

TEXT OF OVERTURES AND PETITIONS FROM PREVIOUS YEARS
IN 2024 GENERAL ASSEMBLY REPORTS

Below are those overtures to which responses or interim study reports are in a committee report to the 2023 General Assembly. They are in order of most recent year's overtures and petitions.

OVERTURE NO. 30, 2017 (A&P 2017, p. 602)

Re: Preamble to ordination and induction of ruling elders

(Referred to Committee on Church Doctrine in consultation with the Life and Mission Agency Committee (Canadian Ministries), p. 235, 23)

WHEREAS, the vision of Pentecost made the word of God accessible to diverse cultural and linguistic communities (Acts 2), and our scriptures were written in a context of racial, cultural and linguistic diversity; and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada reflects considerable diversity in its membership, including, but not limited to geographic, racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic differences; and

WHEREAS, the ordination and admission of elders represents an important aspect of ministry in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, particularly among lay people; and

WHEREAS, the diversity of people in the church may not fully understand the preamble or questions put to elders before ordination or admission; and

WHEREAS, the current preamble before the questions put to elders before ordination or admission is well written, but difficult to understand for people who are not theologically trained or for whom English is not their first language;

THEREFORE, the Session of St. Andrew's Humber Heights, Toronto, Ontario, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 143rd General Assembly to re-write the current preamble before the questions to be put to elders before ordination or admission in plain English, using current and accessible language and while maintaining the theological integrity of the document, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

Transmitted with approval by the Presbytery of West Toronto.

OVERTURE NO. 17, 2018 (A&P 2018, p. 497)

Re: Ministry and mental health

(Referred to Life and Mission Agency Committee, see report p. 23–39)

WHEREAS, according to the Canadian Mental Health Association, over 8 percent of the Canadian population is affected by mental health disorders (including schizophrenia, bipolarity, various levels of anxiety and major depression) at some time in their lives; and

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada continues to strive to respond appropriately to those affected by mental health disorders, whether they be ongoing or immediate, through the guidelines of the "Leading With Care" program, by providing program funding to related projects and initiatives through its various agencies, and by encouraging congregations to be welcoming places of restoration and healing for all those who long for wholeness; and

WHEREAS, the Guidelines for Dealing with Mental Health Issues adopted by the 2011 General Assembly continues to be helpful and appreciated, it primarily outlines procedures for immediate responses after the fact when a person faces a mental health crisis; and

WHEREAS, a number of clergy of The Presbyterian Church in Canada are affected by mental health disorders, while nevertheless very ably ministering to their congregations, and in some cases even pastoring more empathetically because of their own struggles; and

WHEREAS, when references are given and sought at times of clergy transitions, congregations and presbyteries face critical questions with important spiritual and legal ramifications when seeking to balance the welfare and security of a minister's potential future congregation with concerns about discrimination and individual rights to privacy; and

WHEREAS, uncertainty about the church's position and response tends to encourage extreme discretion and secrecy that can make appropriate self care and accountability difficult for ministers affected by mental health disorders;

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Montreal humbly overtures the Venerable, the 144th General Assembly to initiate a deeper study and reflection about mental health disorders and ministry within The Presbyterian Church in Canada in order to produce:

1. a clear position statement,
 2. guidelines for presbyteries, clerks, congregations, interim moderators and indeed all those involved in the transition process when references are given and sought for ministers and staff who are affected by mental health disorders, and
 3. guidelines for those affected by mental health disorders who are beginning the early candidacy process and recommendations for those who accompany and advise them,
- or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

OVERTURE NO. 8, 2019 (A&P 2019, p. 513, 229, 17)

Re: Right to dissent

(Referred to Clerks of Assembly, see report p. 1–2)

WHEREAS, within the polity of The Presbyterian Church in Canada one particular General Assembly is representative of the composition of the presbyteries but not constitutive of the full membership of the several presbyteries of the church; and

WHEREAS, the Barrier Act exists to ensure that no change to church law touching upon the doctrine, discipline, government or worship of the church can be affected without the consent of the majority of presbyteries and aggregate majority of presbyters of which the presbyteries are composed; and

WHEREAS, over the past several years particular General Assemblies have amended or attempted to amend the law of the church touching upon the right and the means to file dissent; and

