CM – 18 - Guidelines for electronic assemblies when participants are unable to meet face to face.

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The polity and theology of the Presbyterian Church recognizes the importance of elders and ministers assembling together to make decisions about the work and ministry of the church. There is no substitute for the richness of conversation and debate that is possible when we gather in one place to listen and watch and open ourselves to the work of the Spirit. We best subject ourselves to each other and to God's discerning power when we are together.

There are circumstances though, when being physically present with one another is impossible or impractical. The following are guidelines for the extraordinary times when we must use other means of accomplishing the business of a governing body when we cannot meet face to face.

1. The 216th General Assembly provided an Authoritative Interpretation concerning votes by email or mail (2004 item 04-14). In that opinion the church was reminded that:
   - **a.** G-9.0302b says that "Meetings of governing bodies, commission, and committees shall be conducted in accordance with the most recent edition of *Robert's Rules of Order…*"
   - **b.** *RRONR* (page 482) states that "The opportunity for simultaneous communication is central to the deliberative character of the meeting, and is what distinguishes it from [other] attempts to do business…"
   - **c.** The summary conclusion of the 216th General Assembly was that "voting by e-mail is permissible only if there has been provision for deliberation, and the governing documents of the governing body provide for vote by mail or email."

2. Furthermore, at the Reunion meeting of the General Assemblies, the UPC General Assembly (1983) reaffirmed the following as reflecting the Historic Principles of the Presbyterian Church:

   Every governing body is composed of persons who are elected to represent the church. Representatives are not simply to reflect the will of the people but rather to seek together to find and represent the will of Christ for the Church. For this reason, the polity of the Church requires

   That representatives may not be instructed nor vote by proxy.
   They must have the freedom to participate in debate.
   Debate within the context of prayer is properly open to the movement of the Holy Spirit.
   Representatives must be open to the possibility of having their minds changed and
   The rules for the conduct of debate are designed so this may happen.

   [G-1.0400, UPC, 1983, pp 141ff, Report of the Special Committee on Historic Principles, Conscience, and Church Government]

3. Any non-traditional form of meeting must provide an opportunity for simultaneous communication and deliberation.

4. Any non-traditional form of meeting must be described in the governing body's bylaws or standing rules.

5. Care must be taken that all qualified to participate in the meeting are included.

6. Care must be taken to provide opportunities for others to participate in the same manner that they might observe a regular meeting of the governing body.

7. Minutes of the meeting must be recorded and added to the minutes record of the governing body.