



MODERATOR OF THE 2017 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The Rev. Peter Bush

August 23, 2017

**TO: Clerks of Session**  
**FROM: Stephen Kendall, Principal Clerk**  
**RE: Actions of the 2017 General Assembly for attention of sessions**

Dear clerks of session,

Please find below, the General Assembly referrals for your attention and action. Electronic copies of the referrals letters (and the documents noted for study and report) are available online at [presbyterian.ca/referrals](http://presbyterian.ca/referrals).

**1. STUDY AND REPORT**

**1.1 Physician Assisted Suicide**

**Committee on Church Doctrine, Rec. No. 3** (A&P 2017, p. 273, adopted, p. 25)

That the above interim response to physician assisted suicide be commended for use by agencies, colleges, congregations, sessions, presbyteries, synods, committees and groups within The Presbyterian Church in Canada and that comments be reported back to the Committee on Church Doctrine by January 31, 2018.

“Physician Assisted Suicide” can be found on the website and at pages 241–73 of the 2017 Acts and Proceedings.

**1.2 Provision for Equalizing Ministers**

**Clerks of Assembly, Rec. No. 6** (A&P 2017, p. 279, adopted, p. 30)

That the above report re equalizing ministers be sent to sessions, presbyteries and synods for study and report back to the Clerks of Assembly by January 31, 2018.

“Provision for Equalizing Ministers” can be found on the website and at pages 278–79 of the 2017 Acts and Proceedings.

**1.3 Censure Definitions**

**Clerks of Assembly, Rec. No. 11** (A&P 2017, p. 284, adopted, p. 30)

That the above report and proposed revisions to Book of Forms sections 252 and 365–375 be sent to sessions, presbyteries and synods for study and report back to the Clerks of Assembly by January 31, 2018.

“Censure Definitions” can be found on the website and at pages 281–84 of the 2017 Acts and Proceedings.

**1.4 The Church and People who are Transgender or Intersex**

**Life and Mission Agency, Rec. No. 5** (A&P 2017, p. 379, adopted, p. 36)

That congregations, ministers, chaplains, elders and youth leaders be encouraged to study “The Church and People who are Transgender or Intersex”.

“The Church and People who are Transgender or Intersex” can be found on the website and at pages 374–79 of the 2017 Acts and Proceedings.

Clerks of Assembly: The Rev. Stephen Kendall and The Rev. Donald Muir

**1.5 Additional Motion** (A&P 2017, p. 38, adopted, p. 38)

That the biblical reflection presented in the report of the Life and Mission Agency Committee concerning the responses to the various overtures on human sexuality be sent to sessions, presbyteries, synods and colleges for study, reflection and report by January 31, 2018.

“Sexuality Overtures – Life and Mission Agency Reports” can be found on the website.

**1.6 Sexuality Overtures, Rec. No. 4** (A&P 2017, p. 539, adopted, p. 28)

That the documents “The Historic Argument Concerning Human Sexuality” and “What the Bible teaches on Covenanted Monogamous Same-sex Relationships” be commended to the agencies, colleges, congregations, sessions, presbyteries, synods, committees and groups of The Presbyterian Church in Canada for study and response to the Committee on Church Doctrine through the General Assembly Office by January 31, 2018.

“Sexuality Overtures – Church Doctrine Reports” can be found on the website.

**1.7 Sexuality Overtures, Rec. No. 5** (A&P 2017, p. 540, adopted, p. 28)

That the document “Where from Here?” be sent to the agencies, colleges, congregations, sessions, presbyteries, synods, committees and groups and other bodies of The Presbyterian Church in Canada for study and report back to the Committee on Church Doctrine by January 31, 2018.

“Sexuality Overtures – Church Doctrine Reports” can be found on the website.

**2. EXPRESSIONS OF APPRECIATION**

**2.1 Committee to Advise with the Moderator, Rec. No. 3** (A&P 2017, p. 201, adopted, p. 12)

That the thanks of the Assembly be extended to the congregations, individuals, presbyteries, organizations, and international and ecumenical partners who warmly welcomed and graciously offered hospitality to the Rev. Douglas H. Rollwage.

