

What Is A Commissioner?

Commissioners are representatives from each congregation in our Presbytery. Every clergy person who is a member of Presbytery is also a commissioner at Presbytery meetings. Of greater relevance is that each congregation is eligible to send at least one elder (whether currently serving or past) as an elder commissioner. Churches of larger membership are eligible to send more than one elder as commissioners to a meeting. In Lake Huron Presbytery, only three churches (Flint First, Midland Memorial, and Bay City First) are large enough to qualify for sending additional elder commissioners. In addition, certain other people are eligible to be commissioners. Commissioned Lay Pastors who are currently serving, members of the Trustees, chairs of Committees, and members of the Presbytery staff are all considered eligible commissioners.

Elder Commissioners are elected by each congregation's Session. It is recommended, though not required, that a commissioner to Presbytery be elected to serve for at least a year, though service for two or three years is possible and may even be desirable. Again, an elder commissioner does not have to be a current member of her/his Session.

Whether clergy or elder, commissioners are the only ones eligible to vote. A commissioner's responsibility is to vote on the various matters that come before Presbytery. In this, Presbytery commissioners are to be guided by their consciences. The Book of Order (G.1.0301 and G.6.0108) specifically mentions that we have freedom of conscience in our decisions and deliberations. The only exception is that one's conscience is "captive to the Word of God as interpreted by the standards of the church" (G-6.1018b). It is easy to see why, when possible, for commissioners to familiarize themselves with the materials and issues that will be coming to any given Presbytery meeting.

In addition, commissioners also will find that much of what they do is gathering information about the programs, ministries, and activities of the Presbytery and, often, congregations. Presbytery is not just a time of decisions-making but is also a time of sharing of our collective knowledge and hopes for the future. Also, a commissioner has the responsibility to report on the decisions of the Presbytery and the information learned at Presbytery with one's congregation. In some ways, that might be the most important aspect of what a commissioner does. For it is in that communication that our connections as Presbyterians are strengthened.

A Quick Overview of the Governance Structure of the Presbyterian Church (USA)

Session

Each of the approximately 11,000 PC(USA) churches has a session. The session of a particular church consists of the pastor(s), associate pastor(s), and elders in active service. The session is responsible for the mission and government of the particular church. For more information on sessions, please refer to chapter ten of the *Book of Order*.

Presbytery

Presbyteries consist of all churches and Ministers of Word and Sacrament within a certain geographical area and there are currently 173 presbyteries within the PC(USA). When presbyteries meet each church is represented by at least one elder (the number of elders depends on the total membership of a church). A detailed list of the responsibilities and other details pertaining to presbyteries may be found elsewhere in this packet and in chapter eleven of the *Book of Order*.

Synod

Synods consist of no less than three presbyteries within a certain geographic area. There are currently 16 synods in the PC(USA). Commissioners to synod meetings are elected by the presbyteries. The synod is an intermediate governmental body tasked with the mission of the Church throughout its region and oversight of the operations of the member presbyteries. For more information on synods, please refer to chapter twelve of the *Book of Order*.

General Assembly

The General Assembly is the highest governing body of the PC(USA) and represents the unity of the congregations, sessions, presbyteries, and synods of the PC(USA). Presbyteries elect representatives to the General Assembly and it meets at least once every two years. Perhaps the most prominent business the GA conducts concerns amendments to the *Book of Order*, modifications to the *Book of Confessions*, and providing authoritative interpretations of the *Book of Order*. Other responsibilities include national and worldwide mission and witness, administrative oversight of the PC(USA), and maintaining the Office of the General Assembly. For more information on the General Assembly, please refer to chapter thirteen of the *Book of Order*.

The Responsibilities of the Presbytery

Each Presbytery is required by the Book of Order to be responsible and have authority for certain aspects of the mission and government of the Church throughout its geographical district. This is a summary of those responsibilities and powers. The detailed list can be found at G-11.0103.

Mission

- Developing a strategy for the mission of the Church
- Coordinate and assist congregations in maximizing their witness to Christ
- Initiate mission activities in light of the strategies of the Synod and General Assembly

Support and Oversee the Churches

- Ensure that everyone is represented within the governance of the Presbytery and each congregation
- Provide encouragement, guidance, and resources to congregations in areas ranging from leadership development to worship to personnel policies
- Provide pastoral care for members of presbytery and visiting sessions and ministers
- Organize new congregations, facilitate the uniting of congregations, dissolve congregations, and oversee the location of congregations
- Provide special oversight of churches without Ministers of Word and Sacrament
- Select, train, examine, support, and authorize Commissioned Lay Pastors
- Review the minutes and records of the sessions
- Consider and act upon requests from congregations to take actions regarding property
- Deal with issues of racism and everything pertaining to racism

