

**Special Rules of Procedure for the General Assembly  
Adopted by the General Assembly 1968 – Revised 1989  
Revised 2009 – Revised 2011**

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**Introduction**

The following special rules of procedure for the General Assembly define further its organization and prescribe additional procedures for the conduct of its business.

As provided in paragraph 48d of *The Design* for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the current edition of Robert's Rules of Order, Revised, shall govern the General Assembly in all other cases to which they are applicable and in which they are not inconsistent with *The Design* or special rules adopted by the General Assembly.

In addition, the General Assembly may from time to time adopt standing rules as needed for the effective conduct of its business.

The General Board and its Administrative Committee shall likewise adopt standing rules for the guidance of their operations.

## **1. Classification and Ordering of Business Items to be Considered by the General Assembly**

- 1.1. All business items to be considered by the General Assembly, except in cases of emergency, shall be received by or shall originate with the General Board.
- 1.2. Business items may be filed with the General Board by any congregation, region, organization with a recognized relationship, institution or general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) or by the governing structure of any such body.
- 1.3. Business items must be received by the Office of the General Minister and President at least 180 days in advance of a meeting of the General Assembly in order to allow sufficient time for the General Board to review and refer them with appropriate recommendations to the General Assembly.<sup>1</sup>
- 1.4. All business items shall be circulated among the congregations and regions by the Office of the General Minister and President at least 60 days in advance of the General Assembly.
- 1.5. Upon recommendation of the General Minister and President, the Administrative Committee shall determine whether each item qualifies for consideration and its classification.
  - 1.5.1. When an item is disqualified or reclassified or combined, the Office of the General Minister and President shall notify the submitters and in the case of a resolution submitted by a congregation, the regional minister.
  - 1.5.2. The notification shall include the Administrative Committee's rationale.
- 1.6. The Office of the General Minister and President shall assist those who are considering filing business items and provide upon request guidelines and an interpretation of the classifications of business and *The Design*.
- 1.7. The classifications of items shall be included in the General Assembly Docket.

## **2. Classification of Business Items**

### **2.1. Reports**

- 2.1.1. Reports are summaries of ministries performed, plans for ministry, and audited financial statements of each general ministry, commission or other entity established or recognized by the General Assembly.
- 2.1.2. Annually the General Board shall review such reports and make whatever comments or recommendations it deems advisable.
- 2.1.3. In the year in which the General Assembly meets, the General Board shall forward the Reports to the General Assembly.
- 2.1.4. If a Report contains only an account of work done and is primarily for information, after appropriate General Assembly consideration, no action shall be required.
- 2.1.5. If a Report contains recommendations for action by the General Assembly or if the General Board proposes recommendations for action by the

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<sup>1</sup> Items postmarked or e-mailed with a delivery receipt requested on the 180<sup>th</sup> day before the General Assembly shall be regarded as meeting the deadline requirement.)

General Assembly, such recommendations shall be submitted separately as an Operational, Policy and Organizational Item.

- 2.1.6. When the timing of the General Assembly prohibits a General Ministry from including an audit of its financial statements in its report, such an audit shall be provided for the next meeting of the General Board. The most recently completed audit shall be provided to the General Assembly.
- 2.1.7. Covenantal relationships are demonstrated by annual informational reports of regions to the General Board and annual statistical reports of the congregations in the *Year Book and Directory of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*. The reports of regions and congregations are not business items for the General Assembly.

## **2.2. Operational, Policy and Organizational Items**

- 2.2.1. Operational, Policy and Organizational Items are those which establish policy, institute or revise structures, or procedures, authorize programs, approve directions or mandate actions.
- 2.2.2. An Operational, Policy and Organizational Item may be originated by the General Board or by any other entity eligible to file business items for the General Assembly.
- 2.2.3. Actions called for in Reports whether recommended by the submitter or by the General Board, shall be transmitted to the General Assembly separately as Operational, Policy and Organizational Items.
- 2.2.4. The General Board shall submit a substitute Operational, Policy and Organizational Item when the substance of multiple items cover the same subject.
- 2.2.5. The submitter of an Operational, Policy and Organizational Item shall be encouraged through guidelines provided by the Office of the General Minister and President to attach a financial estimate of the item and how the expenses will be underwritten, if adopted.
- 2.2.6. The General Board shall review proposed Operational, Policy and Organizational Item(s) make whatever amendments or comments it deems advisable, and refer the items to the General Assembly with recommendation for appropriate action: adopt, not adopt or refer to a designated place for further investigation.

