

OVERTURE 6
to the Forty-second General Assembly
of the Presbyterian Church in America

(As amended by 2014 Overtures Committee and adopted by the 42nd General Assembly)

[Note: The Assembly adopts only the “be it resolved” portions of overtures, not the introductory rationale statements or the “Grounds.”]

Whereas our Lord Jesus demonstrated his righteous anger at his own disciples, rebuking those who would do anything to prevent children from coming unto him, saying “to such belongs the Kingdom of God,” (Mark 10:14) and condemning those who would harm children, saying “it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6); and

Whereas an epidemic of child sexual abuse exists in our culture, with the vast majority of such children being harmed by someone they know and trust, wounding children physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually with lifelong ripple effects; and

Whereas the silence of the church – when we fail to appropriately address “rape, incest, sodomy and all unnatural lusts” (*WLC* 139) by not reporting disclosures of child sexual abuse, or not caring for those who disclose child sexual abuse, or not proactively taking steps to prevent child sexual abuse – is a fundamental failure of servant leadership, rendering the church complicit and culpable before the Lord, driving people away from the safety, healing and hope of Jesus Christ; and

Whereas Scripture warns leaders against the “careless exposing, or leaving [those in their care] to wrong, temptation, and danger” (*WLC* 130), and every jurisdiction acknowledges that child sexual abuse is a serious felony and has its own mandated reporting laws;

Therefore, be it resolved that we exhort all church leaders to become informed and to take an active stance toward preventing child sexual abuse in the church by screening staff and volunteers, training them in child protection, and actively maintaining child protection policies pertaining to our obligations to love our children and protect their rightful interests as God’s image-bearers from the devastating actions of abusers (Matthew 18:5-6; *WLC* 129-130); and

Be it further resolved that we remind all churches that the heinous crime of child sexual abuse must be reported to duly appointed proper representatives of the God-ordained civil authorities, in accordance with local laws, and that we must cooperate with those authorities as they “bear the sword” to punish those who do evil “in such an effectual manner as that no person be suffered . . . to offer any indignity, violence, abuse, or injury to any other person whatsoever” (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-14; *WCF* 23.3); and

Be it further resolved that we urge all church leaders to use their influence for the protection of children, by any and all godly means, including preaching and teaching against the heinous sin of child sexual abuse, warning anyone with knowledge of these sins to “take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them” (Ephesians 5:11), and by supporting victims who often suffer in silence and shame without the vocal and compassionate support of the church; and

Be it further resolved that we direct the Permanent Committees and Agencies of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America to review their policies, procedures and practices in the area of child protection, including their response to child sexual abuse disclosures, their faithfulness in reporting child sexual abuse to duly appointed proper representatives of the God-ordained civil authorities, in accordance with local laws, their care for survivors of child sexual abuse, and their future plans to help educate the PCA on child sexual abuse, and all other areas of response consistent with Scripture and the Constitution of the PCA, and report to the 43rd General Assembly through the Administrative Committee, after it has referred the matter to and received a report from the Cooperative Ministries Committee; and

Be it finally resolved that the 42nd General Assembly urge all members of the PCA to renew our allegiance to our Lord Jesus by loving our children as he loves our children, “for to such belongs the Kingdom of God” (Mark 10:14).

GROUNDS: The protection of covenant children is an important Biblical duty, especially in light of the reality of child sexual abuse in our time. The various Permanent Committees and Agencies of the General Assembly of the PCA would be well served to review their policies, procedures, and practices and to communicate with each other to produce a report that will bring about consistency and assist Presbyteries and Sessions in dealing with such matters. The General Assembly is reminded that the “whereas” clauses are the rationale of the presbytery bringing the overture. They are, therefore, not adopted by the General Assembly, are not amendable, and the Assembly should not be understood as endorsing every point, particularly in the 3rd whereas clause.