

Basic Principles of Parliamentary Procedure

Parliamentary procedure is designed to facilitate decision-making by groups of people. Parliamentary procedure balances the expression of individual conscience with the will of the majority. Therefore, parliamentary procedure seeks always to protect the four rights of individual members:

- the right to know
- the right to speak
- the right to vote
- the right to hold office

Action that affects any of the four rights requires a two-thirds (2/3) vote.

The Presbytery adheres to Robert's Rules of Order as its parliamentary authority in conducting business at meetings of the Presbytery. Any deviations would be found in the Book of Order or the by-laws of the Presbytery.

Speaking at a Meeting

Each person may speak twice on a particular subject. However, you may not speak a second time until everyone who wishes to speak has done so. (Generally) Allow 3 minutes for remarks. Plan carefully what you intend to say. There is nothing wrong with having some notes to guide you; in fact, notes are encouraged.

Obtain the Floor

To participate in the discussion, it is necessary to obtain the floor. To obtain the floor, raise your "Zoom hand" and wait to be recognized by the moderator. If it is apparent that the moderator is not aware that you have your "Zoom hand" raised, you may acquire the moderator's attention by saying "Moderator." Once the moderator has recognized you, it is your turn to speak.

Introduce Yourself

When the moderator has recognized you, introduce yourself by name and by church (or other relationship to Presbytery) before addressing Presbytery.

Speak to the Moderator

Always address your remarks to the moderator; referring to others in the third person.

Motions Must Precede Speeches

If you wish to make a motion, you are limited to only a few words of explanation before making the motion. All persuasive speechmaking must wait until your motion is seconded and the moderator has opened discussion.

Helpful Parliamentary Procedures

Rule of Decorum

The Moderator must recognize all speakers before they speak. This includes those rights of speech which interrupt, including a point of personal privilege or a point of order.

Debate and Action

We'll be making a few decisions that we may need to talk about before we vote - to clarify an issue, share different views, to understand alternatives. Not all actions require debate. Your role is to listen, share in debate as you are spiritually led, and vote your conscience. If you don't understand what is happening, LET THE MODERATOR KNOW. Call "Point of Order." We'll take time to see the issue more clearly.

To Stop Debate

To end debate, you can move the previous question or call the previous question. This motion requires a second and a 2/3 majority vote, and is not debatable.

NOTE: Calls from the floor or in the zoom chat such as "Question!" or "Call the question!" are not in order and will not be acknowledged. Members must be recognized to make this motion. If the motion passes, the debate ends immediately. The motion being debated will promptly be put to a vote.

Referring a Motion to Committee

To refer (or commit) a motion to a committee, you simply move to refer the motion to the group you think should deal with the issue. It requires a second and a majority vote to pass. If it passes, it will not be discussed further by Presbytery until the group it was referred to brings it back with their recommendation.

Changing the Wording of a Motion

To change the wording of a motion, you can move to amend the motion, specifying the wording you wish to change. It requires a second and a majority vote to pass. (An amendment can slightly or significantly change the motion, even to the extent of defeating its original spirit.) Once the amendment has been voted on, debate on the original motion (with any approved amendments) resumes.

More substantial amendments which would replace a whole paragraph or the entire motion are handled in a special process of amending called a substitute motion: first, Presbytery considers the original text and has the opportunity to refine it with any amendments. Second, the proposed substitute language is subjected to the same refining process. After these two steps are completed, Presbytery votes on whether to substitute the second language for the first. Then discussion continues as after any effort to amend a motion.

Delaying a Motion

There are two common ways to suspend action on a motion:

a. Postpone

A motion to postpone a question suspends it to a particular time or until after a particular event. It requires a second and a 2/3 majority vote to pass. If it passes, the original motion (and any amendments or other attached motions that were being debated) will automatically be brought back to the floor to resume debate at the same point when the scheduled postponement time arrives.

b. Table

To table a motion simply sets it aside temporarily. It requires a second and a majority vote, and is not debatable. At any time later in the meeting when no motion is pending, a motion to take from the table will immediately bring a tabled motion back before Presbytery for resumed discussion. This action also requires a second and a majority vote, and is not debatable. NOTE: A motion "to table until [a particular time]" is not really a motion to table but a motion "to postpone," and should be re-worded accordingly.

Challenging a Procedure

A member may raise a point of order to question a procedural action being taken by the meeting or the moderator. The moderator will rule on the point being raised (without a second or debate). If a member is not satisfied with the ruling, they may appeal from the moderator's ruling, which requires a second and a majority vote to overrule the moderator. It is not debatable.

Asking Information

A member may ask for a point of information to clarify a matter being discussed. This request is always addressed to the moderator and must not include debate on the matter. The moderator will then seek clarification from an appropriate member present.

Asking for a Standing Vote

Any member may call for division or division of the house when results of an apparently close vote are announced. No second or vote is required, and the moderator will ask for an uncounted rising vote. If the result of an uncounted rising vote is doubtful, the moderator can ask for a counted rising vote. If they do not, a motion for a counted vote can be made by a member, and if seconded and approved by a majority, will require a standing vote to be visually counted.

Note on Exception to Being Recognized

Points of order, points of information, and requests for division of the house are special cases allowing a member to interrupt when someone else has the floor. If your request is in order, the moderator (in these special cases) will recognize you and you may speak.