

That All May Freely Serve
A Ministry of the Presbytery of Genesee Valley

Dear Friends,

Since first drafting “A Healing Overture,” we have received feedback from several folks across the country, requesting we consider revising some of the earlier language. We have done so and hope this makes the intention and the actions we are recommending accessible in a broader way.

Along with minor editing changes, we have been asked to clarify the areas that refer to “gender identity,” specifically to include “sexual identity” and “sexual orientation.” While gender encompasses the mystery of identity and orientation, the more familiar descriptions should be accessible to a greater number of people.

Secondly, we have heard from those who asked that we expand the scope of bullet point “k.” to incorporate language that includes the harms done to one another on different sides of this debate, as well as within the circle of our own debate. We have attempted to do this, as well.

Lastly, we have received several comments that have asked. “What about harms done to other marginalized groups over the years: indigenous folk, women, people of color, to name a few?”

We totally agree that there are many groups for whom the church should acknowledge harms done. In fact, this overture is based on an admission of such harms by the Presbytery of Yukon and the PC(USA) toward the indigenous folk of Gambell, Alaska. It was an attempt to address the damage done when their traditions and culture were nearly wiped out by early missionaries attempting to convert their community to Christianity in the early 1900’s. (See Attachment 1.)

We extend this and an “invitation” for others to consider in moving overtures of healing on their own through the many ways this might be accomplished. In the rationale area, under bullet point #1, we express our deep desire that this effort will bring others forward to do the same for their communities. Hopefully, our beginning this process will help to grow an all-encompassing reconciliation in these ways and more.

Many of us truly believe that we cannot move forward in the PC(USA) unless we clean house. There are too many wonderful and important ministries and critical stands this church continues to take for it to be weighted down by our mistakes.

We truly believe that this overture can help usher in a time of reconciliation that is needed, and we are under no illusions that this is going to be easy. Further, we understand that there are many concerns, including members who remain troubled by this overture’s impact, especially following the pace of recent changes and other struggles of the day. Still...

We go forward, because we can...trusting in God and the wisdom of others who will be part of this process.

We are hoping that this effort and others like it will bring the church back to those whom we have too often sent away, We see this as a new beginning, with a clean slate and a sincere invitation for all to find a home here in the PC(USA).

In order for this overture to be brought to committee at the next General Assembly in June 2016, we will need passage by one presbytery and concurrence by at least one other presbytery. The required date for final submission of passage and concurrence(s) to the Office of the General Assembly is May 14, 2016.

Please note that it is possible to change the rationale section of the overture, without creating a *new* overture. However, any change to the body of the overture itself, constitutes a new document that requires its own concurrence.

We hope you will consider bringing this conversation to your Sessions for a vote at your presbytery meeting. Please contact us if you have any questions or if we can be of any help. We welcome your comments.

Thank you for considering joining us in this effort. We ask always for your continued prayers...and we hold you in ours.

Peace,

Ray

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Note:

On January 26, 2016, The Presbytery of New York City was the first Presbytery to pass the overture. General Assembly now designates this overture as:

Ovt 050: A Healing Overture for the Admission of, and Apology for Harms Done to the LGBTQ/Q Members of the Presbyterian Church(USA), Family and Friends – From the Presbytery of New York City