

Parliamentary Procedure for General Assembly Committees



Parliamentary Procedure for GA Committees

1. Foundational Principles
2. Preparing for Business
3. Handling Business
4. Subsidiary Motions
5. Privileged Motions
6. Incidental Motions

Part 1

Foundational Principles



Part 1: Foundational Principles

- Foundations and Values of the General Assembly
- Principles of Presbyterian Government
- General Principles of Councils
- Principles Underlying Parliamentary Law

Foundations and Values of the General Assembly

“The General Assembly is the council of the whole church
and it is representative of the unity of the
synods, presbyteries, sessions, and congregations of the
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)...”
(Book of Order, G-3.0501)

(continues)

Foundations and Values of the General Assembly

“The General Assembly constitutes the bond of union, community, and mission among all its congregations and councils, to the end that the whole church becomes a community of faith, hope, love and witness”
(Book of Order, G-3.0501)

Foundations and Values of the General Assembly

“With glad and grateful hearts, we affirm these core values, characteristics and commitments of the General Assembly in three areas: worship of God, creation of community, and faithful discernment and governance.”

The Standing Rules of The General Assembly, Part 1

Principles of Presbyterian Government

“Presbyters are not simply to reflect the will of the people,
but rather to seek together to
find and represent the will of Christ.”

F-3.0204, *Book of Order 2005-2027*

Principles of Presbyterian Government

“Decisions shall be reached in councils by vote,
following opportunity for discussion and discernment,
and a majority shall govern.”

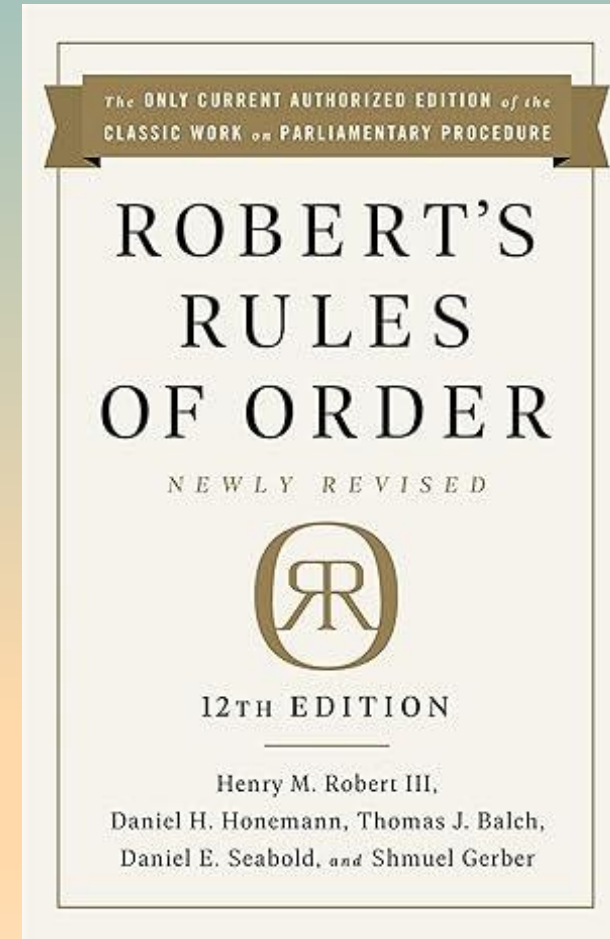
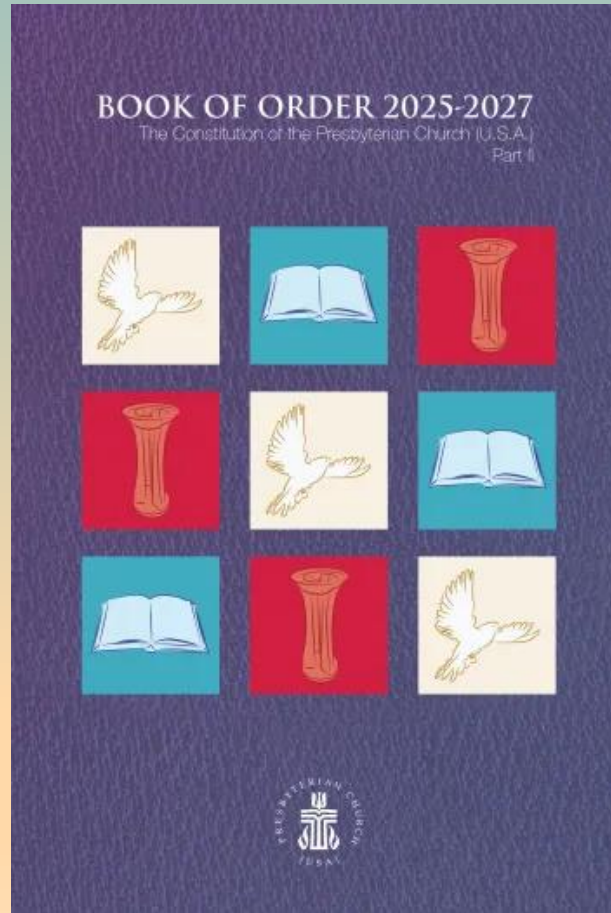
F-3.0205, *Book of Order 2005-2027*

