

1 **OVERTURE 20** from Potomac Presbytery (to AC)

2 “Request Administrative Committee to Research Use of Electronic Records
3 for Denominational Purposes”
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5 **Whereas** it is the duty of the clerks of Sessions to record transactions, keep an accurate
6 record of its proceedings, preserve the records carefully, to grant extracts from them
7 whenever properly required, and the duty of Sessions to keep an accurate record of
8 communing and non-communing members, including granting letters of dismissal.
9 “Such extracts under the hand of the clerk shall be evidence to any ecclesiastical
10 court, and to every part of the Church.” (*BCO* 10-4, 12-7) This is all in keeping with
11 the Presbyterian tradition of doing all things decently and in order.
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13 **Whereas** we are in a digital revolution where so much information is now created and
14 maintained in electronic form. Electronic documents and electronic signatures are
15 used for business transactions worldwide, and laws like the Virginia Uniform
16 Electronic Transactions Act provide legal recognition of electronic records,
17 electronic signatures, and electronic contracts. In fact, the Virginia law states, “If a
18 law requires a signature, or provides for certain consequences in the absence of a
19 signature, an electronic signature satisfies the law.” An electronic record can even be
20 electronically created without use of paper.
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22 **Whereas** maintaining electronic records have many benefits, such as ease of searching and
23 communicating, paper reduction, as well as effective storage and preservation (e.g.,
24 less prone to loss from fire and flooding), while at the same time there are similar
25 risks as with paper, such as the continued need for maintaining availability, integrity,
26 and confidentiality. Also, there are challenges related to electronic records. One
27 example: one key matter that needs to be evaluated is the kinds of signatures that can
28 be used for electronic documents like Session and congregational meeting minutes.
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30 **Whereas** the denomination still has many processes that do not recognize electronic records
31 or that still require paper records. One example is the “Clerk of Session Handbook”
32 08/18 which states “All minutes should be typed or legibly written in ink. Since the
33 Session’s records must be archived, minutes should be kept in a bound or lock-type
34 journal.” While at the same time, electronic records are no doubt in use.
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36 **Therefore** be it resolved that Potomac Presbytery hereby overtures the 50th General
37 Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) for the Administrative
38 Committee and the Office of the Stated Clerk to initiate an effort to identify and
39 make use of records management expertise in the denomination (including the PCA
40 Historical Center) or elsewhere to understand the matter and provide practical and
41 defendable solutions; within two years to provide clerks, churches, and presbyteries
42 with its initial findings and recommendations; and to update the “Clerk of Session
43 Handbook” to address electronic records, to include electronic letters of dismissal to
44 other churches.
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46 Adopted by the Potomac Presbytery at its stated meeting, March 18, 2023

47 Attested by /s/ TE Joel St. Clair, stated clerk pro tem