Presbyterian
CHURCH IN IRELAND

Revised guide to
Assembly procedure

Using this Guide

In this guide you will find definitions and explanations of important elements of the General Assembly.

If you want to know how to do something at the Assembly such as asking a question:

• You will also find practical guidance in boxes with bullet points.

Each section finishes with guidance in italics about where to find further information.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

2023

Notes:

(i) Business commences at 10am on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. There are business sessions on Friday evening.

(ii) Communion will be held on Friday at 11.45am and Worship on Thursday at 12.15pm.

(iii) Figures in brackets refer to page numbers in the Annual Reports.

Wednesday

Opening of General Assembly

Thursday

GA Business Committee – Initial Report

Presbyteries

General Council (Section 1)

Social Witness

Public Affairs

General Council (Section 2)

Friday

General Council (Section 3)

General Council (Section 4)

Councils and Commissions not presenting verbally

Judicial Commission – Code Republishing

Mission in Ireland

General Council (Section 5)

Saturday

Private Session – Judicial Commission etc.

Trustees

General Council (Section 6)

Training in Ministry

General Council (Section 7)

Overtures

GA Business Committee – Final Report

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 21

Assembly Buildings

7pm   Service of Worship
                 Constitution of Assembly
                 Moderator of the General Assembly

THURSDAY, JUNE 22

10am   1. GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE:
                 Initial Report and Resolutions 1–4 (pp. 4–6 and 401)

             2. REPORTS OF PRESBYTERIES: (pp. 215–221)

             3. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 1 of Report and
                 Resolutions 5–7 (pp. 1–25 and 401)
                 Executive Summary and Introduction; Pastoral
                 Leadership Task Group; General Assembly Opening and
                 Installation of Moderator Report; Principal Appointment

11.30am 4. Reception of Visiting Delegates

12.15pm 5. WORSHIP

1pm   *LUNCH*

2pm   6. COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL WITNESS:
                 Report and Resolutions (pp. 222–236 and 406)

2.45pm   7. COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS:
                 Report and Resolutions (pp. 237–258 and 406–407)

3.45pm   *REFRESHMENT BREAK*

4.15pm   8. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 2 of Report and
                 Resolutions 8–12 (pp. 26–54 and 402)
                 Doctrine Committee; Brief Statement on Faith
                 and Order; Virtual Communion; Decision Making
                 and Dissent Task Group

5.45pm   *DINNER*

7.45pm   9. Evening Celebration

(9.15pm)   *Close*

Times in brackets may be anticipated but should not be passed.

FRIDAY, JUNE 23

10am	10.	GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 3 of Report and Resolutions 13–15 (pp. 55–60 and 402–403 Membership and People with Intellectual Disabilities Task Group
10.30am	11.	GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 4 of Report and Resolutions 16–18 (pp. 61–102 and 403 Communications Strategy Task Group; Pandemic Response Task Group
11.30am		*INTERMISSION*
11.45am	12.	Assembly Communion Service
1pm		*LUNCH*
2pm	13.	COUNCILS/COMMISSIONS NOT PRESENTING VERBALLY: Council for Congregational Life and Witness (pp. 259–282 and 407); Council for Global Mission (pp. 283–306 and 408); Linkage Commission (pp. 307–324 and 408)
2.45pm	14.	Listening to the Global Church
3.45pm		*REFRESHMENT BREAK*
4.15pm	15.	JUDICIAL COMMISSION: Report and Resolutions (pp. 365–379 and 409–410) Code Republishing Task Group
5.45pm		*DINNER*
7.15pm	16.	COUNCIL FOR MISSION IN IRELAND: Report and Resolutions (pp. 325–364 and 410–411)
8.15pm	17.	GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 5 of Report and Resolutions 19-21 (pp. 103–150 and 403) Reconfiguration of Ministry Task Group
(9pm)		*Close*

SATURDAY, JUNE 24

10am 18. Private Session – JUDICIAL COMMISSION:
Report and Resolutions (pp. 365–379 and 409–410)
Special Judicial Commisson (p. 378 and 410);
Commission on Applications (p. 379 and 410)

10.30am 19. TRUSTEES:
Report and Resolutions (pp. 380–385 and 411)

