

Guidelines for Assembly Meetings

Amended, June 18, 2013
Minutes, pp. 21392, 21395-97

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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4. PARTICIPATION BY CONGREGATIONS

- In general: because Presbytery assembly meetings require extensive advance preparation, early notice and advance planning are absolutely necessary.
- Congregations are invited to participate through sharing literature and table displays. Because space can be limited, sessions should check with the Stated Clerk at least a month before meeting (for table displays) and a week before the meeting (for literature).
- If a session wishes to host a pre-presbytery event, it should contact the Stated Clerk for more information. Pre-presbytery events tend to book early, so advance notice is necessary.
- Overtures to the General Assembly should be sent to the Stated Clerk at least six weeks prior to the assembly meeting, so the Stated Clerk may comply with General Assembly review procedures. Proposed overtures must also conform with General Assembly format, timing and concurrence rules for overtures. The Stated Clerk can assist your session with General Assembly requirements.
- If a session has formal business for the assembly, it should either contact the Stated Clerk at least six weeks prior to the meeting, so the clerk can forward the proposal to the presbytery entity involved (if any); or a commissioner from that congregation may move that the item be added to the docket at the start of the meeting. In the latter case, if the proposal is lengthy, written copies should be provided for commissioners.

5. 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.

6. 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.
- Fundraising is limited to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Special Offerings, Shared Mission Giving, the CentsAbility cans placed out during meals, and special in-kind mission offerings authorized in advance by the Presbytery Coordinating Commission.
- 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: These proposed guidelines are intended to help streamline presbytery meetings by focusing the assembly's time on matters of substance, education, discernment and community building.