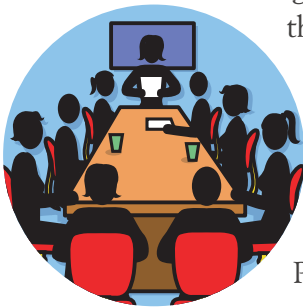


What's on your mind?

Who May Call a Congregational Meeting?

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Congregational meetings. Sometimes they are exciting, hilarious and inspiring. Sometimes they are tense and conflicted. Whatever the case may be, they are essential to the life and ministry of a congregation.

Probably the most common reason for a congregational meeting is to plan for a year's ministry and to adopt a budget that will finance the plan. This is usually called the Annual Meeting or the Annual General Meeting.

Less frequent, but equally important, is the congregational meeting that deals with extending a call to a new minister. The candidate's name and a guarantee of stipend are placed before the congregation and decisions are made that will impact its pastoral leadership for years to come.

Congregational meetings are called for other purposes as well. It might be to discern what to do with the \$500,000 the late Mrs. I.M. Richie left to the church, to discuss a vision statement, to weigh the pros and cons of selling the manse, to consider amalgamating with another congregation and the like.

The question is often asked, "Who may call a congregational meeting?"

Some think anyone who regularly supports the church with time, talent and treasure ought to be entitled to call a meeting to deal with business the person thinks is important for the congregation to discuss. Or the Board of Managers might believe it should have the right to call any congregational meeting needed to deal with finance or maintenance issues.

Book of Forms section 152 provides this answer.

Meetings of the congregation are called by the authority of the session on its own motion or on requisition in writing of the deacons' court or board of managers, or of a number of professing members, or by mandate of a higher court ...

It is the session, then, that has the authority to call congregational meetings.

The phrase "on requisition in writing" means others from the congregation, such as the Board of Managers or a group of members, may submit, to the session, a written request for a congregational meeting. The session is not bound to grant the request. It is part of the session's responsibility for the care and oversight of the congregation to discern whether or not the request is appropriate.

The only bodies that can insist that a session call a congregational meeting are the higher courts, that is, the presbytery, synod or General Assembly. In practice, the most likely higher court to mandate a congregational meeting is the presbytery since that court has the most direct relationship with congregations and is responsible for the "care and good order" of the pastoral charges within its bounds. (*Book of Forms* section 200)

For centuries, Christians have lived in community. We have worshipped and broken bread together, laughed and wept together, been the body of Christ in the world together. And together, as a congregation, we meet to pray, think, speak and discern God's will for the ongoing life and ministry of the congregation.

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