

**A Guide to  
Parliamentary Procedure**  
*In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*



by

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## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND PRELIMINARY CONCEPTS

Section F-1.0401 of the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity in the *Book of Order* (quoting Rom. 12:2) states that in its life and work, “the Church seeks ‘not [to] be conformed to this world, but [to] be transformed by the renewing of [our] minds, so that [we] may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.’” Section F-3.0205 goes on to say that in our church body, “decisions shall be reached in councils by vote, following opportunity for discussion and discernment, and a majority shall govern.”

The first paragraph of G-3.0105 of the Form of Government of the *Book of Order* states that meetings of councils of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) “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.” And then it notes that “councils may also make use of processes of discernment in their deliberations prior to a vote as agreed upon by the body.”

Thus, there are two ways for discernment to take place before a council takes final action on a matter. The first way is to utilize the motions and procedures of *Robert’s Rules of Order*. This could be called “discernment under the rules;” that is, discernment that occurs within the course of processing a motion and is therefore subject to the procedural rules of our parliamentary authority. The second way is to utilize procedures and processes other than *Robert’s Rules of Order*. This could be called “discernment out from under the rules.”

Discernment under the rules can occur in a variety of ways. For example, when it becomes clear in debate on a motion that a reasonable consensus does not exist on a matter, a council can work to build consensus by granting its members adequate time in debate to carefully listen to the perspectives being presented, and then develop and propose amendments that seek to make the proposed action more acceptable to a greater number. This may require utilizing such motions as extending the limits of debate, considering a matter informally, or postponing to a definite time. Alternatively, referring a matter to a committee can be a way to empower a smaller group to prayerfully consider a matter and seek collaborative solutions.

It can also be helpful to spend time in discernment out from under the rules. The 11th edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* (RONR) itself acknowledges this practice. In a section entitled “Aids to the Crystallization of Opinion,” RONR states:

The more traditional aids to the crystallization of opinion in societies have been, simply, to take a Recess or to refer the matter to a committee—often a large committee composed of members representing differing views in the society, such as a committee of the whole or one of its alternate forms. In more recent years, a practice has developed of establishing breakout groups with every member in attendance being urged to participate in a group (RONR, p. 541, ll. 20–28).

While referring a matter or considering it as a committee of the whole would be methods for discernment under the rules, discernment during a recess or in breakout groups would not. Such times can be built into meeting agendas, or can be created spontaneously (by means of a motion to recess with directions about what may occur during the recess). They may also take place as separate events that are not actual meetings of the council. And the procedures to be followed in such gatherings can be devised by those who plan them.

Those in ordered ministries of the PC(USA) have promised to “further the peace, unity, and purity of the church” (*Book of Order*, W-4.4003g). These goals are sometimes made even more challenging by a system of governance that relies on majority rule. When matters under consideration are potentially divisive, presbyters may wish to consider options for continuing discernment instead of moving forward with the action. Motions to recess, refer, postpone (either indefinitely or definitely), or even reconsider (if the action has already been taken) are among the options available to members in such circumstances.

This booklet is not a substitute for RONR. Only the full 11th edition of RONR is the complete current parliamentary authority for councils of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The intent of this booklet is to provide an overview of RONR’s major principles and a helpful resource for immediate reference in meetings.

RONR seeks to balance the rights of the majority (to prevail), with the rights of all members present (to be heard, to vote, and to hold office), the rights of a minority—especially a minority of at least one-third (to be fully heard and to be ensured of fairness in vote counts, etc.), and even the rights of those not present (to be confident that the scope of business

considered does not exceed what was noticed in the call for the meeting). Generally, when any of these rights is being limited or denied, a vote of at least two-thirds is required. And sometimes a proposed action is simply “out of order” under the current circumstances.

As the *Book of Order* states, our Constitution (*Book of Confessions* and *Book of Order*) takes precedence over RONR in any matter on which they disagree (G-3.0105). Additionally, as described in RONR (pp. 15–17), organizations may adopt “special rules of order” that take precedence over the rules in RONR. Those rules are contained and should be clearly identified in each council’s *Manual of Administrative Operations (Manual)* required by G-3.0106 of the *Book of Order*.

