

Barrier Act

Session Starter

Don Muir,
Associate Secretary, General Assembly Office

Prayer

Living God, we humbly ask that you clothe us with your love. May the peace of Christ rule our hearts. May the word of Christ guide our thinking. With gratitude, we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Introduction: Book of Forms section 293.1

No prepared law or rule relative to matters of doctrine, discipline, government or worship shall become a permanent enactment until the same has been submitted to presbyteries for consideration.

Scripture: Colossians 3:12

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience.

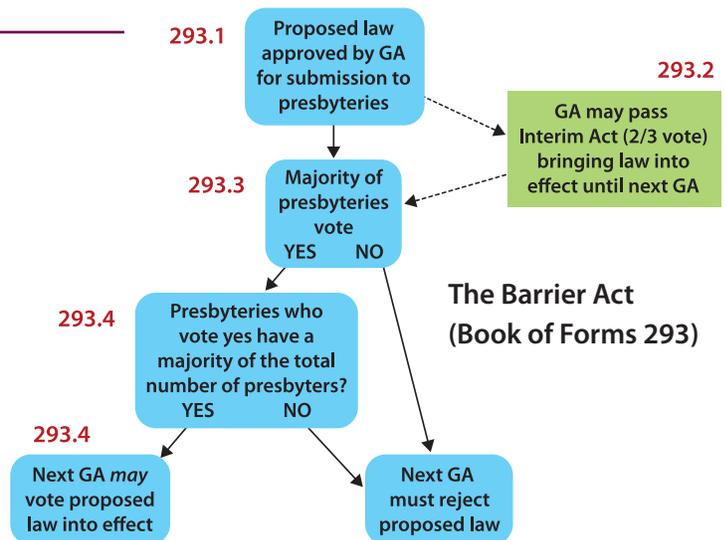
A Brief Commentary

Paul writes to the "saints and brothers and sisters in Christ" in Colossae. In the third chapter, Paul reminds them that, as people raised with Christ, they must discard tattered rags of behaviours like malice and slander while clothing themselves with compassion and patience.

Reflection

The Barrier Act. What is it?

The Barrier Act is a decision-making process of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. It is used when changes to the law or doctrine of the church are proposed. The agreement of two General Assemblies and, between the Assemblies, the approval of a majority of presbyteries whose membership represents a majority of all those on the constituent rolls of the presbyteries, is required before the proposed change can be made.



Here is an example of how the Barrier Act functions.

- Step 1:** The 2019 General Assembly adopted a recommendation to amend how Term Service for Eldership works and to send the legislation to presbyteries for their consideration. The proposed amendment would allow Sessions flexibility regarding the length of the term of service and how often elder elections are held. The information sent to presbyteries about this legislation is called a remit.
- Step 2:** As presbyteries meet during the remainder of 2019 and into 2020, each one is expected to approve or disapprove the remit and to let the General Assembly Office know its decision by April 1.
- Step 3:** If the majority, as described above, approves the remit, it will be placed before the 2020 Assembly where it can be adopted or dismissed. If the presbytery majority disapproves the remit, the 2020 General Assembly will dismiss it.

This is an important process because it means the General Assembly consults with the wider church before making changes to the law or doctrine of the denomination. It is a process that requires patience and, we trust, leads to decisions marked by compassion.

While Sessions are not immediately involved in the Barrier Act process, elders will benefit from understanding why and how this important decision-making process takes place.

Follow up:

1. What do you see as the benefits and challenges for the church in this process?