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Guide to becoming a

Young  
Adult  
Representative

at  
General Assembly

The Presbyterian Church in Canada

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## Welcome

We are glad that you have been selected by your presbytery as a Young Adult Representative, familiarly called YAR.

Attending General Assembly is a unique experience, giving you the opportunity to meet people from across Canada, other nations, and other denominations as they come together to struggle with the concerns that face our church today. You will experience from within the workings of the wider church, its most exciting, frustrating, inspiring and tiring aspects. Hopefully, you will come away with a new sense of God at work through the church and in the world.

This guide introduces you to this week-long event we call General Assembly. It answers the following questions:

- ❖ How is our Church governed?
- ❖ What is General Assembly?
- ❖ Who comes to General Assembly?
- ❖ What will happen at General Assembly?
- ❖ How can you get the most out of Assembly?

## Terms and meanings

As you read this booklet, refer to the section “What does that mean?” on page 14 for an explanation of some unusual words and phrases.

## Who are Young Adult Representatives (YARs)?

YARs are young adults between the ages of 16 and 25 who have been chosen by their presbytery to attend General Assembly. They are lay young people who are active in their congregation and are interested in the life and mission of the church, and who are willing and able to share their experience with others when they return home. Each year, half the presbyteries (about 25) are eligible to send one young adult to Assembly.

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## How is our church governed?

Before discussing the parts that make up the governing structure of our church, it must be said that The Presbyterian Church in Canada affirms Jesus Christ as the king and head of the church. Its members believe that the foundations of the church's structure of governance are firmly rooted in Scripture. John Congram writes that "when we talk about church government we are really talking about how we believe God orders our life and faith in the church on earth."

The Presbyterian Church in Canada is governed by a series of groups called courts. These courts, which are composed of ministers\* and elders from congregations, have certain powers and responsibilities within the church, and are divided into four levels: session, presbytery, synod, and General Assembly. (See chart on page 5.)

The lowest court is the session, whose members are elected from among congregation members to serve as elders. The session is responsible for establishing the overall vision and direction of the congregation, as well as overseeing certain aspects of its ministry, including Christian education and pastoral care.

The presbytery oversees a number of congregations in a certain geographical area. The Han-Ca presbyteries are exceptions to this rule, and are based on ethnicity, language and culture. Members of presbytery include ministers and representative elders from each of the congregations in the presbytery. This court makes decisions about the calling and discipline of ministers, church property, and establishing new congregations, among other things.

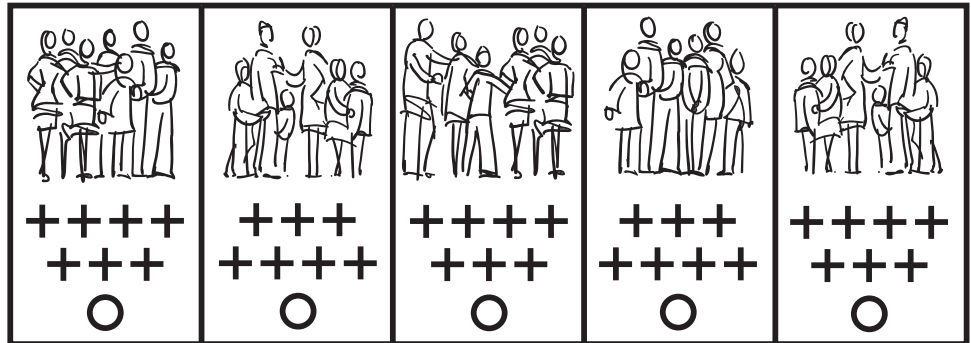
A collection of presbyteries in a certain geographical area make up a synod. All members of a synod's presbyteries attend an annual meeting, where business can include making decisions about regional camping ministries (whom synod oversees) or other matters brought forward by presbyteries.

The highest court in The Presbyterian Church in Canada is General Assembly, which you will learn about in the next section.

