

**PRESBYTERY OF TROPICAL FLORIDA**  
**New Commissioner Information**

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One of the hallmarks of Presbyterian polity is that the church is governed by presbyters. Presbyters are ruling elders and teaching elders (ministers) who come together in councils. The councils of the church are sessions, presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly. The presbytery is a council serving as a corporate expression of the church within a particular district. The presbytery governs and makes decision at assemblies attended by commissioners (teaching and ruling elders). Commissioners are the body of Christ trying to discern God's will and carry out God's business for the Presbytery of Tropical Florida (PTF). Commissioners are not at a presbytery assembly to reflect the will of their church or their session. As stated in the Book of Order, F-3.0204, "Presbyters are not simply to reflect the will of the people, but rather to seek together to find and represent the will of Christ."

**Who attends Presbytery Assemblies?**

All teaching elders (Ministers of Word and Sacrament) within our bounds are members of the Presbytery of Tropical Florida. In addition, the Book of Order requires presbyteries to adopt a plan and communicate it to sessions for determining how many ruling elder commissioners each session is entitled to send to presbytery assemblies. PTF has adopted such a plan. Under the plan, each year after all the statistical reports for the prior year have been completed and verified, a formula is applied that determines the number of elder commissioners for each church. This information is conveyed to the clerk of session of each congregation and is referred to as the "Parity Report." Each church is responsible for the selection of eligible ruling elders who will serve as commissioners.

Ruling elders who are the moderator or vice-moderator of the presbytery, or who are either chairpersons of presbytery committees, or who are a presbytery officer, have voice and vote at presbytery assemblies. In addition to voting participants, there are other people, who are not commissioners, who may attend. They include guest speakers and interested observers who are often present at assemblies.

**When and Where are Presbytery Assemblies?**

There are four *stated* presbytery assemblies each year, normally in February, May, August, and November. The assembly usually convenes in the morning and concludes in two hours. Sometimes there are also *called* meetings to deal with particular business—those meetings are rare. Assemblies take place at the various congregations within the presbytery, so the place varies each time. Attention is paid to travel distance for those who both live in the northern and southern regions of PTF. Since the pandemic, we have also provided an online option.

**The Docket, the Packet, and How Business Gets to the Presbytery Floor?**

Every presbytery assembly has a "docket," a list of items, including motions, that will be handled at the assembly and that includes information on the worship that will be a part of the assembly. The docket is formulated by the presbytery staff in consultation with the Leadership Council. Reports and information are compiled into a "packet" that is distributed in advance of the assembly. If a session or a special group wants to get on the docket, contact the General Presbyter and Stated Clerk. Committees and the Leadership Council are normally the entities that bring business to the presbytery floor.

The packet is posted on the presbytery website and an email notice is sent to each congregation so that it may be forwarded to the commissioners. The docket and packet are not printed. Commissioners are to bring those items to the assembly. When the Clerk of Session receives the link to the docket and packet, the clerk should forward that link to all commissioners so that each commissioner can register for the assembly.

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**Who facilitates the Assemblies?**

The Moderator (or Vice-Moderator or immediate past Moderator) will always preside over the Presbytery assembly—to ensure fairness and to lead the meeting. The Stated Clerk is also in attendance to provide parliamentary and meeting guidance to the Moderator.

**Standard “Floor of Presbytery” Process:**

To say anything on the floor of presbytery, you must go to a microphone and be recognized by the moderator. After being recognized, always first state your name and church. If you are online, use the raised hand icon, and the Stated Clerk will instruct the Moderator to call on you.

**Concerning an Item of Business and Some Simple Parliamentary Guidelines:**

*Main/Original Motions:*

- ❖ The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) designates Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised, as the parliamentary authority to be used in governing body meetings.
- ❖ All business of the 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 come 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, since as the item is coming from an entity. An original motion from an individual 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.

*When Speaking:*

- ❖ All debate and remarks are addressed to the Moderator.
- ❖ Debate is conducted by alternating between speakers for/against the motion, under the direction of the Moderator.
- ❖ Speak only when called upon by the Moderator, by first stating your name and church, and then whether you are speaking for or against the motion.
- ❖ Be sensitive to speakers who simply have clarifying questions vs. wanting to debate. Sometimes a question clears up a debate point very quickly.
- ❖ The maker of the motion has the option to be the last speaker.
- ❖ 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, go to the microphone, be recognized, and state your name and church and then say “Moderator, I have an amendment.” The Moderator will ask you to read your amendment and will then call for a second. 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.

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*Substitute Motions:*

- ❖ These get tricky. A substitute motion seeks to replace the motion on the floor with a substitute. If you think you want to make a substitute motion and know that prior to the assembly, call the stated clerk 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 explain the substitute motion process to the commissioners. Make sure a written copy of the substitute motion gets to the stated clerk quickly (if online, use the chat option and email the motion to [dbultena@vibrantpresbytery.org](mailto:dbultena@vibrantpresbytery.org))
- ❖ 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’re voting on.

*Other Motions:*

- ❖ Motion to refer/commit/postpone, etc. are also in order during debate. In all, there dozens of 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. Or check with the stated clerk beforehand.

*Ending Debate:*

- ❖ Debate will end in one of three ways:
  - a) The Moderator sees that no other commissioners wish to speak.
  - b) Time has expired on the piece of business and time has not been extended.
  - c) 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 a particular number of minutes or not. Debate ends if time is not extended.
- ❖ At any point during debate, a commissioner can go to the microphone and after being recognized and stating name/church can say “Moderator, I move the previous question” or “I call the question.”
- ❖ 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 the motion, and it takes 2/3 majority to approve ending debate.

*Voting:*

- ❖ Voting is generally done by voice vote first. Depending on the motion a majority or 2/3 of those voting will be required.
- ❖ If the voice vote is inconclusive, either the Moderator or a commissioner can call for “division of the house.”
- ❖ If division occurs, the Moderator will appoint tellers to tally hand votes.
- ❖ In some cases, a written ballot will be held. This is usually decided on by the Leadership Council prior to a presbytery assembly, although any commission can make a motion for a written ballot process.
- ❖ Hybrid Meeting: Pay close attention to the instructions that will be provided at the meeting.

**Always remember...we are the Body of Christ trying to work together to glorify God and to undertake God's work for the Presbytery of Tropical Florida. We don't serve Robert and his rules. We serve an awesome God and God's rule of love. Don't let process get in the way of listening to each other and having honest debate to discern what God wants us to do for our presbytery.**