RONR provides a framework of rules and procedures that when followed enables “deliberative assemblies” (decision making bodies) of various sizes and types to consider matters before them and make decisions in an orderly and efficient way. Those rules are based on the following assumptions about decision making in large groups:

- Only one person should “have the floor” at a time. Therefore, RONR outlines an orderly process for seeking recognition from the chair and for being “assigned the floor” by the chair. This even includes an orderly process for making motions that “interrupt” a speaker when the motion is of such extreme importance or urgency that the interruption is warranted.
- An assembly should only consider one matter at a time. Therefore, while a main motion is under consideration, the only additional motions that are in order are ones affecting the disposal of that motion or dealing with the assembly itself, its procedures, or some matter of privilege, in which case discussion of the main motion is temporarily suspended until that matter is resolved.
- Once an assembly has disposed of a matter, it shouldn’t be required to take it up again in the same session except for extraordinary reasons. Therefore, amending something previously adopted by an assembly usually requires a higher vote than that required to adopt it in the first place (even if it was adopted at some point in the distant past), or as in the case of the motion to reconsider, there are restrictions on when it can be moved and by whom.

## **SECTION 2: APPROPRIATE FORMALITY AND APPLICATION OF THE RULES**

RONR defines a total of eighty-six distinct motions. Some of the more common motions and the rules governing them are described in this booklet. But RONR itself provides variations of its rules for assemblies of “not more than about a dozen members present” (pp. 487–88), and for committees (pp. 500–501). Since most local church sessions fit this description of a “small assembly,” and since we *all* serve on committees at one time or another, it is important to become familiar with these relaxed rules.

The purpose of rules in a deliberative assembly is only to ensure that business is handled in an orderly and efficient manner. It is not to make meetings overly complicated or cumbersome. In a section entitled “Suggestions for Inexperienced Presiding Officers,” RONR states,

Good judgment is essential; the assembly may be of such a nature, through its unfamiliarity with parliamentary usage and its peaceable disposition, that strict enforcement of the rules, instead of assisting, would greatly hinder business. But in large assemblies where there is much work to be done, and especially where there is likelihood of trouble, the only safe course is to require a strict observance of the rules (RONR p. 456, ll. 14–21).

Councils of our church, especially sessions, should carefully review the sections in RONR for relaxed rules in committees and small assemblies, and determine what level of formality they require.

## **SECTION 3: ELECTRONIC MEETINGS**

As the use of technology increases, more and more meetings employ electronic elements, including either joining one or more people to meetings electronically, or holding meetings entirely by phone or the internet. The latest edition of RONR has a significantly expanded section on electronic meetings (pp. 97–99). The two most important guiding principles for electronic meetings are that they must be authorized in an organization’s governing documents (our *Manuals of Administrative Operations*), and the technology employed must allow for “the opportunity for simultaneous aural communication.” Otherwise, the decisions being made have not had the benefit of real discussion.

Additionally, RONR urges organizations that meet electronically to adopt special rules related to ensuring quorums, seeking recognition from the chair, and other aspects of meetings that work differently when participants aren't all in the same room together—and that will likely need to be written to apply to the specific technology being employed.

#### **SECTION 4: MEETING PROCESSES AND MOTIONS**

Several important organizational matters are the first orders of business at meetings of church councils. Some councils have traditions such as opening devotionals, intercessory prayer times, worship services, educational moments, or the like. In accordance with G-3.0105, all council meetings are officially opened and closed with prayer. Attendance is usually noted—first to determine the existence of a quorum (the minimum number of members required for a meeting to occur), and then also to establish how many possible votes may be cast. Finally, an agenda for the meeting is presented and adopted.

No particular agenda is mandatory. Many councils either have rules in their manuals or long-standing traditions about the order of business, which is perfectly acceptable. Councils have experimented with a variety of creative agendas some of which have included mirroring an order for worship, docketing significant time for discernment and fellowship, and integrating more prayer and worship moments throughout the meeting.