\* In this document, the term minister includes Ministers of Word and Sacrament and members of the Order of Diaconal Ministers.

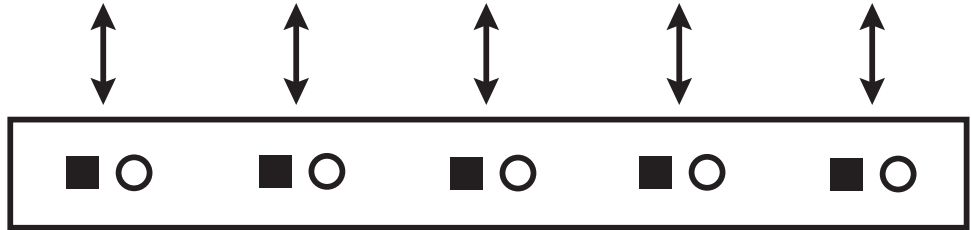


**Congregations**

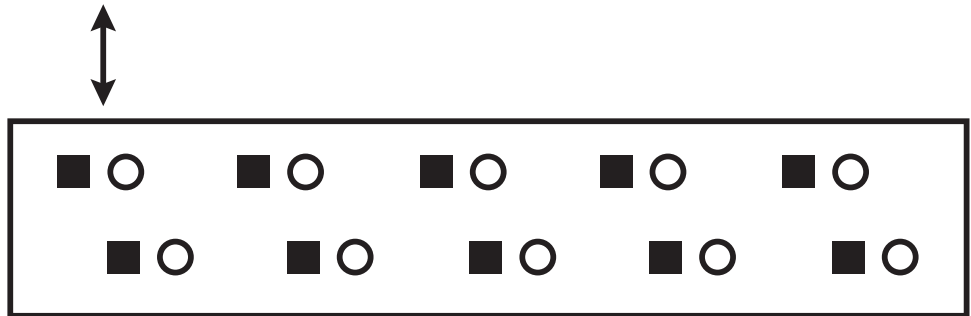


**Sessions**  
Elders elected  
by the  
congregation

**Presbytery**  
Minister and  
representative  
elder from  
each charge or  
congregation



**Synod**  
All members of  
presbyteries  
(others may be  
commissioned)



**General Assembly**

1/6 of the  
ministers of each  
presbytery,  
plus an equal  
number of elders



**Key:** ○ = minister    + = elder    ■ = representative elder



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## What is General Assembly?

The General Assembly meets annually to perform specific duties assigned to it by the constitution of the church. It consists of one-sixth of the whole number of ministers whose names are on the constituent rolls of the presbyteries of the church, together with an equal number of elders. It deals with such matters as doctrine, worship, church government, missions, colleges, the life of the congregations, petitions, overtures, and complaints from the other courts. It hears from ecumenical and interfaith visitors and other invited speakers. The General Assembly differs from the lower courts of the church in that it has, as a body, no permanent existence.

General Assembly is presided over by a Moderator, who is elected as soon as Assembly opens, and whose duty it is to see that business is properly conducted. There are also three Clerks of Assembly, who are responsible for keeping records and minutes, and advising the Moderator on legal and procedural matters.

When General Assembly has performed its duties, it dissolves itself. Its members have no further powers, apart from the powers of any commissions that may have been appointed, and the Assembly ceases to exist.

The Assembly appoints standing committees and boards that are entrusted with conducting the business of the church throughout the year. These report annually to the General Assembly, and receive instruction from the General Assembly as to how to proceed for the coming year. (See *Book of Forms*, sections 277–312.) These boards and committees are supported by a number of people who work out of the national office of the church at 50 Wynford Drive, Toronto, Ontario. The governing boards of our colleges also report to General Assembly.

The reports from the boards, committees and colleges, and other business to be dealt with at General Assembly are gathered together in a book of reports. This book is sent to those attending the General Assembly approximately one month in advance of the meeting. As a YAR, you will be receiving a copy of this book. Although it is a big volume, please read it before arriving.

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## Who comes to General Assembly?

