

SPECIAL RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Adopted by the General Assembly 1968 - Revised 1989
Table of Contents

Introduction, including procedures for amendment

- I. Classification and ordering of business items to be considered by the General Assembly
 - A. Origination of business items
 - B. Classifications of business items
 - 1. Reports
 - 2. Operational, Policy and Organizations items
 - 3. Study Documents
 - 4. Items for Reflection and Research
 - 5. Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolutions
 - C. Determination of eligibility and classification
 - D. Order of business
- II. Responsibilities of the Office of the General Minister and President
- III. Responsibilities of the Executive Committee of the Administrative Committee of the General Board
- IV. Responsibilities of the Administrative Committee of the General Board
- V. Responsibilities of the General Board
- VI. Rules of debate for the General Assembly

The following special rules of procedure for the General Assembly define further its organization and prescribe additional procedures for the conduct of its business.

A two-thirds affirmative vote of the voting members of the General Assembly present and voting, a quorum being present, shall be required for any subsequent amendments. Any proposed amendments shall be circulated in advance as regular items of business of the General Assembly.

As provided in paragraph 38 of *The Design* for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the current edition of Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, shall govern the General Assembly in all other cases to which they are applicable and in which they are not inconsistent with *The Design* or special rules adopted by the General Assembly.

In addition, the General Assembly may from time to time adopt standing rules as needed for the effective conduct of its business.

The General Board and its Administrative Committee shall likewise adopt standing rules for the guidance of their operations.

- I. **CLASSIFICATION AND ORDERING OF BUSINESS ITEMS TO BE CONSIDERED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**
 - A. All items of business to be considered by the General Assembly, except in cases of emergency, shall be received by or originate with the General Board. Items of business may be filed with the General Board by any congregation, region, organization with a recognized relationship, institution or administrative unit of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) (or by the representative governing board of any such body). Such items of business must be filed through the Office of the General Minister and President at least 180 days in advance* of a meeting of the General Assembly in order to allow sufficient time for the General Board to review and refer them with appropriate recommendations to the General Assembly. All items of business shall be circulated among the congregations and regions by the Office of the General Minister and President at least 60 days in advance of the General Assembly meeting (*The Design*, par. 17). (*Items postmarked on the 180th day before the General Assembly shall be regarded as meeting the deadline requirement.)

B. The General Assembly may consider five classifications of business items:

(1) Reports, (2) Operational, Policy and Organizational Items, (3) Study Documents, (4) Items for Reflection and Research, and (5) Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolutions. The rules below prescribe the procedures to be followed with respect to such business items:

1. Reports

- a. Reports are summaries of ministries performed, plans and audited financial statements of each administrative unit, commission, or other entity established or recognized by the General Assembly.
- b. Annually the General Board shall review such Reports and make whatever comments or recommendations it deems advisable.
- c. In the year in which the General Assembly meets, the General Board shall forward the Reports to the General Assembly.
- d. If a Report contains only an account of work done and is primarily for information, after appropriate General Assembly consideration, no action shall be required.
- e. If a Report contains recommendations for action by the General Assembly, or if the General Board proposes recommendations for action by the General Assembly, such recommendations shall be submitted separately as Operational, Policy and Organizational Items.
- f. When the timing of the General Assembly prohibits an administrative unit from including an audit of its financial statements in its report, such an audit shall be provided for the next meeting of the General Board.
- g. Covenantal relationships are demonstrated by annual informational reports of regions to the General Board and annual statistical reports of congregations in the *Year Book and Directory of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*. These reports of regions and congregations are not business items for the General Assembly.

2. Operational, Policy and Organizational Items

- a. Operational, Policy and Organizational Items are those which establish policy, institute or revise structures or procedures, authorize programs, approve directions or mandate actions.
- b. An Operational, Policy and Organizational Item may be originated by the General Board or by any other entity eligible to file business items for the General Assembly (rule 1, A).
 - c. Actions called for in Reports (I,B,1), whether recommended by the submitter or by the General Board, shall be transmitted to the General Assembly separately as Operational, Policy and Organizational Items.
- d. The General Board shall submit a substitute Operational, Policy and Organizational Item incorporating the substance of multiple items on the same subject.
- e. The submitter of an Operational, Policy and Organizational Item shall be encouraged through guidelines provided by the Office of the General Minister and President (see rule I,C,1) to attach an estimate of the financial impact of the item if it were adopted and to suggest how the new expense, if any, could be underwritten.
- f. The General Board shall review proposed Operational, Policy and Organizational Items, make whatever amendments or comments it deems advisable, and refer the items to the General Assembly with recommendations for appropriate action.