11am 20. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 6 of Report and Resolutions 22–29 (pp. 151–187 and 403–404
Support Services Committee; United Appeal Committee; Initial Pension Scheme Review Panel; Holding Trustees Task Group; Guysmere Panel

1pm *LUNCH*

2pm 21. COUNCIL FOR TRAINING IN MINISTRY:
Report and Resolutions (pp. 386-396 and 411-412)

3pm 22. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 7 of Report and Resolutions 30–40 (pp.188–214 and 404–406
Nominations Committee; General Assembly Advisory Committee; Church Relations Committee; Ad Hoc Business (inc. Memorials (pp. 412–413)); Reports for information – PHSI and PCS

23. Overtures (pp. 397–400 and 413–414)

24. Lapsed Business (if any)

25. Final Report of the General Assembly Business Committee

CLOSE OF ASSEMBLY

Times in brackets may be anticipated but should not be passed.

Reports of councils and commissions

Almost all of the time of the General Assembly is taken up with the reports of councils and commissions, as they report on what they have been doing throughout the year and what they hope to do in the future.

These reports are contained in the Annual Reports, or 'blue book', that is issued before the Assembly – it is important to read the reports in advance.

The Assembly cannot carry out the work of the Church directly, so it entrusts this to different councils and commissions.

Councils normally have a number of committees working under them, so there are separate sections in council reports for the work of these committees.

A commission has been entrusted with the power of the Assembly in its particular area of responsibility.

Members of councils and commissions are appointed by the Assembly itself – this is contained in the Nominations Committee of the General Council – a separate booklet is printed with the names being proposed to the Assembly. Councils and commissions are led by a convener, and supported by a secretary.

At the start of each session, a member of the Assembly (usually the convener of the council or commission) will speak about the written report and propose the resolutions – this is known as 'presenting' the report. Then another member of that council or commission will speak and will second the resolutions.

If the council or commission needs to report some things that happened after the main report was written, these are included in the Supplementary Reports booklet - this should be read in conjunction with the main blue book.

Every report must be 'received' by the Assembly. This does not mean that the Assembly agrees with everything that the report says, nor that it accepts responsibility for what a report contains. Rather, it means that the council or commission has presented its report to the Assembly in an acceptable way, and that the Assembly has received the report from the council or commission.

The report does not have the authority of the Assembly, only that of the council or commission.

If a member of the Assembly believes that something important is not covered in any of the existing resolutions from a council or commission, they can submit an additional resolution.

From the 2023 Assembly, some reports will only be presented in written form (GA Reports 2021 P117 Recommendation 3c).

These reports will normally be formally proposed and seconded without speeches. There will be opportunity for genuine questions for clarification (as on Page 5 below). Debate on the resolutions will only be permitted by the Moderator where a resolution is being opposed or an amendment considered. If debate takes place, it will follow the process outlined below.

In 2023, the following council reports will be presented in this format on Friday 23 June at 2pm – CCLW (pp. 259–282 and 407); CGM (pp. 283–306 and 408); and Linkage (pp. 307–324 and 408).

If you want to submit an additional resolution:

- You should give the additional resolution to the Clerk of the Assembly in writing at least one week before the Assembly.

- You will need a proposer and seconder for the resolution. If you are a member of the Assembly you are able to propose or second it yourself. If you are not a member of the Assembly, you may 'present' a resolution, but only Assembly members can propose and second.

- If you want to rescind or reverse a previous decision of the Assembly then you must give notice of this at one annual meeting of the General Assembly, and then bring your resolution to the next annual meeting.

You can find further information on councils and committees in the Code Pars 268-310.

You can find further information on reports and resolutions in Pars III–V of the General Assembly's Standing Orders and the Code Pars 144–7.

Ordering of business

Each session of business is normally ordered in the following sequence:

• Speech by the proposer of a report and accompanying resolutions

• Speech by the seconder

• Questions

• Debate on each resolution

  o Speeches may be made about the resolution

  o Amendments may be proposed, although this is the exception

    – Speech by proposer of the amendment

    – Speech by seconder of the amendment

    – Questions about the amendment

    – Debate about the amendment

    – Closing speech by the proposer or seconder of the amendment

    – Vote to make the amendment the substantive resolution – which will still need to be debated and voted on

  o The proposer or seconder may close debate on the resolution with a speech

  o Vote on the resolution

  o Any dissent is recorded

• Debate on the final resolution 'That the report be received,' following the same sequence as above.

