



The Presbytery of
DONEGAL

New Elder Commissioner Information for Presbytery of Donegal Gatherings

Welcome:

Welcome to your ministry as a commissioner to a Gathering of the Presbytery of Donegal. We are grateful for your service, and we look forward to seeing you. Below is some information that we hope is useful to you as you prepare for the upcoming gathering. We want you to be involved, and we value your wisdom as together we follow God's leading into the future. Other first time commissioners have had questions as they come to their initial presbytery gathering, so we've tried to anticipate these so that you can be prepared. Please contact us with any other questions you might have. We look forward to worshipping and leading together!

Here are some FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) about Donegal Presbytery...

What's a Presbytery?

A presbytery is a "council of the church" with a certain geographic district. This means that it is responsible to making decisions about the life and ministry of the Presbyterian Church within certain boundaries. A presbytery is made up of all the congregations and teaching elders within its bounds. Congregations elect ruling elder commissioners to the meetings with the goal of "parity," which means that there is an equal number of teaching elders and ruling elders.

A presbytery is "responsible for the government of the church throughout its district, and for assisting and supporting the witness of congregations to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that all congregations become communities of faith, hope, love, and witness." (Book of Order, G-3.0301)

Some of the duties of a presbytery include:

- Organizing, receiving, dismissing, dissolving congregations
- Establishing and dissolving pastoral relationships
- Guiding the preparation of those exploring a call to be teaching elders
- Provide guidance and resources to congregations in the areas of mission, leadership development, worship, evangelism,
- Ordaining, receiving, dismissing, installing, and disciplining teaching elders who are members
- Promoting the peace and harmony of congregations
- Helping congregations work together in common ministry and mission

What do you want me to know about Donegal Presbytery?

The Presbytery of Donegal is made up of 50 congregations and 4 immigrant fellowships in York, Lancaster, and Chester counties. There are approximately 15,000 members in these congregations and 150 teaching elder members of the presbytery. When the Presbytery of Donegal gathers, the attendance is usually around 125 voting members present. The presbytery has congregations that are large and small made up of rural, urban, and suburban members. They are located next to housing developments, farms, and downtown office buildings. In the midst of this diversity of life circumstance, background, and perspective, we are called by Jesus to worship God and serve our communities together as a presbytery.

The presbytery has a staff made of up Rev. Dr. Erin Cox-Holmes as Executive Presbyter, Rev. Dr. Michael Wilson as Stated Clerk, Susan Harner as Business Administrator, and Christine Wells as Executive Administrative Assistant. These people are all here to assist you in your ministry. Please ask any of them with any questions.

Camp Donegal is an important mission of our presbytery. In 2017, we have entered a partnership with Camp Krislund for our summer camping program and staffing. Larry Zimmerman is the Camp Office Administrator. Our Camp is located in southeastern York County, close to the Susquehanna River.

May I speak?

Absolutely! If you have been elected to be a commissioner from your congregation for this meeting then - yes, you are permitted to speak! In fact, we encourage you to speak – both to ask questions and to give your opinion about what will happen during the meeting. We believe that God works through us as we listen to one another, so we are interested in encouraging you to speak up. If you don't understand something, please ask.

If you want to speak, you simply go to a microphone and wait to be recognized by the moderator or your raise your hand and wait for a microphone to be brought to you (this depends on the particular location). Please identify yourself by saying your name and the church where you are a member. Then you tell the body how you think it should proceed (voting yes or no, etc.) and why. You can also ask a question about the matter at hand.

Do I vote?

Absolutely! If you have been elected by your Session to be the commissioner for this meeting – yes, you vote! Every Teaching Elder member of the presbytery votes as well as the Ruling Elders elected by their congregations. Other people who vote include Ruling Elders who are chairing committees or commissions of the presbytery and other Ruling Elders who have been given “voice and vote” by the presbytery. The goal of our polity is “parity,” which means that there is equal representation from Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders. One of the distinctive things about Presbyterian polity is that when we gather, all ordained elders have equal responsibility and power (vote) as we seek God's will for the future.

The number of ruling elders elected by a congregation depends on the size of the congregation (larger congregations send more commissioners. Occasionally more ruling elders will arrive than the number of commissioners allotted. If this happens, we help to figure out who will be commissioners and who will be visitors for this particular meetings.

Who are the people up front?

Up front you will see several people: The person standing in the center and conducting the meeting is the Moderator. This is a teaching elder or ruling elder who has been elected to a two-year term as the person responsible for leading our meetings and guiding us in our decision making. Next to the Moderator is the parliamentarian for the meeting. Our Stated Clerk serves as our parliamentarian and is responsible for assisting the moderator in decision making and for making recommendations based upon Robert's Rules of Order, which is our parliamentarian guide. Next to the Stated Clerk is the Recording Clerk, which is responsible to taking minutes for the meeting.

Who are the other people?

A number of people will stand up front and make reports and recommendations to the presbytery. These are ruling elders and teaching elders who are (most likely) the chairperson of a committee or a commission of a presbytery. You will also see our Executive Presbyter, Erin Cox-Holmes, who is responsible to help guide the entire work of the presbytery.

What happens during the meeting?

The first thing we do as a presbytery is worship together. We believe that dwelling together in God's Word and calling upon God's grace shapes us as leaders and helps us to be the best elders we can be. We also start in worship so that we can center ourselves upon God's glory and call upon God's grace. The presbytery also receives reports about the work that it does – from PCUSA mission co-workers that we support, mission projects with which we are involved, congregations who are moving in new ways. The presbytery is responsible to vote upon proposed amendments to the PC(USA)'s constitution, the budget of the presbytery, and any other matters that are brought before it.

What do I do after the meeting?

