

## Voting on and Reporting Proposed *Book of Order* Amendments

When the General Assembly sends proposed amendments to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes, the stated clerk of each presbytery must report the results of that voting. This is now done on the PC(USA) Website, with appropriate features for verification. For each amendment, the stated clerk marks on the reporting form whether the presbytery's vote was affirmative or negative. There is no means for the stated clerk to report the numbers of votes for or against; the report simply records whether the total presbytery vote was negative or affirmative.

It is advisable for the presbytery committee and the stated clerk to agree on organizing the report and recommendations so that the presbytery is able to vote “yes” in favor of the amendment and “no” in opposition. When the presbytery votes on an amendment, the question is decided by a simple majority vote. No absentee or proxy votes are allowed. Of course, the proposed amendments cannot be further amended by the presbytery.

The General Assembly asks the presbytery one question: Does the presbytery concur or not concur in the proposed amendment? In sending actions to the presbyteries for their “affirmative or negative votes,” it is the clear expectation of the wider church that presbyteries will ordinarily vote for or against an amendment. Since there are 173 presbyteries, it takes 87 affirmative votes for the *Book of Order* to be amended (G-18.0301d). The effect of a presbytery stated clerk marking the “negative” choice is that the amendment does not get a vote to AFFIRM.

In answer to confusion in recent years, our office recommends that the presbytery's ballot, if used, offer only two choices for the voting: FOR or AGAINST a particular amendment. Some clerks have used the OGA reporting form as a ballot distributed to the presbytery; this has caused confusion since the form had TAKE NO ACTION as an option to be reported to the OGA. The OGA reporting form should not be used as the ballot. An individual can “take no action” by abstaining from voting.

Taking no action is not a responsible choice for a presbytery as a whole to make. A presbytery should not give up its voice in decisions about amendments to the constitution. A vote to take no action is giving up that voice.

Like a vote against an amendment, the effect of a presbytery taking no action is that the amendment does not get a vote to AFFIRM. If a presbytery does not take any vote at all on an amendment, the presbytery's stated clerk must still completely account to the Office of the General Assembly for each amendment sent to the presbytery by returning the report form, reporting that the presbytery did not act.

The amendment process does not ask for the presbytery's reason for its decision. There is no provision for the presbytery to enclose a comment or statement of reasons with its vote. If a presbytery wants to communicate something more than its aye or nay or the fact

that it has not acted on an amendment, it may do this by sending an OVERTURE to the General Assembly (see G-11.0103t(3)). Such an overture could ask the assembly to formally consider doing something else instead of what is proposed in the amendment sent down.

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