WHEREAS, the right to dissent is fundamental to the unity of the church, inasmuch as it enables individual conscience to be both guarded and relieved; and

WHEREAS, the actions of the 2018 General Assembly in adopting one recommendation of the Clerks of the Assembly and in defeating another recommendation in the same report left the law of the church touching upon dissent in confusion; and

WHEREAS, the right of elders to dissent from actions of the session to which they belong and taken by the session in their absence at General Assembly is expressly stated in section 8.1 of the Book of Forms but the right of presbyters to dissent from actions taken in the presbytery in their absence with regrets and for good and sufficient reason, including while absent on the business of the court and at the appointment of the court, while historically affirmed as part of our polity but removed by action of the 143rd General Assembly in the deletion of the former section 12.1 of the Book of Forms without it first having been remitted to the presbyteries under the Barrier Act, is not now so expressly stated; and

WHEREAS, the minutes of the 2018 General Assembly record instances in which non-members of the court (namely young adult representatives and student representatives) were accorded the right to record “dissent”; and

WHEREAS, it is vital to the relief of conscience before God that all members of all church courts be accorded the right to dissent either with or without reasons for actions which before God any such individual member has cause to believe are contrary to the word of God, the subordinate standards of the church or the constitution and law of the church and for which such an individual shall one day give answer ultimately to God;

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Ottawa humbly overtures the Venerable, the 145th General Assembly, to review and rectify inconsistencies in the law of the church as touching upon dissent resulting from the action of the 2017 General Assembly in removing section 12.1 from the Book of Forms without recourse to the presbyteries under the Barrier Act and the actions of the 2018 General Assembly in adopting Recommendation No. 6 of the report of the Clerks of Assembly prior to its defeating Recommendation No. 5 of the same report; and to take such steps, with the consent of the presbyteries if deemed necessary, to reaffirm the right of a presbyter to record dissent from an action taken by any court of which the presbyter is a member under any of the following circumstances: (a) the presbyter has participated in the vote and is dissatisfied with the result; (b) the presbyter has been absent with leave of the court and is dissatisfied with an action taken while so absent; or (c) the presbyter has been absent having expressed prior regrets and is dissatisfied with an action taken while so absent; or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

OVERTURE NO. 10, 2019 (A&P 2019, p. 514)

Re: Network of student charges and/or placements

(Referred to Life and Mission Agency Committee, see report p. 39–41)

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada formerly had an ordained ministry appointment system that provided graduates with opportunities to learn and congregations and pastoral charges with opportunities to share wisdom and have educated and trained pastoral leadership; and

WHEREAS, congregations and pastoral charges are excellent partners in formation and preparation for ministry and would benefit students greatly for vocations in ministry; and

WHEREAS, there are congregations and pastoral charges that cannot always afford full-time pastoral leadership beyond basic increments; and
WHEREAS, students benefit from having practical experience in a variety of ministerial settings before/at the beginning of ordained ministry; and
WHEREAS, there are congregations and pastoral charges without pastoral leadership; and
WHEREAS, there are congregations and pastoral charges that are being served by non-Reformed or unsuitable or untrained pastoral leadership; and
WHEREAS, there are congregations and pastoral charges located in areas where ordained ministers do not readily wish to go; and
WHEREAS, this is increasingly not just a rural issue but of concern in urban and suburban areas;
THEREFORE, the Session of Calvin Church, Toronto, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 145th General Assembly to request that the church's theological colleges and the Life and Mission Agency work together to amend their curriculums and programs to include, administer and promote the creation of a network of voluntary student charges or placements, with an emphasis on congregations that do not currently have Reformed and trained leadership, for which students will be remunerated and/or receive credits or tuition relief for their services or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

OVERTURE NO. 11, 2019 (A&P 2019, p. 514–15)

Re: Preamble to ordination and induction of ministers

(Referred to Committee on Church Doctrine in consultation with the Life and Mission Agency, p. 240, 17)