**2.2 Life and Mission Agency, Rec. No. 14** (A&P 2017, p. 442, adopted, p. 26)

That individuals, congregations and presbyteries be commended for their support to the Loaves and Fishes Fund of PWS&D, which helps to sustain its mission over a period of seven years, noting that in 2016, a record \$576,852 was received into that fund and it reached a closing balance of nearly \$2.28 million.

**2.3 Life and Mission Agency, Rec. No. 15** (A&P 2017, p. 442, adopted, p. 26)

That individuals, congregations and presbyteries be commended for their support of PWS&D emergency appeals for the Alberta wildfires, Africa drought and Hurricane Matthew in Haiti.

**2.4 Life and Mission Agency, Rec. No. 20** (A&P 2017, p. 451, adopted, p. 27)

That sincere appreciation be expressed to the individuals and congregations who faithfully supported *Presbyterians Sharing* in 2016.

**3. INFORMATION/ACTION**

**3.1 Commissioner’s Overture, Rec. No. 3** (A&P 2017, p. 47, adopted, p. 47)

That congregations be encouraged to engage with the Committees on International Affairs, and Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations in order to constructively work towards peaceful coexistence throughout the world and in our own neighbourhoods.

The preamble to this recommendation can be found at page 47 of the 2017 Acts and Proceedings and is printed below:

### COMMISIONER'S OVERTURE

#### **Witness of Coptic Christians within Northeast Africa and Egypt**

The Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria is arguably the oldest Christian community in the world. Egypt is the cradle of Christian monasticism with its effects felt today within the world Christian movement. The Rule of St. Benedict, New Monasticism and other orders are based partly upon the teachings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers. Alexandria itself was regarded as one of the five primary seats of the early church, including Rome, Carthage, Antioch and Constantinople.

This witness to the gospel of Christ is not locked in the past but continues today in part through The Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, and also through Reformed, Orthodox and Roman Catholic congregations. Coptic Christians have endured persecution for centuries becoming a minority within their nation. Tragedies such as the Palm Sunday massacre on April 9, 2017, in the cities of Tanta and Alexandria are not new. *The New York Times* on May 26, 2017 reported that since December 2016 more than 100 minority Christians have been murdered. This includes 28 earlier that week as a caravan of Coptic Christians travelled to a remote monastery.

- 3.2 Assembly Council, Rec. No. 7** (A&P 2017, p. 218, adopted, p. 14)  
That individuals, congregations and presbyteries be encouraged to give to the Native Ministries Fund.
- 3.3 Committee on Church Doctrine, Rec. No. 1** (A&P 2017, p. 240, adopted, p. 25)  
That "Understanding and Interpreting the Bible" be received as a resource for equipping the church to faithfully read the Bible.  
  
"Understanding and Interpreting the Bible" can be found on the website and at pages 265–78 of the 2016 Acts and Proceedings.
- 3.4 Committee on History, Rec. No. 1** (A&P 2017, p. 291, adopted, p. 16)  
That the congregations be encouraged to celebrate Heritage Sunday on February 18, 2018, or on another Sunday, as a means of celebrating the unique faith journey and heritage we enjoy as Presbyterians.
- 3.5 Committee on History, Rec. No. 3** (A&P 2017, p. 292, adopted, p. 16)  
That the General Assembly and the courts of the church actively celebrate the 150th birthday of our country Canada in worship on Sunday, July 2, 2017, or with an event or project of their choice this year.
- 3.6 Committee on History, Rec. No. 4** (A&P 2017, p. 292, adopted, p. 16)  
That the courts of the church celebrate Reformation @ 500 (the 500th anniversary of the Reformation) in worship on Sunday, October 29, 2017, or a Sunday of their choice this year.
- 3.7 Committee on History, Rec. No. 5** (A&P 2017, p. 293, adopted, p. 16)  
That *Soli Deo Gloria* Reformation Anniversary Project be promoted in its final celebration of the 500th anniversary year of the Reformation at Knox College in Toronto on Saturday, October 28, 2017; and members of the church are encouraged to attend.
- 3.8 Committee on History, Rec. No. 6** (A&P 2017, p. 295, adopted, p. 16)  
That the congregations be encouraged to contribute \$50 each year to the National Presbyterian Museum.
- 3.9 International Affairs Committee, Rec. No. 3** (A&P 2017, p. 303, adopted, p. 20)  
That congregations be encouraged to pray for girls and women who experience violence, and for men and women who are peacefully challenging gender based violence; noting prayers may be offered on a Sunday or near November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