General Principles of Councils

“Meetings of councils shall be opened and closed with prayer.
Meetings shall be conducted in accordance with the most recent
edition of
Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised,
except when it is in contradiction to this Constitution.”

G-3.0105, *Book of Order 2025-27*

General Principles of Councils



Principles Underlying Parliamentary Law

“The rules of parliamentary law ...

are based on a regard for the rights:

- of the majority,
- of the minority, especially a strong minority –
greater than one third,
- of individual members,
- of absentees, and
- of all these together.”

Principles Underlying Parliamentary Law

“The moderator possesses the authority necessary for preserving order and for conducting efficiently the business of the body.

He or she shall convene and adjourn the body in accordance with its own action.”

G-3.0104, *Book of Order 2025-2027*

Principles Underlying Parliamentary

Speakers:

- (usually) seek and obtain recognition before speaking and do not interrupt another speaker
- address the Moderator
- confine remarks to the pending question
- shall not impugn another member or his/her motives
- may not speak against their own motion
- may not speak a second time on a motion until everyone who wishes has spoken
- shall honor time limits

Principles Underlying Parliamentary Law

“Councils may also make use of processes of discernment in their deliberations prior to a vote as agreed upon by the body.”

G-3.0105, *Book of Order* 2025-27

Part 2

Preparing for Business



General Assembly Business

The General Assembly receives the following types of business:

- Overtures from presbyteries and synods
- Reports from entities established by and/or responsible to the GA
- Minutes from synods for general administrative review
- Commissioners' resolutions submitted by assembly commissioners

Committee Business

Item of Business:

- Recommendations
- Rationale
- Advisory Committee on the Constitution (ACC) Advice
- Advice and Counsel Memoranda
- Comments
- Financial Implications
- Appendix

Committee Business

Hearing From Others:

- Public Hearings (Standing Rules, Part 4 B.14.)
- Overture Advocates (Standing Rules, Part 4, B.12.h.)
- Resource Persons (Standing Rules, Part 4, B.12.i)
- Financial Representatives (Standing Rules, Part 4, B. 12.j.)

Committee Business

Draft Agenda:

- Committees meet via Zoom from June 22-June 24
- Creating a community agreement/covenant
- All business items referred to the committee
- Hearing from others speaking to the committee
- Committee deliberations & decision making
- Worship & opportunity for prayer

Part 3

Handling Business



Options for Recommendation to the Assembly

- Approve
 - with amendment and/or comment
- Disapprove
 - with comment
- Refer (to a named agency/committee)
 - with comment
- Answer by an alternate resolution (adoption of new text)
- Answer by action taken on a different item in the same committee

Getting to a Motion in Committee

“We will now consider item [##], [title or brief description].”

In some cases, you might be looking at more than one item at a time.

“We will first hear from [overture advocates, a representative of the committee or other group bringing the report, ACC, etc., in appropriate order]. I recognize [resource person] to speak to this recommendation.”

Resource person(s) speak when recognized.

“Thank you, _____.”

“Are there any questions?”

