

# **INTRODUCTION AND USER GUIDE**

The aim of this Digest is similar to that of the previous PCA Digest and Supplements, which were built on the longer tradition starting back in 1809 by the American Presbyterian Church, “of preparing a book, and having entered therein such decisions of the Assembly as relate to the general government and discipline of the Church, and the duties of judicatures, that such decisions may hereafter be selected and printed for the general use of the churches.” More than mere tradition, such books were intended and organized, above all, for practical use. As Paul Gilchrist noted in *The PCA Digests 1973-1993* and *1994-1998*, digests in the PCA are designed for the benefit and edification of the whole church by providing “guidance in the interpretation and application of our *Book of Church Order*” (*PCA Digest 1994-1998 Supplement*, p. 3).

In this same spirit, *The PCA Digest 1999-2018* has been designed to provide “guidance in the interpretation and application of our *Book of Church Order*” by providing a clear and concise account of the undertakings of the PCA and the decisions of the General Assembly relating to the government and discipline of the Church. *The PCA Digest 1999-2018* has therefore been organized into four main PARTS: PART I) Actions of the General Assembly, PART II) Constitutional Advice from the Committee on Constitutional Business, PART III) Digest of Cases of the Standing Judicial Commission, and PART IV) Study Committee Reports and Ad Interim Committee Recommendations.

PART I contains the actions of the General Assembly from 1999 to 2018. This includes decisions taken by the General Assembly on overtures, proposed changes to the *BCO* and *RAO*, substantial recommendations of Committees and Agencies of the PCA, recommendations of Ad Interim committees, and selected communications. Entries encompassing the Form of Government, the Rules of Discipline, and the Directory for Worship are organized according to the *BCO* chapter most relevant to their content. Entries included under each *BCO* chapter are organized, as far as possible, in chronological order, in order to illustrate most clearly developments and changes across the two decades covered by this Digest. Under *BCO* 14 (The General Assembly), we have included four groupings to increase clarity: 1) Authorities and Responsibilities, 2) GA Permanent Committees and Agencies, 3) Other GA Committees, and 4) Changes to the *RAO*. Two things should be noted in regard to these

subsections of *BCO* 14. First, regarding entries related to the Committee on Review of Presbytery Records (RPR) in the Other GA Committees subsection, the Assembly's action on approval of presbytery minutes was not included if minutes of all presbyteries were approved without question. Second, entries within the Changes to the *RAO* subsection are arranged chronologically as far as possible.

Included after the main section organized according to the *BCO* chapters are self-standing sections on Moral and Theological Topics (organized alphabetically according to topic, starting on p. 99) and actions relating to the Relationship of the PCA to Other Bodies (p. 123). The headings given to each entry have not been taken verbatim from the minutes and action of each General Assembly, but are designed to provide an additional level of context and guidance.

PART II contains Constitutional Advice from the Committee on Constitutional Business. Much as in PART I, entries in PART II are organized according to the *BCO* chapter most relevant to their content, and the entries included under each *BCO* chapter are organized, as far as possible, in chronological order. PART II begins with CCB advice on the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (p. 129), before then proceeding to the main section of PART II with CCB advice relating to the *BCO* (p. 130). PART II concludes with a section dedicated to CCB advice on *Rules of Assembly Operation (RAO)*, starting on p.169. As in PART I, the headings given to each entry have not been taken verbatim from the minutes and action of each General Assembly, but are designed to provide an additional level of context and guidance. With the goal of being as concise as possible, PART II includes advice of the CCB only where an overture or action in question stood in conflict with, or in potential conflict with, the constitution. Not included are opinions of the CCB which stated that the overture or action in question was not in conflict with the constitution of the PCA.

PART III contains a digested summary of the Cases heard by the Standing Judicial Commission (SJC). For each case heard by the SJC, we have included a Summary of the case, the Issue, the Judgment, the Reasoning, and Keywords relevant to each case. The brief summary of each case has been drawn from the "Summary of the Facts" section of each case. Similarly, the Reasoning is a summary drawn from the "Reasoning and Opinion" section of each case. For the Issue and Judgment of each case, the text has been taken verbatim from the SJC Report of the Cases. However, because the Digest is reporting on cases

from the last twenty years, the Issue and Judgment have been edited to be in the past tense. Key words have been included for each case heard by the SJC. The Key words selected are not exhaustive and frequently indicate topics and issues included in the full record of the case that do not feature in the digested summary of each case. For cases declared out of order or withdrawn, we have indicated this fact and, where necessary, included a brief summary of the reason. Full reasoning for cases declared out of order or withdrawn can be found in the relevant *Minutes of the General Assembly*, which each case fully references. Here it must also be stated that the General Assembly's role in the decisions of the SJC has changed between 1999 and 2018. BCO 15-5.a was revised at the 25<sup>th</sup> General Assembly so that the Assembly no longer voted to sustain or reject SJC decisions. From 1997 onwards, the SJC decision was final unless a Minority Report from the SJC was submitted to the General Assembly. For this reason, the decision of the SJC in a minority of cases before 1997 – Case 1995-11, for instance – were not accepted by the General Assembly and required further judicial and Assembly action.

