

1 **OVERTURE 24** from Philadelphia Metro West Presbytery (AC, CDM, MNA, MTW, RUF  
2 “Add Constitutional Precedence Statement to CC, CTS, PCAF, PCA-RBI, RH)  
3 Policy Manuals” (Revised)  
4

5 [Note: An earlier version of this overture appeared online in early March. At its May 4  
6 meeting Philadelphia Metro West Presbytery revised the first “Whereas” clause to  
7 clarify the Committees and Agencies involved. There is no other change to the  
8 original overture.]  
9

10 **Whereas** the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) currently has five Permanent Committees  
11 (Administrative Committee, Committee on Discipleship Ministries, Mission to North  
12 America, Mission to the World, and Reformed University Fellowship) and five  
13 Agencies (Covenant College, Covenant Seminary, PCA Foundation, PCA Retirement  
14 & Benefits, Inc., and Ridge Haven), and may in the future have other or additional  
15 Permanent Committees and Agencies (all such current and future Permanent  
16 Committees and Agencies, collectively, the “Permanent Committees and Agencies”)  
17 [*BCO* 14.1.12; *RAO* 14.1]; and  
18

19 **Whereas** it is necessary for the Permanent Committees and Agencies to function at all times  
20 under the authority of the Constitution (as defined in *BCO* Preface III, and which  
21 includes the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the *Larger Catechism* and *Shorter*  
22 *Catechism*, and the *Book of Church Order*, collectively, the “Constitution”); [*BCO*  
23 14.1.7–8; 14.6; Article V.G of the Corporate Bylaws]; and  
24

25 **Whereas** it is standard operating procedure for organizations to write policy manuals; and  
26

27 **Whereas** the Permanent Committees and Agencies rightly and necessarily have at times  
28 produced their respective policy manuals; and  
29

30 **Whereas** it is essential for every policy manual of the Permanent Committees and Agencies  
31 to remain subject to the Constitution; and  
32

33 **Whereas** it is possible for unanticipated conflicts, potential conflicts, or ambiguities to arise  
34 between Permanent Committee and Agency policy manuals and the Constitution; and  
35

36 **Whereas** it is a well-recognized best practice for policy manuals of organizations to explicitly  
37 state their subordination to organizational constitutional documents and by-laws;  
38

39 **Therefore, it is resolved** that the Philadelphia Metro West Presbytery hereby overture the  
40 47<sup>th</sup> General Assembly to add the following statement to the preface of all policy  
41 manuals of the Permanent Committees and Agencies: “At every point, this entire  
42 manual is subordinate to the entire Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in  
43 America—the *Westminster Standards* and the *Book of Church Order*. If there exists  
44 any conflict between the PCA’s constitutional documents and the content and  
45 stipulations of this manual, the Constitution carries final authority.”  
46

47 **Further resolved**, that any policy manual produced or amended by any of the Permanent  
48 Committees and Agencies shall, before becoming operational, be approved by its  
49 respective board and submitted to the General Assembly for ratification through the  
50 usual process of the reports of the Permanent Committees and Agencies.

1 **Further resolved**, that each of the Permanent Committees and Agencies report back on the  
2 implementation of these actions to their respective Committee of Commissioners at  
3 the 48<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.  
4

5 **Rationale:**

6 In order to carry out their responsibilities faithfully, Permanent Committees and Agencies  
7 must be able to develop and propose policies to the General Assembly for ratification. *BCO*  
8 14.1.7 indicates that “The Assembly's committees are to serve and not to direct any Church  
9 judicatories. They are not to establish policy, but rather execute policy established by the  
10 General Assembly.” The only effective method to ensure Permanent Committee and Agency  
11 policies yield to the PCA constitution, and the only way to ensure that constitutional due  
12 process for staff of these permanent Committees and Agencies in relation to written policies,  
13 is (1) to give the PCA constitution explicitly stated priority in all policy manuals, and (2) to  
14 make policy changes according to *BCO* 14.1.7, which grants the General Assembly full  
15 visibility into proposed policies (and any wording changes to policies) in order to exercise its  
16 constitutionally-appointed powers of ratification.  
17

18 The action of the 5<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, for example, delivers a clear process in relation to the  
19 Committee on Mission to the World (CMTW). This GA action (1977, p. 72, 5–64, IV, 9)  
20 differentiated between the MTW policy manual and the MTW handbook, when it determined  
21 “the policy manual to be revised only by General Assembly procedures while changes in the  
22 handbooks (which unavoidably need continual changes to meet changing situations with  
23 regard to such things as insurance, annuity, travel, etc.) be reported annually to the MTW  
24 Committee of Commissioners (CoC) at the General Assembly for their approval.” Usual  
25 process for policy changes then requires that changes/additions be submitted by CMTW to  
26 the CoC for ratification by the General Assembly, with a CMTW minute to this effect in each  
27 instance. The CoC should then include these as recommendations in their report to GA  
28 (including any minority reports).  
29

30 In 2014, the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly of the PCA passed Overture 6, “Child Protection in the  
31 PCA.” This overture directed the Permanent Agencies and Committees “to review their  
32 policies, procedures and practices in the area of child protection, including their response to  
33 child sexual abuse disclosures, their faithfulness in reporting child sexual abuse to duly  
34 appointed proper representatives of the God-ordained civil authorities, in accordance with  
35 local laws, their care for survivors of child sexual abuse, and their future plans to help educate  
36 the PCA on child sexual abuse, and all other areas of response consistent with Scripture and  
37 the Constitution of the PCA and report to the 43<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly through the  
38 Administrative Committee, after it has referred the matter to and received a report from the  
39 Cooperative Ministries Committee.” We trust that the Permanent Agencies and Committees  
40 have attended to these Overture 6 mandates, but to date no such policies or revisions to policy  
41 manuals have been reviewed by the General Assembly. A more recent example appeared in  
42 2018, when MTW created and implemented a sexual harassment policy, which has yet to  
43 receive General Assembly ratification.  
44

45 *Adopted by Philadelphia Metro West Presbytery at its stated meeting, February 23, 2019*

46 *Attested by /s/ RE Paul Rich, stated clerk*

47 *Revision adopted by Philadelphia Metro West Presbytery, May 4, 2019*

48 *Attested by /s/ RE Paul Rich, stated clerk*