

1 **OVERTURE 66** from the Philadelphia Presbytery (to OC)

2 “Issue a Declaration of Thanksgiving on the Occasion of the 250th Anniversary of the
3 Nation’s Founding”

4
5 **Whereas**, God’s Word calls His church, “O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good, for
6 his mercy endureth for ever” (Psalm 136:1) in whatsoever comes to pass according to
7 Jesus Christ’s sovereign rule and reign over all men and nations; and,

8
9 **Whereas**, we confess that “the providence of God doth, in general, reach to all creatures; so,
10 after a most special manner, it taketh care of his church, and disposeth all things to the
11 good thereof” (*WCF* 5.7); and,

12
13 **Whereas**, a pastoral letter published and circulated to Presbyterian congregations by the
14 Synod of New York and Philadelphia in 1775 counseled colonial American
15 Presbyterians in solemn terms, “In particular, as the Continental Congress, now sitting
16 at Philadelphia, consists of delegates chosen in the most free and unbiassed manner,
17 by the body of the people, let them not only be treated with respect, and encouraged
18 in their difficult service; not only let your prayers be offered up to God for his direction
19 in their proceedings, but adhere firmly to their resolutions; and let it be seen that they
20 are able to bring out the whole strength of this vast country to carry them into
21 execution,” which prayers the Lord abundantly and affirmatively answered; and,

22
23 **Whereas**, the Synod’s pastoral letter of 1775 further urged American Presbyterians, “We
24 would also advise for the same purpose, that a spirit of candour, charity, and mutual
25 esteem, be preserved and promoted towards those of different religious denominations.
26 Persons of probity and principle of every profession, should be untied together as
27 servants of the same Master; and the experience of our happy concord hitherto in a
28 state of liberty, should engage all to unite in support of the common interest; for there
29 is no example in history in which civil liberty was destroyed, and the rights of
30 conscience preserved entire,” which state of liberty the Lord was gracious, merciful,
31 and kind to preserve; and,

32
33 **Whereas**, colonial American Presbyterian preachers and pastors defended the sacred cause of
34 liberty from pulpits across our land, including Dr. John Witherspoon, the only minister
35 of the Gospel to sign the Declaration of Independence, who delivered on May 17, 1776
36 a sermon entitled “The Dominion of Providence Over the Passions of Men” on Psalm
37 76:10, in which he preached, “The knowledge of God and his truths have from the
38 beginning of the world been chiefly, if not entirely, confined to those parts of the earth,
39 where some degree of liberty and political justice were to be seen” and who later
40 served as the first Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in
41 the United States of America, serving Christ faithfully in both his civil and his
42 ecclesiastical calling; and,

43
44 **Whereas**, the Directory for the Public Worship of God (received by our American
45 Presbyterian forefathers) teaches that “it is lawful and necessary, upon special

1 emergent occasions, to separate a day or days for public fasting or thanksgiving, as the
2 several eminent and extraordinary dispensations of God’s providence shall administer
3 cause and opportunity to his people”; and,
4

5 **Whereas**, God’s Word reads, “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers,
6 intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are
7 in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty”
8 (1 Timothy 2:1-2); and,
9

10 **Whereas**, we confess that “God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained
11 civil magistrates, to be, under him, over the people, for his own glory, and the public
12 good; and, to this end, hath armed them with the power of the sword, for the defence
13 and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evil doers” (*WCF*
14 23.1); and,
15

16 **Whereas**, the success of America’s War of Independence has resulted in the enshrinement of
17 certain civil liberties and individual rights in the Constitution of the United States of
18 America, including that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of
19 religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech,
20 or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assembly, and to petition the
21 Government for a redress of grievances” (First Amendment to the Constitution of the
22 United States), all which ensure the freedom of Christians to worship God as He has
23 ordained in His Word, for “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free
24 from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in anything contrary to his
25 Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship” (*WCF* 20.2); and,
26

27 **Whereas**, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) since its founding on December 4, 1973
28 has ever and always endeavored to be a national Presbyterian Church ministering in
29 (and beyond) the territory of the United States of America as a Church faithful to the
30 Scriptures, true to the Reformed Faith, and obedient to the Great Commission of the
31 Lord Jesus Christ; and,
32

33 **Whereas**, the Declaration of Independence, drafted by Thomas Jefferson, working in
34 collaboration with a Committee of Five, in a rented room in Philadelphia merchant
35 Jacob Graff Jr.’s home (now known as the Declaration House) on the corner of Seventh
36 and Market Streets in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was adopted by the Continental
37 Congress on July 4, 1776; and,
38

39 **Whereas**, it was in this very city of Philadelphia in the year 1706 that the Rev. Francis
40 Makemie, known as the father of American Presbyterianism, together with six other
41 ministers organized the first presbytery on American soil, thereby planting the pure
42 Reformed witness of the gospel on these shores more than three centuries ago; and,
43

44 **Whereas**, God in His kind providence has preserved a faithful Presbyterian witness in
45 Philadelphia through every trial and blessing from that day until now, so that

1 Philadelphia Presbytery today rejoices to labor in the same place where our spiritual
2 forefathers first established ordered Presbyterianism in America; and,
3

4 **Whereas**, acknowledging that “every good gift and every perfect gift is from above” (James
5 1:17), including the gracious providential gift of a free nation where we may worship
6 the true and only living Triune God without hindrance, we confess with the apostle,
7 “what do you have that you did not receive?” (1 Corinthians 4:7), and dare not boast
8 or presume upon these mercies; knowing also that “from everyone who has been given
9 much, much will be required” (Luke 12:48), and being mindful that our brothers and
10 sisters in Christ around the world face persecution and hardship for the faith while we
11 enjoy these liberties, we humbly pray that the Lord would renew Philadelphia
12 Presbytery and the whole Presbyterian Church in America in living faithfulness, that
13 we might faithfully steward this gift by boldly proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom,
14 so that people from every tribe and tongue might come to saving faith in Jesus Christ;
15 and,
16

17 **Whereas**, the General Assembly shall have the power: “In general, to recommend measures
18 for the promotion of charity, truth and holiness through all the churches under its care”
19 (*BCO* 14-6.k);
20

21 **Therefore, be it resolved** that the 53rd General Assembly issue a formal “Declaration of
22 Thanksgiving for the United States of America (USA) on the Occasion of the 250th
23 Anniversary of the Nation’s Founding” on July 4, 2026 by publishing the foregoing
24 statements together with this resolution, to be spread upon the minutes and published
25 electronically by the Administrative Committee through byFaith; and that the churches
26 of this Presbytery and the whole denomination would be stirred up to fervent prayer—
27 in accordance with our *Larger Catechism*’s exposition of the second petition of the
28 Lord’s Prayer (*WLC* 191), that the gospel may be propagated throughout the world,
29 that the Church may be furnished with all gospel officers and ordinances, purged from
30 corruption, countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate—that the same God
31 who has preserved a faithful Presbyterian witness in Philadelphia for more than three
32 centuries and granted our nation 250 years of ordered liberty would continue to pour
33 out His Spirit upon us, that we may walk worthy of our calling with living faith,
34 humility, and zeal for the gospel.
35

36 *Adopted by Philadelphia Presbytery at its stated meeting of March 21, 2026.*

37 *Attested by /s/ Greg Hobaugh, Stated Clerk*
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