PART IV contains the Ad Interim Committee Recommendations from the six Study Committee Reports commissioned by the PCA between 1999 and 2018. The entries in PART IV are arranged in alphabetical order by subject. For the Digest, we have chosen to include only the actions taken in relation to the Committee Recommendations from each report. This decision was made for a variety of reasons, not least because of the real possibility of error of substance or emphasis when it comes to creating a “summary” of the often lengthy and considered reports of the Ad Interim Committees. For anyone seeking information from the reports, we encourage them to read the full reports of the Ad Interim Committees directly, which are reproduced in full in the Minutes of the General Assembly and are accessible and fully searchable online at the PCA Historical Center website, [pcahistory.org](http://pcahistory.org).

INDEX. The index has been compiled in such a way as to ensure its maximum effectiveness for readers of the Digest, not simply in noting the many past actions of the General Assembly, but also for observing how the strands of important concepts and principles can be found weaving through the four major sections of this Digest. For the terms included, the index follows standard bibliographic procedure by not necessarily including a page reference for every occurrence of a term. (Identification of every occurrence of a specific term can be best

achieved through a word search of the PDF version of the Digest, found on the website of the PCA Historical Center, [pcahistory.org](http://pcahistory.org).) Instead, the index most frequently includes page references when the text makes reference to the conceptual formulation, or the specific application of the principle, in question. For instance, page numbers for “The Lord’s Supper” are included not for every occurrence of the term, but instances in which the substance, definition, or matter of practical application are discussed. This approach, especially when combined with electronic word search of the PDF version of the Digest, enhances the usability of the index by highlighting significant actions and minimizing page references linked to more incidental occurrences of a term.

### ***Notes on Using the Digest***

Our vision and priority for *The PCA Digest 1999-2018* was to create a document in one volume that was rich in information yet concise and easily navigated. Therefore, the Digest has adopted a system of referencing which directs users to the pages and sections of *Minutes of the General Assembly* related to the digested action.

Each reference contains several pieces of information (e.g. **2018, p. 69, 46-41, III.8**). References begin with the year in which the Assembly took action. This is followed by the page number of the action, the number of the General Assembly referenced along with the item number in the minutes (e.g., 46-41), and ends by referring to the section of the report or appendix where a recommendation concerning the overture, or other action about which the Assembly voted, was made.

To ensure the fullest possible coverage, many actions of the General Assembly (especially for actions from around 2005 onwards) have been given two references, a reflection of larger changes in how the Minutes of the General Assembly were organized. The first reference directs the user’s attention to the Daily Session of the General Assembly when the Assembly took a particular action. The second reference directs the user’s attention to the report in which the recommendation concerning the overture or other action about which the Assembly voted was made. For instance, during the 46<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in 2018, the Assembly answered in the affirmative Overture 19 from New Jersey Presbytery to redraw the boundaries of New Jersey Presbytery to include Mercer County (see p. 20 in this Digest). Therefore, the first reference given for this action of the Assembly (**2018, p. 67, 46-41**) refers to the Daily Session of the 46<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in which the Assembly answered in the affirmative the recommendation of the Committee of Commissioners on

Mission to North America. Meanwhile, the second reference (**2018, p. 69, 46-41, III.8**) directs the user to the report of the Committee of Commissioners on Mission to North America in which the Committee of Commissioners initially made this recommendation.

***A Note on Terminology***

One term used frequently between 1999 and 2018 is the term “memorial.” However, despite its frequent usage, the meaning of this term has changed and should not be confused. Whereas the current usage of the term refers to resolutions honoring deceased individuals, until 2006 the term “memorial” was also a judicial term relating to the procedure of bringing a matter directly before a higher court. (Some other Presbyterian denominations currently use the term “memorial” as a synonym for “overture” from a presbytery.) In 2006, our presbyteries approved an amendment to *BCO* 40-5 which removed reference to judicial memorials, thereby eliminating confusion (**2006, p. 52, 34-8; 2006, p. 55, 34-8, Items 2, 3**). The complaint process of *BCO* Chapter 43 gives ample opportunity to take a judicial matters to a higher church court in a timely manner. See also Ecclesiastical Commissions (*BCO* 15) in this Digest.