## **2.3. Study Documents**

- 2.3.1. A Study Document is a study and analysis of a subject which involves ethical, moral or religious elements and on which it is deemed important that members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) be more thoroughly informed as an aid to the formation of Christian opinions and judgments, or on which the judgment of individuals or groups is desired.
- 2.3.2. A Study Document should clearly and fairly set forth various points of view held by competent and sincere Christians.
- 2.3.3. Study Documents for General Assembly consideration may be developed by administrative units, committees, task forces, commissions or panels only after authorization by the General Assembly or General Board.

- 2.3.4. The General Board shall review proposed Study Documents, determine whether they meet the criteria above, make whatever amendments or comments it deems advisable, and refer the Study Documents to the General Assembly with recommendations as to whether or not they should be issued for study.
- 2.3.5. When a Study Document is issued by the General Assembly for study, the following statement shall appear as a part of it: "This document is issued by the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). It is a study document only. It is not to be construed as an official statement of attitudes or policies of the General Assembly." The introduction to the document shall include the substance of the definition of a Study Document as set forth in 2.3.1 above.
- 2.3.6. Studies not intended for the General Assembly may be conducted by general administrative units or other recognized entities with special interests or capabilities.

#### **2.4. Items for Reflection and Research**

- 2.4.1. Items for Reflection and Research introduce critical issues that require further exploration before they could be addressed in resolutions, study documents, or items dealing with church policies or operations, and those that may never lend themselves to "yes-no" votes.
- 2.4.2. When an item is accepted for reflection and research, the Administrative Committee of the General Board shall in its next meeting establish, in consultation with the submitting entity, a process for moving the reflection and research forward. One element in the process shall be an interest group during the next General Assembly. Other options might include, but not be limited to:
  - 2.4.2.1. Encouragement of individual inquiry and reflection
  - 2.4.2.2. Organization of response from local study groups
  - 2.4.2.3. Incorporation into ongoing educational programs
  - 2.4.2.4. Suggestions of input-feedback in retreats
  - 2.4.2.5. Enlistment of constituted bodies in regions
  - 2.4.2.6. Preparation of articles for denominational publications
  - 2.4.2.7. Assignment to an existing group
  - 2.4.2.8. Formation of a task force
  - 2.4.2.9. Proposal of a study document
  - 2.4.2.10. Request for research by particular scholars
  - 2.4.2.11. Consultation with ecumenical/non-denominational agencies
  - 2.4.2.12. Arrangement of seminars or conferences
- 2.4.3. The General Board shall review all proposed Items for Reflection and Research, make whatever amendments or comments it deems advisable, and refer the items to the General Assembly with recommendations for appropriate action.

#### **2.5. Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolutions**

- 2.5.1. A Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolution is an expression of the General Assembly concerning a moral, ethical or religious matter confronting the church, the nation or the world. Adoption of a resolution must represent

agreement by a majority of an assembly's voting representatives that the conviction or view expressed is based on Christian insights and is a part of their witness to Jesus Christ. Resolutions are developed for the guidance of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in its program operation, for the consideration of the congregations and members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and for a Christian witness to the world. The text of a proposed resolution should be so phrased as not to bring into question the Christian commitment of those who do not agree.