RONR offers a more traditional order for business:

1. Reading and Approval of Minutes
2. Reports of Officers, Boards, and Standing (permanently established) Committees
3. Reports of Special Committees (committees that exist only until they have completed a specified assigned task)
4. Special Orders (matters that have been given a special priority by vote of the body)
5. Unfinished Business and General Orders (matters previously introduced but not finished whether from the current or a prior meeting, or that were on the agenda of the last meeting but not taken up)
6. New Business (matters initiated in the present meeting)

While some of these items might not require any action (such as the reports of officers on their activities), when action needs to be taken it is accomplished by means of one or more *motions*—which may be presented as “recommendations” in a report. Recommendations are not *automatically* motions, however. They must be *moved* as such either by the maker of the report or by another member of the body.

The handling of motions follows a number of usual steps—certain of which may be altered for particular motions. Those steps are as follows:

1. A member rises and addresses the chair. In a large assembly, this may be done formally with an electronic recognition system. In a small assembly, it may be done by raising a hand instead of rising and addressing the chair.
2. The chair recognizes the member and “assigns” them the floor.
3. The member makes the motion.
4. Another member (without rising or being recognized) seconds the motion.
5. The chair “states the question” (“It is moved and seconded to ... Is there any debate?”).
6. Members seek recognition from the chair to debate the question, offer amendments, or make other motions that are in order at the time (each of which results in another cycle of these steps!). The chair recognizes and assigns the floor to each speaker. The maker of the motion usually has the right to speak first. If there are a number of speakers, the chair should attempt to alternate between those speaking “for” and “against” the motion. All remarks are addressed to the moderator (rather than to one or more specific individuals), facing the moderator if it is possible to do so.
7. The chair “puts the question;” that is, puts it to a vote by stating the question a final time.
8. The vote is taken, and the chair announces the result (“the ayes have it, and the motion is adopted,” or “the noes have it, and the motion is lost”).



## SECTION 5: THE RANKING MOTIONS (MAIN, SUBSIDIARY, AND PRIVILEGED)

As stated above, only one main motion can be considered at a time; however, while any motion is “pending” (being considered), certain other motions may be in order—that either affect the disposal of the pending motion or deal with the assembly itself, its procedures, or some matter of privilege. These are called “secondary motions.”

Thirteen of the motions in RONR are called “ranking motions,” because they stand in a strict hierarchy—meaning that while any of them are pending, the only additional ones that are in order for consideration are those of a *higher* rank than the immediately pending item. The ranking motions are on Chart #1 in the center of this booklet. The “Main Motion” is the lowest ranking motion (1.), while the motion “To Fix the Time to Which to Adjourn” is the highest (13.). So for example, while a motion to limit speeches on a matter to a certain number of minutes is pending (rank 6.), a motion to refer the matter to a committee (rank 4.) is not in order; however, a motion to take a recess (rank 11.) *would* be in order.

Parliamentarians often describe these motions as a “ladder,” which can be a helpful image. Each of the thirteen motions is like a “rung” on the ladder. We can go up and then back down the ladder as many times as necessary in the process of making a decision, being careful to hit the same rungs going down that we hit on the way up.

The first seven of the ranking secondary motions are called “subsidiary motions,” because they have the effect of either perfecting the main motion or altering the manner in which motions are considered. The remaining five ranking motions are called “privileged motions.” They affect the meeting itself, as well as the rights and privileges of its members.

