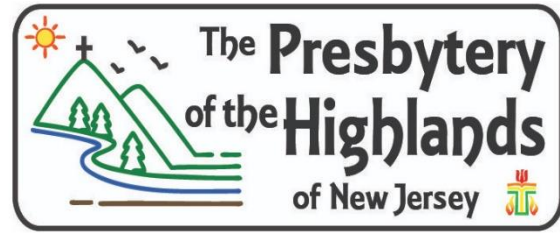


Presbytery of the Highlands Electronic, Virtual or Hybrid Meetings Policy



Introduction

The Presbytery recognizes that the work of the church increasingly requires the use of technology to connect members across distance and circumstance. While electronic meetings provide flexibility and accessibility, they must also preserve the spirit of fairness, order, and inclusivity that guides all Presbytery gatherings. This document establishes clear standards and procedures for conducting virtual and hybrid meetings, ensuring that they reflect the same integrity, accountability, and deliberative character as traditional in-person meetings. By outlining expectations for communication, participation, and decision-making, these guidelines safeguard the unity of the Presbytery while making space for faithful and effective ministry in a changing environment.

Purpose Statement:

This document sets the standards and procedures for conducting electronic meetings of the Presbytery and its entities. It ensures that these meetings maintain fairness, accessibility, and thoughtful deliberation, consistent with traditional meetings. It outlines requirements for technology, notification, quorum, participation, and record-keeping, safeguarding the integrity of decision-making and the inclusion of all members.

Scope of Application:

This policy applies to all electronic meetings of the Presbytery and its committees or entities. It defines the procedures, requirements, and standards for such meetings.

Accountability Statement:

All members of the Presbytery, its committees, and entities are responsible for following the provisions of this document when conducting electronic meetings. The moderator is especially accountable for ensuring that meetings adhere to these guidelines and uphold the integrity, inclusivity, and deliberative nature of the proceedings.

Process:

Virtual or electronic meetings of the Presbytery, its committees, or other entities may be conducted according to the following provisions:

- **Purpose of Meetings:**

Virtual or electronic meetings may be held to conduct regular or special meetings when needed. They may also be conducted as hybrid meetings if the technology allows.

- **Communication Requirements:**

Meetings must allow simultaneous audio communication among all participants to support full discussion of the issues; all must be able to “hear and be heard simultaneously” (G-3.0105).

- **Quorum:**

A quorum for virtual or electronic meetings shall be a majority of members and must be declared at the beginning of the meeting.

- **Participation Rules:**

The same participation rules apply as in traditional meetings. The body may grant, but is not required to grant, the privilege of the floor to guests. Guests may not vote or speak after debate has closed.

- **Meeting Policy:**

Virtual or electronic meetings must adhere to the Constitution of the PC(USA) and Roberts Rules of Order Newly Revised. Care must be taken to allow observers to attend, just as they would in a traditional meeting.

- **Minutes:**

Minutes of the proceedings must be recorded and added to the official record.

- **Motions:**

Motions shall be handled the same way as in traditional meetings. The moderator must also consider any technological issues that could affect participants’ ability to fully engage and provide opportunities to resolve these issues before business begins.

- **Inclusivity:**

The moderator is responsible for ensuring that all participants can hear, contribute to, and fully participate in the meeting.

- **Email Communication and Voting:**

When email is used to share information and build consensus, the final decision must be confirmed or rejected by vote at the next meeting.

An email vote is only permitted if the matter has already been discussed in a traditional or electronic meeting. Such a vote must be unanimous. If any questions are raised or a negative vote is cast, the matter must be revisited in a traditional or electronic meeting.

Key Words Definitions

Electronic Meetings: “Meetings at which, rather than all participant members being physically present in one room or area as in traditional (“face-to-face”) meetings, some or all of them communicate with the others through electronic means such as the Internet or by telephone” (RONR 9:31).

“In accordance with the requirement of Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised, councils and their commissions and committees may meet electronically, provided that the technology employed allows for all members present to hear and be heard simultaneously. This includes joining one or more persons electronically to an otherwise in-person meeting” (G-3.0105).

Presbytery: The Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey.

Committee or Other Presbytery Entity: This policy pertains to the Presbytery, its authorized assemblies, and any bodies established according to the Presbytery’s bylaws (RONR 9:35). The congregations of the Presbytery are required to establish their own electronic meeting policies in their bylaws if such meetings are to be held.

Moderator – person(s) elected or appointed to conduct the meeting and see that the rules are observed.

Quorum – A quorum must be declared at the beginning of the meeting, and it shall be determined by audio and/or visual means. Thereafter, the continued presence of a quorum shall be determined by the online list of participating members, unless any member demands a quorum count (RONR p. 639).

The Presbytery’s approved definition of quorum for stated and special meetings of the Presbytery is eight minister member commissioners and eight ruling elder commissioners, for a total of sixteen commissioners, representing eight different congregations. For other bodies established by the Presbytery’s bylaws, a quorum for virtual or electronic meetings shall be a majority of members.

Privilege of the Floor – To seek recognition by the Moderator, a member shall use the “raise hand” feature, and failing that, may unmute and speak to get the Moderator’s attention. Other electronic reactions will not be recognized, and their use is strongly discouraged.

Guest – someone not a member of the body who is granted “privilege of the floor,” which means permission has been permitted to enter the meeting, in part or in whole, when ordinarily only members and staff could attend. It carries no right to speak or any other right of membership, except as determined by the body in its rules or action.

Such persons can be excluded at any time from part of all of a meeting, or from all of its meetings, by ruling of the chair, adoption of a rule, or by an appropriate motion as the need arises (RONR 3:31 fn 5; 61:7).

Technological Disruption – Each member is responsible for their own audio or Internet connections; no action shall be invalidated on the grounds that the loss of, or poor quality of, a member’s individual connection prevented participation in the meeting (RONR p. 640).

Deliberative Character of Meetings –

When the number of participants is too large for all to be displayed simultaneously, a video of the Moderator shall be displayed throughout the meeting, as well as a video of the member currently recognized to speak.

A member seeking to gain privilege of the floor shall use the “raise hand” feature, and failing that, may unmute and speak to get the Moderator’s attention. This same practice is to be employed when a member wishes to interrupt another when doing so is permissible under the rules.

The Moderator may cause or direct the disconnection or muting of a member’s connection if they are causing undue interference with the meeting. The Moderator’s decision to do so, which is subject to an undebatable appeal that can be made by any member, shall be announced during the meeting and recorded in the minutes (RONR p. 640).

Motions and amendments shall be submitted in writing via the online area available for such communications.

Voting is ordinarily conducted by use of a green check mark (Ü) to vote in favor and a red “X” to vote against.

Notice of Meeting – The Presbytery shall send by email to every member, at least 7 days before each Presbytery meeting, the time of the meeting, the address and codes necessary to connect to the meeting, and alternate phone numbers and access codes needed to participate by phone (RONR p. 639).

The meeting shall open at least five minutes prior to the start of the meeting.