

FOR THE FIRST TIME COMMISSIONER

A GUIDE TO PARTICIPATING IN THE STATED MEETINGS OF THE PRESBYTERY OF ELIZABETH

Now **Discussion** can take place, members of the Presbytery taking turns to offer opinions, clarifications, ask questions, or seek to persuade their fellow members about the Motion.

Amendments, changes in the language and formulation of the Motion can be offered and each voted on in turn. Sometimes it can get complicated.

Calling the question is not unusual if the debate goes long and someone decides it is time to move on. This move can end discussion and bring on a vote.

Ministers and candidates may be examined on their Statements of Faith. A **Motion to Arrest an Examination** will occur if the questions go on too long. It is like ‘calling the question’. If passed, the vote to accept the minister or candidate as a member of or under care of the Presbytery will then be taken.

More rarely, someone may call for **the Order of the Day**. The docket is time sensitive. If things are running behind, this Motion can move debate forward to where it needs to be on the Docket, skipping anything in between—even to forcing adjournment.

In you have questions about anything, ask someone. Name tags make introductions easy. Feel free to ask your neighbors in the pews. As a Presbytery, we would prefer inquiring whispers to puzzled silence.

Finally, it may seem like the reason we meet is to “do things decently and in order”. In fact, we do all to the Glory of God.

Introduction

Welcome to the Stated Meeting of the Presbytery of Elizabeth. For the next five hours, you are going to observe and participate in debates and examinations, hear reports on diverse topics in many areas, worship with pastors and fellow elder commissioners, and be expected to make informed decisions as voting members of a middle governing body of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

The first meeting can be overwhelming. Robert’s Rules for debate and decision can seem unnaturally stiff and cumbersome. The number of reports and diversity of information flowing out of each Meeting can appear insurmountable. Many times, you may enter into a debate that has already been going on for an extended period of time with no opportunity to be caught up on what has already happened. You will be asked to make informed decisions on matters you are seeing for the first time. You may be thrust into small groups, you may find the discussions range from the sublime to the ridiculous, you will probably feel at least once during the Meeting that you are out of your depth.

This primer is designed to introduce you to the controlled chaos that is the Stated Meeting of the Presbytery.

The Council of the Presbytery of Elizabeth

For corrections or updates, please contact Rev. Peter Hofstra at
pastorpeter@fpcperthamboy.org. Last updated 12.09.09

Start with **the Docket**. It is the table of contents for the meeting. It is hammered out well in advance of the Meeting and is designed to move things in an orderly fashion. It is time coded to keep the Meeting on track. Certain things to take special note of: **Dinner**, whether sit down or brown bag, is an informal time of fellowship and sharing. The **Worship Service** grounds the whole meeting in Christ. It is often the only time when the ministers present can participate in-not lead-the service of worship.

With the Docket there may appear to be hundreds of other pages of information, either emailed ahead of time or handed out at the meeting. There is a numbering system, included in the packet, but some papers will defy it. Taking the time to match reports to the items on the Docket will speed your process, even if you do not have time to read everything.

A large number of pages are the **Minutes**, the official record of what happened at previous Stated Meeting of the Presbytery and meeting of the Presbytery Council. They can be helpful to catch you up on this meeting, especially ongoing debates.

The **Council** of the Presbytery is made up of, among others, the chairpersons and moderators of the different units of the Presbytery. The role of Council is to serve as a filter for the information that will come before Presbytery, setting the Docket, allotting time, and focusing the work of the whole body.

Within the Docket, near the top, is the **Consent Agenda**. Council seeks to determine if certain items can be presented with an assumption of consent on the part of the entire Presbytery, and not as separate items requiring time for reporting and decision making. You are encouraged to read those reports ahead of time. Any member of the Presbytery may request any item on the Consent Agenda be moved onto the Docket for consideration.

The Docket is like a box of chocolates, you never really know what you are going to get.

Your Participation

As a Presbytery Commissioner, you have the right and expectation to vote on matters brought up at the Stated Meeting and you have the privilege of speaking on the Floor. Please stand up, identify yourself and your church, coming out to the microphone if appropriate, and be sure to address the Moderator directly, not someone else. You are asked to use inclusive language-language that is gender inclusive, not simply assuming that the male pronoun covers everyone.

How Decisions are Made

Decisions and discussions are governed by **Robert's Rules of Order**, the standard set of democratic Parliamentary procedures. You are probably familiar with some of this from your Sessions. Common at Presbytery are the following:

Making a Motion. An item for decision is presented. It is precisely worded and recorded for debate. Unless proposed by a Unit of Presbytery, the Motion cannot come from a single person.

A **Second** is required, so that at least two people back any decision coming to the Floor. You will observe plenty of volunteers willing to make the Motion or Second it.