Some of the primary characteristics of these motions are included on Chart #1. But it is important to note that not *all* of the characteristics are included, and also that simple “yes” or “no” requirements on a chart do not always tell the whole story. For instance, in the section on the seconding of motions, RONR states:

The requirement of a second is for the chair’s guidance. ... If the chair is certain that the motion meets with wide approval ... [the chair] can state the question without waiting for a second. However, until debate has begun ... a point of order can be raised ... and then the chair must proceed formally and ask if there is a second. ... After debate has begun or, if there is no debate, after any member has voted, the lack of a second has become immaterial and it is too late to make a point of order that the motion has not been seconded.” (RONR, p. 36, l. 26–p. 37, l. 12)

**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 |
|----------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>PRIVILEGED MOTIONS:</b> |   |                                     |                  |                  |           |                            |                     |
| 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                  |
| <b>SUBSIDIARY MOTIONS:</b> |   |                                     |                  |                  |           |                            |                     |
| 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 <sup>1</sup>    |
| 3.                         | Amend                                   | No                                  | Yes              | Yes <sup>2</sup> | Yes       | Maj                        | Yes                 |
| 2.                         | Postpone Indefinitely                   | No                                  | Yes              | Yes              | No        | Maj                        | Yes <sup>3</sup>    |
| 1.                         | MAIN MOTION                             | No                                  | Yes              | Yes              | Yes       | Maj                        | Yes                 |

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<sup>1</sup> Cannot be reconsidered if the committee has already begun its work.

<sup>2</sup> No if the motion being amended is not debatable—such as a motion to limit debate.

<sup>3</sup> Only an affirmative vote on this motion may be reconsidered.

**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 |
|---|-------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>INCIDENTAL MOTIONS:</b>                                      |                                     |                  |                  |           |                            |                     |
| Appeal a Ruling of the Chair                                    | Yes                                 | Yes              | Yes <sup>4</sup> | 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 <sup>5</sup>                            | Yes                                 | No               | No               | No        | 2/3                        | Yes <sup>6</sup>    |
| 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                  |
| <b>MOTIONS THAT BRING A QUESTION AGAIN BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY:</b> |                                     |                  |                  |           |                            |                     |
| Reconsider  | No                                  | Yes              | Yes <sup>7</sup> | No        | Maj                        | No                  |
| Rescind or Amend Something Previously Adopted                   | No                                  | Yes              | Yes              | Yes       | 2/3 <sup>8</sup>           | Yes                 |
| Take from the Table   | No                                  | Yes              | No               | No        | Maj                        | No                  |

<sup>4</sup> If the motion upon which the ruling was made is debatable.

<sup>5</sup> Can only be made before any debate has begun.

<sup>6</sup> Only a vote sustaining the objection can be reconsidered.

<sup>7</sup> If the motion being reconsidered is debatable.

<sup>8</sup> Majority vote with previous notice or a majority of the entire membership.

Below are a few important details about each of the ranking motions.

### **1. Main Motion**

Main motions are items that bring a matter before an assembly while no other motion is currently pending (under consideration). Well-worded main motions clearly state a proposed action—including instructions for who will carry out the action, when, and why, and if the action will cost money, how it will be paid.

### **2. Postpone Indefinitely**

Postponing indefinitely is a way in which an assembly can dispose of a main motion without having to state whether a majority are for or against the action. An item that has been postponed indefinitely cannot be considered again in the same session of the council (at the same General Assembly, for example) unless a majority of the members vote to reconsider the postponement. This motion can be very useful in cases where a council is aware that a reasonable consensus on an important or controversial matter does not yet exist—and isn't likely to emerge at the current meeting.

### **3. Amend (Including Substitute Motions)**

Amendment is the most common and frequently used secondary motion. It is the means by which main motions can be “perfected” by the body to achieve a greater consensus. In the simple form of amendment, particular consecutive words within a single paragraph of a motion are amended by either striking out words, adding/inserting words, or both.

In addition to the distinction between simple amendments and substitute motions, amendments can also be either “primary” amendments or “secondary” ones; that is, it is possible to “amend an amendment.” There are limits to what can be altered, however. For example, if the primary amendment is to strike out certain words, the only secondary amendment in order would be to remove some of the proposed words to be stricken. The addition of *new* words, or striking more words would need to come later, after the first amendment was either adopted or defeated. And only one secondary amendment is allowed at a time.

