

## Elders' Toolbox

### Sage Advice for Ruling Elders

1. Many people mistakenly think that *Robert's Rules of Order* is our rule book. Although there may be some similarities, the Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC) follows *The Book of Forms*, which represents 140 years of church experience in Canada. The principles that undergird it go back 450 years to the Reformation. The PCC is a representative theocracy, not a democracy. (Roberta Clare, Elders' Institute Director)
2. *The Book of Forms* is not so much a rule book as a book about process. It is a policy companion and guide. (Ted Siverns, Elders' Institute Course Writer and Instructor)
3. What is pastoral visiting? Here's the answer from the prophet Isaiah: "The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher that I *might sustain the weary with a word*. Morning by morning he wakens my ear *to listen as one who is taught*" (Isaiah 50:4). What are we listening to hear in our pastoral conversations? How the other person is experiencing God in his or her life. We do not judge, order, tell people how to solve their problems. We help brainstorm options and use "mirroring" and feedback tools so the person will feel he or she has been heard. (Roberta Clare)
4. My experience is that, most often, strong disagreement in session meetings about particular programs or strategies is rooted in a common commitment to seek the good of the congregation. While members of session all want the congregation to flourish, we don't always agree on how to do that. We're better listeners though when we hear the common care in what others propose." (Richard Topping, Professor of Reformation History, St. Andrew's Hall)
5. A tip for writing prayers for public worship: Think of prayers as a conversation with God in which we offer our praise, thanksgiving and petitions (requests) on behalf of the people. (Introduction to Lay Ministry online course discussions, 2011)
6. Pray from the heart without ceasing. Wait on God; do not do things on your own initiative. (Kathleen Bolton, Elders' Institute Communications Administrator)
7. It is easy to allow one or two people to make all the decisions and do all the work; it is tempting to say nothing while other people push through the ideas about which they are passionate. The Book of Forms guides us as we make decisions from mutual consent; spread the burden of leadership among those whose gifts are suited for the task, and refuse to allow bullying. Creating an open spirit now will circumvent many problems later. (Mark Tremblay, Church of the Covenant, Lansdowne and St. Paul's, Caintown, Ontario)
8. Burnout occurs when we are called on to work consistently out of our weaknesses rather than our strengths. Beware of burnout. Identify your gifts. Make sure you have opportunities to work with your strengths in order to balance the fatigue you experience from working out of your weaknesses. (Roberta Clare)
9. In my experience, most controversy is about the church building and worship. See our tools for dealing with controversy. (Roberta Clare)