- 2.5.2. Not more than one Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolution may be presented by any congregation, region, institution of higher education, organization with a recognized relationship or administrative unit (or by the representative governing board of any such body) to a General Assembly. The General Board may initiate resolutions as it deems necessary or advisable.
- 2.5.3. The General Board shall submit a substitute Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolution to replace multiple resolutions on the same subject.
- 2.5.4. A Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolution shall not be eligible for consideration if a resolution on the same subject has been acted upon by either of the two immediately previous General Assemblies, unless its content, or the circumstances leading to its submission, are substantially different. In preparing the docket for the General Assembly, the General Minister and President shall determine whether a resolution qualifies under this rule. If the General Minister and President determines that a resolution does not qualify, this fact and the reasons for the decision shall be made known to the submitting organization and reported to the moderator. If the submitting organization is dissatisfied with the decision, it may appeal to the Administrative Committee of the General Board for final decision (see par.66 of *The Design*).
- 2.5.5. Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolutions of a self-congratulatory, promotional nature are ineligible for consideration. As in 2.5.4 above, the determination shall be made by the General Minister and President, and an appeal may be made to the Administrative Committee of the General Board.
- 2.5.6. A Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolution is out of order and shall not be considered by the General Assembly when it contains doctrinal statements as "a test of fellowship" in its "Therefore, be it resolved" text. Doctrinal content may be included in all other parts of a resolution (and in other business items for the General Assembly) if it does not imply a test of fellowship for participation in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Determination of a Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolution's eligibility for consideration shall be made by the Executive Committee of the Administrative Committee of the General Board upon recommendation of the General Minister and President. An appeal of a determination of ineligibility may be made to the Administrative Committee (see par.66 of *The Design*).
- 2.5.7. The submitter of a Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolution shall be encouraged through guidelines provided by the Office of the General Minister and President, to attach an estimate of the item's financial impact, if

any, if it were adopted, and to suggest how any new expense could be underwritten.

2.5.8. The General Board shall review all Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolutions, make whatever amendments or comments it deems advisable and refer the resolutions to the General Assembly with recommendations for appropriate action.

### **3. Responsibilities of the Office of The General Minister and President(OGMP)**

- 3.1.** The General Minister and President, working pastorally and collegially, may counsel to limit the number of business items, urge submitters to combine resolution on a single subject, and offer aid in the drafting of items. Regional Ministers shall be informed when resolutions are received from their regions and may be enlisted in extending interpretation and pastoral care.
- 3.2.** Upon request the Office of the General Minister and President shall provide printed guidelines for the preparation of business items. The guidelines shall include definitions and interpretations of the classifications of business, the standing rules, and *The Design*.
- 3.3.** The General Minister and President shall support the Administrative Committee in its preparation of the docket of business by making recommendations concerning the eligibility of items to be considered and the classification of items. Submitters shall receive appropriate and timely notification if their items are ruled ineligible or placed in classifications other than those under which they were filed and informed that appeals for final decisions may be made to the Administrative Committee.
- 3.4.** In receiving proposed business items and following them through the processes of the Administrative Committee, the General Board and the General Assembly, the General Minister and President shall see that the identity of the group first submitting an item is preserved even if the item eventually is transmitted to the General Assembly by a different entity such as a region, a general ministry or the General Board.
- 3.5.** The General Minister and President shall invite each submitting entity to designate a spokesperson to attend the meeting of the portion of the Administrative Committee and/or General Board in which business for the General Assembly is discussed.
  - 3.5.1.** The designated person shall attend or participate at his or her own expense.
  - 3.5.2.** Communication may occur through the use of technology at the discretion of the Moderator of the General Assembly and the General Minister and President.
  - 3.5.3.** If the entity does not send a person, the General Board through the Office of the General Minister and President shall inform the submitting organization in writing of the General Board's decision and rationale.
- 3.6.** At least 40 days prior to the opening of the General Assembly, the General Minister and President shall invite each submitting entity to designate a spokesperson to make the first affirmative speech when the item is placed before the General Assembly.

