

1 **OVERTURE 31** from Eastern Pennsylvania Presbytery (to AC, OC)
2 “Form an Ad Interim Committee to Address Matters Related to Domestic
3 Abuse, Domestic Oppression, and Sexual Assault” (Version 6)
4

5 **Be it resolved:**
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- 7 1. That the 47th General Assembly create a seven-member Ad Interim Committee (AIC)
8 tasked to accomplish the following.
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- 10 a. Prepare an annotated bibliography of recommended pastoral resources available on
11 the nature of domestic abuse, domestic oppression,¹ and sexual assault, as well as
12 pastoral resources for the care of victims of these sins;
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 - 14 b. Explore these matters from an historical perspective, giving special consideration of
15 how they have been conceived of and addressed within the Reformed tradition and
16 provide a summary of their findings.
17
 - 18 c. Describe "best practices" and policy guidelines that could be helpful for elders,
19 Sessions, Presbyteries, and agencies for protecting against these sins and for
20 responding to them;
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 - 22 d. If the Committee deems it prudent, it may include in the report any revisions or
23 additions to *BCO* Rules of Discipline that might more appropriately protect victims of
24 these sins within a biblical process, which changes may be issued as an overture to a
25 subsequent General Assembly by any Presbytery that would wish to do so;
26
 - 27 e. If the Committee deems it prudent, it may include in the report any statement the
28 Committee might recommend for the GA to consider adopting regarding any PCA
29 repentance related to these matters, which statement may be issued as an overture to a
30 subsequent General Assembly by any Presbytery that would wish to do so.
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- 32 2. The 47th GA authorizes the Moderator of the 47th GA to appoint the seven voting
33 members of this Committee. (*RAO* 9-4)
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- 35 a. These members shall be PCA ministers or PCA ruling elders, and the Committee shall
36 include at least two of each. (Presbyteries, Sessions, and individuals may contact the
37 Moderator with suggested names.)

¹ Domestic oppression is an ongoing pattern of intimidating and domineering behavior employed by one family member to control one or more other family members. A superior/inferior, hierarchical power differential is established, maintained, and increased more and more as time goes on... domestic oppressors systematically tyrannize, intimidate, threaten, emotionally coerce, dehumanize, objectify, demean, degrade, manipulate, and bully at least one other person within the family home—usually their spouse. Source: Rev. Warren Lamb, <https://pastorlamb.com/2018/05/08/domestic-oppression-time-to-talk-about-i>

1 b. The 47th GA authorizes the Moderator to make all of his appointments after the 47th
2 GA adjourns. (RAO 9-4)

3
4 3. The 47th GA authorizes the Moderator to appoint others to serve the Committee as
5 advisors, regardless of gender or denominational affiliation, within the confines of its
6 budget. The 47th GA recommends the Moderator appoint at least two women who are
7 subject-matter experts and voting members.

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9 4. Budget and Funding – The AIC budget shall be \$15,000, all of which shall come from
10 contributions to the AC designated for the AIC. (The Pacific Northwest Presbytery will
11 commit to contribute \$1,000 to that end.)

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13 5. Reporting

14 The Committee shall either report its findings on 1.a (bibliography) and 1.c (best practices)
15 directly to the 48th GA, or at that time request an extension (RAO 9-4).
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17
18 **Rationale:**

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20 1. The sins of domestic abuse and sexual assault are expressly forbidden by Scripture and
21 the Westminster Standards. (For example, see 2 Timothy 3:2-5; Jude 7; Exodus 21:15;
22 Deuteronomy 22:25-27; also, WLC 135 and 139.)

23
24 2. These sins are especially heinous as they are “against the express letter of the law,” “break
25 many commandments,” “admit of no reparation,” and often involve various other
26 aggravations (WLC 151).

27
28 3. Sadly, these sins are prevalent in our society, and in the church.²

29
30 4. These sins often produce in the victims a complex response of denial along with immense
31 fear and shame that persist with varying severity throughout life (e.g., 2 Samuel 13:1-22).

32
33 5. It is the responsibility of the elders of the Church to exercise their authority, severally and
34 jointly, to shepherd those who are under their care by guarding against such sinful behavior
35 as much as possible, by wisely caring for those victimized by the sins of others, and by
36 appropriately disciplining those guilty of such sins, with an aim toward a full repentance.