**Moderator** is an officer of Assembly elected during the first sederunt (sitting). The Moderator presides over the sessions. Although technically this office only runs during the week of Assembly, the Moderator represents The Presbyterian Church in Canada during the coming year. (See *Book of Forms*, 282–285.)

**Clerks of Assembly** are officials of Assembly. There is a Principal Clerk and two Deputy Clerks who are responsible for keeping an accurate account of the proceedings of Assembly. (See *Book of Forms*, 286ff.)

**Commissioners** consist of elders and ministers who represent their presbyteries. They have the right to vote, speak and introduce motions on the floor of Assembly. (See *Book of Forms*, 278ff.)

**Young Adult Representatives** are appointed by their presbyteries to attend General Assembly. They must be between the ages of 16 and 25 and actively involved as lay people in a congregation. *YARs do not have the right to vote, but are normally, near the opening of Assembly, given permission to speak on the floor of Assembly.*

**Student Representatives** are those studying for ministry within our denomination. They are selected by the theological institution they are attending. They do not have the right to vote, but are also usually given permission to speak on the floor of Assembly.

**Resource Persons** are national staff personnel or members of a board or committee. They will be present in briefing groups and participate in presenting reports to the General Assembly. They do not have the right to vote, but may be given permission to speak on the floor of Assembly.

**Ecumenical Visitors** are normally invited by the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee to speak during the week of Assembly. They may be from Canada or abroad and from any church or ecumenical organization.

**Interfaith Visitors** are normally invited by the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee to speak during the week of Assembly. They come from various faith groups within Canada.

**YAR Advisors** are chosen by the staff at national office and are responsible for coordinating the activities of the YARs.

**Visitors** are people who are interested in the life and work of The Presbyterian Church in Canada and who come to listen to the proceedings. They may not speak on the floor of the Assembly.



## What will happen at General Assembly?

General Assembly begins with a service of public worship, during which the sermon is preached by the Moderator of the last Assembly, and the sacrament of communion is celebrated. After that, the Assembly is constituted with prayer, the roll submitted and a new Moderator elected.

### Election of a Moderator

Several months before General Assembly is due to meet, presbyteries are asked to nominate candidates for Moderator. A few months later, all members of the presbyteries are asked as individuals to indicate their choice from among these nominees for the official nomination of Moderator. This official nomination is presented to the Assembly at the first sederunt. There is an opportunity for other nominations from the floor. The Assembly then votes on the nomination or nominations. The Moderator is installed at the first sederunt.

### Briefing groups

Before the Assembly begins its official deliberations, delegates are given an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the reports and work of the boards and committees, and the content of their recommendations. These briefing groups provide a time and place to ask questions and make suggestions. Prior to coming, you will be given an opportunity to sign up for several briefing groups.

YARs are encouraged to make full use of these groups. Don't be shy! Many of the commissioners are there for the first time, too. Everyone could well benefit from your questions and comments.



## Business sessions

The Assembly then moves into the times designated for conducting business, called “sederunts.” Reports are received, and the recommendations are considered, deleted, amended, withdrawn, divided, referred, deferred, defeated, or reconsidered.

Strict rules of procedure are necessary in order to keep such a large body working efficiently. General Assembly adheres to specific rules. Here are some with which you should be familiar:

### Discussion and debate

- No discussion is in order until a motion is before the court. Speakers should only address the topic being discussed. If they fail to do this, they may be called to order. (See Book of Forms, 39.)
- Every motion or amendment shall be given in writing to the clerk through the Business Committee as soon as it has been made, and it cannot be discussed until it has been duly seconded. (See Book of Forms, 40.)

## Free evenings

Every Assembly has one or two free evenings. Your YAR Advisors (a man and woman from the area) will plan with you some fun and/or educational activity. The national budget covers the cost of at least one of the nights.

## Addressing the Assembly

If you, as a YAR, want to address the Assembly on the motion before the court, you may simply move to a microphone and, after receiving acknowledgement by the Moderator, state your name and the presbytery from which you come. Then proceed with your comments.

