**OVERTURE & COMMUNICATION FAQs**

**As found in the Classis BCNW Rules of Procedure (ROP)**

FAQs:

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### WHAT IS AN OVERTURE AND COMMUNICATION? (Excerpted from the ROP, pp. 4-5)

* 1. Overtures & Communications
     1. Overtures
        1. An overture is a formal written proposal sent to an assembly requesting adoption or amendment of a policy or other legislative action by the assembly. *(Rules for Synodical Procedure, V. A. 2)*
        2. See [p. 3, below] for regulations and formatting guidelines for overtures.
     2. Communications
        1. A communication is a document presenting information, ideas, thoughts, opinions, complaints, or objections for consideration of the assemblies. A communication is distinguished from an overture in that an overture proposes specific action, and a communication does not. One type of communication is a protest, which expresses a complaint or objection to a decision or course of action followed by an assembly. An assembly is not required to take any action with respect to a communication. *(Rules for Synodical Procedure, V. A.3)*
        2. Classis must note clear grounds when changing a church’s request for a communication to synod to an overture to synod. *(Classis BCNW: Minutes March 3 & 4, 2020)*
     3. General Guidelines:
        1. A council may send an overture or communication to classis; classis may send an overture or communication to synod. Individual members of churches may only send an overture or communication to classis or synod after first sending an overture or communication to council and classis. A council may only send an overture or communication to synod after first sending an overture or communication to classis. Only when overtures or communications are not acceded to may individuals and councils send overtures or communications to a higher assembly.
        2. Councils or individuals presenting overtures or communications to classis shall send a copy to the stated clerk at least seven weeks before classis convenes.
        3. In order for an overture or communication from a church to be properly before classis, the church sending the request must have delegates at the meeting where the matter is being discussed.
        4. Any delegate from the church sending an overture or communication to classis has the privilege of the floor, can participate in discussion, and has the privilege of voting on the matter.
        5. Any individual who is not a delegate, and who brings an overture or communication to classis after their church council rejects it, may be granted the privilege of the floor by the chair, at the chair’s discretion.

### HOW IS AN OVERTURE HANDLED AT A CLASSIS MEETING? (ROP pp. 12-13)

* 1. Advisory Committees

1. General Guidelines:
2. Advisory committees shall serve in order to facilitate the work of classis. They exist simply to give advice to the classical assembly.
3. The stated clerk shall propose committee members and the Classical Interim Committee shall appoint them.
4. Advisory committees shall present their recommendations as motions, which need to be seconded from the floor.
5. Overtures:
   1. The presentation of the report of the Overture Advisory Committee takes precedence over the presentation of the overture when being brought to the floor. After the advisory committee reports, the church presenting the overture will be given an opportunity to speak and/or rebut.
   2. If the motion of the Overture Advisory Committee is substantially different from an overture’s recommendations, the recommendations of the advisory committee shall take precedence. (Note: this is to allow classis to have one motion on the table rather than competing motions if multiple overtures are received on the same topic.)
   3. Process:
      1. The Overture Advisory Committee presents their report and puts their motion on the floor.
      2. Before the motion is seconded, the church or individual *(see ROP, II.A.4.c&d.)* is then granted an opportunity to respond.
      3. The chair asks for a second to the motion from the Overture Advisory Committee and debate / discussion can commence.
   4. Classis may dismiss the recommendation(s) of the Overture Advisory Committee and address the overture without advice, or recommit the matter to the advisory committee for further work, or simply table the whole matter. Classis’ decision is final until synod rules otherwise, or classis decides to revisit the matter.
   5. If an overture is submitted that addresses a confessional issue, or a matter the overture advisory committee deems weighty, the committee shall submit their written recommendation to the stated clerk five weeks before the time classis meets to give time to all councils and delegates to weigh both the overture and the advisory committee response before the classis meeting.
   6. The classis agenda is to be arranged in such a way as to allow overture committee matters to be dealt with earlier in the meeting, in order to provide additional time or flexibility that may be required for a substantive issue and its need for careful deliberation. *(Classis BCNW: Minutes March 3 & 4, 2020)*
   7. See [page 4, below] for regulations specifically guiding the Overture Advisory Committee.