- 3.10 Life and Mission Agency, Rec. No. 2** (A&P 2017, p. 352, adopted, p. 27)  
That all Presbyterians be encouraged to subscribe for free home delivery of the new *Presbyterian Connection* newspaper.
- 3.11 Life and Mission Agency, Rec. No. 4** (A&P 2017, p. 370, adopted, p. 27)  
That sessions and presbyteries be encouraged to write to the local Member of Parliament in their area encouraging support from all parliamentarians for a commitment to provide clean and potable water in every Indigenous community.
- 3.12 Life and Mission Agency, Rec. No. 10** (A&P 2017, p. 406, adopted, p. 21)  
That the Bereavement Leave Policy for Ministers Serving in Congregations outlined above be adopted.  
  
“Bereavement Leave Policy for Ministers in Congregations” can be found on the website and at pages 405–406 of the 2017 Acts and Proceedings.
- 3.13 Life and Mission Agency, Rec. No. 16** (A&P 2017, p. 443, adopted, p. 26)  
That individuals, congregations and presbyteries seek creative ways to fundraise in 2017 in support of the humanitarian needs related to the Syria Crisis, as 4.8 million refugees require support in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt.
- 3.14 Life and Mission Agency, Rec. No. 17** (A&P 2017, p. 443, adopted, p. 26)  
That individuals, congregations and presbyteries promote the participation of members across the country in the Ride for Refuge in support of PWS&D’s Maternal, Newborn and Child Health projects in Afghanistan and Malawi; noting, a special word of appreciation is offered to the seven teams that participated in 2016, the first year of PWS&D’s participation.
- 3.15 Life and Mission Agency, Rec. No. 18** (A&P 2017, p. 443, adopted, p. 26)  
That congregations and presbyteries consider committing themselves to an ongoing refugee sponsorship ministry, building on the experience gained in 2016 supporting large numbers of refugees from Burma (Myanmar), Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Liberia, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Venezuela, recognizing that refugee sponsorship requires patience and a sustained commitment due to complex and changing policies governing the application and approval processes.
- 3.16 Life and Mission Agency, Rec. No. 19** (A&P 2017, p. 443, adopted, p. 26)  
That congregations consider contacting their Members of Parliament and the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, to strongly urge that quotas for refugees be increased to respond to the support being offered by qualified sponsoring groups.
- 3.17 Sexuality Overtures, Rec. No. 3** (A&P 2017, p. 479, adopted, p. 14)  
That The Presbyterian Church in Canada and its agencies, colleges, congregations, sessions, presbyteries, synods, committees and groups “seek the peace and unity of Christ among [our] people and throughout the Holy Catholic Church” under the guidance of the Holy Spirit as it discerns the mind of Christ in the matter of sexuality before the church.
- 3.18 Sexuality Overtures, Rec. No. 10** (A&P 2017, p. 551, adopted, p. 14)  
That The Presbyterian Church in Canada and its agencies, colleges, congregations, sessions, presbyteries, synods, committees and groups seek the unity of the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit as it discerns the mind of Christ in the matter of sexuality before the church.