After the meeting, it is your responsibility to report back to your session and congregation about what has occurred. Many elders make a written report to their Session and then decide what to report to the entire congregation – either verbally in worship or in written form in a newsletter or email. We are available to help you with this so that we can communicate clearly and well. Thanks for making sure that the important work that we do together is communicated to the many member of the Presbytery of Donegal.

Below is a two page guide to the "parliamentary process" that is used in our meeting. It will give you some insight into the common language that is used and is meant to help you prepare for your day.

Again, thank you for your ministry – both in your congregation and in our presbytery. We value your insight and your input. Please contact us with any questions that you have.

- Rev. Dr. Erin Cox-Holmes, Executive Presbyter
- Rev. Dr. Michael Wilson, Stated Clerk
- Ruling Elder Doug Good, Moderator
- Ruling Elder Dianne Yuninger, Recording Clerk Presbytery Gathering Polity & Procedures

Main/Original Motions

- The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) designates *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, as the parliamentary authority to be used in governing body meetings.
- All business of presbytery is started by placing a main motion on the floor.
- There can be only one main motion on the floor at any given time, and that motion must be disposed of permanently or temporarily before another main motion can be before presbytery.
- An original motion for an item of business is typically made by a committee chair or less frequently by a commissioner from a church.
- Motions from committee chairs do not need to be seconded; otherwise an original motion needs a second if it is introducing business.
- The commissioner making the motion cannot speak to the motion until it is seconded.
- The Moderator calls for debate, with the motion maker speaking first.
- Commissioners then debate or can ask questions about the motion.
- New Business in our presbytery must be submitted to the Stated Clerk by the time announced on the docket. This business is dealt with towards the end of the meeting. Often it will be referred to a committee for more intensive preparation for a discussion by the entire presbytery.

While at the Microphone

- All debate remarks are addressed to the Moderator only, not to another commissioner.
- Debate is conducted by alternating between speakers for/against the motion, under the direction of the Moderator.
- To speak, go to a microphone and, when called upon by the Moderator, first state your name and church—e.g., “Name, Elder Commissioner, Your Church” and then whether you are speaking for or against the motion or have a question.
- While lining up at the microphone, be sensitive to speakers who simply have clarifying questions vs. wanting to debate. Sometimes a question clears up a debate point very quickly.
- Debate is sometimes regulated by time/procedural rules. For example, debate may be limited to two or three minutes per speaker. Or an item of business may have a time limit due to the docket timing.

Amendments

- Amendments can be a key part of the debate process.
- To make a motion to amend, simply rise, be recognized, and state your name and church and then say “Mr. /Madam Moderator, I have an amendment.” The Moderator will ask you to read your amendment and will then call for a second. Your amendment must be written on a form available from the Stated Clerk in order to help with clarity.
- An amendment can also be made to an amendment.
- When there has been a motion to amend, debate on the main motion stops temporarily and presbytery will then debate the amendment.
- You must put your amendment in writing and get it to the stated clerk during the amendment debate. If you know you will have an amendment prior to the meeting, call the Presbytery of Donegal office. Typically, PowerPoint screen projections of motions and amendments can be made in advance—which helps all commissioners to understand the amendment.

Substitute Motions

- These get tricky. A substitute motion seeks to replace the motion on the floor with a different motion (it must pertain to the same subject matter but it a significant enough amendment that it requires all new wording. If you think you want to make a substitute motion and know that prior to the meeting, call the Presbytery of Donegal office for guidance.
- If during the debate on the main motion you want to move a substitute motion, when the Moderator recognizes you, move your substitute. The Moderator will seek a second and then explain the substitute motion process to the commissioners. Make sure a written copy of the substitute motion gets to the Stated Clerk quickly.
- The presbytery then “perfects” both the main motion and the substitute motion and then the issue the presbytery will be debating is “shall the substitute motion become the main motion.”
- History shows that substitute motions can be confusing. Ask questions from the floor if you are unclear about what you are voting on!

Other Motions

- Motions to refer/commit/postpone, etc., are also in order during debate. In all, there are about ten possible motions a commissioner could make! If you want to do something and do not understand the official process, simply seek to be recognized by the Moderator and, once recognized, ask about how you can best accomplish your objective. You can also check with the Stated Clerk beforehand. It is the job of the Stated Clerk to help you accomplish what you want to accomplish in the meeting, to the best of the Clerk’s ability, regardless of whether the Clerk would agree to disagree with you.

Ending Debate

- Debate will end in one of three ways:
 - The Moderator sees that no other commissioners wish to speak.
 - Time has expired on the piece of business and time has not been extended.
 - The question has been “called.”
- When the time allotted has expired on an item of business, the Moderator will indicate that fact to commissioners. Commissioners can then choose to extend for several minutes or not. Debate ends if time is not extended.
- At any point during debate, a commissioner can rise and after being recognized and stating name/church can say “Mr./Madam Moderator, I move the previous question” or “I call the question.” This means that the commissioner making the motion wants to stop debate and move to a vote.
- The Moderator has the right to not entertain the motion to end debate, and may exercise that option if others are still seeking to debate and the time allotted has not expired.
- The motion to move the previous question must be seconded. There is no debate on this motion, and it takes a 2/3 majority to approve ending debate.

Voting

- Voting is generally done by voice vote first. Depending on the motion a “simple majority” (over 50%) or a “super-majority” (usually 2/3 of those voting) will be required.
- If the voice vote is inconclusive, either the Moderator or a commissioner can call for “division.”
- If division occurs, the Moderator will either ask people to stand for a vote or appoint tellers to tally hand votes.
- In some cases, a written ballot will be held. This is usually decided on by the Leader Team before a presbytery meeting, although any commissioner can make a motion for a written ballot process. You can also stand and request that the vote be taken by written ballot.