

The General Assembly and the Overture Process

The General Assembly

- The General Assembly consists of commissioners elected by presbyteries—half ruling elders, half teaching elders.
- Among the responsibilities of the GA is to protect our church from errors in faith and practice and assure that the expression of our theology remains true to the biblical standards in our historic confessions. It presents a witness for truth and justice in our community and the world. And it sets priorities for the church and establishes relationships with other churches or ecumenical bodies. Book of Order G-3.0501
- It does this in part through considering reports and recommendations from the Presbyterian Mission Agency and the Office of the General Assembly.
- It does this in part by considering overtures from presbyteries and synods which bring recommendations and raise matters of concern.
- Commissioners to the General Assembly may also bring business.
- The GA week goes like this: Saturday evening there is worship and a plenary session at which a Moderator and Vice-Moderator are elected. Then for the next few days the assembly meets in committees to consider business (like overtures) that it will report back to the GA. Finally, there are further plenary sessions at which the General Assembly acts on the recommendations and a closing worship.
- The Stated Clerk of the General Assembly prints a “Manual of the General Assembly” about a year prior to the convening of the next GA. You can find it on the PCUSA website when it is published. It contains information on how to submit an overture. Here is a link to the Manual for 2016: <https://www.pc-biz.org/#/resources>.
- The next GA will be in St. Louis, MO, from June 16-23, 2018.

The Overture Process

- One of the responsibilities of the presbytery, besides electing commissioners to the GA, is to propose to the General Assembly overtures that have received a concurrence from at least one other presbytery. G-3.0302d.
- Overtures have to be received by the Office of the General Assembly (OGA) by certain deadlines. For this GA, the deadlines are as follows:
 - 120 days—2/16/18 – for amendments to or interpretations of the Book of Order
 - 60 days – 4/17/18 – for other overtures having financial implications
 - 45 days – 5/2/18 – for all other overtures
- **Note:** Concurrences are due by these same deadlines. Therefore, if the OGA has not received from another presbytery a concurrence with NCP’s overture recommending an amendment to the Book of Order by 2/19/16, OGA will just return the overture and it will not be considered.

- In NCP, per our Manual of Administrative Operations, the Bills & Overtures Committee reviews and presents to Presbytery all overtures from sessions for GA action. In order for the NCP to timely act on overtures and for sponsors of those overtures to have time to obtain concurrences from other presbyteries, the Bills & Overtures Committee has set deadlines for when it must receive the overtures from the sessions:
 - October 10, 2017 – first deadline for overtures and concurrences (to be voted on at the November 14, 2017 meeting of presbytery).
 - January 2, 2018 - final deadline for all overtures (to be voted on at the January 23, 2018 meeting of presbytery) and final deadline for all requests for concurrences seeking amendment to or interpretation of the Book of Order or that have financial implications.
 - March 2, 2018 – final deadline for concurrences regarding non-Book of Order/ non-authoritative interpretation/non-financial implications overtures (to be considered at special April 24, 2018 presbytery meeting).
- **Note:** Any session presenting an overture has the responsibility to find a concurring presbytery. The Bills & Overtures Committee will not do that for you.
- **Note2:** Bills & Overtures strongly recommends that original overtures be submitted by the October 10 due date. It is sometimes difficult to find a presbytery to concur with your overtures and most presbyteries do not meet even as often as National Capital Presbytery! So if you wait to have your amendment to the Book of Order overture presented at the January meeting, you will have to hope a presbytery will have a meeting before the February 16 deadline and will be willing to add your overture to their docket. Every GA we have disappointed congregations who have waited too late.

Overture Advocates

Each presbytery submitting an overture is to notify the GA Stated Clerk of the name of an overture advocate who shall be available to provide information on the background and intent of the overture to the committee considering the overture. NCP provides travel funds for one overture advocate for original overtures.

PC-Biz

PC-biz.org is a site that contains overtures from previous General Assemblies, including their legislative histories and, when overtures for the 223rd General Assembly begin to be posted, it will list those—as well as any concurrences with those overtures. It also contains resources such as the Manual for the General Assembly and information on parliamentary procedure at the General Assembly.