

From Idea to Action: Overtures in Assemblies

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1. It begins with an IDEA.
 - a. Anything you want to accomplish in the life of the church that involves or impacts others. No matter how simple or complex, it must be presented as an Overture (motion) to an Assembly if you want and need others to embrace your idea and act upon it with you.
 - b. Good order demands it:
 - i. Scripture:
 1. 1 Cor. 14:33: God is not a God of disorder, but of peace.
 2. 1 Cor. 14:40: Everything (particularly worship) should be done in a fitting and orderly way.
 3. Col 2:5: Paul expressed delight at the orderliness of the Colossian church as well as at the firmness of their faith in Christ.
 - ii. Church Order:
 1. Article 17: “In all assemblies only ecclesiastical matters shall be transacted, only in an ecclesiastical manner.”
 2. Article 19: “... It is the chairman’s duty to state and explain clearly the matters to be dealt with, and to ensure that the stipulations of

the Church Order are followed and that every delegate observes due order and decorum in speaking....”

3. Article 20: “In every assembly there shall be a clerk whose task it shall be to keep an accurate record of the proceedings....”

c. Servant leadership demands it.

i. Scripture:

1. Luke 22:26: “the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.”
2. Phil. 2:3-4: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

ii. Principles:

1. Shepherds **lead** (John 10): those who follow generally have inward agreement (more and more over time) with those who serve them in leading.
2. Cattle drivers (non-shepherds) **push** (Ezekiel 34): those who are driven inwardly rebel (more and more over time) against those who serve themselves by pushing.

2. It is sharpened through asking questions of yourself (and perhaps of others).

- a. Is there any previous history addressing this matter?
 - i. This history should be fairly represented in a *background* if one is required or would simply be helpful (see 3) b. i. below). Fairness demands it.
 - ii. You should reference previous actions that are relevant to this matter in your *grounds* (see 3) b. iii. below).
 - 1. Actions that seem to support your idea.
 - 2. Actions that stand opposed to your idea.

- b. What exactly do I want to see accomplished? (see 3) b. ii. below)
 - i. What is wrong / lacking with the status quo?
 - ii. How will what I propose serve to rectify or improve upon the status quo?

- c. Is this a good thing? (Heidelberg Catechism QA 91)
 - i. Can I (and others) do it in true faith?
 - 1. Does it express love of God?
 - 2. Does it express love of neighbor?
 - ii. Is it in accord with God's revealed will (Law)?
 - 1. Apply decision making by the revealed will of God:
 - a. Prohibit what God prohibits.
 - b. Pursue what God commands.

- c. Exercise wisdom in all things neither expressly prohibited nor commanded.
 - 2. Beware of binding men's consciences with anything other than the Word of God (and good and necessary inferences thereof).
 - a. Even a good end does not necessarily justify the means.
 - b. Even good means do not necessarily justify the end.
 - iii. Will it bring glory to God?
- d. Is it predicated on (an) other idea(s) that must first be implemented?
 - i. You will need to consider backwards from the end through the means to the current circumstances.
 - ii. At each step along the way, you must apply 2, b and c above.
 - 1. Define what you want to see accomplished (see 2) b. above).
 - 2. Ask yourself whether it is a good thing (see 2) c. above).
- e. Who will be impacted by the implementation of your idea(s): whether in embracing and implementing your idea, or as a result of its implementation?
 - i. If it is only the local congregation, the overture may be addressed to one or more of the following:
 - 1. Consistory
 - 2. Council

3. Congregation
 - ii. If it impacts other congregations within the Classis, the overture will need to be addressed to and modified for each of the following, in order:
 1. Consistory
 2. Classis
 - iii. If it impacts other congregations within the Federation, the overture will need to be addressed to and modified for each of the following, in order:
 1. Consistory
 2. Classis
 3. Synod
- f. Who or what might oppose your idea?
 - i. Anticipate objections.
 1. Are they good objections? (see 2) c. above)
 2. Are they private opinions or commandments of men?
 - ii. Adapt your idea and or proposed plan of action.
 1. Modify and make them “better” in light of these objections.
 2. Either accommodate an anticipated objection or present the justification for opposing and prevailing over it.
3. It finds expression in an overture.
 - a. Prime your target assembly to consider your idea (if possible).

- i. Identify the present situation that requires action.
 1. Challenge the group to consider how they might approach the situation.
 2. Prepare them to embrace your idea for action as their own.
 - ii. Know the importance of the first draft – your overture.
 1. It serves to largely frame the discussion.
 2. It can significantly mold the outcome of the discussion.
 - iii. Stage your overture if necessary. If there are several steps, either:
 1. Arrange them in an orderly and understandable manner.
 2. Present them as a series of individual overtures.
- b. Draft the Overture proper.
- i. Provide a brief background of the circumstances or situation which occasions the need for your overture
 1. For Consistory, Council, or Congregation
 - a. Often not necessary when the body already knows the situation.
 - b. It may be helpful if the matter is new or unexpected.
 2. For Classis: probably helpful.
 3. For Synod: required by *Regulations for Synodical Procedures*, 3.3 and Appendix A.
 - ii. Make it specific:
 1. The group involved and/or impacted.

2. The action proposed.
3. The time frame:
 - a. Allowing time for the overture to be considered and acted upon.
 - b. “From idea to action”
 - i. at the local level, often takes 90 days or more.
 - ii. at the Classical level, often takes 6 months or more.
 - iii. at the Synodical level, often takes 3 years or more.
- iii. Give adequate and appropriate grounds. If you want the grounds included in the minutes of the assembly, make them known that you are “moving the grounds” as well.
 1. Why this is a good thing (see 2) c. above).
 - a. Scripture
 - b. Confessions
 - c. Church Order
 - d. Wisdom
 - e. Glory of God
 - f. Benefit to the church (group)
 2. Positively present your case.
 3. Provide justification for overcoming objections (see 2) f. above).
- iv. Form your presentation to facilitate your message.
 1. Tailor the size and/or complexity of the overture to the need of the assembly.

- a. Simple idea / action = simple overture
 - b. Complex idea / action = complex but understandable overture
 2. Lead them through to the decision (don't just point in the right direction).
 3. Minimize opportunities for misunderstanding or confusion.
4. It culminates in some ACTION.
- a. Wholesale acceptance and implementation of your overture.
 - b. Acceptance and implementation of an amended overture.
 - c. Wholesale denial of your overture.
 - i. Possible reasons:
 1. Good idea; needs more work before considering.
 2. Good idea; disagreement with implementation.
 3. Outright rejection
 - ii. Possible result:
 1. Submit to the wisdom of the assembly.
 2. Be content with the status quo.
 3. Start again with knowledge (and hopefully wisdom) gained.
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Example Template

Background: *(If required or simply helpful, state the background as briefly as possible. Use this background to focus the attention of the assembly on the issue you are seeking to address with your overture.)*

Overture: **That (the assembly) act in a particular way at (or within) a particular time.** *(or Motion)*

Grounds: *(make the case and address anticipated objections)*

1. Aaaaa
2. Bbbbb
3. Ccccc
4. Dddd