Ministers of Word and Sacrament

- Enter into covenants and provide oversight and support those wishing to become Ministers of Word and Sacrament and elect readers for ordination exams
- Ordain, receive, install, dismiss, remove, and discipline Ministers of Word and Sacrament
- Provide support of Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Certified Christian Educators, including the minimum terms of call
- Establish and dissolve pastoral relationships
- Designate Ministers of Word and Sacrament for ministries recognized by the Presbytery (e.g. teachers, administrators, chaplains)

Administrative

- Serve in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline (the third part of the Book of Order)
- Maintain relationships with and elect commissioners to the Synod and General Assembly
- Establish and supervise groups necessary and mandated for the work of the Presbytery (e.g. committee, teams)

Brief Recent History of Lake Huron Presbytery

The Presbytery of Lake Huron is made up of fifty churches, located from Tawas in the north to Holly in the south and from Harbor Beach in the east to Alma in the west. These fifty churches currently total a little over 10,000 Presbyterians. They range in size from 10 members to 1,686 members. These churches are served by about 35 clergy and 12 Commissioned Lay Pastors.

Like the rest of the denomination, Lake Huron Presbytery has shrunk over the years. A number of rural and urban neighborhood churches have closed. Yet vital and growing ministry is also happening in a number of locations within our Presbytery. Many of the challenges faced in our Presbytery will mirror the shifts in both the economy and the life of mid-Michigan communities. Communities that are aging, with shrinking resources is something many congregations – as well as communities – are all too familiar with. But the ability to do more with less is a skill that many of our congregations have and that can carry over into the world around us.

To do its work, the Presbytery has a number of Committees and ministry groups to carry out its tasks.

They include the Committee on Ministry (relations between churches and pastors)

Committee on Preparation for Ministry (development and care of candidates for ministry)

Coordinating Team (tying together the various strands of ministry in the Presbytery)

Trustees (overseeing the property and business aspects of the Presbytery)

Personnel Team (to work with and manage the staffing needs of the Presbytery)

Nominating Committee (fills the membership of committees of Presbytery)

Committee on Representation (helps to ensure all ages and groups are represented in the work of Presbytery)

It takes about 75 people, split as equally as possible between clergy and non-clergy, to fill all the positions within the life of the Presbytery.

All of this is designed to help the work of Jesus Christ through the Presbyterian Church (USA) to go forward within the bounds of the Presbytery. To that end, the Presbytery seeks to fulfill the following Mission Statement:

“The mission of the Presbytery of Lake Huron is to partner with congregations, helping people to know, grow, share and serve as disciples of Jesus Christ.”

To guide us in that, the Presbytery has adopted several Directional Signals with the goal of enabling us to be moving away from.... And moving toward....

We seek to move away from legalism and

Move toward grace, recovering our spiritual center.

We seek to move away from serving the institution and

Move toward serving the Kingdom, recovering our focus.

We see to move away from acquiring members and

Move toward making disciples, recovering our purpose.

Parts of a Lake Huron Presbytery Meeting

Though there may not be such a thing as a “typical” Presbytery meeting, most meetings will continue a number of the same elements. Below, you will find a brief discussion of those typical elements.

Worship: Worship has always been a part of Presbytery meetings. When we remember that for our clergy, membership is found in the Presbytery just as for an elder it is in a congregation, we can see the importance that worship can have for clergy. But for elders, worship at Presbytery can be equally meaningful. The chance to gather with fellow clergy and elders from so many different congregations and backgrounds is a wonderful reminder of the power of our worshipping community. Currently, the Presbytery celebrates Communion at each meeting.

Over the last several years, this Presbytery has made a conscious decision to allow for worship opportunities throughout the meeting day. Hopefully, this “worship and work” model makes our deliberations as a Presbytery part of our daily worship of God and a reminder that we are gathered not just for business but for the work of God in this Presbytery.

Greetings: While most of the items at the beginning of the meeting are self-explanatory, this time does serve an important purpose. It is a chance for us to put faces and names together amongst our commissioner members. It also allows the host church to share some of who they are with the Presbytery.

Reports: Big parts of any Presbytery meeting are the various reports from Presbytery committees, staff, ministry groups and/or other invited speakers. Some of the regular reports are from the Coordinating Team, which handles much of the administrative business of the Presbytery; the Committee on Ministry which deals with the relationships between congregations and clergy or commissioned lay pastors; the Committee on Preparation for Ministry, which oversees the preparation of inquirers and candidates for ministry. Many times, there are reports from other groups or committees within the Presbytery.

Time is also provided at each meeting to hear about a mission project or two, either from an individual congregation or with a larger focus. It is yet another way of connecting us together as both churches and individuals in Christ.

Abbreviations: Attend a Presbytery meeting and you will soon hear a number of abbreviations for various actions or groups in the Presbytery. Not knowing what those mean can make a meeting pretty confusing. Listed below are some of the more common abbreviations you might hear used and what they stand for.

