Term service has been an elder election model for some two decades. Overture No. 9, 2017 asserts that as the denomination has gained experience with term service, some congregations have encountered challenges related to it. Finding suitable elder candidates who are willing to make a six-year commitment to the ministry of the session as well as the time and effort required to hold elections every two years are identified as two of those challenges. The overture asks that it be permissible for terms of service to be set between three to six years.

To help formulate a response to this overture, the Clerks of Assembly prepared a survey inviting the church to comment on the term-service model. There were 185 replies. They came from sessions as well as individual ministers and elders. The number of responses suggests that ministers and elders value their calling to the leadership, pastoral care and oversight of congregations and are keen to comment on the models of service.

Survey responses make it clear there is a significant diversity of views regarding this legislation. Some indicate the current six-year term is too long and discourages candidates from considering the office of elder. Others maintain a six-year term is appropriate since it can take two years for a new elder to learn about the role before becoming effective in it. Still others feel a six-year term is not long enough because session experience and corporate memory are lost by a frequently changing membership. Among those who currently employ the term-service model, 56% are satisfied with the status quo (six-year term – election every two years), 44% desire flexibility.

The church is blessed to have more than 7,400 women and men leading and serving the denomination in the office of ruling elder. Having two models of service provides helpful options for the various needs of congregations. Since the survey indicates a wide range of preference even within the term-service model, the Clerks of Assembly believe there may be merit in making term service more flexible by permitting sessions to determine the length of term and frequency of elections that best suits their needs. While the initial decision to employ term service requires consultation with the congregation and the permission of the presbytery, changes to the length of term and frequency of election could be initiated by the session with the approval of the presbytery.

While maintaining the status quo as the standard for term service, the Clerks propose amendments to sections 108 and 108.2 that would enable a local term service option. The amendments are underlined and struck through.

108. Elders once lawfully called to the office, and having gifts of God meet to exercise the same, are ordained for life. They may serve in the office for life unless deposed or suspended in process of discipline. They may, however, at the call of a congregation in which the session has instituted term service for elders, fulfill the duties of the eldership on the session normally for periods of six years, but may stand for re-election at the end of each six-year term.

108.1 Any session desiring to opt for term service for elders should consult with the congregation and must notify the presbytery of its intention and receive that court’s permission.

108.2 In congregations that have instituted term service for elders, normally one third of the session shall be elected every two years. Sessions opting for an alternative term shall establish a consistent term of service and frequency of election, which shall be subject to approval by the presbytery.

108.3 Elders may resign the active exercise of the office at any time during their term of service. (Declaratory Act 1985, p. 261, 52)

If the General Assembly refers amendments to sections 108 and 108.2 to the church for study and report, a detailed summary of survey responses can be made available to assist with this deliberation.

**Recommendation No. 9** (adopted, p. 36)

That the proposed amendments to Book of Forms sections 108 and 108.2 regarding term service for elders be referred to sessions and presbyteries for study and report to the Clerks of Assembly by January 31, 2019.