37
38 6. These sins have been a concern and a subject of attention not only in other denominations
39 but even in the proceedings of the 46th General Assembly.

² For example, the National Domestic Violence Hotline reports: “More than 1 in 3 women (35.6%) and more than 1 in 4 men (28.5%) in the United States have experienced rape, physical violence and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime.” (Available at www.thehotline.org/resources/statistics/, accessed 6/15/18). For further statistics on sexual violence see the National Center for Injury Prevention and Controls Report titled *Sexual Violence Surveillance: Uniform Definitions and Recommended Data Elements* (Atlanta: CDC, 2014; available at www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/sv_surveillance_definitions1-2009-a.pdf).

- 1 7. In 2014, the 42nd General Assembly (Houston, TX) exhorted the PCA and its courts to
2 respond boldly against one form of these sins, namely the sexual abuse of children.
3
- 4 8. Many PCA ministers, ruling elders, and candidates report a desire to be resourced in order
5 to provide better pastoral care on these sins and their resulting complex consequences.
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- 7 9. Many PCA ministers, ruling elders, and candidates report a desire to learn of "best
8 practices" regarding church and presbytery policies in this area. For example, some
9 ministers and elders are unaware of the different levels of background checks that can be
10 utilized in screening. Some do not know what their State's laws are regarding mandatory
11 reporters or in what situations those laws may or may not apply.
12
- 13 10. Our *BCO* Part II Rules of Discipline might benefit from additions or revisions that address
14 these matters. For example, the following *BCO* provisions might benefit from review and
15 revision, at least in the context of a minor who accuses an adult of sexual misconduct:
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17 *BCO* 35-1....The accused party may be allowed, but shall not be compelled to
18 testify; but the accuser shall be required to testify, on the demand of the accused.
19

20 ...

21 *BCO* 32-13. In order that the trial may be fair and impartial, the witnesses shall
22 be examined in the presence of the accused, or at least after he shall have
23 received due citation to attend. Witnesses may be cross-examined by both
24 parties, and any questions asked must be pertinent to the issue.
25

26 *BCO* 32-20. Process, in case of scandal, shall commence within the space of
27 one year after the offense was committed, unless it has recently become
28 flagrant....
29

30 *BCO* 35-4. No witness afterwards to be examined, unless a member of the court,
31 shall be present during the examination of another witness on the same case, if
32 either party object.
33

34 11. Reporting Recommendations through the Overtures Committee
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36 In the past, Ad Interim Committees have customarily reported recommendations directly
37 to the GA floor. But going through the OC is a more prudent and efficient path for any
38 AIC recommendations on *BCO* changes and/or any recommended statement for GA
39 adoption.
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41 Furthermore, *RAO* 12-1 stipulates "*all* recommendations proposing amendment to the
42 Constitution *shall* be referred to the Overtures Committee for their review and
43 recommendation to the General Assembly." And this would also be the most prudent and
44 efficient path for any *BCO* recommendation from this AIC.

1 The *RAO* section on OC reports to GA provides a wiser method for handling all
2 recommendations from the AIC:

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4 *RAO* 15-8.c. "A recommendation [from the OC] shall be considered under the
5 standard rules governing debate, but Subsidiary Motions (*RRO* VI) to *Postpone*
6 *Indefinitely*, to *Amend*, to *Commit*, and to *Limit Debate*; and Incidental Motions
7 (*RRO* VIII) to *Divide a Question*, to *Consider Seriatim*, and *Constitutional*
8 *Inquiries*, shall **not** be permitted. A motion to *Recommit* shall be permitted, but
9 a motion to *Recommit With Instructions* shall not be permitted."

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11 If the 2019 Dallas GA Overtures Committee, and then the Dallas GA, want recommendations
12 from this particular AIC to go through the 2020 Birmingham OC first, that is certainly the
13 constitutional prerogative of the commissioners in Dallas.

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15 *Adopted by Eastern Pennsylvania Presbytery at its stated meeting, April 9, 2019*

16 *Attested by TE Mel Farrar, stated clerk*