



Questions and Answers

WHAT IS THE ELDER COMMISSIONER'S ROLE DURING THE PRESBYTERY MEETING?

Commissioners are the body of Christ trying to discern God's will and carry out God's business for the Presbytery of Genesee Valley. They are not at a presbytery meeting to reflect the will of their church or their session. As stated in the Book of Order, F-3.0204, "Presbyters are not simply to reflect the will of the people, but rather to seek together to find and represent the will of Christ."

A commissioner's responsibility is to vote on the various matters that come before Presbytery. In this, Presbytery commissioners are to be guided by their consciences. The Book of Order (G.1.0301 and G.6.0108) specifically mentions that we have freedom of conscience in our decisions and deliberations. The only exception is that one's conscience is "captive to the Word of God as interpreted by the standards of the church" (G-6.1018b). It is easy to see why, when possible, for commissioners to familiarize themselves with the materials and issues that will be coming to any given Presbytery meeting.

In addition, commissioners also will find that much of what they do is gathering information about the programs, ministries, and activities of the Presbytery and, often, congregations. Presbytery is not just a time of decision-making but is also a time of sharing our collective knowledge and hopes for the future. Also, a commissioner has the responsibility to report on the decisions of the Presbytery and the information learned at Presbytery with one's congregation. You may hear: 1) committee reports that let you know what the Presbytery is doing, 2) presbytery-wide training, events, resources, and programs, 3) programs in other congregations or neighborhoods that might benefit your own. In some ways, sharing what you hear might be the most important aspect of what a commissioner does. For it is in that communication that our connections as Presbyterians are strengthened.

You have the right to speak. You have the right to ask questions. You have the right to vote, if you are a registered commissioner. You do not have to ask for permission to exercise any of these rights. Come with an open heart, to listen to what others say. Come prepared to ask if you need to, or speak if the Spirit moves you. Pray in preparation for the meeting and even during it.

WHAT IS THE BOOK OF ORDER?

The Book of Order is an important part of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA). It provides guidance for the ministry and mission of congregations, presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly. The Book of Order has three sections.

The *Form of Government* provides the basic structure for the mission of the Church. It lays out foundational principles of the church's mission, outlines the meaning of church membership, describes the roles of church officers, and states the responsibilities of the governing bodies of the Presbyterian Church (USA), sessions, presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly.

The *Directory for Worship* provides the theological foundations and general guidelines for Presbyterian worship. As well as describing and interpreting the Sunday worship service, the Directory provides guidelines for proper celebration of the Sacraments, an overview of the liturgical calendar and its role in the worship life of the Church, and a wonderful chapter on the importance of service to others.

The *Rules of Discipline* provide guidance for the church in times of controversy and error. It is the "judicial" portion of our Constitution, outlining the process for dealing with controversies arising from actions of

governing bodies or from the actions of individuals. The Rules of Discipline provide a clear grievance process, as well as a clear process for trial and appeal.

WHAT IS A CONSENT AGENDA

A *Consent Agenda* helps the presbytery work efficiently by allowing us to handle in a single vote those motions which are anticipated to be non-controversial -- but first the moderator asks if anyone wishes to have any one of the listed motions in the Consent Agenda handled separately. It just takes one person's simple request for a motion to be pulled from the Consent Agenda for discussion and vote, the request doesn't require a second or a rationale.

WHY DOESN'T THE STATED CLERK VOTE?

The Stated Clerk's primary role during presbytery meetings is that of a parliamentarian (with respect to both Robert's Rules of Order and the Book of Order). Robert's specifies that the parliamentarian should vote only when there is a secret ballot. The reason for this principle is that the parliamentarian is the servant of the Moderator and of the body as a whole. Therefore, it is important that the parliamentarian maintain public neutrality on issues before the body.

The Stated Clerk will not speak to issues before the presbytery, but will speak when asked to by the Moderator, and like all other participants, will address comments to the Moderator.

WHAT IS A POINT OF PERSONAL PRIVILEGE?

Personal privilege is the means by which an individual member of a voting body has his or her needs met, so that he or she may vote in an intelligent, informed manner. All remarks must be addressed to the Moderator, and be made respectfully and in decorous language. When the Moderator recognizes you, state your name and where you are from, and continue facing the Moderator as you make your remarks. An example is: "Moderator, would you please ask the Clerk to read the motion before we vote?"

WHAT IS A MOTION?

A motion is a proposal that the Presbytery take a stand or take action on some issue. It may be a statement of action, of policy, or of opinion. Only one main motion can be on the floor at one time. A "second" to the motion ensures that more than one member of the body wishes to consider the issue. Motions which come from committees do not need a "second."

HOW DOES BUSINESS GET TO THE PRESBYTERY FLOOR?

Every Presbytery meeting has a "docket," a list of business items, such as motions that will be handled at the meeting, reports to be received, and information on the worship that will be a part of the meeting. The docket is formulated prior to the meeting by the Stated Clerk. Reports and appendices are also in the docket. If a Session or a special group wants to get on the docket, they contact the Stated Clerk. The docket and packet are provided to teaching elders and elder commissioners at least one week in advance of the Presbytery meeting. The docket is also posted on the PGV website.

HOW IS BUSINESS CONDUCTED?

The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) designates Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, as the parliamentary authority to be used in governing body meetings. All business of presbytery is started by placing a main motion on the floor. There can be only one main motion on the floor at any given time, and that motion must be disposed of permanently or temporarily before another main motion can be before presbytery.

An original motion for an item of business is typically made by a committee chair or less frequently by a commissioner from a church. Motions from committee chairs do not need to be seconded; otherwise an original motion needs a second if it is introducing business. The commissioner making the motion cannot speak to the motion until it is seconded.

The Moderator calls for debate, with the motion maker speaking first. Commissioners then debate or can ask questions about the motion. At the conclusion of debate a vote on the motion is held.

WHAT IF I WISH TO SPEAK?

All debate remarks are addressed to the Moderator only, not to another commissioner. Debate is conducted by alternating between speakers for/against the motion, under the direction of the Moderator. To speak, raise your zoom hand and, when called upon by the Moderator, first state your name and church—e.g., “John Doe, Elder Commissioner, Anywhere Church” and then whether you are speaking for or against the motion. Be sensitive to speakers who simply have clarifying questions vs. wanting to debate. Sometimes a question clears up a debate point very quickly. The maker of the motion has the option to be the last to speak.