

# THE PRESBYTERY OF BEAVER-BUTLER

P.O. Box 279 \* 134B South Main Street \* Zelienople, Pennsylvania 16063-0279  
724-452-7515(P)\*www.beaverbutler.org\*office@beaverbutler.org\*724-452-7522(F)



September 25, 2019

Greetings,

Attached you will find an Overture and supporting information approved by the Presbytery of Beaver-Butler for General Assembly consideration.

We ask that you would consider concurring with this recommendation of the Beaver-Butler Presbytery.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

David Byers  
Stated Clerk  
Beaver-Butler Presbytery

October 3, 2019

Good Day,

I am Rev. Robin Swinsburg, pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Sarver, PA. I wrote the overture for GA that you received with the help of Elder Tom McMeekin and Sally Pavlina. It was formulated with the help of Thomas Hays who is (was) the associate clerk at our national headquarters. The session of Westminster Presbyterian unanimously passed this overture on September 8, 2019 and it was overwhelmingly approved at the Beaver/Butler presbytery on September 28. As the originator of the overture, I am writing to seek concurrence from your presbytery so that it may officially be considered at the next G.A. in Baltimore next year. I am sending the overture and the rationale along with documentation from Beaver/Butler presbytery.

This overture seeks to clarify the role of COMs in our denomination when it comes to authority on severance. The Book of Order does not speak specifically about this issue. An authoritative Interpretation over 25 years ago sided with the local congregation in severance for a pastor. The presbytery had recommended 6 months and the congregation gave the pastor three months. Presbyteries currently set minimum salaries, participation in the Board of Pensions, vacation and continuing education time, however under the past interpretation presbytery cannot enforce any severance.

My concern is for financial care of pastors and their families. There are unhealthy, toxic sessions and congregations who do not provide a sufficient financial safety net for pastors who leave involuntarily.

Pastors are not entitled to “unemployment.”

I want to make it very clear that I am NOT SPEAKING about a scenario when a pastor is guilty of misconduct. Each COM has its own policy concerning these situations. This overture simply gives authority to local presbyteries to deal with each situation as it arises.

If I can provide any additional information, or if you would like a phone call, I would be happy to share more and answer questions.

Please understand that all we need is one presbytery to concur, but I am requesting support from many presbyteries in order to find “one.”

There is a deadline of February 21 to find a presbytery to concur.

Please let me know when your next presbytery is meeting and how I

might be helpful in this process. I will be keeping in contact with your presbytery leaders so that I might communicate with those who are considering the overture.

Thanks,

Rev. Robin Swinsburg  
210 Westminster Road  
Sarver, PA 16055  
Church Phone - 1-724-352-1376  
Cell – 941-920-5230

## **On establishing the authority of Presbyteries to define severance plans for installed ministers**

The Presbytery of Beaver-Butler overtures the 224th General Assembly (2020) to direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Shall G-3.0303(c) be amended as follows: [Text to be added is shown as italic.]

G-3.0303 Relations with Sessions

- c. establishing minimum compensation standards *including provisions for severance payments* for pastoral calls and Certified Christian Educators and Certified Associate Christian Educators within the presbytery.

Rationale for Overture from Beaver/Butler Presbytery 8/27/19

In 1993 the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission ruled in the case *Saurbaugh v. the Presbytery of Great Rivers* that “The *Book of Order* does not give the presbyteries power to require congregations to pay compensation upon dissolution of pastoral relationships.” (Remedial Case 206-13,11.094 attached)

In subsequent years the church has maintained that while a presbytery can have guidelines and policies concerning severance for ministers at the dissolution of a pastorate, the presbytery has no authority to enforce those policies.

This overture seeks to remedy that omission in the *Book of Order* by making explicit the authority of presbyteries to create and enforce severance policies by linking that authority to the power to set minimum wages and approve calls.

The overture does not attempt to set a national severance policy, but to clarify the presbytery’s relationship to both the session and the minister during times of transition.