child Sexual Abuse is an issue in the PCA 40

41 I didn't know everyone's story in the room in December when we wrote this statement. I do
42 know that three of ten in the room were personally victims of child sexual abuse. I also
43 know that number is five of ten if you include those of us who have had immediate family
44 who were victims.
45

1 I know an RUF campus pastor who is currently ministering to seventeen students who were
2 victims of child sexual abuse. Not seventeen over the life of his ministry – seventeen current
3 students in his RUF chapter. Let that sink in for a minute.

4
5 I know two pastors who have had their daughters sexually assaulted in the PCA churches
6 they were serving at the time. One of my best friends knows a man who was found to be
7 serially molesting his own granddaughter. This man is a long-time PCA member and has
8 been a leader in Bible Study Fellowship. I could tell you many other stories of abuse from
9 people I know personally.

10
11 I know of multiple cases where the PCA church did not report the abuse. One of the two
12 PCA pastors I mentioned, the elders and the pastor at the time knew about the abuser was
13 guilty of child rape but did not call the authorities. When my friend was called to come
14 pastor the church he knew something was not right in the church, but before he could figure
15 it out his own young daughter was sexually assaulted by the same abuser.

16
17 Dr. Diane Langberg told me this story personally. Several years ago the then current head of
18 woman's ministry in the PCA was talking with Dr. Langberg about child sexual abuse. She
19 said to Dr. Langberg, "I'm so glad we don't have this in the PCA." Dr. Langberg told her at
20 her next women's ministry conference to list child sexual abuse as an issue faced by women
21 and see what happens. She said don't even mention it, just list it in one of the handouts. A
22 few months later the head of women's ministry called Dr. Langberg and said, "What do I
23 do? They are coming out of the woodwork!"

24
25 Brothers, I love the PCA. Because I love the PCA I want us to be honest and say this is an
26 issue in our churches. There is a huge false sense of security that this is not happening in the
27 PCA. This statement will exhort us to wake up and act with courage for the sake of
28 vulnerable kids.

29 30 4. The Need for Leadership

31
32 Child sexual abuse thrives in environments where there are abusers and other adults who are
33 unaware and/or unwilling to create an environment of accountability around children. Over
34 the past few decades, we have learned a great deal about child sexual abuse and how to
35 prevent it. Because of our theology of covenant children, we should lead the way in
36 following these safeguards, and these practices should become as routine as buckling our
37 children into seat belts. Some of us resent that we have to have laws about seatbelts. I
38 understand, but we are not even talking about a law. We are talking about an exhortation
39 that says following well-informed and established practices for child protection ought to be
40 part of our service to Christ as we join his efforts to prevent anyone from harming one of his
41 little ones.

42
43 For decades, we have put the burden on children to come forward if they are being abused.
44 This status quo has failed. The antidote to child sexual abuse is faithful adults working
45 together to create a safe environment for children. Our confession rightly emphasizes the

1 biblical notion that those in authority must protect anyone in their care (*WLC* 130). The
2 Prophets again and again chastise God's people because they are not speaking up and
3 protecting the vulnerable (Isaiah 1:17; Zechariah 7:9-10). They even chastise the shepherds
4 who prey on the sheep themselves instead of protecting them (Ez. 34:1-10). Lack of
5 awareness has led to a lack of training and responsible actions and thousands of kids in the
6 PCA are vulnerable as a result. I have no hesitation saying that this resolution will help save
7 children who are currently unprotected.