

Moderators Moderating Moderately

Session Starter Number 32

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Prayer:

God of wonder, we gather in your holy name to seek your will for the church. May we be open to the guidance of your spirit so that we might genuinely echo the prayer of our Lord, “not our will but yours be done.” In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Introduction: *Book of Forms* section 15

A moderator is judge only of order, and it is his or her part “to announce matters, gather the votes, and cause good order to be kept.”

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:31-33 NRSV

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved.

Brief Commentary:

On one level, this passage is about liberty and wisdom. There may be times when we are at liberty to enjoy a sizzling steak (birthday?) and times when it is not wise to do so (soaring cholesterol?). On another level, the passage is about being sensitive towards others while glorifying God.

Reflection:

Every session has a moderator. It might be the minister called by the congregation or a minister appointed by the presbytery to help a session on a temporary basis. This minister is known as an interim moderator. Interim or not, the moderator plays a vital role in the life and work of a session.

In part, the moderator’s task is to ensure session meetings are conducted in an effective and orderly fashion. As noted in *Book of Forms* sections 15 and 117, the moderator counts votes and announces decisions. There is, of course, much more to the office than that.



The moderator may introduce business appropriate to the responsibilities of the session. Though the moderator normally does not vote, the moderator is at liberty to offer helpful information and sage advice. As a teaching elder and minister of Word and

Sacraments, the moderator is involved actively in the life of the whole congregation and brings to the session a deep understanding of the Word of God, the needs of the congregation and the mission of the larger church. The moderator votes only to break a tie, but the moderator may choose to decline this vote if it is deemed wiser to postpone the decision in favour of the session working towards consensus.

There are also some things a moderator should not do. While the *Book of Forms* language is rather archaic on a couple of these points, it is clear the moderator should not hinder appropriate session discussion or refuse to put a motion, deemed to be in good order, before the elders. Although section 17.1 states that a moderator needs to vacate the moderator’s chair to express a view during a discussion, this applies more to presbytery, synod or General Assembly. During a session meeting, the minister needs to be free to join in the conversation while being careful to guard against unduly directing it.

Reflecting the spirit of Paul’s message to the Corinthians, moderators moderate moderately when they graciously enable and encourage ruling elders to discern the mind of Christ in a way that glorifies God.

(See *Book of Forms* sections 13-17 and 115-117.)

Follow up:

1. What did you discover about the role of the moderator from this Session Starter?