

The Anatomy of a Session Meeting 2026

I. Preparation; The Agenda:

1. **Create an agenda template that can be rolled over month after month.**
2. **The template will need to be kept in the Church office and overseen by a responsible church employee/volunteer.**
3. Holdover items from the previous meeting will be inserted into the new month's agenda. Most generally these items will be listed under "old business".
4. As new items arise, they will be dropped into "new business" most of the time.
5. Committee meeting minutes/reports including motions will be inserted into the template as a packet item. Committee minutes/reports need to be a part of the Session meeting packet with cross references shown on the agenda and committee minutes/reports to each other, however short simple motions from committee minutes can go directly onto the agenda.
6. "Note" Committees must meet prior to the Agenda meeting if the committees meet. Some Committees don't have a need to meet monthly but the chair must communicate there was no meeting to the Agenda meeting group if that's the case.
7. Copies of all Committee minutes/reports will be included with the agenda's as support documents and thus an "agenda packet" has been created.
8. The agenda should have a section titled "Omnibus Motion" that would dispose of multiple routine actions such as approving minutes, transferring a member who moved out of town to another church, and etc. Before this motion is made and seconded opportunity will be given to all Session member to move any of the listed actions to the main agenda if they so desire.
9. **Next is an agenda meeting consisting of at least the Pastor, Clerk of Session, and the church employee in charge of the agenda template will finalize the Session meeting agenda. At this time when the agenda is completed, besides the agenda itself, added to it will be the separate committee minutes/motions and again a Session agenda packet is created.**
10. The final act of preparation is to distribute the agenda packages to the Session members. This can be done via electronic and/or paper; however, the Session members must have received these **Agenda packages at least four days prior to the Session meeting.**

II A Word About Sessional Committees

1. All committees shall have written job descriptions, it's just common sense
2. Committees shall submit written minutes/report to the agenda group 2 to 3 days prior the Session agenda meeting.
3. The reports/minutes shall include any motions emulating from the committee meetings. These aforementioned motions shall be clearly identified as "motions" along with their rational.
4. Some minutes/reports will not require any action and thus when listed on the agenda these items should be clearly marked "Info Only" no action required. This will avoid unneeded discussions that accomplish nothing and waste time.
5. There are instances when committees don't have a need to meet every month. In those instances when a committee doesn't meet, it's the responsibility of the chair to communicate with the agenda group "no report didn't meet" which should appear on the agenda.

III Basic Common-Sense Meeting Practices

1. The most important thing for all Session members to remember is as stated in the Book of Government 9-8: **It is the first duty of the Ruling Elder to represent the mind of Christ, as that person understands it, in the various courts of the Church.**
This is the most important issue for all Elders to understand and practice throughout their eldership! EPC Sessions do not make decisions as the US Congress does where actions are based on pressure from special interest groups and lobbyist. EPC Elders/Sessions base their actions on the guidance from Jesus Christ, in other words **"Represent the Mind of Christ"**. That doesn't mean Elders don't listen to concerns of congregants but at the end of the day the highest priority is "Represent the Mind of Christ". This is why all major Sessional decisions must be in the hands of the elders several days prior to a Session meeting so that the proposals can be read, studied, above all prayed over prior to the meeting, & then voted on.
2. All Session meetings must begin with prayer/devotion and end in prayer. Most often this is done by the Pastor however it's certainly proper for the Pastor to assign the devotion to a RE if he/she chooses to do so.