WHEREAS, the church was born in a moment of cultural and linguistic diversity at Pentecost when the word of God was made accessible to a multitude of people; and
WHEREAS, the membership of The Presbyterian Church in Canada reflects broad linguistic and cultural diversity and differences; and
WHEREAS, the ordination and induction of ministers of Word and Sacraments are important moments in ministry in The Presbyterian Church in Canada; and
WHEREAS, the congregation and candidate for ordination and induction may not fully understand the edict or preamble at the ordination and induction of a minister of Word and Sacraments; and
WHEREAS, the current edict and preamble to be read at ordinations and inductions of ministers of Word and Sacraments are instructive and articulate important and valuable beliefs we have about ministry but contain exclusive language and can be difficult to understand for people who are not theologically trained or for whom English is not their first language;
THEREFORE, the Presbytery of East Toronto humbly overtures the Venerable, the 145th General Assembly to re-write the edict and current preamble to be read before the ordination and induction of ministers of Word and Sacraments, using non-exclusive, current and accessible language while maintaining the theological integrity and dignity of the text or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best

OVERTURE NO. 3, 2023 (A&P 2024, p. 266-67)

Re: Sustainable funding for Indigenous Ministries

(Referred to Life and Mission Agency Committee in consultation with National Indigenous Ministries Council and Assembly Council, p. 152, 24)

WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has committed itself to healing and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples; and
WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has a moral, ethical and spiritual responsibility for the Indigenous people for reparation for harms done; and
WHEREAS, the funding for the recognized Indigenous ministries (coming from Canadian Ministries grants and, in recent years, the Indigenous Ministries Fund) are not enough to fund basic staffing needs in several of the ministries; and
WHEREAS, executive staff in Indigenous ministries are often working long hours and the toll is high; and
WHEREAS, executive staff in Indigenous ministries are often the primary fundraisers for these ministries while also being the primary people on the front lines with some of the most vulnerable people in Canada, thereby forcing staff into choices between ministering to people in dire need and working on vision and fund-raising strategies; and
WHEREAS, the majority of the Indigenous ministries are within the bounds of presbyteries that have some of the lowest dollar bases and smallest memberships and therefore less human and financial resources; and

WHEREAS, the majority of the Indigenous ministries are in areas where land values are lower than other urban areas, meaning that when the church sells the property in presbyteries that wish to support Indigenous ministries within their bounds, they have less funds to do so than places in the country with higher land values; and
WHEREAS, the wealth of institutions in Canada, including The Presbyterian Church in Canada, is directly correlated to long term land ownership and the land was taken from Indigenous Peoples; and
WHEREAS, there is a policy for 10 percent of funds from dissolved congregations to go into the Indigenous Ministries Fund and this is to be reviewed soon, but the amount is not enough, the need is acute now, and this policy does not apply to amalgamations of congregations when land is sold;
THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Winnipeg humbly overtures the Venerable, the 148th General Assembly to make provision for the necessary ongoing funding to allow for the recognized Indigenous ministries within The Presbyterian Church in Canada to operate at levels where their ministries are sustainable and thriving, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

OVERTURE NO. 6, 2023 (A&P 2023, p. 267)

Re: Living Faith concerning the church as “the new Israel”

(Referred to Committee on Church Doctrine, p. 72, 14)

WHEREAS, God does not break God’s promises; and
WHEREAS, God has promised that Israel shall be God’s beloved people forever; and
WHEREAS, in Christ, God has included the Gentile nations into God’s covenantal care by expansion, not abrogation, of God’s covenantal faithfulness to Israel; and
WHEREAS, The Presbyterian Church in Canada accordingly affirms “that Jews have not been supplanted and replaced by Christians in the one covenant” (A&P 2011, p. 43); and
WHEREAS, the exclusivist definition of the church as “the new Israel” (Living Faith 1.2) fails to reflect these vital features of God’s faithfulness; and
WHEREAS, the supersessionist implications of defining the church as “the new Israel” risk undermining efforts to oppose antisemitism; and
WHEREAS, “the church, in obedience to Scripture and under the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit” must seek to be faithful in its “continuing function of reformulating the faith” (Book of Forms 447, 449, 450 and 451);
THEREFORE, the Session of New St. James, London, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 148th General Assembly to delete, emend or qualify the definition of the church as “the new Israel” in Living Faith, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Submitted with approval by the Presbytery of London.

