

**OVT-003**      **On Amending G-3.0503 and G-6.04 Regarding Meetings of the General Assembly and Amending the Constitution—From the Presbytery of Foothills.**

**Source:**      Presbytery                      **Event:**                      222nd General Assembly (2016)

**Committee:** No Assignment      **Sponsor:**                      Foothills Presbytery

**Topic:**              Unassigned                      **Type:**                      General Assembly Full Consideration

<http://pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=5289>

Recommendation

The Presbytery of Foothills overtures the 222nd General Assembly (2016) to direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendments to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative vote:

1. Shall the first paragraph of G-3.0503 be amended as follows: [Text to be inserted is shown as italic.]

*"The General Assembly shall hold a stated meeting at least biennially. Each General Assembly shall be organized around one of the Six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304), taken up in succession in the order listed in F-1.0304. The main business of each General Assembly shall be to discuss and to explore ways to enable Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) congregations and councils to fulfill more faithfully and effectively the Great End which is the theme for that General Assembly. Every third General Assembly shall depart from the rotation of the Six Great Ends and instead be called together to consider all amendments to the Constitution that have been properly submitted. All overtures to amend the Constitution, in order to be considered by the General Assembly for constitutional change, must have the endorsement of no fewer than 15 percent of the presbyteries in the PC(USA). Overtures that receive two-thirds endorsement of the presbyteries may be considered at any General Assembly following the achievement of the two-thirds endorsement. The moderator, or in the event ... [the rest of G-3.0503 continues unaltered from this point];"*

2. Shall G-6.04 be amended as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be inserted is shown as italics.]

*"Amendments to the Book of Order shall be made only at a General Assembly for constitutional change (every third assembly, as required by G-3.0503) and only if all the following steps are completed:*

*"a. All overtures to amend the Constitution must have the endorsement of 15 percent of the presbyteries to be considered by the General Assembly. Overtures that achieve endorsement of two-thirds of the presbyteries may be considered at the next session of the General Assembly, regardless of the assembly rotation (G-3.0503).*

*"~~a~~. b. All proposals requesting amendment of the Book of Order are communicated in writing to the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly no later than 120 days prior to the convening of the ~~next~~ session of the General Assembly at which they will be considered.*

*"~~b~~. c. [Text remains unchanged.]*

*"~~e~~. d. [Text remains unchanged.]*

*"~~d~~. e. [Text remains unchanged.]*

*"~~e~~. f. [Text remains unchanged.]"*

Rationale

The General Assembly exists to serve the individual churches that make up the PC(USA), and not the churches to serve the General Assembly.

"The General Assembly constitutes the bond of union, community, and mission among all its congregations and councils, to the end that the whole church becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness ..." (G-3. 0501).

The six Great Ends of the Church are "the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world" (F-1.0304).

In actual result, recent General Assemblies have produced the opposite of a "bond of union, community, and mission" among its member congregations—but instead have produced strife, division, and dysfunction; and thereby greatly distracted PC(USA) congregations from their central work of pursuing the six Great Ends in their mission and ministry.

The central focus of recent General Assemblies has not been on "provid[ing] that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard ... that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received ... [and the nurture of] the covenant community of disciples ..." (G-3.0501a–c), but rather has been centered upon the consideration of constitutional amendments—effectively turning the meetings of the General Assembly into biennial constitutional conventions.

A constitution is not a manual of operations, but is a deeper document expressing shared and unifying principles and values that establish the general framework for governance, and therefore should not be easily amended without thoughtful consideration and widespread consensus regarding these fundamental principles and values.

General Assembly meetings of the PC(USA) must return to their rightful purpose of supporting and building up the congregations of our denomination as defined by the *Book of Order*—enabling them, individually and together in church councils, to more faithfully and effectively fulfill the six Great Ends of the Church.