Questions

After the report has been presented and seconded, there is an opportunity for questions to be asked about anything in the reports and speeches.

Questions must be strictly asking for information about something in the report or speeches, or something not in the report but on a topic under the council's or commission's area of responsibility. A question should not be asked to score a point, or to make a speech.

If you wish to ask a question:

• You can ask without giving any advance warning, but you will get a better answer if you submit your question in advance.

• If submitting your question in advance you should write it out and place it in the box provided at the front of the hall, or you can submit it by email to deputyclerk@presbyterianireland.org.

• You should do this at least 15 minutes before the report in question. The more notice you give of a question, the more time there will be for the person responding to provide you with a full and accurate answer.

• Make sure that you are sitting in the main part of the hall, not the public gallery.

• Before asking your question, you should come up to the front in good time, and sit in the seats reserved for speakers, close to the microphone. By doing so, the Moderator will know that you want to speak and will invite you to do so when it is your turn - don't wait in your own seat.

• If the Moderator stands up again to speak while you are speaking, you must stop and listen to the Moderator.

• Normally, no one is able to ask more than two questions on any report, and the total time for questions is limited to 10 minutes.

You can find more information on Questions in the Code Par 153.

Debate

After questions have been asked and answered, the resolutions from the council or commission are debated and voted on one at a time. The resolutions are numbered and printed in the Resolution Booklet.

In the debate, speeches are made either in support of, or in opposition to a resolution.

The final resolution of every report is 'that the report be received.' This is the opportunity for speeches to be made (but not ask questions about) on any matters in the report or for which the council or commission should bear responsibility, but which are not included in any previous resolution.

If you wish to speak in a debate:

• Make sure that you are sitting in the main part of the hall, not the public gallery.

• Come up to the front in good time and sit in the seats reserved for speakers, close to the microphone. By doing so, the Moderator will know that you want to speak and will invite you to do so when it is your turn – don't wait in your own seat.

• If the Moderator stands up again to speak while you are speaking, you must stop and listen to the Moderator.

• To make sure everyone has a fair chance to speak, you can only speak once to each resolution, and there is a strict time limit on speaking. There is normally up to four minutes for speeches, apart from the proposer and seconder, who have longer. There are two lights to help you know when your time is running out. The red light turns solid and a buzzer sounds when your time is up. You must stop speaking at this point.

You can find further information on Debate in the Code Par 148-155.

Voting

When the Moderator thinks that a resolution has been sufficiently debated, they will move the Assembly to vote on it. Only voting members can vote.

There are three ways a vote can happen:

- Most votes are **voice votes**. The Moderator will ask everyone in favour of the resolution to say 'Aye', and then ask everyone opposed to it to say 'No'.

- If the voice vote is close, then the Moderator may call for a **standing vote**. First, everyone in favour will be asked to stand while holding up their voting cards. Then everyone opposed will be asked to stand while holding up their voting cards. A rough count will be taken by the Moderator. Only people on the ground floor of the hall can vote. Anyone in the public gallery will not be able to vote, so it is important that you are seated on the ground floor.

- If this vote seems close, then the Moderator may call for a **card vote**. When you arrive at the Assembly, you will have been given a voting card with tear-off strips for yes and no. During the vote, tellers will move throughout the ground floor with voting boxes. Put one voting strip into the box – either yes or no. The tellers will then count the votes and report the result to the Moderator.

Sometimes, the Moderator may decide to go straight to a card vote. A card vote must happen if 25 people ask for it.

Proxy voting for a member of the Assembly who cannot be present is not allowed.

You can find further information on Voting in the Code Pars 156-160.

Dissent

After a vote, you may disagree with a decision the Assembly has made.

If you feel very strongly that a bad decision has been made, then you can register your dissent in the minutes. However if you are a minister or elder, even when you disagree, you still have a responsibility to loyally implement the decisions of the Assembly.