OVERTURE NO. 9, 2023 (A&P 2023, p. 268–69, 72, 14)

Re: Ruling elders as interim moderators

(Referred to Clerks of Assembly, p. 72, 14)

WHEREAS, present regulations of The Presbyterian Church in Canada require that only ministers of Word and Sacraments may be moderators of sessions and interim moderators; and
WHEREAS, in some presbyteries, the number of vacancies exceeds the number of pastoral charges with settled ministers of Word and Sacraments (in the Presbytery of Assiniboia there are 1.75 ordained, called ministers and nine pastoral charges); and
WHEREAS, this places an undue hardship on ministers of Word and Sacraments who may already be serving in a two or three-point pastoral charge and/or have additional responsibilities within the presbytery and synod due to a lack of ministers; and
WHEREAS, ruling elders are already considered competent to moderate high courts of the church; and
WHEREAS, the situation within presbyteries has worsened in more than 15 years since Overture No. 12, 2005 from Pinawa Christian Fellowship, Pinawa Manitoba, was considered; and
WHEREAS, many presbyteries are experiencing a lack of ministers available to serve as interim moderators, so are unable to appoint “assessor interim moderators” to other presbyteries; and
WHEREAS, it is not practical or even feasible to have assessor interim moderators from other provinces; and
WHEREAS, many ruling elders are already taking responsibility within their congregations for chairing search committees, preparing congregational profiles, arranging for pulpit supply and providing pastoral care, a current need is for people to moderate regular session and congregational meetings; and
WHEREAS, it is now possible for ruling elders to be commissioned by presbyteries to administer sacraments; and
WHEREAS, Ministry and Church Vocations reports highlight the significant problem of long-term vacancies and point to the need for creative solutions and a change in traditional approaches to church structure;

THEREFORE, the Session of First Church, Regina, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 148th General Assembly to enact legislation to permit presbyteries to create alternate processes for the oversight, health and welfare of congregations, including commissioning ruling elders to serve as interim moderators, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

Transmitted with approval by the Presbytery of Assiniboia.

OVERTURE NO. 10, 2023 (A&P 2023, p. 269)

Re: Increase benefits for mental health services

(Referred to Pension and Benefits Board, p. 72, 14)

WHEREAS, the mental health challenges being faced by church workers only seem to be on the rise in these times; and

WHEREAS, the church needs to encourage everyone facing any mental health challenges to seek the help that they need in a timely manner and church workers need to be setting a good example by talking about such needs and also by seeking help when they need it; and

WHEREAS, financial considerations often present a serious barrier to seeking and finding necessary help; and

WHEREAS, the group insurance coverage available for counselling to church workers is presently only a maximum of \$700 a year; and

WHEREAS, the above coverage is supplemented by an Employee Assistance Program which provides free counselling, but this program is limited to short-term counselling which may not be sufficient; and

WHEREAS, a fifty-minute psychotherapy session can start at \$200, so \$700 would cover less than four sessions a year; and

WHEREAS, a thorough Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) program would require at least 10–15 sessions plus regular follow-up sessions; and

WHEREAS, an individual seeking counselling often requires a self-assessment, which alone may cost at least \$1,500;

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Waterloo-Wellington humbly overtures the Venerable, the 148th General Assembly to review the coverage of mental health services in our group insurance with a view to increasing coverage for counselling and other related services, to seek to fill the gaps in our coverage by other means, or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, may deem best.

OVERTURE NO. 11, 2023 (A&P 2023, p. 72, 73, 268)

Re: Amalgamation of Presbyteries of Central Alberta, Edmonton-Lakeland and Peace River

WHEREAS: The Presbytery of Edmonton-Lakeland have shown a decline in churches and membership over the last number of years.

WHEREAS the Presbytery of Central Alberta has assessor presbyters from the Presbytery of Edmonton-Lakeland

WHEREAS the Presbytery of Central Alberta will probably be down to one minister this year sometime.

WHEREAS the Presbytery of Peace River has not incumbent ministers but one assessor minister and one retired minister on the roll.

WHEREAS it would seem efficient to join the presbyteries and there would be greater strength in a larger presbytery

WHEREAS technology makes it easier to have larger geographic presbyteries.

WHEREAS the Synod of Alberta and the Northwest has approved an amalgamation between the presbyteries of Edmonton-Lakeland and Central Alberta

WHEREAS the Presbytery of Peace River is considering amalgamation with Edmonton-Lakeland and Central Alberta

THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Peace River humbly requests the 2023 General Assembly permission to amalgamate with the Presbytery of Edmonton-Lakeland and the Presbytery of Central Alberta; and upon permission outline the process for amalgamation; or to do otherwise as the General Assembly in its wisdom deems best.