3. The basics of “Roberts Rules

- a. Generally speaking, discussions on various issues are prohibited unless there is a motion on the meeting floor.
 - b. Motions emulating from committees do not require seconds
 - c. All non-committee motions do require “seconds”
 - d. To amend a motion already on the floor is done as follows:
 - 1- A motion to amend is made in writing and seconded
 - 2- The motion to amend is voted on. If the vote fails obviously the motion to amend dies on the meeting floor.
 - 3- If the motion to amend carries, then the motion as a whole is then voted on. Again, if that vote fails to carry the amended motion dies on the meeting floor
 - e. **The practice of amending motions on the floor of a meeting should be rare and seldom done.**
 - f. Changes to the agenda must be voted on and agreed to if the agenda is to be changed from as printed just as done at Presbytery.
4. The majority of all motions placed on the meeting floor must be written and concise. Vaguely worded motions generally become impossible to execute, (Example: motion to “hire a new organist”) it becomes obvious that such a motion would cause considerable confusion and be difficult to carry out, who, salary, & etc.? However simple routine motions such as: “I move to adjourn this meeting” wouldn’t need to be written.
5. **No Session member should be permitted to speak on a motion a second time on the meeting floor until all the other Session members have been permitted to speak the first time if they so desire.**
6. During a discussion when two sides arise on a floor motion, then the discussion must vacillate back and forth between “for” or “against” until the discussion ends and/or one of the two sides have all spoken.
7. In the event a major important motion is placed on the meeting floor and it was not included in the agenda, that motion will be voted on at the next meeting. In the instance when the motion is time sensitive, then schedule a called meeting a few days later and then vote. Session members can’t represent the Mind of Christ unless sufficient time is allotted to pray over the proposal.

8. The length of a meeting should on average be between 1.5 to 1.75 hours and under no circumstances last beyond 2 hours. In the event 2 hours prove to be an insufficient amount of time to transact all the needed business, at that point an additional meeting will need to be called/scheduled. It's been proven over and over that when decisions are made beyond the 2-hour mark in a meeting, a good deal of the time those decisions aren't good. What happens more often than not is when meetings go beyond 2 hours it descends into a state of "psychobabble"!
9. Some Sessions meet at an agreed to restaurant and eat a relaxed meal together before the Session meeting. In most instances the meeting isn't discussed, it's just a good time of fellowship and relationship building.
10. It becomes obvious that once the agenda is written, short of an emergency nothing will be brought up at that meeting not written in the agenda. In instances when a Session member attempts bring up something not on the agenda, the moderator will politely reply by saying something like "please write up your proposal and submit it to the agenda planning group for next month" and it will be addressed at that time. Of course, something simple such as confirming the time of an event is not what's being addressed.
11. Through prayer and discernment, the Session seeks to represent the mind of Christ together—not just individually. Once the session has voted it becomes incumbent upon each elder to submit to their fellow elders in the Lord (Question No. 7 of the Ordination Vows asks: "Do you promise subjection to your fellow Presbyters in the Lord?") This means that, after an appropriate opportunity for remonstrance, as elders you commit to follow the decision of the majority. If, after appropriate remonstrance, an elder finds they cannot in good conscience support the decision they may peaceably withdraw from Session, but under no circumstances may they continue their remonstrance in the congregation. To do so violates their ordination vows.

12. There is to a great degree wisdom in the Session electing a “Moderator Pro-Tempore”. This person must be selected by the TE Moderator and approved by the session. One of the major reasons is that when there is a motion on the floor the TE Moderator must be “impartial”. The notion that a church's Pastor is unable to speak to a motion on the floor of the meeting is absurd. This is where the Moderator Pro-tempore comes in as he/she would moderate when motions are on the floor. This individual should be part of the agenda planning group and thus would naturally be in favor of the vast majority of the motions contained in the agenda.

In a scenario like this a wise TE would wait until all the REs had spoken to the issue and then offer his/hers in-put, by waiting until last to speak this avoids some REs just agreeing with the Pastor.

13. **Sessions may want to consider having vetting/brainstorming informal meetings to address a major issue like a building project as an example prior to voting at the stated meeting.**

IV Sample time lines with the Session meeting being the first Monday of the month Feb. 3, 2020:

Scenario # 1

1. 1/24/20 All Committee meetings have been completed and minutes submitted to the agenda planning group.
2. 1/27/20 Agenda planning group meets and completes agenda packet.
3. 1/29/20 Agenda packets distributed to Session members either electronically and/or RE mail boxes.
4. 2/3/20 Stated Session meeting
5. “Note” The calendars below are to provide visual references of the above time scenario.