If you wish to register your dissent:
- Speak to the Deputy Clerk immediately after the vote has taken place.
- You can then sign a statement that the Deputy Clerk will print, which says that you dissent from the decision the Assembly has just taken.
- This is then recorded in the minutes.

You can find further information on Dissent in the Code Pars 104 & 160.

Amendments

As well as voting yes or no to resolutions, members of the Assembly can also amend resolutions.

An amendment is a change to the wording of a resolution. This may clarify what the resolution states or substantively change what is being proposed, but it cannot introduce another subject and it cannot be an outright negation of the original resolution.

When a valid amendment is proposed and seconded at the Assembly, then:

- Debate about the original resolution is paused
- The proposer and seconder may each give a speech about the amendment

- The Assembly may ask questions about the amendment in the same way as with a resolution

- The Assembly may debate the amendment

- Either the proposer or seconder may give a closing speech

- The Assembly votes on the amendment

If the vote on the amendment passes, then the amendment becomes the substantive resolution and debate continues about whether to pass that amended resolution.

If the vote does not pass, then the original resolution is not altered and debate about it resumes.

If you want to propose an amendment:

- You must submit the Amendment in writing to the Clerk of the Assembly, either in writing to the Clerk's desk or by email to deputyclerk@presbyterianireland.org

- You must have a proposer and seconder for the amendment

- You must give at least one day's notice if your amendment substantially affects the scope of a resolution or overture.

- You cannot introduce another subject in your amendment or propose outright negation of a resolution.

- You may propose an amendment during debate if it does not substantially affect the scope of a resolution or overture.

- If you propose an amendment sufficiently in advance, the General Assembly Business Committee may licence it and it will then take precedence over other amendments.

- If you speak to the proposer and seconder of the original motion in advance, they may accept your amendment without the Assembly voting on it. If it is not accepted and you still wish to propose the amendment then, if you notify the Clerk, it will appear in the supplementary reports. If an amendment is accepted before the Assembly starts, then the updated resolution can be distributed in supplementary reports.

You can find further information about amendments in the Code Pars 148–152 and Par VI of the General Assembly's Standing Orders.

Memorials

Memorials are requests made to the Assembly, usually by a person or body who is not a member of the Assembly – a presbytery, a church member or group of members, or a group of people not connected with the Church. If you are not a member of the Assembly, you are able to bring a memorial.

Procedures and forms are laid down to be used in bringing memorials.

If you wish to submit a memorial:

• You should contact your Clerk of Presbytery or the Clerk of the General Assembly (clerk@presbyterianireland.org) for advice

• It is advisable to first present your memorial to a lower court of the church such as your Presbytery. If the lower court supports the memorial then you will be able to present it to the Assembly with their support. If they do not support the memorial it is less likely that the Assembly would be supportive.

You can find further information on Memorials in the Code Pars 147(5); 217(5)(a)&(b); 262.

Overtures

Overtures are special resolutions which are used to change the Code, which is the constitution of the Church.

Some overtures are printed in the blue book. If these are agreed by a two-thirds majority, they will be adopted immediately. Others which have not had such notice, will be adopted if no one votes against. If overtures do not achieve the preceding majorities, they are 'placed on the books' for one year, and decided on by the following Assembly. This also applies to the rules governing the Central Ministry Fund and other Ministry Funds.

In the Basic Code, where it's desirable that the proposed changes come into operation immediately, the change can be adopted temporarily during the intervening year as an 'Interim Act'. If an overture is submitted that would result in a significant constitutional change, it must also be sent to presbyteries to be voted on during the intervening year.

You can find further information on Overtures in the Code Pars 111 & 112.

Alternative format items

At each Assembly, one or two items of business will have an alternative format. This will often include presentations with speakers or videos which highlight the work of a council, for example, Global Mission Workers, or Mission in Ireland or Social Witness staff. Often there will be no formal resolutions or debates during these sessions, but they provide important updates on the work the Church through its councils.

Further information on the General Assembly can be found in the Code Pars 97–112.

The Code is available at www.presbyterianireland.org/Resources/ General-Assembly/The-Code.aspx

The General Assembly's Standing Orders can be found in the Code.

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