- 3.6.1.** In the case of reports, the designated speaker shall summarize or supplement the printed report.
- 3.6.2.** Submitting entities shall provide the name and contact information of the designated spokesperson including mailing address to the Office of the General Minister and President no later than 20 days prior to the opening of the General Assembly.
- 3.7.** The General Minister and President shall recommend an order of business to the Moderators, which the Presiding Moderator shall propose to the General Assembly as the first item of business.
- 3.8.** When a “division of the house” or counted vote is taken on a business item in a plenary session of the General Board, a responsibility of the Office of The General Minister and Presidents to record the count and report the count with the item in the General Assembly minutes.
- 3.9.** The Office of the General Minister and President shall convene the General Assembly Program and Arrangements Task Force.
  - 3.9.1. The Task Force shall be comprised of 10 persons or more appointed by the General Minister and President in consultation with the Moderators, and staff from the Office of the General Minister and President.
    - 3.9.1.1. The 10 or more persons shall include the host Regional Minister(s) and at least one member from the Region hosting the next General Assembly.
    - 3.9.1.2. The First Vice Moderator shall chair the Task Force.
  - 3.9.2. The Task Force shall assist in the planning and preparation of the program of worship, education and business for the General Assembly as directed by the General Minister and President and the Moderators.
  - 3.9.3. In developing the program of the General Assembly, the General Minister and President and Moderators shall consult with general ministries, regions, the Administrative Committee and other church leaders as appropriate.
  - 3.9.4. The Office of the General Minister and President shall:
    - 3.9.4.1. Coordinate and administer the implementation of the General Assembly including all program and mechanical preparations in the host city.
    - 3.9.4.2. Coordinate and supervise the Local Arrangements Committees.
    - 3.9.4.3. Execute all contracts serving the General Assembly including the coordination and subletting of space.
    - 3.9.4.4. Survey all hotels and eating establishments contracted for use to assure compliance with General Assembly-established standards<sup>2</sup>.
  - 3.9.5. The full Task Force shall normally meet once with ongoing responsibilities being supervised by the staff of the Office of the General Minister and President, the Moderators of the General Assembly and meetings of Task Force sub-groups.
    - 3.9.5.1. Staff members of the Office of the General Minister and President with responsibilities for program arrangements, promotion and interpretation shall attend Task Force meetings.

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<sup>2</sup> See the Office of the General Minister and President’s Event Planning Manual.

3.9.5.2. Regular reports on General Assembly planning and preparations shall be made to the Administrative Committee.

**4. Responsibilities of the General Minister and President and the Moderators of the General Assembly**

- 4.1. Prepare the agenda for the General Assembly to be approved by the Moderators, including scheduling “orders of the day”.
- 4.2. Determine appropriate classification of business items.
- 4.3. Work with the Administrative Committee in the event of an appeal of the classification.
- 4.4. Work with ministry partners to provide the General Board with educational material regarding General Assembly business items.

**5. Responsibilities of the Administrative Committee of the General Board**

- 5.1. Receives and reviews all business items on behalf of the General Board including communication with the submitting organizations.
- 5.2. Forwards recommendations regarding Reports and Operational, Policy and Procedure business items, Sense of the Assembly Resolutions, Study Documents, and Items for Research and Reflection to the General Board including debate times (12, 24 or 48 minutes) and other actions as needed for approval by the General Board.
- 5.3. Receives and makes final decisions concerning appeals regarding eligibility of business items or classification of business items.
- 5.4. Serves as the Committee on Reference and Counsel at the General Assembly as defined in 7.3.

**6. Responsibilities of the General Board**

- 6.1. All business items<sup>3</sup> for consideration by the General Assembly, except in cases of emergency, shall originate with or be presented to the General Board.<sup>4</sup>
- 6.2. The General Board shall review the recommendations of the Administrative Committee and present a docket of business to the General Assembly including: recommendation(s) for appropriate action and designation of the length of time for debate (12, 24 or 48 minutes).