3. Study Documents

- a. A Study Document is a study and analysis of a subject which involves ethical, moral or religious elements and on which it is deemed important that members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) be more thoroughly informed as an aid to

the formation of Christian opinions and judgments, or on which the judgment of individuals or groups is desired.

- b. A Study Document should clearly and fairly set forth various points of view held by competent and sincere Christians.
- c. Study Documents for General Assembly consideration may be developed by administrative units, committees, task forces, commissions or panels only after authorization by the General Assembly or General Board.
- d. The General Board shall review proposed Study Documents, determine whether they meet the criteria above, make whatever amendments or comments it deems advisable, and refer the Study Documents to the General Assembly with recommendations as to whether or not they should be issued for study.
- e. When a Study Document is issued by the General Assembly for study, the following statement shall appear as a part of it: "This document is issued by the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). It is a study document only. It is not to be construed as an official statement of attitudes or policies of the General Assembly." The introduction to the document shall include the substance of the definition of a Study Document as set forth in "a" above.
- f. Studies not intended for the General Assembly may be conducted by general administrative units or other recognized entities with special interests or capabilities.

4. Items for Reflection and Research

- a. Items for Reflection and Research introduce critical issues that require further exploration before they could be addressed in resolutions, study documents, or items dealing with church policies or operations, and those that may never lend themselves to "yes-no" votes.
- b. When an item is accepted for reflection and research, the Administrative Committee of the General Board shall in its next meeting establish, in consultation with the submitting entity, a process for moving the reflection and research forward. One element in the process shall be an interest group during the next General Assembly. Other options might include, but not be limited to:
 - Encouragement of individual inquiry and reflection
 - Organization of response from local study groups
 - Incorporation into ongoing educational programs
 - Suggestions of input-feedback in retreats
 - Enlistment of constituted bodies in regions
 - Preparation of articles for denominational publications
 - Assignment to an existing group
 - Formation of a task force
 - Proposal of a study document
 - Request for research by particular scholars
 - Consultation with ecumenical/non-denominational agencies
 - Arrangement of seminars or conferences
- c. The General Board shall review all proposed Items for Reflection and Research, make whatever amendments or comments it deems advisable, and refer the items to the General Assembly with recommendations for appropriate action.

5. Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolutions

- a. A Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolution is an expression of the General Assembly concerning a moral, ethical or religious matter confronting the church, the nation or the world. Adoption of a resolution must represent agreement by a majority of an

assembly's voting representatives that the conviction or view expressed is based on Christian insights and is a part of their witness to Jesus Christ. Resolutions are developed for the guidance of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in its program operation, for the consideration of the congregations and members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and for a Christian witness to the world. The text of a proposed resolution should be so phrased as not to bring into question the Christian commitment of those who do not agree.

- b. Not more than one Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolution may be presented by any congregation, region, institution of higher education, organization with a recognized relationship or administrative unit (or by the representative governing board of any such body) to a General Assembly. The General Board may initiate resolutions as it deems necessary or advisable.
 - c. The General Board shall submit a substitute Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolution to replace multiple resolutions on the same subject.
 - d. A Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolution shall not be eligible for consideration if a resolution on the same subject has been acted upon by either of the two immediately previous General Assemblies, unless its content, or the circumstances leading to its submission, are substantially different. In preparing the docket for the General Assembly, the General Minister and President shall determine whether a resolution qualifies under this rule. If the General Minister and President determines that a resolution does not qualify, this fact and the reasons for the decision shall be made known to the submitting organization and reported to the moderator. If the submitting organization is dissatisfied with the decision, it may appeal to the Administrative Committee of the General Board for final decision (see par.32 of *The Design*).
 - e. Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolutions of a self-congratulatory, promotional nature are ineligible for consideration. As in "d" above, the determination shall be made by the General Minister and President, and an appeal may be made to the Administrative Committee of the General Board.
 - f. A Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolution is out of order and shall not be considered by the General Assembly when it contains doctrinal statements as "a test of fellowship" in its "Therefore, be it resolved" text. Doctrinal content may be included in all other parts of a resolution (and in other business items for the General Assembly) if it does not imply a test of fellowship for participation in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Determination of a Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolution's eligibility for consideration shall be made by the Executive Committee of the Administrative Committee of the General Board upon recommendation of the General Minister and President. An appeal of a determination of ineligibility may be made to the Administrative Committee (see par.32 of *The Design*).
 - g. The submitter of a Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolution shall be encouraged through guidelines provided by the Office of the General Minister and President (see rule I,C,1) to attach an estimate of the item's financial impact, if any, if it were adopted and to suggest how any new expense could be underwritten.
 - h. The General Board shall review all Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolutions, make whatever amendments or comments it deems advisable and refer the resolutions to the General Assembly with recommendations for appropriate action.
- C. Upon recommendation of the General Minister and President, the Executive Committee of the Administrative Committee shall determine whether each item qualifies for consideration and its classification. If an item is disqualified or if its classification is different from that under which it was filed, the General Minister and President shall notify the submitting entity, giving reasons for the Executive Committee's decisions. The submitter may appeal

to the Administrative Committee for final decision (see par.32 of *The Design*).