COM	Committee on Ministry
CPM	Committee on Preparation for Ministry
FOG	Form of Government (usually the “G” section of the Book of Order)
CLP	Commissioned Lay Pastor
PIF	Personal Information Form (document pastors use when searching for a call)
CIF	Church Information Form (document churches use when searching for a pastor)

A Brief on Parliamentary Procedure

The Presbytery adheres to *Robert's Rules of Order* as its parliamentary authority in conducting business at meetings of the Presbytery. Any deviations would be found in the *Book of Order* or the by-laws of the Presbytery.

A. Steps for Speaking at a Meeting

1. Obtain the Floor

To participate in the discussion it is necessary to obtain the floor. To obtain the floor, raise your hand and wait to be recognized by the moderator. If it is apparent that the moderator is not aware that you have your hand raised you may stand and acquire the moderator's attention by saying "Madam Moderator" or "Mister Moderator". Once the moderator has recognized you, it is your turn to speak.

2. Introduce Yourself

When the moderator has recognized you, introduce yourself by name and by church (or other relationship to Presbytery) before addressing Presbytery.

3. Speak to the Moderator

Always address your remarks to the moderator; referring to others in the third person.

4. Motions Must Precede Speeches

If you wish to make a motion, you are limited to only a few words of explanation before making the motion. All persuasive speechmaking must wait until your motion is seconded and the moderator has opened discussion.

B. Helpful Parliamentary Procedures

1. To Stop Debate

To end debate you can *move the previous question* or *call the previous question*. This motion requires a second and a 2/3 majority vote, and is not debatable. NOTE: Calls from the floor such as "Question!" or "Call the question!" are not in order and will not be acknowledged. Members must be recognized to make this motion. If the motion passes, the debate ends immediately. The motion being debated will promptly be put to a vote.

2. Referring a Motion to Committee

To refer (or commit) a motion to a committee, you simply move to *refer the motion* to the group you think should deal with the issue. It requires a second and a majority vote to pass. If it passes, it will not be discussed further by Presbytery until the group it was referred to brings it back with their recommendation.

3. Changing the Wording of a Motion

To change the wording of a motion, you can move to *amend* the motion, specifying the wording you wish to change. It requires a second and a majority vote to pass. (An amendment can slightly or significantly change the motion, even to the extent of defeating its original spirit.) Once the amendment has been voted on, debate on the original motion (with any approved amendments) resumes.

More substantial amendments which would replace a whole paragraph or the entire motion are handled in a special process of amending called a substitute motion: first, Presbytery considers the original text and has the opportunity to refine it with any amendments. Second, the proposed substitute language is subjected to the same refining process. After these two steps are completed, Presbytery votes on whether to substitute the second language for the first. Then discussion then continues as after any effort to amend a motion.

4. Delaying a Motion

There are two common ways to suspend action on a motion:

a. Postpone

A motion *to postpone* a question suspends it to a particular time or until after a particular event. It requires a second and a 2/3 majority vote to pass. If it passes, the original motion (and any amendments or other attached motions that were being debated) will automatically be brought back to the floor to resume debate at the same point when the scheduled postponement time arrives.

b. Table

To table a motion simply sets it aside temporarily. It requires a second and a majority vote, and is not debatable. At any time later in the meeting when no motion is pending, a motion *to take from the table* will immediately bring a tabled motion back before Presbytery for resumed discussion. This action also requires a second and a majority vote, and is not debatable. NOTE: A motion "to table until [a particular time]" is not really a motion to table but a motion "to postpone," and should be re-worded accordingly. This more restrictive action deserves opportunity for debate, which the postponement procedure requires.

Note on Permitted Debate for #2, #3, and #4a:

Debate on referral, amendment or postponement is limited to the merits of taking that action. It can only deal with the motion itself to the extent necessary to support arguments for or against the wisdom of referring, amending, or postponing in the manner proposed at the time.

5. Challenging a Procedure

A member may raise a *point of order* to question a procedural action being taken by the meeting or the moderator. The moderator will rule on the point being raised (without a second or debate). If a member is not satisfied with the ruling, they may *appeal from the moderator's ruling*, which requires a second and a majority vote to overrule the moderator. It is not debatable.

6. Asking Information

A member may ask for a *point of information* to clarify a matter being discussed. This request is always addressed to the moderator and must not include debate on the matter. The moderator will then seek clarification from an appropriate member present.

7. Asking for a Standing Vote

Any member may call for *division* or *division of the house* when results of an apparently close vote are announced. No second or vote is required, and the moderator will ask for an uncounted rising vote. If the result of an uncounted rising vote is doubtful, the moderator can ask for a counted rising vote. If they do not, a motion for a counted vote can be made by a member, and if seconded and approved by a majority, will require a standing vote to be visually counted.

Note on Exception to Being Recognized for #5, #6, and #7

Points of order, points of information, and requests for division of the house are special cases allowing a member to interrupt when someone else has the floor. If your request is in order, the moderator (in these special cases) will recognize you and you may speak.