



Process for Overtures and Amendments

In ECO polity, a high level process is given to make amendments to the constitution. This high level process is spelled out in 6.02 of our Constitution.

6.02 Amending this Constitution

Presbyteries may overture the Synod of ECO for changes in this *Constitution* as follows:

- a. Two presbyteries must concur in the proposed changes and overture the larger body with changes.
- b. The Synod may amend and transmit the proposed changes to the *Constitution* to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative vote. A two-thirds majority of the presbyteries shall be required for adoption.
- c. Any amendment to the *Essential Tenets* shall require an affirmative vote of two-thirds of the voting members of the Synod present and voting. In addition, the affirmative vote of each presbytery for such amendment shall require an affirmative vote of two-thirds of the voting members of such presbytery present and voting.

Further clarification, however, is needed as to the timing and mechanism that a presbytery may use to submit those proposed amendments as well as other overtures that do not require changes to the polity. The following provides the guidelines for submission of those overtures.

1. All overtures, whether related to the polity or not, must come by way of the presbytery to the Synod, or be proposed by the Synod Executive Council. All overtures shall **include a clear and legal motion**. If the overture requires an amendment to the constitution, it shall clearly state the text that is to be added and/or removed. A rationale shall also be included. Because our meetings are short and the agenda needs to be clearly defined in advance, no new business can be brought onto the floor of the Synod.

2. Presbyteries must submit overtures 120 days in advance of a particular Synod meeting and concurrence by another presbytery must be made 90 days in advance of the Synod meeting for the item to be considered on the at the Synod. (The next Synod meeting is January 23, 2018. Overtures must therefore be submitted by September 25, 2017 and must have concurrence by October 17, 2017.)
3. All overtures that require Synod action will be passed on to the Synod. The Synod Executive Council, and other related Synod entities can comment on the submitted overture. Unless otherwise stated in the polity, Synod approval is done by a simple majority.
4. Some overtures may be able to be handled by the Synod Executive Council in a more timely fashion. If the Synod Executive Council cannot handle the overture to the satisfaction of the submitting presbytery, then the overture will be passed on to the Synod.
5. Some overtures may not require a change to the polity or theology but be related to a rule or procedure. In these cases, if the overture is passed, it does not require concurrence of the presbyteries. Therefore, the result of the overture goes into effect at the close of the Synod meeting.
6. Some overtures, if passed at the Synod, require approval of presbyteries. The presbyteries will have 180 days after the close of the Synod meeting to vote affirmative or negative on those overtures. If the overture passes at the required number of presbyteries, it will go into effect on the 181st day after the close of the Synod meeting. In the case of the 2018 Synod, the effective date is July 22, 2018.)

The Spirit and Process for the Deliberation of Amendments at Synod meetings

ECO has always sought to position and maintain itself as an authentic gospel movement in the midst of a post-Christian culture. Our mission is “to build flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ.” We have a both a polity as well as a theology that have been developed to create an environment in which churches may flourish. These are living documents and are not considered inerrant in and of themselves. There is a process in place in our polity to change these documents.

As changes are considered, within presbyteries and the Synod as a whole, it is our hope that there will be a healthy spirit behind considering these changes. Deliberative bodies can often be set up in adversarial stance or in a “win-lose” stance. It is our hope that within ECO there will be a different ethos. Our hope is that proposals will be made and considered based on the question of whether or not a proposal helps us, both nationally and individually, fulfill our mission to build flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ.

If we are clear and singularly focused on our mission, then we can have robust dialogue about particular proposals and how they may or may not help us fulfill our mission. If we are singularly focused on our mission and the position we advocate for does not carry the day, it will allow us to continue to maintain our unity as we fulfill our mission.

Proposed process - When a proposal is brought to the floor of the Synod, deliberation will occur as follows:

- The moderator will allow for 20 minutes of discussion after an initial presentation is made.
- Each speaker from the floor will be allowed to speak for 120 seconds.
- Speakers will alternate, as much as possible, between those who are for a proposal and those who are against a proposal. Those who are in favor of the proposal should speak to how the proposal will advance the mission of ECO. Those who are against the proposal will should speak to why the proposal doesn't help advance the mission of ECO.
- If deliberation is finished before 20 minutes, then the moderator may call for the vote.
- If after 20 minutes there is a desire for further discussion, the may entertain a motion to expand deliberation.
- Votes will ordinarily be voice votes unless a count is needed by having commissioners stand or a paper ballot.

Proposal for Amendment to the ECO Essential Tenets Regarding Baptism

Introduction and Rationale:

The Essential Tenets of the ECO has been an effective document in uniting churches around the common reformed heritage that we embrace and has served as a bridge to greater theological engagement across denominations. The words that have been crafted flow out of the language of the confessions and attempt to communicate many truths in a concise and effective way. In regards to our sacramental theology much burden was placed upon a few well constructed sentences, however the brevity of the construction left some opportunity for misunderstanding. Some have interpreted our statement to allow for an understanding of baptismal regeneration. This is most certainly not an intended understanding of the sacrament. To address this concern a combination of phrases and ideas from the Westminster Confession's statement on Baptism in Chapter XXX/XXVII have been selected. This statement will add additional substance to the existing text and further anchor the statement to our confessions.

The third paragraph of Section III. C. of the Essential Tenets would receive an additional line of text, shown in red, that would expand upon our convictions regarding baptism and clarify our reliance upon the confessions for our understanding of its effectiveness.

Proposal:

Within the covenant community of the church, God's grace is extended through the preaching of the Word, the administration of the Sacraments, and the faithful practice of mutual discipline. First, through the work of the Holy Spirit, the word proclaimed may indeed become God's address to us. The Spirit's illuminating work is necessary both for the one who preaches and for those who listen. Second, the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are signs that are linked to the things signified, sealing to us the promises of Jesus. In the Baptism of infants, we confess our confidence in God's gracious initiative, that a baby who cannot turn to God is nonetheless claimed as a member of the covenant community, a child of God, cleansed by grace and sealed by the Spirit; in the Baptism of adults, we confess our confidence that God's grace can make us new creations at any stage of our lives. ***<Baptism is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, a mark of entrance into the visible church, and it is the Holy Spirit that makes this sacrament efficacious in God's time to those whom he has called.>*** In the Lord's Supper, we confess that as we eat the bread and share one cup the Spirit unites us to the ascended Christ, so that His resurrection life may nourish, strengthen, and transform us. Third, the community of the Church practices discipline in order to help one another along the path to new life, speaking the truth in love to one another, bearing one another's burdens, and offering to one another the grace of Christ