

The Annual Meeting: Considering a Consent Agenda

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What is a consent agenda?

A consent agenda is a way of adopting, all at once, a number of reports or recommendations that are anticipated to be readily and unanimously approved. The purpose of the consent agenda is to devote more time to matters that call for deep discernment. In some cases, it may also reduce the time needed for meetings.

Consent agenda procedures example

If a congregation, for instance, wanted to use a consent agenda at its annual general meeting, it would follow these steps.

1. Those preparing the regular agenda for the meeting add to the consent agenda any items expected to be readily and unanimously approved by the congregation.
2. The consent agenda, and supporting information for the consent agenda, are conveyed to the congregation. Sufficient time for the material to be received and read must be provided so everyone can make responsible judgments regarding which items, if any, should be removed from the consent agenda because they may require further prayer, thought and discussion. In this example, the supporting information would likely be the annual report.
3. Early in the annual meeting, the consent agenda is proposed. As the name suggests, those voting must concur with it. Therefore, any individual may have one or more items removed from the consent agenda. Items removed are inserted into the regular agenda and dealt with in the usual manner.
4. Once the congregation agrees with the consent agenda content, the moderator asks, "Are you in favour of approving the consent agenda?" The congregation registers approval.
5. All recommendations adopted in this way are included in the minutes.

What can be included on a consent agenda?

Consent agenda items may range from the routine to the significant. Provided the voting body is satisfied that the items require no further discussion, possibly because they have been considered at previous meetings, they could be adopted by means of a consent agenda.

A congregation's annual meeting consent agenda might include items like the approval of the minutes of the previous meeting, the election of the secretary and the adoption of the reports of the committees. If the congregation agrees to the consent agenda, all the reports and their recommendations are adopted together.

Generally speaking, legal matters, major financial issues and decisions expected to be controversial should not be placed on a consent agenda. The session may want to draw up a description of the sorts of items deemed appropriate for consent agendas used by the congregation.

Who can use a consent agenda?

The General Assembly experimented with a consent agenda this year. It was favourably received and may be used more extensively in the future. At least one presbytery has introduced the consent agenda to its proceedings. Provided each body agrees to employ the consent agenda, it can be used by the session, board, committees or any other groups of the congregation. It is hoped this stewardship of time will prove to be a blessing to the church.

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