**7. Business Rules for the General Assembly**

- 7.1. The General Assembly shall receive all business items submitted to it by the General Board, consider their comments and recommendations, and after appropriate discussion and debate, take action.
  - 7.1.1. Action on Reports: received by virtue of inclusion in the Docket of the Assembly; no action is required. The General Assembly shall allow the time designated by the General Board for presentation and discussion of each report.
  - 7.1.2. Action on Operational, Policy and Organizational Items and Sense of the Assembly Resolutions:

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<sup>3</sup> Section 2 of this Document defines business items

<sup>4</sup> Paragraph 44 of *The Design*



- 7.1.2.1. Adopt or not adopt,
- 7.1.2.2. Commit to the Administrative Committee, serving as the Committee on Reference and Counsel, for revision and reported back to the current General Assembly, as feasible;
- 7.1.2.3. Commit to the Administrative Committee for designation to the appropriate body or further investigation and reported to the ensuing General Board
- 7.1.3. On Study Documents
  - 7.1.3.1. Issue for study or not issue for study;
  - 7.1.3.2. Commit to the Committee on Reference and Counsel, either for consideration of revising and reporting or for designation of a place to which the item may be referred. The item is to be reported back to a subsequent session of the current General Assembly;
  - 7.1.3.3. Refer for further investigation to a place designated by the General Board or the Committee on Reference and Counsel.
- 7.1.4. On Items for Reflection and Research
  - 7.1.4.1. Accept or not accept.
  - 7.1.4.2. There will be one speech in favor of acceptance and one speech opposed, followed by the vote. (Speeches in this classification will be limited to five minutes and cannot be reduced by action of the assembly.)
- 7.1.5. If an item is committed in the closing business session of an assembly, the item will automatically be referred to the General Board.

**7.2.** The introduction of a business item, properly presented by the presiding Moderator, shall be regarded as the main motion and does not require a second, since the motion originated with a group.

7.2.1. After the business item's introduction and allotted debated time, the action of the assembly is on the main motion and not on the recommendation of the General Board, except when the General Board's recommendation is to refer for further investigation, which is a subsidiary motion.<sup>5</sup>

7.2.1.1. If the motion to refer fails, the original business item is immediately brought to the floor of the General Assembly.

7.2.1.2. The General Board shall prepare a contingent recommendation to adopt or not adopt the original item in case the motion to refer fails.

7.2.2. The Administrative Committee shall be limited to the same recommendations as used by the General Board as listed in Section 7.1 of these rules.

**7.3.** Amendments are not permitted from the floor. A person desiring to amend an item may request that the item be committed to the Administrative Committee, serving as the Committee on Reference and Counsel, for consideration of amending and reporting back to the current General Assembly. When time does not permit for an item to return to the General Assembly, the item shall be assigned to the General Board.

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<sup>5</sup> See General Assembly Special Rules 7.13.

- 7.4.** New business may not be initiated at the General Assembly except for an emergency item.<sup>6</sup>
- 7.5.** When the General Board presents a substitute business item<sup>7</sup> to the General Assembly, the following procedures shall apply:
- 7.5.1. The moderator shall recognize a member of the General Board to speak in support of the substitute business item.
  - 7.5.2. The moderator shall recognize a representative of the group or organization submitting the original business item.
  - 7.5.3. If a substitute business item fails, the original item comes immediately to the floor of the General Assembly. The General Board shall have a contingent recommendation prepared.
  - 7.5.4. If a substitute business item is replacing multiple business items on the same subject and fails, the originals come before the General Assembly in the order in which they were received by the Office of the General Minister and President.
- 7.6.** A proposed order of business shall be published, including all Orders of the Day, and is the first business item to be presented to the General Assembly for action.
- 7.7.** A motion to receive all General Ministry reports as a group shall be ruled out of order unless the allotted time has passed for discussion and review of all reports. Similarly, a motion to receive a single Report without allowing the designated time for discussion shall be ruled out of order.
- 7.8.** The total time for debate unless otherwise noted in these rules
- 7.8.1. Shall be set by the Administrative Committee and reviewed by the General Board.
  - 7.8.2. Shall govern the debate on any given business item.
  - 7.8.3. May be changed by the presiding Officer with the approval of the assembly.
  - 7.8.4. May be changed by the assembly.
- 7.9.** Each person with floor privileges<sup>8</sup>, when recognized by the presiding Officer, may speak to each business item and debatable motion once and for no more than 3 minutes, and may speak again only if all other persons desiring to speak to the motion have had the opportunity within the total time for debate.
- 7.10.** The length of time allotted to each speaker may be reduced by motion and approval of the assembly.
- 7.10.1. The reduction does not apply to the designated spokesperson<sup>9</sup>.
  - 7.10.2. In the event a substitute resolution fails and an original resolution is brought to the floor, the designated spokesperson representing the original motion shall also be allowed 3 minutes.
- 7.11.** If there is a desire to close debate, the following procedure should be used: The chair shall receive the motion, "I move the previous question." When

