

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE FOR EFFECTIVE PRESBYTERY MEETINGS

Parliamentary Procedure or Parliamentary Law is: common sense and courtesy; the original model for conflict resolution; not technically “law” but a body of conventions and customs used to aid decision-making in deliberative assemblies; subordinate to the bylaws of the mid-council (both parliamentary law and mid-council bylaws are subordinate to the *Constitution of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.*); and designed to provide accuracy, efficiency, impartiality, objectivity, and uniformity. Parliamentary Law is grounded in two assumptions: (1) the overwhelming desire for unity on the part of the members as a visible expression of the Body of Christ; and (2) the necessity of tension between majority and minority views as a means by which the Spirit is present in governing bodies of the Church. The function of Parliamentary Law is to insure the rights and unity of the body; the will of the majority; and the rights of the minority are protected.¹

Parliamentary principles attempt to balance the expression of individual conscience with the will of the majority. **Individual members have the following rights:** *the right to know* (due notice of meeting; approval of minutes); *the right to speak* (rules of debate); *the right to vote* (definition of membership); and *the right to hold office* (fair representation).

- Please be sure you are eligible to **SPEAK** and/or **VOTE** at meetings of Presbytery. All teaching elders on the roll of Presbytery, commissioned ruling elders, and ruling elders elected by their sessions have the privilege of **VOICE AND VOTE**. Any of the following, if not a commissioner to Presbytery, shall be a corresponding member, **WITH VOICE AND VOTE**: any ruling elder serving as Moderator, Moderator-in-Nomination, Immediate Past Moderator, Treasurer, Stated Clerk, Chair of a Committee, or Coordinating Committee member, and any ruling elder who is a certified Christian educator during their term of service in an educational ministry under the jurisdiction of the church. In addition, the *Book of Order* makes provision for the following to be seated as corresponding members, **WITH VOICE** but **WITHOUT VOTE**: any executive or spokesperson from Synod or General Assembly; certified Christian educators, certified lay employees, and teaching elders of other presbyteries.
- **THE MODERATOR** is the presiding officer of the Presbytery. All business must be brought before the **MODERATOR**, who will guide the process to its conclusion.
- All business comes to the Presbytery in the form of **MOTIONS**. **To make a MOTION, you must rise and address the MODERATOR, and you must be recognized by the MODERATOR.** Unless you are moving to accept a report or making a simple "housekeeping" **MOTION**, all **MOTIONS** should be given to the **Stated Clerk in clear written form**. Proper wording and punctuation are the responsibilities of the **MAKER OF THE MOTION**.
- Most **MOTIONS** require a **SECOND** (someone who agrees the matter is worthy of discussion). Exceptions to this are: **MOTIONS COMING FROM COMMITTEES OR COMMISSIONS; CALL FOR THE ORDER OF THE DAY; QUESTIONS OF PRIVILEGE; DIVISION OF THE ASSEMBLY; POINT OF ORDER**, etc.

- After a **MAIN MOTION** is made and seconded and the **MODERATOR** states the **MOTION**, there is time for **DEBATE**. The **MAKER OF THE MOTION** has the privilege of **first** debate.
- All speakers must address the Moderator and be recognized by the Moderator. **DEBATE** should begin with the phrase, "Mr./Madame Moderator, I rise in support of (in opposition to) the motion because . . ."
- During **DEBATE**, you may make a **MOTION TO AMEND** the **MAIN MOTION**. If the **MOTION TO AMEND** is **SECONDED**, the governing body will **DEBATE** the merits of the **AMENDMENT** only and then **VOTE** on the **AMENDMENT**. A **SECONDARY AMENDMENT** may be offered to the **AMENDMENT**, but no more. Any number of **AMENDMENTS** can be offered in succession - so long as they do not again raise questions already decided.
- If the **AMENDMENT** fails, **DEBATE** on the **MAIN MOTION** continues. If the **AMENDMENT** passes, the **AMENDED MAIN MOTION** will be **DEBATED** until the assembly takes action.
- If you believe the **DEBATE** has gone long enough, you may **MOVE THE PREVIOUS QUESTION**, that is, call for an **IMMEDIATE END OF DEBATE**. *You must be recognized by the MODERATOR, and the MOTION must be SECONDED.* It is **NOT DEBATABLE**, and must be approved by a **TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY**.
- If you believe that a motion is ill-conceived or unclear and the **AMENDMENT** process fails to clarify the motion, you may make a **MOTION TO REFER** the matter to its source or to another appropriate body. **DEBATE** on a **MOTION TO REFER** is limited to the desirability of referral, not the merits of the **MAIN MOTION**.

QUESTIONS FOR INFORMATION ARE ALWAYS IN ORDER. IF YOU DO NOT KNOW WHAT IS GOING ON, YOU HAVE THE RIGHT AND RESPONSIBILITY TO BE PROPERLY INFORMED BEFORE YOU CAST YOUR VOTE.

Contact Therese Howell, Stated Clerk, if you have questions or need additional information. [thehowell@aol.com; 615-332-3330 (office), 615-305-6795 (mobile)]

¹"Parliamentary Procedures in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)" by Marianne L. Wolfe, P.R.P.