#### **4. LEGISLATION (BARRIER, INTERIM, OR DECLARATORY ACTS)**

- 4.1** Please note that Remit A, 2016, found at pages 472–74 of the 2017 Acts and Proceedings, was adopted and the relevant sections of the Book of Forms have been amended accordingly as follows:

##### OVERTURES

###### Definition

65. An overture is a formal proposal to a church court requesting a change in legislation, doctrine, policy or another action that is of general interest. It cannot be used in place of judicial process. The request, if granted, must be within the jurisdiction of the court to which it is addressed, and would be binding on all within the jurisdiction of that court.

###### Initiation

66. Anyone may prepare an overture, but it must be adopted by a court of the church in order for it to be considered by the court to which it is addressed.

###### Form

67. An overture must be in respectful language and it should contain: the name of the court to which it is addressed, the rationale for the proposal and the proposal itself. If addressed to the General Assembly, the overture may also contain a request that it be referred to a particular standing committee for consideration in advance of the next General Assembly. The General Assembly may change the referral.

###### Transmission

68. Once a court has adopted an overture, a motion must be adopted to transmit it to the court to which it is addressed. This is normally the General Assembly. Overtures from presbyteries and synods may be transmitted directly to the General Assembly. Session overtures must be transmitted through the presbytery. The presbytery transmits the overture with one of the following designations: with approval, with disapproval, or without comment. If the transmission is refused on grounds of not being in proper form the overture shall receive no further consideration unless those presenting the overture amend it for resubmission or commence a corrective case (see sections 381ff).

69. An overture intended for the General Assembly that contains a request for referral is to be sent by the clerk of the lower court to be received by the Clerks of Assembly by February 1 so that the committee to which it is referred has time to consider it before its report to the General Assembly is due. If no referral is requested it must be received prior to April 1 and the General Assembly will determine how it shall be considered or where it shall be referred.

70. An overture received by the Clerks of Assembly after April 1 will be held for the next General Assembly with the provision that the court initiating the overture may request that it be referred to a standing committee in the meantime.

##### PETITIONS

###### Definition

71. A petition is a formal request made to a church court initiating specific business concerning the petitioners. A petition is one of the primary ways that members of the church have access to the courts of the church. A petition may begin, but not replace judicial process (see sections 324–392).

#### Initiation

72. A petition may be made by a lower court, or by one or more church members. A petition must be presented to the lowest court that has oversight of the petitioners and a petition by members of the church must first be presented to their session.

#### Form

73. A petition must be in respectful language and it should contain: the name of the court to which it is addressed, the rationale for the request and the specific request. The petition may include a request that it be transmitted to a higher court provided that court has jurisdiction in the matter raised in the petition.

74. A petition may not be used to bring the proceedings of a lower court under the review of a higher court. Corrective cases and appeals are used for that purpose.

#### Reception and Transmission

75. The court to which a petition is presented decides whether to receive or not receive it based on whether or not it is in proper form. If there is no request for further transmission, the court shall decide what action is to be taken. If the petition is received with a request that it be transmitted to a higher court, it shall be sent on with one of the following designations: with approval, with disapproval, or without comment.

76. A petitioner may be given the opportunity to speak in advance of the decision whether or not to receive it and must be given the opportunity to speak to the petition at any court that agrees to receive it.

77. If a court decides to not receive a petition it shall be returned to the petitioner and the matter ends unless the petitioner chooses to amend and resubmit the petition. The petitioner, subject to section 383 regarding standing, may commence a corrective case, but only based on the court's refusal to receive the petition. A petition may be presented directly to a higher court, but only if the lower court refuses to consider the corrective case. The higher court must hear from the lower court before deciding whether or not to receive the petition.

78. Petitions to the General Assembly must be received by the Clerks of Assembly prior to April 1.

79. When considering how to act on a petition, a court may give any who might be affected by the petition the opportunity to be present.

80. Deleted

80.1 Deleted

80.2 Added to section 300.

## **5. DECLARATORY ACT**

**5.1** The following Declaratory Act was adopted (A&P 2017, p. 280, 15) and will be added to Book of Forms section 176.1.7:

Institutional chaplains shall have their presbytery certificate lodged with the presbytery in which they reside.