### *Substitute Motions*

Any amendment that goes beyond the limit of “consecutive words within a single paragraph” is a more complex form of amendment called a “substitute.” The primary difference in how the two forms of amendment are handled is that when a substitute motion is offered, an assembly is given the opportunity to “perfect” *both* the motion as it was presented, *and also* the substitute motion by means of secondary amendments, after which the assembly debates and votes on the question, “shall the substitute motion become the main motion?” If a majority votes to make the substitution, then the substitute motion becomes the main motion, and the process continues.

Minority reports from a committee to an assembly are generally presented as substitute motions—in the hope that the body will vote to substitute their report including its recommendations for the report and recommendations adopted by a majority of the committee. Councils may have established processes for how these reports are to be composed, presented, and handled by the assembly, which should be clearly stated in their manuals. For example, the General Assembly’s practice for handling minority reports is as follows:

- The committee offers its report and moves the adoption of its recommendations.
- The minority offers its report and moves that it be substituted for the committee’s report and recommendations.
- The moderator calls for amendments to the main motion (the committee’s report and recommendations). When no more amendments are offered, the moderator declares that it is “perfected,” after which no additional substantive changes can be made to the motion unless the body votes to reconsider the declaration.
- The moderator calls for amendments to the substitute motion, ending in a similar declaration.
- The moderator states the question, “shall the substitute motion become the main motion,” which is debated and put to a vote. The debate can include the merits of both the main motion and the substitute motion.

- The result of this vote is only to accept or reject the substitute motion; therefore, the question is then on the adoption of the main motion—which is either the perfected original main motion or the perfected substitute motion which has now become the main motion. *Only this vote* becomes the assembly’s “final action” on the matter.

#### **4. Commit or Refer**

Referral of business items to a committee is a time-honored and effective way to encourage thorough and thoughtful consideration. Sometimes matters are referred to existing standing or special committees. Other times, the motion to refer includes the *creation* of a special committee to handle the consideration. If that is the case, then the motion needs to be specific about who will serve on the committee and in what role(s), and who names the committee and when. Motions to refer can include any instructions to the committee about processes to follow, timelines for their work and reporting, and any other details an assembly wishes to give them.

#### **5. Postpone Definitely**

This is the usual way that an assembly makes adjustments to its schedule in the midst of a meeting—either when some other important matter needs to be addressed, or when it becomes evident in the midst of the consideration of a matter that additional time or information is needed. The motion maker would say something like, “I move to postpone this matter until 2:00 p.m. so that we can read the committee’s rationale over the lunch hour,” or “I move to postpone this matter until after the report of the property committee,” or so on.

If the council or entity involved meets at least quarterly, a motion can even be postponed until its next stated meeting. Or it can be postponed to an “adjourned meeting,” which is an agreed upon continuation of the current meeting held at another time and perhaps place—but such a meeting must already have been established, or be established by means of the privileged motion to “fix the time to which to adjourn” before the postponement is adopted.

#### **6. Limit or Extend Limits of Debate**

Unless an assembly has adopted a special rule that states otherwise, members may speak twice on any motion on the same day (although any-

one who hasn't yet spoken is entitled to preference in recognition), and speeches may be up to ten minutes in length. Many assemblies find it necessary to limit speeches more severely than this, and they may do so even in the midst of the meeting by a two-thirds vote. Occasionally, the opposite is also true, and previously adopted limits need to be relaxed. The same motion and rules apply. The motion maker simply says something like, "I move that debate be limited to five minutes per speaker."

### **7. Previous Question**

Previous Question (commonly known as "Calling the Question") is the means by which an assembly can end debate on one or more pending items even when there are some who still wish to keep debating. The motion requires a two-thirds vote. In its simplest form ("I move the previous question"), it only affects the *immediately pending* question. But it can also be made on the immediately pending question and any or all other consecutive pending questions. For example, if the immediately pending question is a secondary amendment, the previous question can be called on the secondary amendment, the secondary and primary amendments, or on "all pending questions;" namely, the secondary and primary amendments, followed immediately by the main motion either as amended or not.