YARs may wish to sit with one or more commissioners from their presbytery rather than in a block with other YARs.

When a question is under discussion, the motion before the court must be disposed of. No other motion can be entertained unless it is to adjourn the court, to adjourn the debate, to lay on the table, to commit, to amend, or to take an immediate vote. These motions have precedence in the order in which they are listed. (See Book of Forms, 42.)

When a member rises to speak, the speaker gives both his/her name and presbytery. If two or more rise at the same time, the Moderator decides who will speak first. (See Book of Forms, 51.)

Every speaker addresses the Moderator, and may not address any other member directly. (See Book of Forms, 52.)

No member shall speak more than once to any motion or amendment, unless by permission of the court, and in explanation or to correct mistakes. The right to reply, however, belongs to the mover before the final vote to the main motion is taken. (See Book of Forms, 56.)

### **Voting**

The vote may be taken by any method determined by the court. It is ordinarily taken by showing a yellow voting card, but the Moderator may ask members to vote by rising to their feet. Further, if so required by one third of the members present, the vote shall be taken by ballot. At the final vote on the main motion, the roll may be called, if required by two members of the court. Ordinarily, the state of the vote is not recorded. But this may be done in regard to any vote, if required by two members of the court. (See Book of Forms, 57ff.)

Members should not, without good cause, decline to vote. Unless excused by the court from voting, all who do not vote are held as acquiescing (agreeing in silence) with the decision of the majority. (See Book of Forms, 58ff.)

### **Dissent**

Being the supreme court of the church, The General Assembly's decisions are final.

Any member of a court who has voted on a question and is not satisfied with the decision is entitled to have his/her dissent recorded. By doing so, the member is relieved from responsibility for the decision and saved from censure on account of it. The dissent must be given within a reasonable amount of time. (See Book of Forms, 91.) When the decision is announced, written reasons for the dissent may be submitted within a prescribed period of time.

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## How can you get the most out of Assembly?

Have we scared you off yet? No? Good!

It may seem a bit daunting at first, but bear with it, you will catch on. Some of the following suggestions may help you get the most out of this experience.

### Before you come to Assembly

- ❖ Read all the material sent to you, and mark it up.
- ❖ Ask your minister about items in this book or in the book of reports sent to you before Assembly.

### During Assembly

1. During briefing groups, take part as fully as possible.
2. On the floor of Assembly:
  - a. If the Assembly has already voted for YARs to speak, go to the microphone.
    - i. When recognized, address the Moderator.
    - ii. State your name, say that you are a YAR, and name your presbytery.
    - iii. Be prepared to speak: state whether you are speaking for or against the motion, and have your thoughts organized.
    - iv. End with a strong statement.
3. Amongst YARs
  - a. Make sure you arrive early enough for the YAR orientation period (usually the Saturday before the Assembly).
  - b. Attend the YAR meetings.
  - c. Discuss issues amongst yourselves.
  - d. Make your views known to other YARs and consider their views.
  - e. Do not go off on your own at any time.
  - f. Share in developing the report the YARs will give at the end of Assembly.



#### 4. Informally

- a. Talk to other delegates, especially the commissioners from your presbytery.
- b. Spend time in the display area.
- c. Ask questions of resource people.
- d. Keep notes on your impressions.
- e. Take pictures.

#### **After Assembly**

- ❖ Complete a General Assembly evaluation form.
- ❖ Report to presbytery from your perspective as a Young Adult Representative.
- ❖ Share your experience at Assembly with your congregation.
- ❖ When involved in the work within your congregation, presbytery and synod, use the information you have gained.

## What can you do to get ready?

**Money** – You will need to buy your meal tickets as soon as you register at Assembly. Most YARs are reimbursed for this from their presbytery, or their presbytery pre-pays for them. Check this out with your minister or the clerk of presbytery. You may want to bring extra spending money.

