

Helpful Information for First-Time Commissioners and Guests Attending a Meeting of the Presbytery of Tampa Bay

Presbytery Meeting Basics

As a Presbyterian, you probably already know the basics of our system of government, so let me share a few tips you may not realize:

- You are a Commissioner, not a Representative
 - This means that no one—not your session, not your pastor, not your spouse—can tell you how to vote on a matter before the presbytery. That’s between you and the Holy Spirit. As it says in the **Foundations of Presbyterian Polity** in our **Book of Order**, “Presbyters are not simply to reflect the will of the people, but rather to seek together to find and represent the will of Christ.” (F-3.0204) *(You can download a copy of the Book of Order from the Resource list on our homepage at www.presbyteryoftampabay.com).*
- You may not know who all these people are and what their jobs are, so here’s a brief introduction:
 - Moderator

At the start of our meeting, Rev. Bobby Musengwa will be the person at the podium. The moderator is responsible to make sure the meeting runs well and is the elected leader of the Presbytery. Following election and installation of a new moderator at this meeting, Bobby will automatically become the Chair of the Coordinating Team.
 - Vice Moderator
 - Ruling Elder Paula Salter will be our vice moderator at the start of the meeting but is expected to be elected and installed as moderator early in the meeting. Rev. Dr. Haemin Lee is nominated for election and installation as vice moderator. The vice moderator ordinarily moderates part of each Presbytery meeting and can fill in for the moderator in other duties when necessary.
 - Presbytery Coach and Coordinator
 - Ruling Elder Patrice Hatley is our Presbytery’s coach and executive. She’s the head of staff for the Presbytery of Tampa Bay and has a variety of responsibilities throughout the Presbytery and in service to the larger church.
 - Associate Presbyter for Emerging Ministries
 - Rev. Libby Shannon is the first person to hold this new position. She supports primarily the work of the Commission on Church Vitality and its New Worshiping Communities Committee, and is involved in interfaith activities in Pinellas County.

- Stated Clerk
 - Rev. Bill Wildhack is the Presbytery's Stated Clerk. He's responsible to help plan presbytery meetings, prepare the presbytery packet, and help the moderator keep the meeting running "decently and in order" as the Presbytery's parliamentarian.
- Treasurer
 - Ruling Elder Terry Dennis is our elected volunteer treasurer and usually reports on how giving to and through the presbytery is being handled and advises us on financial policies, practices, and budget recommendations.
- We often use and hear a lot of acronyms at a Presbytery meeting. Mostly these refer to our Committees and Commissions. Some translations:
 - GA (General Assembly) and OGA (Office of the General Assembly)
 - The General Assembly is the most inclusive governing body in the church, made up of commissioners from every presbytery, and the Office of the General Assembly manages day to day affairs of the church in support of all of us.
 - COM (Commission on Ministry)
 - The Commission on Ministry is the primary body responsible for making decisions about relationships between pastors and churches, whether a particular minister may become a member of the Presbytery, etc. It does some of its work in regional groupings.
 - CPM (Commission on Preparation for Ministry)
 - The Commission on Preparation for Ministry is the primary body responsible for those seeking to become ministers, also known as Inquirers and Candidates, and those interested in serving as commissioned ruling elders in the role of a commissioned pastor in certain situations. Chaired by Rev. Paul Suich.
 - CCV (Commission on Church Vitality)
 - CCV's work in 2020 focused largely on assisting congregations and ministries with financial resources in response to COVID-19, and it continues to work with churches and new worshipping communities to start new ministries. CCV is chaired by Rev. Andy Walton.
 - BoT (Board of Trustees)
 - The Board of Trustees is a commission of the Presbytery responsible for the civil side of Presbytery business, implementing decisions of the presbytery but also acting with delegated authority to approve requests from churches for things

like leasing their sanctuary, selling property, etc. Rev. Rebecca Harrison chairs the Board.

- CNR (Committee on Nominating and Representation)
 - CNR is responsible for nominating ministers and Ruling Elders to most committees and commissions, and for advising the presbytery regarding the implementation of principles of unity and diversity in the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity and the Form of Government in the Book of Order. Be sure to share your gifts and talents with Chair Rev. Meg Pabst!

- CT (Coordinating Team)
 - As the leadership group of the Presbytery, the Coordinating Team is a commission made up of the chairs of each group above as well as the Moderator and Vice-Moderator. The outgoing Moderator acts as the chair of the CT, while the Treasurer, Stated Clerk and Presbytery Coach and Coordinator all serve as ex officio members of the Team. Former Moderator Jonathan Owen became chair of CT at our meeting in November as soon as Bobby Musengwa was installed as moderator.