1. To assist those who are considering the filing of business items, the Office of the General Minister and President shall provide, upon request, guidelines that include definitions of the five classifications of business as well as interpretation of relevant paragraphs of *The Design* and these Rules.
 2. In the Docket of Business, printed as an index, items shall be listed under their respective classifications, each classification shall be defined and the actions appropriate to each classification shall be stated (see Appendix 1 for the format of the docket).
- D. The Executive Committee of the Administrative Committee of the General Board, making use of recommendations from the General Minister and President, shall propose an order of business to the General Assembly as its first item of business (see rule VI,F).

II. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE OFFICE OF THE GENERAL MINISTER AND PRESIDENT

- A. The Office of the General Minister and President, working pastorally and collegially, may counsel to limit the number of business items, urge submitters to combine resolutions on a single subject, offer aid in the drafting of items and so on. Regional ministers shall be informed when resolutions are received from their regions and may be enlisted in extending interpretation and pastoral care.
- B. Upon request, the office shall provide printed guidelines for the preparation of items of business. The guidelines shall include definitions of the five classifications of business, interpretation of relevant paragraphs of *The Design*, these Rules and other information that will improve understanding of the business procedures.
- C. The General Minister and President shall support the Executive Committee of the Administrative Committee in its preparation of the docket of business by making recommendations concerning the eligibility of items to be considered and the classification of items. Submitters shall receive appropriate and timely notification if their items are ruled ineligible or placed in classifications other than those under which they were filed, and informed that appeals for final decisions may be made to the Administrative Committee.
- D. In receiving proposed items of business and following them through the processes of the Executive Committee of the Administrative Committee, the General Board and the General Assembly itself, the General Minister and President shall see that the identity of the group first submitting an item is preserved even if the item eventually is transmitted to the assembly by a different entity such as a region, a general unit or the General Board.
- E. The General Minister and President shall invite each submitting entity to designate a spokesperson to attend the meeting of the General Board in which business for the General Assembly is processed (at the group's / person's expense) to speak to its item in section and plenary considerations. If such a representative cannot be present, the general minister and president shall notify the submitter of the recommendation of the General Board and shall make available the names of the chairperson and secretary of the section that considered the item, should the group wish to explore the General Board's rationale.
- F. At least 40 days prior to the opening of the General Assembly, the General Minister and President shall invite each submitting entity to designate a spokesperson to make the first affirmative speech when its item is placed before the assembly (in the case of a Report, the designated speaker will summarize or supplement the printed report). Each submitting entity shall be asked to submit the name, identification and mailing address of its spokesperson to the Office of the General Minister and President no later than 20 days prior to the opening of the assembly so instructions concerning the microphone to be used and time limits can be sent to the speaker and so the moderator can be prepared to recognize the person properly.
- G. The General Minister and President shall recommend an order of business to the Executive Committee of the Administrative Committee, which shall propose an order to the General

Assembly as the first item of business (see rule VI,F).

- H. When a "division of the house" or counted vote is taken on a business item in a plenary session of the General Board, a responsibility of the Office of the General Minister and President will be the recording of the count with the item in the General Assembly business docket.

III. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL BOARD

Making use of recommendations from the General Minister and President, the Executive Committee of the Administrative Committee shall prepare the Docket of Business for consideration by the General Board and for transmittal to the General Assembly with a proposed order of business. This preparation shall include determination as to whether items qualify for consideration and assignment of classifications. Submitters of proposed items of business may appeal decisions of the Executive Committee to the Administrative Committee for final decision.

IV. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL BOARD

- A. The Administrative Committee of the General Board shall receive, consider and make final decisions concerning appeals of decisions of its Executive Committee regarding:
 - 1. Eligibility of proposed items of business to be considered.
 - 2. Classification of items of business.
- B. In its next meeting after a General Assembly in which an Item for Reflection and Research has been accepted, the Administrative Committee of the General Board shall, in consultation with the entity that submitted the item, establish a process for moving the reflection and research forward (see rule I,B,4,b).

V. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE GENERAL BOARD

- A. All items of business for consideration by the General Assembly, except in cases of emergency, shall originate with, or be presented to, the General Board as provided in paragraph 17 of *The Design* .
- B. Items of business which may be considered by the General Assembly include: Reports; Operational, Policy and Organizational Items; Study Documents; Items for Reflection and Research; and Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolutions.
- C. The General Board shall review all items of business, make whatever amendments or comments it deems advisable, establish a total time for debate on each business item and present the docket of business to the General Assembly with the board's recommendation(s) for appropriate action and designated debate time(s).
- D. When two or more Operational, Policy and Organizational Items or Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolutions have been submitted on the same subject, the General Board shall prepare a substitute business item to replace them (see rules I,B,2,d and I,B,5,c). The General Board also shall prepare contingent recommendations concerning each of the original items in the event a substitute fails (see rule VI,E,3).
- E. A Report requires no recommendation from the General Board to be received. Should a Report call for action, or should the General Board propose action based on the Report, a recommendation should be prepared separately as an Operational, Policy and Organizational Item.
- F. The General Board may recommend to the General Assembly that an Operational, Policy and Organizational Item or a Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolution be adopted, not adopted, or referred to a designated place for further investigation.
- G. The General Board may recommend to the General Assembly that a Study Document be

issued for study, not issued for study or referred to a designated place for further investigation.

- H. The General Board may recommend to the General Assembly that an item for Reflection and Research be accepted or not accepted and may provide a brief rationale for the recommendation.

VI. RULES OF DEBATE FOR THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

- A. The General Assembly shall receive all items of business submitted to it, consider the comments and recommendations of the General Board, and after appropriate discussion and debate, take one of the following actions:
 - 1. On Reports
 - a. Having been received by virtue of inclusion in the Docket of Business, no action is required. However, as provided in rule VI 6, the General Assembly shall allow the time designated by the General Board for presentation and discussion of each report.
 - 2. On Operational, Policy and Organizational Items and on Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolutions:
 - a. Adopt or not adopt;
 - b. Commit to the Committee on Reference and Counsel, either for revision or for designation of a place to which the item may be referred. The item is to be reported back to a subsequent session of the current General Assembly;
 - c. Refer for further investigation to a place designated by the General Board or the Committee on Reference and Counsel.
 - 3. On Study Documents
 - a. Issue for study or not issue for study;
 - b. Commit to the Committee on Reference and Counsel, either for revision or for designation of a place to which the item may be referred. The item is to be reported back to a subsequent session of the current General Assembly;
 - c. Refer for further investigation to a place designated by the General Board or the Committee on Reference and Counsel.
 - 4. On Items for Reflection and Research
 - a. Accept or not accept.

If an item is committed in the closing business session of an assembly, the item will automatically be referred to the General Board.
- B. The introduction of a business item, properly presented, shall be regarded as a "main motion" before the General Assembly; and having originated from a group rather than an individual, it will be assumed it has been duly seconded. Action by the General Assembly shall be on the "main motion" (the item of business itself) and not on the recommendation of the General Board, except in the case of the recommendation "to refer for further investigation," which shall be regarded as a "subsidiary motion" to refer. If the motion to refer fails, the business item shall come immediately to the floor of the Assembly. The General Board shall have prepared a contingent recommendation to adopt or not adopt the original item in case the motion to refer fails. The Committee on Reference and Counsel

shall be limited to the same kinds of recommendations used by the General Board.

- C. Amendments to business items may not be made from the floor of the General Assembly, although debate is encouraged. The item properly could be committed to the Committee on Reference and Counsel for possible amendment, and then reported back.
- D. New business may not be initiated in the General Assembly, except for an emergency item as provided for in paragraph 18 of *The Design*, and no item of business may be introduced by a member of the assembly from the floor.
- E. When the General Board presents a substitute item of business to the General Assembly, the following procedures will apply:
 - 1. The moderator will recognize a member of the General Board to speak in support of the substitute item of business.
 - 2. The moderator then will recognize a representative of the group or organization submitting the original item of business.
 - 3. If a substitute item of business fails, the original item comes immediately to the floor of the General Assembly. the General Board shall have prepared a contingent recommendation to adopt, not adopt or refer the original in event the substitute fails.
 - 4. If a substitute replacing multiple items of business on the same subject fails, the originals come before the General Assembly in the order in which they were received by the Office of the General Minister and President.
- F. For equity and convenience in handling the business of the General Assembly, a proposed order of business will be published and will become the first item of business to be presented to the General Assembly for action.