**Travel** – Be sure to follow the directions sent to you by the General Assembly Office and to complete the travel information forms sent to you. Plan to arrive on time for the orientation period and to stay until the end of Assembly.

**Accommodation** – All Young Adult Representatives are housed together at General Assembly. You may share a room with another YAR. No one stays off campus.

### What to bring

- ❖ Clothes for all occasions, including formal attire for opening night
- ❖ Recreational clothing, including a swim suit
- ❖ Walking shoes
- ❖ Any medication that you normally take
- ❖ Umbrella or rain apparel
- ❖ All materials sent to you about General Assembly
- ❖ Notebook, pens, highlighter
- ❖ Bible
- ❖ Camera
- ❖ Alarm clock
- ❖ Perhaps you may want to borrow a Book of Forms (or a CD version of it) from your minister or elder

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## What does that mean?

Explanations of some words and phrases related to General Assembly.

**Acts and Proceedings** – A book that contains the reports and minutes of a given year's General Assembly.

**Amendment** – This is made by adding, striking or substituting certain words or clauses to a motion or even another amendment.

**Barrier Act** – This is required if there is a change in the Book of Forms or doctrine of the church. The procedure of this Act is as follows: (a) The change in the Book of Forms or doctrine must first be proposed to a General Assembly. The proposal is sent to sessions and presbyteries for input. (b) The next General Assembly makes a recommendation based on this input. This recommendation is sent to presbyteries, which approve or disapprove the recommendation. (c) The next General Assembly announces the final decision.

**Book of Forms** – A book that contains the laws and regulations of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

**Committee of the Whole** – This is used to allow greater freedom in discussion. When considering any particular matter, the court may resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole. A chairperson is appointed and the Moderator leaves the chair. While the court is in Committee, the motions considered are not recorded in the minutes, and members are at liberty to speak more than once on any motion. When the Committee of the Whole completes its business, it reports to the Assembly and its decisions are recorded in the minutes and voted on.

**Court** – A body of men and women appointed to rule and to make legislative and judicial decisions. Church courts (sessions, presbyteries, synods and General Assembly) are called upon to guide the affairs of the church and to make decisions that are legally binding within the church.

**Declaratory Act** – The Assembly may pass a Declaratory Act affirming what it understands to be the law of the church regarding any particular matter. Such acts may be passed without submission to presbyteries.

**Docket** – A list of the business to come before Assembly.



**Ex officio** – Means “by virtue of office” and is most commonly used at Assembly in connection with the membership of boards or committees.

**In camera** – Means “sit with closed doors.” This is when all but commissioners and any persons specifically named by Assembly are ordered to leave so that the Assembly may sit alone. If this happens, you, as a YAR, must leave the court.

**Interim Act** – The Assembly, if it sees cause, may, by a majority of two-thirds of those present, pass a proposed law or rule into an Interim Act. This Interim Act shall possess the force of law until the presbyteries have reported their judgment upon it to the next General Assembly.

**Knox College** – A theological college of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, federated with the University of Toronto, a member of the Toronto School of Theology, and accredited by the Association of Theological Schools in Canada and the United States. Knox College is located in Toronto, Ontario.

**Laity** – People who do the work of the church, but are not ministers/diaconal ministers. They may also be called lay persons, lay men or lay women.

**Memorial** – A memorial is a written representation of facts made to a court, and may be the ground (or part) of a petition.

**Motion to defer** – A motion to defer is used when matters that have bearing on the current motion are to be considered by the court later in the agenda. The motion can indicate deferral until after a specific event or to a later sederunt.

**Motion to refer** – Any subject with the motion and pending amendment may be referred to a committee to be considered and reported on.

**Motion to table** – This motion is voted on without debate. If adopted, the subject to which it refers and overriding amendments remain on the docket and may be taken up at a subsequent time by agreement of the court at that time. It is not a motion that defers debate. It stops debate indefinitely.

**Order of Diaconal Ministers** – An order of professional church workers designated to work in specialized ministries in the church.