### **8. Lay on the Table**

The motion to Lay on the Table (or "Table") is a means of temporarily suspending consideration of a matter because of a very urgent matter that has arisen. It is quick and relatively easy—because it is not debatable, and requires only a majority vote; however, it *also* requires a majority to then take the matter from the table, and bring it back to the assembly. It is *not* the motion that should be used if the intent is to make the matter go away entirely. The motion to Postpone Indefinitely is a more effective way to accomplish that end. Likewise, Postpone Definitely should be used when postponement should be an option for discussion rather than a pressing need because of present circumstances.

### **9. Call for the Orders of the Day**

When an assembly has agreed to deal with particular matters at certain times, it is in order for a member to call the chair's attention to the fact that the agreed upon time has arrived, even if another speaker currently has the floor.

## **10. Question of Privilege**

Questions of Privilege can be wide ranging, but are generally related to an assembly's processes or arrangements—such as the inability to hear a speaker, or heating and cooling issues, but also including such various matters as the need to dismiss visitors and meet in “executive session,” correcting inaccurate information that has been distributed or spoken, or requesting that a member be called to order for speaking inappropriately.

## **11. Recess**

While recesses are typically taken in long meetings for the purpose of attending to physical needs, they can also be helpful as a way for leaders to consult about meeting processes, or for “sides” in a debate to meet and work out their differences, or for other reasons. As stated above, a recess might be taken for a specific period of time in order to conduct a discernment process. If a recess is moved as a privileged motion (while another item of business is pending), it is not debatable and can only be made for an *immediate* recess; however, it can still be amended with respect to the recess's duration. If it is made when no motion is pending, it can be debated and the motion can be to set a recess for some future time in the meeting. When a recess is concluded, the meeting is called back to order and business resumes *exactly* as it stood when the recess was taken, beginning with whatever motion was immediately pending at the time.

## **12. Adjourn**

Adjournment brings the current meeting to an end. It is therefore nearly always a privileged motion, and it is important that assemblies do not adjourn without ensuring that necessary details of the next meeting have been established.

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

The time “to which to adjourn” means the time at which an assembly that still has business to accomplish will hold another meeting to complete its work. It is therefore the highest ranking motion because it could be necessary even while a motion to adjourn is pending.

## **SECTION 6: ADDITIONAL MOTIONS**

The remaining seventy-three motions in RONR are either “Incidental” motions, or motions “that bring a matter again before the assembly.” As



with most of the ranking and privileged motions, when incidental motions are made with no other motion pending, they are generally handled as any other main motion would be. If they are made while another motion is pending, they are usually handled immediately, if they are deemed to be in order. But as always, only the full description in RONR gives all the details.

Chart #2 in the center of this booklet lists a number of these motions, and some of their characteristics. Further descriptions of a few of them are given here.

### **Reconsider**

Reconsideration is a special way that an assembly can take a matter back up in the same session at which it was first decided when it believes it has acted rashly or when in the aftermath of a decision, additional information comes to light that is likely to change the vote. The motion maker is required to have voted with the prevailing side (or in committees, to have not voted on the losing side). The motion is *only* in order at the same session as the original action, or in assemblies of multiple days, no later than the next day after the action. After that, the motion to Rescind or Amend Something Previously Adopted must be used.

### **Rescind; Amend Something Previously Adopted**

Generally, an assembly can either rescind or amend an action taken at some point in the past, as long as the action has not already been carried out and cannot be undone. Unlike the motion to Reconsider, *any* member can make the motion; however, it requires either previous notice (which means announcing the intent to offer the motion at a prior meeting or in the call to the current meeting), a two-thirds vote, or a majority of the entire membership (not just those who are present and who vote on the motion).

Since actions of administrative commissions in the PC(USA) are considered actions of the appointing council, this is the motion by which any member of a council may attempt to alter an action of a commission of that council.

### **Point of Order**

A Point of Order is essentially a challenge to how a matter has been handled by the assembly (that is, whether provisions of the constitution,

bylaws, or rules of order of the organization have been applied correctly). It is made by a single member, and must usually be stated almost immediately to be in order. It can therefore interrupt the chair or a speaker. If someone says, "Point of Order!" the chair is required to ask them to state their point, and then "rule" whether or not the point is "well-taken." If it is well-taken, then the matter is immediately corrected. If it is not well-taken, then business resumes.