### HOW DOES ONE FORMAT AND PRESENT AN OVERTURE TO CLASSIS? (ROP pp. 19-20)

1. Definition:
   1. An overture is a request for action made by an assembly to a higher assembly, or by an individual to their council.
   2. A council may overture classis; a classis may overture synod.
   3. Individual members of churches may only overture a classis or synod after first overturing their council and respective classis. A council may only overture synod after first overturing classis. Only when overtures are not acceded to, do individuals, councils, and classis appeal by overturing a higher assembly.
2. Procedure:
3. An overture being submitted should be accompanied by a cover letter, stating the place and date of the meeting of the assembly at which the overture was adopted; the letter is to be signed by the council clerk and/or chair.
4. If more than one overture is being submitted, each should begin on a separate page. A single cover letter will suffice.
5. Council overtures to classis must be submitted to the stated clerk seven (7) weeks prior to a classis meeting in order to be on the agenda. Overtures received late will be deemed out of order, unless classis rules otherwise.
6. Overtures to synod are due to the CRCNA executive director's office no later than March 15. Overtures or communications received after the March 15 deadline are accepted if they are relevant to reports found in the printed Synod Agenda (i.e., for matters that have not previously been made available to churches before the Agenda is released). As classis meets the first week of October and the first week of March, overtures presented at either classis will meet this deadline.
7. Classis, by means of the stated clerk or the CIC, is available to provide assistance in formulating overtures or communications, when requested by an individual or a church council, making use of the Classis Rules of Procedures and its outline on how to prepare an overture.
8. Format:
   * + 1. The first part of the overture is a statement of three parts:
          1. Who overtures whom – e.g., “the Council of First CRC overtures Classis BCNW”.
          2. What specific action is being requested – e.g., “to instruct Classis BCNW to study…”.
          3. What mode of implementation is being requested – e.g., to report to the Spring 2015 meeting of Classis BCNW”.
       2. The second part of the overture is a presentation of grounds in support of the action being requested. Unless such grounds are brief, they are customarily itemized.
       3. If the overture affects the classical ministry share assessment, include an approximation of the costs involved and the impact on assessments.
       4. The overture is to be as succinct as possible while still being definitive.
       5. If the Bible is quoted, the version used must be cited.
       6. If other publications are quoted or referred to (e.g., book, Bible, article), they must be referenced properly. If the Acts of Synod are referred to, list the title, year, the recommendation number (if there is one) and the page number (e.g., AOS, 2013, R-4, p. 255).
9. Cautions:
   1. “Careful and prayerful deliberation” ought to precede the submission of an overture. Grounds must demonstrate that “the petitioner’s conscience is inappropriately infringed upon” by the matter raised. *(Church Order Commentary, 2011, p. 184)*
   2. Overtures which deal with matters concerning the discipline or charges against persons must be dealt with sensitively. Individuals and councils must bear in mind Church Order articles 78 ff. In certain cases, the council may request and/or classis will invoke Judicial Code *(C.O. Art. 30c & its supplement)*.

### HOW WILL THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE HANDLE AN OVERTURE? (ROP pp. 21-22)

Advisory committees shall serve in order to facilitate the work of classis. They exist simply to give advice to the classical assembly. See IV. C. of these ROP for more information on Advisory Committees, particularly the procedure to be followed at classis when dealing with overtures and study committee reports.

1. In the case of an overture, advisory committees serve well by:
   1. Communicating first with the church council or individual overturing classis. Verbal communication can especially provide a sense of the background for the overture, its weight for the church/individuals and parties involved, and give opportunity for clarification.
   2. Meeting before final deliberations, so as to pray together about the matter, and to come to clear consensus on the advice they will render.
   3. Selecting a chair and a reporter for the committee. They ought to be designated as such in the list of those serving on the committee, which is included at the end of the advisory report. Should there be any possible conflict of interest, an advisor should ask the Classical Interim Committee to be excused from the work.
   4. Communicating to the stated clerk what amount of time is likely needed to handle the overture during the assembly, taking into consideration:

* the time needed to present the overture committee report,
* time given to the church to speak/rebut,
* time for discussion.

Accordingly, the committee may need to check with the church bringing the overture to see what time they will need. The advisory committee will recommend to the stated clerk the time to be allotted to the church to do this.

1. Advisory Reports
   1. Advisory reports must be written, be clear, concise, and address the overture directly. Reports should also include a listing of the materials that may also have been submitted to the classis regarding the material.
   2. Advisory committees may add further recommendations, broaden the mandate, and provide additional grounds. A listing of supplementary materials and references are to be included with the report.
   3. As a matter of courtesy and fellowship, the committee shall ordinarily submit a copy of their recommendation to the council of the authoring congregation prior to the start of classis.
   4. If an overture is submitted that addresses a confessional issue, or a matter the advisory committee deems weighty, the committee shall submit their written recommendation to the stated clerk five weeks before the time classis meets to give time to all councils and delegates to weigh both the overture and the advisory committee response before the classis meeting.
   5. The report and motions of an overture advisory committee take precedence over those of the overture when being brought to the floor (unlike study committee or task force reports whose presentation and motions takes precedence over the report of the advisory committee).
   6. Classis may dismiss the report to address the overture without advice, or recommit the matter to the advisory for further work, or simply table the whole matter. Its decision is final until synod rules otherwise, or classis decides to revisit the matter.
   7. A report should be formatted similar to what follows:

**Classis BC Northwest – Month, Year Overture Advisory Committee Report**

Materials:

Observations

The advisory committee …

Recommendation

The advisory committee recommends that classis accede/not accede to the overture that “Classis BCNW …”

Grounds:

1.

2.

Advisory committee members:

First, last name, chair

First, last name, reporter

First, last name