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<sup>6</sup> Paragraph 45 of *The Design*.

<sup>7</sup> A substitute item of business is defined as the General Board creating a new business item based on a resolution submitted by another organization.

<sup>8</sup> Paragraphs 38 a-d of *The Design*.

<sup>9</sup> See 3.5 and 3.6.2 of the Special Rules for the General Assembly.

that motion has been seconded and carried by a two-thirds majority, the presiding Officer shall immediately put the main question without debate.

**7.12.** When the debate is closed:

7.12.1. On a Report, no action is required.

7.12.2. On an Operational, Policy and Organizational Item, Study Documents, Item for Research and Reflection or Sense of the Assembly Resolution, it is recommended that the presiding Officer shall say: "The question is on adoption of Business Item No. \_\_\_\_ entitled \_\_\_\_\_. All those who are in favor of adopting Business Item No. \_\_\_\_\_, say yes. All those who are opposed, say no." Following the vote it is recommended that the presiding Officer shall say: "The yeases have it and the business item is adopted" or "the noes have it and the business item is not adopted." When a counted vote is taken, the results shall be recorded in the General Assembly minutes.

7.12.3. In a recommendation to refer, it is recommended that the presiding Officer shall say: "The question is on the recommendation of the General Board (or Administrative Committee) to refer Business Item No. \_\_\_\_\_ entitled \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ for further investigation. All those who are in favor of referring the business item, say yes. All those who are opposed, say no." Following the vote it is recommended that the presiding Officer shall say: "The yeases have it and the business item is referred" or "the noes have it, the business item is not referred, and it now comes to the floor of the assembly for action."

**7.13.** In general, the basic rules of parliamentary procedure as described in the current edition of Robert's Rules of Order, Revised, shall be followed. The following motions, for instance, are in order, the first taking precedence over the second, the second over the third, and so forth.

- 7.13.1. To adjourn
- 7.13.2. To take a recess
- 7.13.3. To raise a question of privilege
- 7.13.4. To call for orders of the day
- 7.13.5. To rise to a point of order
- 7.13.6. To withdraw a motion
- 7.13.7. To close debate (move the previous question)
- 7.13.8. To limit or extend time for discussion and debate
- 7.13.9. To postpone discussion to a certain time
- 7.13.10. To commit
- 7.13.11. The main motion

**7.14.** Additional notes on motions

- 7.14.1. "Privileged" or "incidental" motions are 7.13.1-7.13.6
- 7.14.2. Motions subsidiary to main motion are 7.13.7-7.13.11
- 7.14.3. Debatable motions are 7.13.9-7.13.11
- 7.14.4. The following cannot be amended: 7.13.1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
- 7.14.5. The following do not require a second: 7.13.3, 4, 5, 6
- 7.14.6. The following may interrupt a speaker: 7.13.3, 4, 5
- 7.14.7. Simple majority votes carry, except for a two-thirds affirmative vote required for 7.13.7 and 7.13.8

## **8. Procedure for Amendment**

**8.1.** A two-thirds affirmative vote of the voting members of the General Assembly present and voting, a quorum being present, shall be required for any subsequent amendments.<sup>10</sup>

**8.2.** Any proposed amendments shall be circulated in advance as regular business items of the General Assembly.

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<sup>10</sup> Paragraph 46 of *The Design*.