



## New Elder Commissioner Information for Presbytery of Donegal Gatherings

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### Welcome:

Welcome to your ministry as a commissioner to a Gathering of the Presbytery of Donegal. We are grateful for your service and look forward to seeing you. Below is some information that we hope is useful to you as you prepare for the upcoming gathering. We want you to be involved and value your wisdom as we follow God's leading into the future. Other first-time commissioners have had questions as they come to their initial presbytery gathering, so we've tried to anticipate these so that you can be prepared. Please contact us with any other questions you might have. We look forward to worshipping and leading together!

### Here are some FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) about Donegal Presbytery...

#### What's a Presbytery?

A presbytery is a "council of the church" with a certain geographic district. This means that it is responsible for making decisions about the life and ministry of the Presbyterian Church within certain boundaries. A presbytery comprises all the congregations and teaching elders within its bounds. Congregations elect ruling elder commissioners to the meetings with the goal of "parity," which means that there is an equal number of teaching elders and ruling elders.

A presbytery is "responsible for the church's government throughout its district, and for assisting and supporting the witness of congregations to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that all congregations become communities of faith, hope, love, and witness." (Book of Order, G-3.0301)

Some of the duties of a presbytery include:

- Organizing, receiving, dismissing, and dissolving congregations
- Establishing and dissolving pastoral relationships
- Guiding the preparation of those exploring a call to be teaching elders
- Provide guidance and resources to congregations in the areas of mission, leadership development, worship, evangelism,
- Ordaining, receiving, dismissing, installing, and disciplining teaching elders who are members
- Promoting the peace and harmony of congregations
- Helping congregations work together in common ministry and mission

#### What do you want me to know about Donegal Presbytery?

The Presbytery of Donegal comprises 47 congregations, two immigrant fellowships, and 3 New Worshipping Communities in York, Lancaster, and Chester counties. (And one church in Harford County,

Maryland!) There are approximately 10,000 members in these congregations and 160 teaching elder members of the presbytery. When the Presbytery of Donegal gathers, around 100 voting members are usually present. The presbytery has large and small congregations made up of rural, urban, and suburban members. They are next to housing developments, farms, and downtown office buildings. In the midst of this diversity of life circumstances, backgrounds, and perspectives, we are called by Jesus to worship God and serve our communities together as a presbytery.

The presbytery has a staff of Rev. Dr. Erin Cox-Holmes as Executive Presbyter, Rev. Dr. Michael Wilson as Stated Clerk, and Christine Wells as Executive Administrative Assistant. These people are all here to assist you in your ministry. Please ask any of them with any questions.

### **May I speak?**

Absolutely! If you have been elected to be a commissioner from your congregation for this meeting, then - yes, you are permitted to speak! We encourage you to speak, ask questions, and give your opinion about what will happen during the meeting. We believe that God works through us as we listen to one another, so we are interested in encouraging you to speak up. If you don't understand something, please ask.

If you want to speak, you simply go to a microphone and wait to be recognized by the moderator, or you raise your hand and wait for a microphone to be brought to you (this depends on the location). Please identify yourself by saying your name and the name of the church where you are a member. Then, tell the body how you think it should proceed (voting yes or no, etc.) and why. You can also ask a question about the matter at hand.

### **Do I vote?**

Absolutely! If your Session has elected you to be the commissioner for this meeting – yes, you vote! Every Teaching Elder member of the presbytery votes and the Ruling Elders are elected by their congregations. Other people who vote include ruling elders who chair committees or commissions of the presbytery and other ruling elders who have been given “voice and vote” by the presbytery. The goal of our polity is “parity,” which means equal representation from Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders. One of the distinctive things about Presbyterian polity is that when we gather, all ordained elders have equal responsibility and power (vote) as we seek God's will for the future.

The number of ruling elders elected by a congregation depends on the size of the congregation (larger congregations send more commissioners. Occasionally, more ruling elders will arrive than the number of commissioners allotted. If this happens, we will help determine who the commissioners and visitors for a particular meeting will be.

### **Who are the people up front?**

Up front, you will see several people: The person standing in the center conducting the meeting is the Moderator. This is a teaching elder or ruling elder elected to a two-year term as the person responsible

for leading our meetings and guiding us in our decision-making. Next to the Moderator is the parliamentarian for the meeting. Our Stated Clerk serves as our parliamentarian and is responsible for assisting the moderator in decision-making and making recommendations based on Robert's Rules of Order, our parliamentarian guide. Next to the Stated Clerk is the Recording Clerk, responsible for taking minutes for the meeting.

### **Who are the other people?**

Several people will stand up front and make reports and recommendations to the presbytery. These are ruling elders and teaching elders who are (most likely) the chairperson of a committee or a commission of a presbytery. You will also see our Executive Presbyter, Erin Cox-Holmes, who is responsible for helping guide the entire work of the presbytery.

### **What happens during the meeting?**

The first thing we do as a presbytery is worship together. We believe that dwelling together in God's Word and calling upon God's grace shapes us as leaders and helps us to be the best elders we can be. We also start in worship to center ourselves upon God's glory and call upon God's grace. The presbytery also receives reports about its work – from PCUSA mission co-workers that we support, mission projects with which we are involved, and congregations who are moving in new ways. The presbytery is responsible for voting upon proposed amendments to the PC(USA)'s constitution, the budget of the presbytery, and any other matters brought before it.

