

OVT-004 **On Adding a New Standing Rule F.5.c. Regarding Social Witness Policy Statements or Resolutions at the General Assembly—From the Presbytery of the 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=5290>

Recommendation

The Presbytery of the Foothills overtures the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to do the following:

1. Approve the following position concerning the process for addressing issues of social justice, economics, and politics:

"The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) hereby affirms the importance of and supports engagement of Presbyterians in issues of social justice, economics, and politics. Following the example of Jesus Christ, Christians should engage in matters of social justice, economics, and politics, in addition to matters of the church and theology.

"In carrying out this responsibility as a denomination, the PC(USA) shall cease taking divisive, up-or-down, yes-or-no positions on partisan issues of social justice, economics, and politics at the national level. Instead, the PC(USA), when such matters are properly before the General Assembly, shall call to the denomination's attention the importance of the issue, explore the various dimensions of the issue, and implore its members to learn about and pray about the issue and to become engaged according to one's conscience and views at the local church and presbytery level. The PC(USA) shall also develop the schedule and agenda for the General Assembly so that the time allocated for education on such issues in committees, on the floor, and with all other aspects of the General Assembly is not disproportionate with the fact that social justice, economics, and politics relate primarily to just one of the six great ends of the church."

2. Amend Standing Rule F.5.c. regarding Plenary Meeting Procedures by adding the following new paragraph F.5.c. and re-lettering existing paragraphs c, d, e, f, and g: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown as italic.]

"c. Any social witness policy statement or resolution to be proposed at the General Assembly shall first have the concurrence of one-third of the presbyteries. On any such issue, as an alternative to establishing a potentially divisive policy by a yes/no vote, the assembly shall seriously consider calling the denomination's attention to the issue to explore its various dimensions, and imploring its members to learn and pray about the issue and become engaged at the local church and presbytery level. In developing the docket of plenary and committee meetings, the docket framers shall be mindful that social witness policy relates primarily to only one of the six great ends of the church and not give disproportionate attention to this one.

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

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

~~"f. g.~~ [Text remains unchanged.]

~~"g. h.~~ [Text remains unchanged.]

Rationale

Jesus was born into and lived in the real world of politics, economics, and social injustice.

The ministry and life of Jesus demands that Christians engage not just in matters of the church and theology, but also in the real world by attempting to right wrongs and combat injustice.

At times the church has not engaged in matters of social justice, economics, and politics, and, in those situations, has perpetuated injustice in the world.

Presbyterians are a diverse Christian denomination with a wide range of views on matters of social issues, economics, and politics.

Presbyterians favor open and respectful debate about matters of social justice, economics, and politics and how the Christian faith impacts such issues.

The General Assembly of the PC(USA) has taken positions as a denomination on a wide range of partisan issues on matters of social justice, economics, and politics about which there is diversity of viewpoints among the denomination.

Taking yes or no positions on partisan issues has caused and continues to cause division within the denomination and loss of members.

The Presbytery of the Foothills believes there is a better way to fulfill the church's obligation to engage in matters of social justice, economics, and politics, but avoid at the national level taking unnecessary positions on controversial issues that have the adverse effects described above.

The makers of this overture understand social witness "policy statements" and "resolutions" according to the definitions approved by the 205th General Assembly (1993) in the report entitled "Why and How the Church Makes a Social Witness Policy."