- Presbytery meetings are guided by the most recent edition of ***Robert's Rules of Order: Newly Revised*** (RONR) – and that's been the **newly released 12th Edition** since September 1, 2020!
 - The **Form of Government** in the **Book of Order** directs (G-3.0105) that Presbyterian councils (such as the session, presbytery, and general assembly) are governed by RONR whenever it doesn't conflict with the Book of Order. That doesn't mean you have to be a parliamentary expert to attend meetings, but you should probably learn the basics below if you want the meeting to make sense once business begins.

Robert's Rules Quick Guide

Here's a quick summary of your rights and responsibilities under Robert's Rules. Generally, these rules are intended to reduce tension, protect the rights and voice of anyone who might find themselves in the minority on something and, of course, keep us doing things "decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40, ESV).

- Always address your comments to the Moderator first (not "Madam Moderator" or "Mr. Moderator," just "Moderator"), and then to the presenter or speaker only after being recognized by the moderator and given permission to speak.

- Generally, don't interrupt another speaker, but wait until you're recognized by the Moderator, but there are some exceptions:
 - You can't hear what's going on or you're so uncomfortable over the room temperature, etc. you can't stay in the meeting (say, "Point of Privilege" then explain the problem when the moderator recognizes you)

- You think something was wrong with what just happened (say, “Point of Order” then state your objection when the moderator recognizes you. The moderator will then decide if you’re right or not.)
- Some motions it may be useful to know about:
 - Move the Previous Question (a.k.a. Call the Question)
 - A request to vote on whether to end discussion and vote on a pending matter. This motion requires a second, isn’t debatable, and can only be made after the Moderator recognizes you; no one should ever just shout it out. Typically, it’s made when someone thinks we’ve hit the limit of productive discussion and we’re running in circles. It is NOT appropriate to use this to shut down debate prematurely.
 - When you hear “Move the Question” or “Call the Question,” be aware that the next vote is *not* on whatever it is we’ve been talking about, but on whether to end discussion. An affirmative vote will end discussion, and then the next vote is on the main motion.
 - To protect the rights of others to be heard, this motion requires a 2/3 majority to pass.
 - Amendments to Main Motions
 - If you want to slightly modify the language of a motion, to add, delete or replace some language, you’ll want to seek recognition and say “I move to amend the motion...” when the Moderator recognizes you. This requires a second and will then be discussed and voted on.
 - Please be ready to provide a written copy of the text of your amendment to the Stated Clerk if it’s more than just a couple of words.
 - Substitute Motions
 - If you want to substantially modify a motion on the floor, changing the intent or most of the language, you need to use a Substitute Motion instead of amending the current motion. When the Moderator recognizes you, you’ll say, “I move the following substitute motion” and read your alternative suggestion. You will need to provide a written copy of the substitute motion to the Stated Clerk.
 - Division of the House
 - If you think that a voice vote was too close to call, any member of the Presbytery may request a “Division of the House” or vote by raised hands or ballot.

- Order of the Day
 - Not a motion, but something you'll sometimes see on the agenda. All "Order of the Day" means is that we need to drop whatever it is we're doing when the time for that item arrives and start doing the "Order of the Day."
- Not necessarily in Robert's, but please follow these conventions of our Presbytery regardless:
 - **When you want to speak, please move to a microphone and wait to be recognized by the moderator.**
 - Please read the Presbytery Packet thoroughly *before* the meeting and take another look when we get to a specific item. The answers to many questions may already be in the written reports. You can also reach out to Stated Clerk Bill Wildhack or the chair of the commission or committee before the meeting if you have questions.

What makes the Presbytery of Tampa Bay different than other presbyteries?

Several years ago our presbytery underwent a transformation process that resulted in a new mission statement, some common values, and a more relational, "bottom up" model of doing its work.

Our Mission Statement—"to identify and strengthen leaders so that every congregation makes new and mature disciples for Jesus Christ"—helps us keep our focus on leadership development and outreach. Practically, this means that there is usually a component of training at Presbytery meetings, but also that there are intentional relational opportunities for us to get to know other leaders.

The core values we adopted during the transformation were to be ***relentlessly congregational, meaningfully connected, faithfully constitutional and unapologetically Christ-Centered***. We want to focus on helping our congregations succeed, our Teaching and Ruling Elders to know and lean on one another, our processes and meetings distinctively Presbyterian, while focusing not on ourselves but on our Leader, Christ.

You can learn more about our presbytery on the website at www.presbyteryoftampabay.com and more about our meetings and how we use Zoom on our [Orientation/Refresher for First Time Commissioners](#) webpage.