

# STATED CLERK ATTACHMENT 2

## *Overture to the Presbytery of Western North Carolina to Overture the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly*

**The Session of the First Presbyterian Church, Hendersonville, North Carolina overtures the Presbytery of Western North Carolina to overture the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to**

**Receive the report and recommendations of the Form of Government (FOG) Task Force, and**

**Entrust the proposed Form of Government revision to the church for at least a two-year period of study, discernment, and consideration of the advisability of further action.**

### *Rationale*

1. From the Minutes of the 217<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) the instructions to the FOG Task Force in the General Assembly-approved response to 05-11 are as follows:

**From Item 1. a. (6) “The Form of Government Task Force will release the proposed revision of the Form of Government, including advisory handbooks, by September 1, 2007.”**

The Form of Government Task Force was established by the 217<sup>th</sup> General Assembly to prepare a revised Form of Government (FOG) for the church’s consideration. The Task Force was directed to issue its report to the church with advisory handbooks no later than September 1, 2007. This would allow sessions, presbyteries and synods ample time to study the proposed FOG and, if necessary, suggest amendments to it. As of mid-November 2007 there is still no final revision released, only a “draft.” The “draft” version of the first four chapters of the new Form of Government released last year were greatly changed from that “draft” to this more recent “draft,” and the church still awaits the proposed final version of this lengthy document for careful study and discernment.

The final date for any overtures or amendments to the finally revised FOG is February 22, 2008. This window of time does not allow a long enough period of time for study and comparison. Additionally, possible overtures and/or amendments will not have adequate time to work through the presbytery approval system by the end-date of February 22, 2008.

2. This is exactly the same problem that faced the Task Force report on Peace Unity and Purity. One presbytery meeting, our January meeting, was devoted to the presentation by the members of the PUP Task Force. When the presbytery was finally allowed to debate the issue at our April meeting and an overture was received for the presbytery’s consideration, we were then informed that it was already too late for that overture to be received by the 217<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, even if approved.

3. The rewrite of the Form of Government is an impressive and complicated piece of work. The extensive changes to our polity proposed by the Form of Government Task Force require a period of study and discernment to consider whether and how such extensive changes will benefit our life together, and whether further changes might improve the document. Since the proposal already involves significant changes at every level of our government, including, but not limited to terminology, processes, how rules are written and adopted, and how standards are applied, study at

every level of the church is needed. The study necessarily includes not only changes for a single level of government, but also the implications of changes for every level.

Prior to asking the governing bodies to vote on this document, the wellbeing of the whole church necessarily requires sufficient time for study. It is the practice of Presbyterians not to rush into changes of this magnitude without careful examination of the pros and cons as well as to look at the unintended consequences of the proposed changes.

In a time when trust is a serious issue across our denomination, an extension of the time for insuring that each governing body has opportunity to read the proposed document carefully and reflect on the implications of the changes is an opportunity for building trust. Haste may only help to further destabilize the basis of trust as exhibited in this our covenant on which our mutual life together is based.

By the time the task force has provided all the final documents and resources to aid in such a study, governing bodies will also have other resources available to them, so that no further expense need be incurred by the General Assembly in order to call for this period of study.

There is simply no need to rush to acceptance of what even the Task Force recognizes as a radical change in our church's governance. A period of study and discernment of at least two years in length will cost us nothing, and will undoubtedly result in a stronger Form of Government that may serve the church well for years to come.

Approved by the Session of First Presbyterian Church, Hendersonville, North Carolina

Date: November 19, 2007

Mimi Jamieson, Clerk of Session