However, Items for Reflection and Research and Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolutions scheduled for each session will come to the floor of the assembly in a sequence determined by a drawing at the beginning of each session. Those not completed at the recess of a session in which they were scheduled will be put at the end of the order of business in the sequence determined by the original drawing. Items for Reflection and Research and Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolutions not dealt with because of expiration of time will automatically be referred to the General Board. Any item of business in process at the recess of a session will be completed at the beginning of the next business session of the current General Assembly.

- G. Because Reports of general administrative units and other entities comprise an essential component of General Assembly business, a motion from the floor to receive them as a group shall be ruled out of order unless there has been access to the time allotted by the General Board for discussion and review of each Report. Similarly, a motion to receive a single Report without allowing the designated time for discussion shall be ruled out of order.
- H. The total time for debate set by the General Board and designated in the General Assembly business docket shall govern the total time for debate on any given business item. Each person with floor privileges, when recognized by the presiding officer, may speak to each business item and debatable motion once and for no more than three minutes, and may speak again only if all other such persons desiring to speak to the motion have had the opportunity within the total time for debate. Speeches on Items for Reflection and Research shall be limited to one in favor of acceptance and one opposed to acceptance, and will be limited to five minutes each. The presiding officer may change the time for individual debate with the permission of the General Assembly. The General Assembly may change the total time for debate for any business item, except for Reports and Items for Reflection and Research as described in "G" above and "I" below or change the time limit for individual debate by two-thirds affirmative vote.

However when a motion is passed reducing the time of each speaker to less than three minutes, the reduction does not apply to the person charged with presenting the agenda item to the assembly. In the case of a substitute item of business, the second speaker representing the original also will be allotted three minutes.

- I. On Items for Reflection and Research, there will be one speech in favor of acceptance and one speech opposed, followed by the vote. (Speeches in this classification will be limited to five minutes and cannot be reduced by action of the assembly.)
- J. If there is a desire to close debate, the following procedure should be used: The chair will receive the motion, "I move the previous question." When that motion has been seconded and carried by a two-thirds majority, the presiding officer will immediately put the main question without debate.
- K. When the debate is closed:
 1. On a Report, no action is required.
 2. On an Operational, Policy and Organizational Item and on a Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolution, the presiding officer shall say: "The question is on adoption of Business Item No. ____ entitled _____. All those who are in favor of adopting Business Item No. _____, say aye. All those who are opposed, say no. The ayes have it and the business item is adopted." (Or, "The noes have it and the business item is not adopted.") When a counted vote is taken, the results shall be recorded in the General Assembly minutes.
 3. On a Study Document, the presiding officer shall say: "The question is on whether Business Item No. ____ entitled _____ shall be issued by the General Assembly for study. All those who are in favor of issuing Business Item No. ____ for study, say aye. All those who are opposed, say no. The ayes have it and the business item shall be issued for study." (Or, "The noes have it and the business item shall not be issued for study.")
 4. On an Item for Reflection and Research, the presiding officer shall say: "The question is on whether Business Item No. ____ entitled _____ shall be accepted for reflection and research. All those in favor of accepting Business Item No. ____ for reflection and research, say aye. All those who are opposed, say no. The ayes have it and the business item is accepted for reflection and research." (Or, "The noes have it and the business item is not accepted for reflection and research.")
 5. On a recommendation to refer, the presiding officer shall say: "The question is on the recommendation of the General Board (or Committee on Reference and Counsel) to refer Business Item No. ____ entitled _____ to _____ for further investigation. All those who are in favor of referring the business item, say aye. All those who are opposed, say no. The ayes have it and the business item is referred." (Or, "The noes have it, the business item is not referred, and it now comes to the floor of the assembly for action.")
- L. In general, the basic rules of parliamentary procedure as described in the current edition of Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, will be followed. The following motions, for instance, are in order, the first taking precedence over the second, the second over the third, etc.
 1. To adjourn
 2. To take a recess
 3. To raise a question of privilege
 4. To call for orders of the day
 5. To rise to a point of order
 6. To withdraw a motion
 7. To close debate (move the previous question)
 8. To limit or extend time for discussion and debate
 9. To postpone discussion to a certain time

10. To commit
11. The main motion
 - "Privileged" or "incidental" motions are 1-6
 - Motions subsidiary to main motion are 7-11
 - Debatable motions are 9-11
 - The following cannot be amended: 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
 - The following do not require a second: 3, 4, 5, 6
 - The following may interrupt a speaker: 3, 4, 5
 - Simple majority votes carry, except for a two-thirds affirmative vote required for 7 and 8

