

THE PRESBYTERY OF LOS RANCHOS
GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

As leaders within the Christian community, the Presbytery Council has the opportunity to show by its own action, its ability to address issues of potential disagreement and/or controversy. Guidelines adopted by the 204th General Assembly and by the Presbytery of Los Ranchos seek the means by which we can listen to and respect our differences regardless of their nature. These guidelines focus on:

- Praying for God's grace so that we may be open to new ideas and to the vision God holds for us all.
- Respectful treatment of each other,
- Learning about all positions on a topic of potential disagreement,
- Listening and seeking clarification of positions that differ from our own,
- Sharing our concerns directly with those who disagree,
- Focusing on ideas rather than people,
- Sensitivity to the feelings of others.

We provide guidelines for responsible people to follow in the task of appropriately addressing controversy and recognize that each issue will require the applied wisdom of Presbytery leadership.

Background:

It is the role of Presbytery to provide a fair and balanced forum for dealing with issues of divergent opinion. Committees and staff of Presbytery, through the Council, need to bring these issues to the main body for study and reflection to assure that the Presbytery is knowledgeable about an issue, whether or not that issue results in action by the body.

The primary responsibility for researching and presenting views to be brought to Presbytery, whether they agree or differ from a particular committee's position, lies with the Presbytery Council. (This does not mean Council necessarily does the research, only that such is done appropriately.)

It is the responsibility of Presbytery or Council committees, however, to alert the Council of an issue where there may be a difference of opinion or disagreement.

I. Informational Forums

From time to time, the Presbytery may wish to discuss a sensitive topic or issue. The Presbytery Council, through the use of the meeting docket or educational event will:

- Urge persons of various points of view to speak and promise to seriously listen to each other's positions,
- Listen to and respect the feelings and concerns of those who disagree, who may be in the minority and respect their rights of conscience,
- Seek outcomes, where possible, informed by the discussion and in accordance with consensus agreement.

II. Action Items/Overtures/Constitutional Amendments

Where an issue or overture of potential controversy comes before the Presbytery for action, the following procedure will be followed:

A. Preparation

Committees or Task Forces shall prepare the presbyters to understand the issue and be ready to respond to the issue through:

1. Education events occurring in conjunction with a Presbytery meeting.
2. Study material which includes:
 - Recommendation of the committee,
 - Rationale to support the committee recommendation, and
 - Minority report if there is one.

Such material should be provided prior to the Presbytery meeting at which the issue/overture is to be presented, preferably in the docket mailing.

NOTE: Where there is no committee or task force to prepare these materials, the Presbytery Council can appoint an Ad Hoc Committee to educate and/or prepare materials for presentation to Presbytery in a similar time line. Council may also determine that, where time permits, the item presentation can be delayed in order to provide sufficient preparation time.

NOTE: Overtures coming from other presbyteries, synods or churches of the Presbytery on the way to General Assembly will be received by the Stated Clerk by October 10 and processed through the Polity and Records Committee who may seek recommendations from other committees of Presbytery. Proposed constitutional amendments coming from the General Assembly for vote by the Presbytery will be handled in the same manner.

B. First Reading

A first reading of an action item or motion dealing with an issue/overture of potential disagreement or controversy shall be made at a Presbytery meeting. The reading shall include:

1. presentation of the committee recommendation and supporting rationale,
2. minority report, if any,
3. other presentations as arranged in advance in consultations with committee and Council, if any,
4. opportunity for discussion of the motion (no vote to be taken),
5. announcement that persons wishing to make a *formal presentation* of a differing opinion need to contact the Stated Clerk, Council Moderator or Presbytery Moderator at least 30 days prior to the next Presbytery meeting in order to arrange adequate docket time. (Persons wishing to comment may do so as part of the regular floor debate.)

C. Forum

A forum-type meeting should be arranged for presbyters prior to the time of voting where diverse opinions may be presented. This will generally be conducted immediately prior to the Presbytery meeting where the second reading is scheduled. A prominent announcement shall be included in the mailing to presbyters.

D. Second Reading

A "second reading" of an action item or motion shall ordinarily be made at the next scheduled Presbytery meeting following the Presbytery meeting in which the first reading occurred. This shall include:

1. presentation of the committee recommendation and supporting rationale,
2. minority report, if any,
3. presentation, by others, providing these have been arranged for in advance (See B.5),
4. discussion of the motion with a vote taken if it is in order.

NOTE: In rare cases, in order to respond in a timely manner, Presbytery Council may make exceptions to the time line, if adequate material can be sent to all Presbyters in time for them to acquaint themselves with the issue/overture and if a forum can be scheduled for discussion of the issue/overture prior to the meeting to vote on the motion. In such exceptional cases, the necessity of a first reading may be waived.