

Tool 11



How to Write a Motion

A motion puts a matter “on the floor” of the court so that it can then be discussed. Through our discussion, we attempt to discern God’s will and then we are in a position to pass or reject the motion. It is, therefore, extremely important to present a motion that is clear, complete and debatable. This is not always easy. No one wants to make a motion that is difficult to understand because it is poorly worded, too specific or too vague. Try to formulate the motion ahead of time, particularly if you anticipate the motion will generate a lively exchange of ideas. The ability to debate well requires an understanding of what should be in a motion and what stands as support or opposition.

What Is a Motion?

A motion introduces a subject or issue for consideration by presbytery. It may be helpful to remember the questions Why? What? Where? When? How? Who? You may not need to answer all these questions in every motion, but keeping them in mind ensures your motion is complete. Consider this well-meaning motion adopted by a lower court: “ ... that the Sunday school teachers be invited to attend the workshop on Saturday.”

Not until the next meeting does anyone realize no one was designated to invite the Sunday school teachers! The motion might have been better written to read:

M. Tremblay moved, D. Muir seconded, that B. Smart invite the Sunday school teachers to attend the presbytery Christian education workshop to be held at St. Peter's, Madock, on Saturday, March 24, 2007.

We did not answer all the W5 questions, but keeping them in mind ensured that the motion was as complete as possible. Presenting a clear, unambiguous motion avoids unnecessary debate and provides clarification that leaves us more time to discern God’s will for our actions.

Other motions cannot be entertained until the motion on the floor has been decided unless a member of the court makes one of the following six motions. (These are referred to as six instances of how a motion can “yield to others.” In other words, they have precedence over the original motion under consideration on the floor.) In order of importance, these motions are:

1. to adjourn
2. to lay a motion on the table to be taken up at a future sitting of the court
3. to refer to a committee for further study
4. to amend
5. to take an immediate vote
6. to reconsider (in this case, a decision must be moved as a notice of motion and may only be moved and seconded by presbyters who voted in the majority).

Any questions or comments? Please contact the Elders’ Institute for information.

Written by Rev. Mark Tremblay
Assisted by Rev. Don Muir, deputy clerk of the General Assembly
Copyright © Elders’ Institute 2007