

## **Guidelines for Debate and Vote Presbytery of Santa Barbara**

### **Preliminary information:**

- A. Robert's Rules of Order shall be operative for the presbytery meetings.
- B. The presbytery will be urged to remember that this process is a part of the privilege we have as Presbyterians to look at and change our constitution, our Standing Rules, and our presbytery guidelines.
- D. To be included in these Guidelines is the document "Seeking to be Faithful Together: Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement" adopted by the 204<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1992) of the PC(USA).

### **Guidelines for debate and vote on all matters before the presbytery:**

- 1. Persons who speak shall identify themselves by giving their name and church or relationship to the presbytery.
- 2. No one person may speak for more than two (2) minutes; speakers will alternate pro and con; no one may speak twice until all have had an opportunity to speak once.
- 3. During the debate, speakers will address the moderator and speak to the proposed amendment.
- 4. It is inappropriate to applaud.
- 5. We will follow our regular procedure for Corresponding Members. The Book of Order states that ministers or elders "in good standing in other governing bodies of this church or in any other Christian church, who are present at any meeting of the presbytery, may be invited to sit as corresponding members, with voice but no vote." Since this is our normal practice, individuals the presbytery designates as Corresponding Members will be seated and will be allowed to speak to all matters coming before the presbytery at the meetings.
- 6. Committee members are routinely granted privilege of the floor and therefore may speak at the meetings. They may not vote.
- 7. Meeting attendance shall be totaled prior to voting.
- 8. Voting will be by voice unless requested otherwise. For a ballot vote, we will use blank paper for ballots.

# Seeking To Be Faithful Together:

## Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement

Adopted by the 204th General Assembly (1992) of the PC(USA)

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In a spirit of trust and love, we promise we will:

1. Treat each other respectfully so as to build trust, believing that we all desire to be faithful to Jesus the Christ:

we will keep our conversations and communications open for candid and forthright exchange;

we will not ask questions or make statements in a way that will intimidate or judge others.

2. Learn about various positions on the topic of disagreement.
3. State what we think we heard and ask for clarification before responding, in an effort to be sure we understand each other.
4. Share our concerns directly with individuals or groups with whom we have disagreements in a spirit of love and respect in keeping with Jesus' teachings.
5. Focus on ideas and suggestions instead of questioning people's motives, intelligence, or integrity; we will not engage in name-calling or labeling of others prior to, during, or following the discussion.
6. Share our personal experiences about the subject of disagreement so that others may more fully understand our concerns.
7. Indicate where we agree with those of other viewpoints as well as where we disagree.
8. Seek to stay in community with each other though the discussion may be vigorous and full of tension; we will be ready to forgive and be forgiven.
9. Follow these additional guidelines when we meet in decision-making bodies:
  - urge persons of various points of view to speak and promise to listen to these positions seriously;

seek conclusions informed by our points of agreement;

be sensitive to the feelings and concerns of those who do not agree with the majority and respect their rights of conscience;

abide by the decision of the majority, and if we disagree with it and wish to change it, work for that change in ways that are consistent with these guidelines.

10. Include our disagreements in our prayers, not praying for the triumph of our viewpoints, but seeking God's grace to listen attentively, to speak clearly, and to remain open to the vision God holds for us all.

As Presbyterians, we are called to work for "the peace, unity, and purity of the church" (Book of Order, G-14.0207g) as we seek to be faithful to God's work in the world. However, disagreements and conflicts are inevitable in the life of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as we try to be faithful. They exist within committees, congregations, presbyteries, synods, at General Assemblies, and in the national life of the denomination.

Conflicts are inevitable in all of life and certainly in the church. The history of the church is filled with conflicts and disagreements. Several of Paul's letters address the conflicts that were [common] in the early church. There have been and are going to be disagreements as Christians attempt to discern God's work in the world and as we interpret Scriptures.

Conflicts can be harmful and even destructive. They can cause individuals a great deal of pain and the community of faith immeasurable damage. Congregations have been divided; denominations have experienced schisms.

At the same time, conflicts can be an opportunity for new insights, learning, and individual and corporate growth. Disagreements can illuminate a topic in helpful ways and can present solutions to problems that previously had not been seen. The successful resolution of conflict can also bind people together in a powerful way.

The Bible contains many stories of conflict and disagreement and much advice about how they can be addressed. As those stories indicate, God is already present wherever there is brokenness, granting wholeness and peace. God promises to be with us in times of disagreement and calls us to reconciliation, trust, love, and forgiveness.

We realize that our perspectives are limited, so to help us affirm each other, enhance our community, stay open to the viewpoints of others and be sensitive to cultural diversity, we commit ourselves to the guidelines in a spirit of prayer, trust, and love, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit.