

GUIDELINES FOR PRESBYTERY ASSEMBLY MEETINGS

PREAMBLE

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) witnesses, in its life, work and governance, to the lordship of Jesus Christ, who alone is head of the church. It lives out this witness through a church order based on:

- Equality between ruling and teaching elders;
- Community decision-making that is not directed by popular opinion but seeks to discern the will of Christ; and
- Respect and mutual forbearance for differences of opinion, subject to majority rule.

These principles undergird presbytery assembly meetings of the Presbytery of Chicago. They are subject to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The purpose of assembly meetings is to:

- Celebrate the Word of God in worship;
- Conduct the business necessary to the governance and mission of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in the greater metropolitan Chicago area;
- Provide an opportunity for fellowship and community building; and
- Educate commissioners, and through them, congregations, about matters of concern to the presbytery as a whole.

1. LOCATION

- Assembly meetings should be held in handicapped accessible facilities, with adequate parking and meeting space.
- Meetings should be rotated among the different geographic areas of the presbytery, in order to balance the burden of travel. Preferably meetings will be held in PCUSA buildings.

2. ATTENDANCE

- Active teaching elders are required, by G-2.0503a, to responsibly participate in the deliberations and work of the presbytery.
- Sessions are encouraged, for the sake of continuity, to elect ruling elder commissioners for at least one year, G-3.0202a; however, alternate, rotating or substitute commissioners are allowed. All names should be provided in writing to the stated clerk so they can be entered accurately in the records.

3. WORSHIP

- Worship is central to the life and work of the presbytery. Assembly meetings will therefore be centered in worship.
- Worship services are subject to the oversight of the Presbytery Coordinating Commission. Services should be simple, with few elements. Music and other special features should be offered as a form of prayer, not for entertainment or artistic display (W-2.1004).
- The worship service should honor the theme chosen by the presbytery assembly moderator, and be centered around the Word (W-2.2001). If there is a sermon, the preacher is chosen by the moderator.

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Approved, December 14, 2010

Minutes, pp. 19884, 19896-97

4. EXPEDITING THE MEETING

- According to Robert's Rules of Order (11th ed., p. 450, ll. 12-13), the presbytery assembly moderator, as the presiding officer, has the authority to expedite business in every way compatible with the rights of members and the constraints of the limited time schedule.
- Unless specifically identified as an order of the day, the time allocated to each report on the docket is advisory, and may be extended or limited by the moderator. The assembly moderator also has discretion to extend or limit the time set for adjournment.
- There will be no announcements or advertisements of upcoming events unless one of these is an order of the day. The congregations and presbytery entities sponsoring such events are encouraged, instead, to place flyers on the assembly literature table and to use alternate electronic means of advertising their events.

5. MISCELLANEOUS

- Debate will be conducted in accordance with the principles found in the Book of Order and Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement, a copy of which will be included in the floor papers for each assembly meeting.
- The presbytery assembly is encouraged to employ discernment processes in addition to those specified in Robert's Rules and to devote time to theological reflection and education on matters of general concern to the church and the world.

Background: In September, 1987, the presbytery assembly adopted certain guidelines governing the conduct of assembly meetings (Minutes, pp. 10418-10420). Those guidelines have not been updated since, despite major developments over the last quarter century.

First, the internet has significantly changed the way organizations communicate. The presbytery and its congregations are no longer dependent on bulk mailings and verbal announcements. Email and websites spread information far more effectively. The business items that are decided at assembly meetings are too substantial to permit email voting. However, much of the general information shared at assembly meetings is different. In fact, announcements of upcoming events will reach more people if they are shared through the internet and posted on the presbytery website.

Second, the 217th General Assembly (2006) encouraged governing bodies "to explore the use of alternative forms of discernment preliminary to decision-making, especially in dealing with potentially divisive issues." While discernment models are often better suited to small groups, they also contribute towards community building and mutual understanding. They are therefore an essential tool for the presbytery.

Finally, in 2004 and 2005, the assembly dedicated substantial time to studying developments in the Middle East. Approximately one hour in each of five meetings was devoted to speakers from a variety of perspectives, followed by small group discussion. To this day, that program remains one of the more popular activities engaged in at presbytery meetings.

These proposed guidelines are thus intended to help streamline presbytery meetings by focusing the assembly's time on matters of substance, education, discernment and community building.