Scenario # 2

1. 1/6/20 \$ 75,000 proposal to remodel church kitchen presented @ Jan. Session Meeting
2. 1/16/20 “Brainstorming” meeting is called to “vet” the Kitchen proposal. The meeting will begin at 6:00 PM with deli sandwiches, actual discussion of proposal begins at 6:25 PM, and discussion ends at 8:15 PM. From this discussion a roughed-out motion is created and via straw poll agreed to for the Feb. Session meeting.
3. 1/24/20 All Committee meetings have been completed and minutes submitted to the agenda planning group.
4. 1/27/20 Agenda planning group meets and completes agenda packet.

5. 1/29/20 Agenda packets distributed to Session members either electronically and/or RE mail boxes.
6. 2/3/20 Stated Session meeting. Kitchen proposal briefly discussed & voted on along with other business on the meeting agenda.
7. The idea of this scenario is to exhibit a reasonable set of time sequences as to how a major proposal could be processed and do a thorough job vetting it prior to voting on the proposal. The dates used are only illustrations for the purpose of training, for instance the Stated Session meeting could be any date within a month which obviously would shuffle the scenario dates in this document and still retain the approximate time gaps between the listed steps in this document.

V. Misc. Comments

1. It's wise for Sessions in governing themselves to consider not permitting items that have been decided to be brought up in less than a year unless agreed to by a majority sessional vote.

2. Electronic Meetings

- a. Example of an EPC churches motion to adopt the practice of electronic meetings:

ELECTRONIC MEETING MOTION By
Law Amendment

SESSION MEETING 7/9/15

WHEREAS, the Session for MGEPC recognizes that we live in an increasingly mobile society in which Session members are not always available for Session meetings, particularly special meetings or emergency circumstances;

WHEREAS, the EPC Book of Order and the MGEPC Bylaws require that Session members be physically present for meetings, and that a quorum exist in order to take action at any meeting;

WHEREAS, Article VI, Meetings of the Session, Section 2 provides that Special meetings may be held without notice [only] if all the Elders are present, or if those not present waive notice of time, place, and purpose of the meeting, either before or after the holding thereof;

WHEREAS, Article VI, Meetings of the Session, Section 3 provides that, while a majority of the Elders shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business, in the event there is less than a quorum present, the Session must adjourn the meeting until a quorum shall have been obtained;

WHEREAS, Article VI, Meetings of the Session, Section 4 provides that informal action may be taken by Session without a meeting [only] if written consent to the action in question is signed by all the Elders;

WHEREAS, in the event of exigent circumstances, the current Bylaws for MGEPC fail to provide a means for Session to take action without being physically meeting;

WHEREAS, Session acknowledges that the occasional need to take quick action is not a substitute for regular or special meetings, wherein a full discussion of facts and issues can occur;

NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS HEREBY MOVED that MGEPC Session approve amendments to its BYLAWS as follows:

1. To Article VI, Meetings of the Session, Section 3, add the underlined portion:

“A majority of the Elders shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business, except for the purpose of receiving members in which case the quorum shall be the Moderator and two Elders, and the action of a majority of the Elders present at any meeting at which a quorum is present shall be the action of the Session. If at any meeting of the Session there shall be less than a quorum present, a majority of those present may adjourn the meeting from time to time until a quorum shall have been obtained. With the Consent of those Elders physically present at any meeting, an Elder may participate at any meeting of the Session by means of a conference call, video conference, or such other similar electronic means that allows for each Elder to hear and to be heard by each other Elder at the same time, and such Elder shall be deemed to be present at such meeting. (Amended 7/9/15)”

2. To Article VI, Meetings of the Session, Section 4, add the underlined portion:

“Action taken by a majority of Elders then holding office without a meeting is nevertheless Session action if written consent to the action in question is signed by all the Elders, or consent given by electronic transmission, and filed with the minutes of the proceedings of the Session, whether done before or after the action so taken. Any such action shall only be effective upon a vote either in writing or by electronic transmission of a majority of Elders. (Amended 7/9/15).”

Submitted this the 9th day of July 2015.

Written by Ruling Elder Duke Lineberry

3. The new Roberts Rules book also articulates a procedure to practice electronic meetings.

2020 JANUARY

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

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2020 FEBRUARY

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29

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