

CONDUCTING ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

NARRATOR 3: Hello, my name is NARRATOR 3. I would like to tell you more about your role as a commissioner or advisory delegate to the 218th General Assembly meeting of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and how the assembly conducts its business.

The General Assembly considers a great many reports and recommendations. Material about the specific issues that you will be considering during the assembly will be available online at www.pc-biz.org. Commissioners and advisory delegates, as well as all other participants, are asked to bring laptops for use at the assembly. For more information on PC-biz, as well as the laptop requirements please see the video called "PC-biz: Tracking Assembly Business".

Business comes before the assembly from several sources. First reports and recommendations come from the various committees and areas of the General Assembly Council, the Office of the General Assembly, and the four other General Assembly entities. Overtures from synods and presbyteries are the second source of assembly business. These governing bodies use overtures to bring recommendations and matters of concern to the whole church. Commissioners' Resolutions are the third source of General Assembly business. As a commissioner, you are entitled to sign up to two resolutions that will come before the assembly. Finally, there may be business that has been referred to this assembly from past assemblies.

You need to be aware that a number of the proposals coming before the assembly will have financial implications. For example, an action asking that the Stated Clerk send every church a letter about an issue might have a financial implication of \$5,000 for printing, envelopes and postage. At the initial plenary session a presentation will be made about which proposals will impact either the current or future budgets, or both. When you vote on any proposal at the General Assembly, please make sure that you have an understanding of the financial impact of your decision. If you're not, don't hesitate to ask.

Due to the sheer volume of business to be considered, the assembly uses several methods for moving swiftly through routine business. Sometimes the Assembly uses a motion called a "consent agenda." Included here will be what are thought to be non-controversial actions that deal with ongoing activity or routine business. The

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person presenting the committee's report will say, "Items x, y, and z are in the consent agenda. I move its adoption on behalf of the committee. The Moderator will ask "does anyone wish to remove any item?" In response, commissioners should be at the microphone and raise their hand. When you are recognized, tell the Moderator which item you'd like removed from the consent agenda for further discussion.

Sometimes the assembly uses the short form of voting. A recommendation is made, moved and the Moderator will ask, "Are there any questions? Then, is there any objection? It is approved." That completes the voting. The short form of voting can assist the assembly in moving through a very large amount of business in a limited time.

Finally, one of the ways that votes can be taken at the assembly is through using an electronic response system. At your seat you'll find an electronic key pad which is linked to a system that tallies the votes of all commissioners and advisory delegates in a matter of seconds. This system saves time, provides for an accurate count, and insures confidentiality. When a vote is ready to be taken, watch the video screens at the front of the room and listen to the instructions which the Moderator will give you. Then vote by pressing the number on the key pad that represents your choice on a particular issue. The results of the vote will be quickly displayed on the video screens and announced by the Moderator. Early on at the assembly you'll have some time to get comfortable with the electronic voting system, and even make some practice votes.

Each of these is a tool to assist the assembly in handling a large volume of work. In each case, you'll need to listen carefully as the speaker announces the specific recommendations on which you're voting. Each particular action will be identified by the numbers and letters in the assembly committee report. If you are confused, please be sure to ask those around you for help, or ask the Moderator for clarification.

Some of the most challenging times in the life of the General Assembly will be when the assembly faces conflict. People will often disagree about the allocation of limited funds, or about a particular issue facing the church. But remember, we're expressing our understanding, developed with prayerful guidance, of where God is leading the Presbyterian Church. The people you disagree

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with are trying to do the same thing. They are partners with you in this Christian pilgrimage, seeking God's guidance for our church at this particular time. I urge you to read "Seeking to be Faithful Together: Guidelines for Presbyterians during times of Disagreement." This too is available on PC-biz and will help you handle disagreements with integrity and grace.

Finally, when you go back home your presbytery is likely to ask you for a report. People will want to know what the assembly was like. Keep some perspective on the days you spend at the assembly. Plan how you will interpret your experience to those who can't possibly imagine what you have been through, but who have high expectations of your service to our church.

This is only a brief introduction to conducting assembly business. More information will be available on the web at www.pcusa.org/ga218, and will also be provided to you during orientation.

ONSCREEN: for more information, contact:
Office of the General Assembly
888.728.7228 x2417
E-mail to gameetingservice@pcusa.org
www.pcusa.org/ga218