Depending on the circumstances, you can invite questions after all have spoken or after each speaker.

“Is there a motion?”

Processing a Motion

1. Motion moved
2. [Seconded]
3. Moderator states the question
4. Moderator calls for debate
5. Moderator states the question
6. Moderator puts the question
7. Vote taken
8. Moderator declares results
9. Moderator explains effect

Tools to Handle Some Business

- Multiple similar items of business
- Division of a Question (RONR 27:1-15)
- Consideration by paragraph or seriatim (RONR 28:1-11)

Options for Discussion of Business

- Quasi Committee of the Whole (RONR 52:19-23)
- Informal Consideration (RONR 52:24-27)
- Aids to Crystallization of Opinion (RONR 52:28)

Chart #1: The Ranking Motions

Characteristics:		In order when another has the floor	Must be seconded	Debatable	Amendable	Vote required for adoption	Can be reconsidered
PRIVILEGED MOTIONS:							
13.	Fix the Time to Which to Adjourn	No	Yes	No	Yes	Maj	Yes
12.	Adjourn	No	Yes	No	No	Maj	No
11.	Recess	No	Yes	No	Yes	Maj	No
10.	Question of Privilege	Yes	No	No	No	—	No
9.	Call for Orders of the Day	Yes	No	No	No	—	No
SUBSIDIARY MOTIONS:							
8.	Lay on the Table	No	Yes	No	No	Maj	No
7.	Previous Question (“Call the Question”)	No	Yes	No	No	2/3	Yes
6.	Limit or Extend Limits of Debate	No	Yes	No	Yes	2/3	Yes
5.	Postpone Definitely	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maj	Yes
4.	Refer (or Commit)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maj	Yes ¹
3.	Amend	No	Yes	Yes ²	Yes	Maj	Yes
2.	Postpone Indefinitely	No	Yes	Yes	No	Maj	Yes ³
1.	MAIN MOTION	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maj	Yes

Chart #2: Some Common Additional Motions

Characteristics:	In order when another has the floor	Must be seconded	Debatable	Amendable	Vote required for adoption	Can be reconsidered
INCIDENTAL MOTIONS:						
Appeal a Ruling of the Chair	Yes	Yes	Yes ⁴	No	Maj	Yes
Close Nominations or Polls	No	Yes	No	Yes	2/3	No
Consider by Paragraph (or Consider "Seriatim")	No	Yes	No	Yes	Maj	No
Divide the Question	No	Yes	No	Yes	Maj	No
Division of the Assembly	Yes	No	No	No	—	No
Object to Consideration ⁵	Yes	No	No	No	2/3	Yes ⁶
Request for Information or Parliamentary Inquiry	Yes	No	No	No	—	No
Point of Order	Yes	No	No	No	—	No
Suspend the Rules	No	Yes	No	No	2/3	No
MOTIONS THAT BRING A QUESTION AGAIN BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY:						
Reconsider	No	Yes	Yes ⁷	No	Maj	No
Rescind or Amend Something Previously Adopted	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	2/3 ⁸	Yes
Take from the Table	No	Yes	No	No	Maj	No

Part 4

Subsidiary Motions



Chart #1: The Ranking Motions

Characteristics:		In order when another has the floor	Must be seconded	Debatable	Amendable	Vote required for adoption	Can be reconsidered
PRIVILEGED MOTIONS:							
13.	Fix the Time to Which to Adjourn	No	Yes	No	Yes	Maj	Yes
12.	Adjourn	No	Yes	No	No	Maj	No
11.	Recess	No	Yes	No	Yes	Maj	No
10.	Question of Privilege	Yes	No	No	No	—	No
9.	Call for Orders of the Day	Yes	No	No	No	—	No
SUBSIDIARY MOTIONS:							
8.	Lay on the Table	No	Yes	No	No	Maj	No
7.	Previous Question (“Call the Question”)	No	Yes	No	No	2/3	Yes
6.	Limit or Extend Limits of Debate	No	Yes	No	Yes	2/3	Yes
5.	Postpone Definitely	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maj	Yes
4.	Refer (or Commit)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maj	Yes ¹
3.	Amend	No	Yes	Yes ²	Yes	Maj	Yes
2.	Postpone Indefinitely	No	Yes	Yes	No	Maj	Yes ³
1.	MAIN MOTION	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maj	Yes

Main Motion

1

Does it Need a Second?

