

# Presbytery of Northumberland: Approved Decorum for Presbytery Meetings

**Scriptural premise: *The Golden Rule* Matthew 7:12**

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. NIV

**Definition of Decorum:** Propriety of manner or conduct; grace arising from suitableness of speech and behavior to one's own character, or to the place and occasion; decency of conduct; seemliness; that which is seemly or suitable. Usage: Decorum, in accordance with its etymology, is that which is becoming in outward act or appearance; as, the decorum of a public assembly. Dignity springs from an inward elevation of soul producing a corresponding effect on the manners.

**It has been brought to the attention of the Council of the Presbytery of Northumberland that members of the Presbytery would benefit from a reminder of the rules of decorum, Presbyterians have established over many years. These rules provide an expectation for all Presbytery meetings.**

## The Rules of Decorum:

The Presbyterian Church has a long history of assembling itself for the purpose of edification, worship, and doing the work of God. In order to provide a safe and orderly assembly the following rules have been adopted over the years. **What is Parliamentary Law?**

- Parliamentary Law is common sense and courtesy developed over many centuries of practice.
- Parliamentary Law is the original model for conflict resolution and is still a working model, when used correctly.
- Parliamentary Law is not law, but, rather, is a body of conventions and customs used to aid decision making in deliberative assemblies.
- Parliamentary Law is subordinate to the bylaws of the governing body and both are subordinate to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).
- Parliamentary Law, when properly used, is designed to provide:
  - A - accuracy
  - E - efficiency
  - I - impartiality
  - O - objectivity
  - U - uniformity

Parliamentary procedures, as they are used in the church, are grounded in two assumptions, without which our decisions have no valid basis.

1. First, there is a presumption of the overwhelming desire for unity on the part of the members as a visible expression of the Body of Christ. It is from this covenant of Presbyterians with one another that the tenacity and patience to live with and work with differences of opinion derives. (G-4.0200)

2. Second, there is a presumption of the necessity of tension between majority and minority views as the means by which the Spirit is present in the Governing Bodies of the church (G-1.0304–1.0305)

**Rights of Individual Members:** Parliamentary principles attempt to balance the expression of individual conscience with the will of the majority. In so doing, these principles take very seriously the following rights of individual members of the body:

- The Right to Know: due notice; approval of minutes.
- The Right to Speak: rules of debate
- The Right to Vote: definition of membership
- The Right to Hold Office: fair representation

In general, parliamentary practice requires a two-thirds vote to abridge any one of these rights of the

member in favor of the rights of the majority.

### **Rules of Decorum RONR §42**

1. Speeches limited to three minutes are recommended as a standing rule of the governing body unless the assembly grants additional time.
2. Each person may speak twice on a subject, but may not speak a second time until everyone who wishes has spoken. (This rule relates to the kind of meeting being held.) The maker of a motion has the right of first debate.
3. Remarks shall be confined to the pending question.
4. Remarks shall not impugn another member or that member's motives.
5. All remarks shall be addressed to the moderator.
6. Members' names shall not be used.
7. Members may not refer adversely to prior acts not pending.
8. A member may not speak against one's own motion.
9. Reading of reports or documents requires the permission of the assembly.
10. Members seeking recognition shall be seated when another has the floor or when the moderator is speaking.
11. **Members shall not disturb the *orderly execution of the assembly*.**

### **Three Parliamentary Principles :**

Three statements express the parliamentary principles that preserve constructive tension between these individual rights of conscience and the unity of the body:

- ✘ The Rights and the Unity of the Body Shall Be Preserved
- ✘ The Will of the Majority Shall Prevail (G-1.0400)
- ✘ The Rights of the Minority Shall Be Protected

### **The role of the Moderator:**

The Role of the Moderator: The moderator of any governing body is a member of the governing body, chosen by the members to represent, in a person, the unity of the body, which is in tension between individual conscience and majority opinion.

"All authority necessary" is delegated to that person by the body. The authority of the moderator in preventing abridgement of the rights of members is seen in the power to

- (a) rule actions and motions out of order,
- (b) in the appointment of committees, and
- (c) control of debate

The moderator is in a position to refuse premature closure of debate by a member through the use of the motion to "call the question." If, in the moderator's judgment, the assembly has not completed debate, the moderator has the power to refuse the motion to close debate. **The moderator controls the decorum of the assembly and the proper disposition of motions according to decency and order and may interrupt the assembly at any time it is necessary to restore order.**

A moderator always controls the conduct of the assembly in full knowledge that the assembly may appeal the decision of the chair through the motion "to appeal" and the moderator can be confident in making decisions by allowing the burden of disagreement to reside with the assembly through the motion "to appeal." **The moderator preserves decorum.**