### **Appeal**

Likewise, any member can "Appeal from the Ruling of the Chair" with respect to any ruling the chair makes, although this motion requires a second. The effect of the appeal is that the assembly itself decides the question. Since the assembly has elected its presiding officer, the "presumption" is that their ruling was correct. For that reason, the chair has the privilege of both beginning and concluding the debate on an appeal, and the question on which the vote is taken is, "shall the ruling of the chair be sustained?" An "aye" vote therefore affirms the chair's ruling, and a "no" vote overturns the chair's ruling.

### **Requests and Inquiries**

Every member of an assembly has the right and the responsibility to be well-informed. A **Request for Information** can be made at any time. If the request is related to meeting procedures (for example, if a member is unclear about what motion is currently pending), the request is called a **Parliamentary Inquiry**. These requests are usually in order, and are generally either answered by the chair or someone to whom the chair directs the question.

Requests should never be used as a means to *make* a point or argue for one position or another, and any attempt to do so should be ruled out of order. If the request essentially challenges the meeting process, the motion **Point of Order** should be used. And if the request is for anything *other* than information (for example, a request to speak louder or turn up the heat in the building), then the request should take the form of the privileged motion **Question of Privilege**.

### **Consider Seriatim**

If the matter under consideration in an assembly is a resolution of more than one section or paragraph (such as a policy or a revision of one or more sections of a manual), it may be preferable to consider it "seria-

tim,” which means one after another in a series. When considering a motion in this way, each paragraph, section, or the like is opened for debate and perfection as a separate question (to which every member has the right to speak, even if they have exhausted their right to speak on another section), but the motion is not put to a vote until all sections have been perfected. Considering a matter seriatim requires a majority vote; however, the chair has the prerogative of proceeding as though it has been ordered by the assembly. If the chair does so, a member may instead move to consider the matter as a whole, which also then requires a majority vote.

## SECTION 7: VOTING

The final step in decision making (or in processing any motion) is to vote. Most votes require a majority of those present and voting. But other votes can require a greater consensus. There are a number of methods by which votes are taken—whether at the will of the chair, by vote of an assembly, or as required by its rules:

- **Unanimous Consent**

Much routine business is handled by means of “unanimous consent,” which means that the chair simply says, “is there any objection?” If no one immediately seeks recognition or says “I object,” then the chair says “it is so ordered.” In this form of voting, if *anyone* objects, the chair then proceeds to take the vote by another method.

- **Voice Vote**

Voice vote is the most usual form of voting. The chair says “all in favor, say aye,” pauses briefly, then says, “opposed no.” The chair declares which side “has it,” and says the motion is either adopted or defeated, gives any direction required as a result of the motion (such as, “the clerk will compose and send the approved letter”) and then announces the next pending item of business.

- **Rising Vote (or Show of Hands)**

If the chair or anyone else is unsure of which side prevailed on a voice vote, any member has the right to demand a “division,” by simply calling out “Division!” A division is *not* a counted vote.

It is simply a re-taking of the vote by either raising hands (in a small assembly) or standing.

- **Counted Vote**

A counted vote can always be ordered by the chair. But otherwise, it requires a majority vote of the members—yes, sometimes you have to vote on how to vote! And of course in some meetings there are electronic forms of voting available that present counted votes more efficiently (and are therefore used more frequently in the meeting).

- **Ballots and Roll Calls**

Finally, some votes are taken by ballot or roll call. Ballots have the effect of protecting the secrecy of the voter's choice, and are often used for elections or votes on controversial matters. Roll call votes have the opposite effect, since all voters' responses are recorded in the minutes. Either of these methods, if not specified in a council's manual, requires a majority vote.

It should be noted that when voting electronically, it is not always evident whether the vote is a simple counted vote (i.e., not necessarily secret), a ballot vote, or a roll call vote. This should therefore be clearly stated in a council's rules.