- Most motions require a second
 - except one member alone can:
 - raise a question of privilege
 - call for the orders of the day
 - request information or make a parliamentary inquiry
 - raise a point of order
 - demand division of the assembly

Can We Talk About It / Debate It?

- Most motions may be debated – except...
 - ...motions that require no second
 - ...motions that are about how long to debate or when to meet
 - limit or extend limits of debate
 - move the previous question
 - lay on the table
 - take from the table
 - recess
 - adjourn
 - fix the time to which to adjourn
 - ...motions about organizing debate and voting
 - consider by paragraph – seriatim
 - divide the question

Can We Change the Motion?

- Most motions may be amended – except...
 - ...motions that don't need a second
 - ...lay on the table or take from the table
 - ...call the question
 - ...suspend the rules
 - ...appeal a ruling of the chair
 - ...reconsider
 - ...adjourn

Primary Amendment

3.1

Forms of Amendment

- to insert [between words] or add [at the end] – words or paragraphs
- to strike out – words or paragraphs
- to do both (strike out some words and insert/add others)

The words must be consecutive.

That all commissioners and Young Adult Advisory Delegates receive a T-shirt commemorating the 1700th anniversary of The Nicene Creed.

That all commissioners receive a T-shirt commemorating the 1700th anniversary of The Nicene Creed.

Secondary Amendment

3.2

Not amendable

That all commissioners *and Theological Student* and Young Adult Advisory Delegates receive a T-shirt commemorating the 1700th anniversary of The Nicene Creed.

That all commissioners and Young Adult Advisory Delegates receive a T-shirt commemorating the 1700th anniversary of The Nicene Creed.

That all commissioners receive a T-shirt commemorating the 1700th anniversary of The Nicene Creed.

Substitute Motion

A substitute motion is a motion to amend by striking out an entire paragraph, section, or article—or a complete main motion or resolution—and inserting a different paragraph or other unit in its place.

RONR 12:69

MAIN MOTION:

That all commissioners and Advisory Delegates receive a T-shirt commemorating the 1700th anniversary of The Nicene Creed.

SUBSTITUTE MOTION:

That everyone in attendance at the General Assembly be encouraged to celebrate the 1700th anniversary of The Nicene Creed by wearing a red T-shirt on Thursday.

Handling a Substitute Motion

1. Perfection of the main motion
2. Perfection of the substitute motion
3. “*Shall the substitute motion become the main motion?*”
 - The merits of both motions can be debated
 - No other amendments are in order
4. Vote on “*Shall the substitute motion become the main motion?*”
 - In favor of the current main motion, vote no
 - In favor of the substitute motion, vote yes
5. Vote on the now current main motion

A Word about Minority Reports

At least two members of an assembly committee may submit a written minority report expressing views that differ from those in the committee's recommendation. If the moderators of the committee affirm that the positions expressed...were presented to the whole committee during its consideration of the matter, the Stated Clerk shall distribute it to the assembly with the report of the committee. A minority report must be appropriate for consideration as a substitute motion.

SR 4.B.16.a.

A Word about Voting

- **Majority or 2/3?** Two-thirds vote often necessary to abridge the rights of members:
 - End debate (“Call the Question”)
 - Limit or extend limits of debate
 - Changing something that has already been decided
 - Suspend the rules
 - Rescind or amend something previously adopted
- **Counting the vote, doing the math**
- **Unanimous Consent** (RONR 4:58-63)

Unanimous Consent

- A motion is made
- The Moderator States, “If there is no objection...”
- Pause...look around the room...give the body time....
- The Moderator states, “So ordered.”

