

# What's On Your Mind?

## Does a motion to adjourn need to be seconded?

Don Muir, Associate Secretary, General Assembly Office

Set against the heights of heaven and the depths of some issues facing the church, a question about a motion to adjourn does not likely dominate the thoughts of many. Still, we who do things decently and in order want the work of our courts and committees to function properly. Perhaps that's why I've frequently been asked, "Does a motion to adjourn need to be seconded?"

### Motion to Adjourn:

How often have you heard a meeting end with a discussion something like this?

Moderator: I am ready to entertain a motion to adjourn.

G.O. Holmes: So moved.

Moderator: Very good. And do we have a seconder?

G.O. Holmes: You don't need to second a motion to adjourn.

I.B. Lively: Yes you do.

G.O. Holmes: No...you don't.

I.B. Lively: I'm pretty sure you do.

Moderator: Okay...right. All those in favour of adjourning this meeting, please stand for the benediction.

### Why do we second motions?

We second motions as one way of determining which matters will be dealt with at a meeting and which ones will not. If someone proposes a motion and no one else is prepared to second it, the motion is not considered. It is treated as if it were never made. However, if another person at the meeting seconds the motion, this is deemed sufficient support to bring the matter to the floor.

### What would Robert do?

When puzzled by proper procedures, some refer to Robert's Rules of Order. In the 10th edition, the Table of Rules Relating to Motions notes that a motion to adjourn must be seconded. One website adds, "A motion to adjourn may not interrupt another speaker, must be seconded, is not debatable, is not amendable, cannot be reconsidered, and requires a majority vote." ([sonoma.edu/Senate/Roberts\\_Simple](http://sonoma.edu/Senate/Roberts_Simple))

### The Book of Forms:

There are at least two sections of the *Book of Forms* that are relevant to this discussion.

43. A motion to adjourn is always in order, and is voted on without debate.

This motion is seldom made until people are reasonably satisfied that the business is completed or that people are too weary to continue. Nevertheless, the motion is powerful since it can be made at any time without debate. That alone is an argument for the need of a seconder.

Section 40 simply states,

40. Every motion or amendment shall be given in to the clerk in writing as soon as it has been made, and it cannot be discussed until it has been duly seconded.

Although it would be unusual to write out such a motion, "every motion" would logically include the motion to adjourn.

While regulations in other organizations may allow them to operate differently, in Presbyterian circles it is legitimate to second a motion to adjourn.

Blessings,  
Don Muir

## What's on your mind?

Do you have a question about the polity of our church? Are you confused by something that happened at session, presbytery, synod, or General Assembly? Puzzling over a section of the *Book of Forms*?

Send your questions to The Rev. Don Muir and he will strive to answer them in future issues of *Equipping for . . . Elders* in a manner that maintains confidentiality and seeks to be helpful to the church at large.

Contact Don at: [dmuir@presbyterian.ca](mailto:dmuir@presbyterian.ca), 50 Wynford Dr., Toronto, Ontario M3C 1J7  
416-441-1111, ext. 223 or 1-800-619-7301, ext. 223