



Congregational Meetings During a Pandemic

The pandemic, with its restrictions on in-person gatherings, has caused the church to rethink how to conduct congregational meetings in such circumstances. If your congregation cannot hold in-person meetings, here are a few ideas to consider prior to your Annual General Meeting or other congregational meetings.

1. The polity of the church states that congregations should hold an annual meeting. The purpose is to transact whatever business is properly brought before it, including the financial accounts of the church. This is normally when the congregation reflects on how it will fulfill the ministry of Christ and adopts a budget that will serve that ministry for the coming year.

153. Every congregation should hold an annual meeting for receiving the report of the board of managers or the deacons' court, and transacting any other business regularly brought before it. It is recommended that the annual report be printed and circulated among the members of the congregation.

170. It is the duty of the treasurer to keep the accounts of the congregation, together with all vouchers; to receive and disburse all moneys subject to the direction and control of the board; and to produce his/her accounts, properly audited, to the annual meeting of the congregation. Where there is a chartered bank convenient to the congregation, it is the duty of the treasurer to deposit therein, without delay, all money received by him/her, and in a separate account identifying it as belonging to the congregation. (Declaratory Act: A&P 2008, p. 253, 17)

2. The purpose of any congregation meeting is to provide an opportunity to discuss business of the church and reach decisions together. The steps that follow attempt to honour that principle.
3. Congregations are encouraged to meet via Zoom or some other teleconference platform. This allows members and adherents to discuss matters in real time. Those who do not have access to laptops or other devices may join a Zoom meeting by telephone. They won't see what is happening by they can hear and be heard. They can also vote or ask to speak by pressing *9 on their phone.

The national office provides assistance with Zoom technology. You may contact Grace McCreary for help by emailing her at gmccreary@presbyterian.ca.

Some congregations have decided to include an authorizing motion at the beginning of the meeting similar to this:

Recommendation: That this congregational meeting, held with members and adherents joining by videoconference and telephone, be authorized as a regular congregational meeting for making decisions.

4. If congregations cannot meet by Zoom, the following is an alternate method of making congregational decisions.
 - a. Information regarding a matter requiring congregational decision is distributed to the congregation by email, Canada Post, or any other feasible means of communication. It may be appropriate to post the information on the church's website.
 - b. Members and adherents are invited to send questions or concerns to (where?) by (date?)
 - c. The questions and concerns are summarized and answered by the appropriate body and distributed to the congregation along with an invitation to vote on matters requiring a vote. This is not ideal but comes reasonably close to enabling the congregation to hear and consider the thoughts of others before a decision is made.
 - d. The minutes of the meeting, including decisions made, are announced or circulated.

Because members and adherents cannot interact together with this method, it should be considered irregular and reserved for use only during the pandemic when other real-time options are not possible and important decisions are required.

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