**Postpone
Indefinitely
2**

Commit/Refer

4

Postpone Definitely

5

**Majority vote
(unless the time
when the motion will be taken up
creates a special order
for a particular time –
then, 2/3)**

**Limit Debate/
Extend Limits
of Debate**

6

Not debatable

2/3 vote

Previous Question

7

Not debatable

Not amendable

2/3 vote

Lay on the Table

8

Not debatable

Not amendable

May not be reconsidered

Part 5

Privileged Motions



Chart #1: The Ranking Motions

Characteristics:		In order when another has the floor	Must be seconded	Debatable	Amendable	Vote required for adoption	Can be reconsidered
PRIVILEGED MOTIONS:							
13.	Fix the Time to Which to Adjourn	No	Yes	No	Yes	Maj	Yes
12.	Adjourn	No	Yes	No	No	Maj	No
11.	Recess	No	Yes	No	Yes	Maj	No
10.	Question of Privilege	Yes	No	No	No	—	No
9.	Call for Orders of the Day	Yes	No	No	No	—	No
SUBSIDIARY MOTIONS:							
8.	Lay on the Table	No	Yes	No	No	Maj	No
7.	Previous Question (“Call the Question”)	No	Yes	No	No	2/3	Yes
6.	Limit or Extend Limits of Debate	No	Yes	No	Yes	2/3	Yes
5.	Postpone Definitely	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maj	Yes
4.	Refer (or Commit)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maj	Yes ¹
3.	Amend	No	Yes	Yes ²	Yes	Maj	Yes
2.	Postpone Indefinitely	No	Yes	Yes	No	Maj	Yes ³
1.	MAIN MOTION	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maj	Yes

Call for the Orders of the Day

9

Not seconded

Not debatable

Not amendable

No vote – ruled on by the moderator –
unless it is being refused, then 2/3 negative

May not be reconsidered

Question of Privilege

10

Not seconded –

unless requires formal action

Not debatable

Not amendable

No vote – ruled on by the moderator

May not be reconsidered

Recess

11

Not debatable

May not be reconsidered

Adjourn

12

Not debatable

Not amendable

May not be reconsidered

**Fix the Time
to Which to Adjourn
13**

Not debatable

Part 6

Incidental Motions



Chart #2: Some Common Additional Motions

Characteristics:	In order when another has the floor	Must be seconded	Debatable	Amendable	Vote required for adoption	Can be reconsidered
INCIDENTAL MOTIONS:						
Appeal a Ruling of the Chair	Yes	Yes	Yes ⁴	No	Maj	Yes
Close Nominations or Polls	No	Yes	No	Yes	2/3	No
Consider by Paragraph (or Consider "Seriatim")	No	Yes	No	Yes	Maj	No
Divide the Question	No	Yes	No	Yes	Maj	No
Division of the Assembly	Yes	No	No	No	—	No
Object to Consideration ⁵	Yes	No	No	No	2/3	Yes ⁶
Request for Information or Parliamentary Inquiry	Yes	No	No	No	—	No
Point of Order	Yes	No	No	No	—	No
Suspend the Rules	No	Yes	No	No	2/3	No
MOTIONS THAT BRING A QUESTION AGAIN BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY:						
Reconsider	No	Yes	Yes ⁷	No	Maj	No
Rescind or Amend Something Previously Adopted	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	2/3 ⁸	Yes
Take from the Table	No	Yes	No	No	Maj	No

Point of Order

Not seconded

Not debatable –

unless the moderator submits it to the body

Not amendable

No vote – ruled on by the moderator

unless it is submitted to the body or appealed

May not be reconsidered

Request for Information or Parliamentary Inquiry

Not seconded

Not debatable

Not amendable

No vote

May not be reconsidered

Appeal from a Ruling of the Chair

Not amendable

Shall the decision of the moderator be sustained?

**Those who support the chair vote in the affirmative,
and a majority or a tie will sustain the ruling.**

Divide the Question

**Not debatable
May not be reconsidered**

Consideration by Paragraph (Seriatim)

**Not debatable
May not be reconsidered**

Division of the Assembly

Not seconded

Not debatable

Not amendable

No vote

May not be reconsidered

Reconsider

Not amendable

**In committee, takes a 2/3 vote
unless there is prior notice**

**(or all who voted
on the prevailing side are present)**

May not be reconsidered

**In committee, may only be made by someone
who did not vote on the losing side.**

Overwhelmed?