### **What do I do after the meeting?**

After the meeting, you are responsible for reporting back to your session and congregation about what has occurred. Many elders make a written report to their Session and then decide what to report to the entire congregation – either verbally in worship or written form in a newsletter or email. We are available to help you with this so that we can communicate clearly and well. Thanks for ensuring that the important work we do together is communicated to the many members of the Presbytery of Donegal.

Below is a two-page guide to the "parliamentary process" used in our meeting. It will give you some insight into the common language used and is meant to help you prepare for your day.

Again, thank you for your ministry in your congregation and our presbytery. We value your insight and your input. Please contact us with any questions that you have.

# Presbytery Gathering Polity & Procedures

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## Main/Original Motions

- The Presbyterian Church's (U.S.A.) Constitution designates *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, as the parliamentary authority for governing body meetings.
- All presbytery business is started by placing a main motion on the floor.
- There can be only one main motion on the floor at any time. That motion must be disposed of permanently or temporarily before another main motion can be before the 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 ask questions about the motion.
- New Business in our presbytery must be submitted to the Stated Clerk by the time announced on the docket. This business is dealt with towards the end of the meeting. Often, it will be referred to a committee for more intensive preparation for a discussion by the entire presbytery.

## While at the Microphone

- 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, go to a microphone and, when called upon by the Moderator, first state your name and church—e.g., “Name, Elder Commissioner, Your Church” and then whether you are speaking for or against the motion or have a question.
- While lining up at the microphone, be sensitive to speakers who simply have clarifying questions vs. wanting to debate. Sometimes, a question clears up a debate point very quickly.
- Debate is sometimes regulated by time/procedural rules. For example, debate may be limited to two or three minutes per speaker. An item of business may also have a time limit due to the docket timing.

## Amendments

- Amendments can be a key part of the debate process.
- To make a motion to amend, simply rise, be recognized, state your name and church, and then say, “Mr. /Madam Moderator, I have an amendment.” The Moderator will ask you to read your

amendment and then call for a second. Your amendment must be written on a form available from the Stated Clerk to help with clarity.

- An amendment can also be made to an amendment.
- When there has been a motion to amend, debate on the main motion stops temporarily and presbytery will then debate the amendment.
- You must write your amendment and get it to the stated clerk during the amendment debate. If you know you will have an amendment before the meeting, call the Presbytery of Donegal office. Typically, PowerPoint screen projections of motions and amendments can be made in advance, which helps all commissioners understand the amendment.

### **Substitute Motions**

- These get tricky. A substitute motion seeks to replace the motion on the floor with a different motion (it must pertain to the same subject matter, but it is a significant enough amendment that it requires all new wording. If you think you want to make a substitute motion and know that before the meeting, call the Presbytery of Donegal office for guidance.
- If you want to move a substitute motion during the debate on the main motion, when the Moderator recognizes you, move your substitute. The Moderator will seek a second and then explain the substitute motion process to the commissioners. Ensure a written copy of the substitute motion gets to the Stated Clerk quickly.
- The presbytery then “perfects” both the main motion and the substitute motion, and then the issue the presbytery will be debating is “shall the substitute motion become the main motion.”
- History shows that substitute motions can be confusing. Ask questions from the floor if you are unclear about your vote!

### **Other Motions**

- Motions to refer/commit/postpone, etc., are also in order during debate. In all, there are about ten possible motions a commissioner could make! If you want to do something and do not understand the official process, simply seek to be recognized by the Moderator and, once recognized, ask about how you can best accomplish your objective. You can also check with the Stated Clerk beforehand. The Stated Clerk's job is to help you accomplish what you want to accomplish in the meeting to the best of the Clerk's ability, regardless of whether the Clerk would agree to disagree with you.

### **Ending Debate**

- Debate will end in one of three ways:
  - The Moderator sees that no other commissioners wish to speak.
  - Time has expired on the piece of business, and time has not been extended.
  - The question has been “called.”

- When the time allotted has expired on an item of business, the Moderator will indicate that fact to commissioners. Commissioners can then choose to extend for several minutes or not. Debate ends if time is not extended.
- At any point during the debate, a commissioner can rise and, after being recognized and stating their name/church, can say, “Mr./Madam Moderator, I move the previous question” or “I call the question.” This means that the commissioner making the motion wants to stop the debate and move to a vote.
- The Moderator has the right to not entertain the motion to end the debate and may exercise that option if others are still seeking to debate and the time allotted has not expired.
- The motion to move the previous question must be seconded. There is no debate on this motion, and it takes a 2/3 majority to approve ending the debate.

### **Voting**

- Voting is generally done by voice vote first. Depending on the motion, a “simple majority” (over 50%) or a “super-majority” (usually 2/3 of those voting) will be required.
- If the voice vote is inconclusive, the Moderator or a commissioner can call for “division.”
- If division occurs, the Moderator will either ask people to stand for a vote or appoint tellers to tally hand votes.
- In some cases, a written ballot will be held. The Leader Team usually decides on this before a presbytery meeting, although any commissioner can make a motion for a written ballot process. You can also stand and request that the vote be taken by written ballot.