

**NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN THE U.S.A.**

**STANDING RULES OF THE  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**Adopted November 1995  
Revised November 2003**

# NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN THE U.S.A.

## STANDING RULES OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Revised November 4, 2003

### ARTICLE I — PROCEDURES FOR GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETINGS

#### ***Section 1. Calendar of Meetings***

The General Assembly shall adopt a schedule of dates for not less than the next three (3) annual meetings.

#### ***Section 2. Preparation and Adoption of Agenda***

- A. The General Secretary in consultation with the President, and with the assistance of a General Assembly Planning Team including participation from the Executive Board, the Church World Service Board of Directors (“CWS Board”) and their respective staffs, shall prepare an agenda for each meeting of the General Assembly. The agenda shall be such as will best enable the Assembly to advance the total welfare of the Council, in light of circumstances existing at the time.
- B. If for any reason the General Secretary considers it not feasible to include an item requested by the Executive Board, the CWS Board or a General Assembly Standing Committee, this should be discussed with the respective chair and be reported to the President. If the chair is dissatisfied with the decision of the General Secretary, he/she has the right of appeal to the President who shall finally determine whether the item shall be placed on the agenda.
- C. In presenting a proposed Agenda for adoption by the General Assembly, the General Secretary shall mention any item that a Board or Standing Committee requested be included but which was excluded from the Agenda.

#### ***Section 3. Procedures for Presenting Reports***

- A. The Committees of the General Assembly, the Executive Board and the CWS Board, when bringing reports to the General Assembly, shall indicate in each such report:
  - (1) an outline of the procedure that was followed in preparing the report;
  - (2) the attendance when the report was adopted; and
  - (3) any negative votes or abstentions when the report was adopted.
- B. The General Assembly, when making announcement of actions on matters of public interest shall indicate an analysis of the voting on these matters, including the number of approvals, disapprovals, and abstentions.

**Section 4. Procedures for Elections of Officers**

- A. The elections of a General Secretary, a President-Elect, four Vice Presidents and an Executive Board Secretary at the General Assembly in the fourth year of each quadrennium shall be by secret ballot. Such elections shall be held not earlier than the third day of the General Assembly meeting.
- B. In order to facilitate preparation of that ballot, any nomination for the President-Elect, the two Vice Presidents at large or the Executive Board Secretary in addition to those in the Report of the Nominations Committee shall be submitted in writing at the Council Office at the General Assembly site not later than 12:00 noon on the second day of the General Assembly meeting. The nominations thus submitted shall be on the form, if any, prescribed by the Nominations Committee and shall include, at a minimum, evidence that
- (1) the person nominated has consented to the nomination;
  - (2) the person nominated has the approval of his/her communion; and
  - (3) the nomination is supported by the signatures of at least ten (10) representatives from at least five (5) different communions.
- C. The election of a President-Elect in the second year of each quadrennium shall also be by secret ballot not earlier than the third day of the General Assembly meeting. Accordingly, any nomination in addition to that in the Report of the Nominations Committee shall be submitted as provided in the preceding paragraph B.
- D. The ballots shall be prepared and the elections shall be administered by a three-person *ad hoc* Election Committee consisting of an officer of the Council as chair, one member of the Nominations Committee and one member of the General Assembly, all designated by the President, none of whom shall be a candidate for any office in the election being administered by the Committee.

**Section 5. Committee of Reference**

- A. The General Assembly's Committee of Reference shall be composed of up to twelve members of the General Assembly appointed by the President during the initial session of the meeting to serve only for the duration of that meeting. It shall be chaired by the President-Elect.
- B. Provision shall be made during each of the first two plenary sessions of the meeting of the General Assembly for the introduction of new business. Any proposals which are introduced by delegates to the General Assembly shall be in written form. All new business shall be referred without debate to the Committee of Reference for study and report.
- C. If time and circumstances permit, the Committee of Reference shall invite proponents and opponents of any proposed resolution to speak to the Committee concerning the text and intent, but the Committee may deliberate in executive session.
- D. Provision shall be made in a later session of the General Assembly meeting for a report from the Committee of Reference. Substantive discussion and consideration of items of new business by the Assembly shall be scheduled by the presiding officer so as not to interfere with the consideration of previously scheduled agenda items.

- E. With regard to any item of new business which requires the expenditure of funds not previously budgeted or the allocation of staff time not previously scheduled, the Committee of Reference shall investigate whether such additional funding and staff time are already available or can reasonably be expected. The results of such investigation shall be considered by the Committee of Reference and reported by it to the General Assembly along with its recommendation on the proposed business.

**Section 6. Guests and Visitors to General Assembly Meetings**

- A. It is desirable for selected guests to be invited to meetings, granted visitor status and recognized by the presiding officer, including particularly, but not limited to, such persons as
  - (1) communion executives in the geographical area and
  - (2) presidents and chief executive officers of ecumenical agencies and organizations in the geographical area.
- B. Guests and properly accredited representatives of the press shall be welcome to attend open sessions of the General Assembly.

**ARTICLE II – PROCEDURES FOR DEVELOPMENT  
AND ISSUANCE OF DOCUMENTS AND STATEMENTS**

**Section 1. General Stipulations**

- A. The Council shall formulate and issue documents and statements of several types to member churches and to the general public. These Rules define and prescribe the procedures to be followed with respect to such documents and statements, which are classified into the following categories:

Study Papers

Study Documents  
Consultation Reports

Position Papers

Issue Papers  
Policy Statements

Resolutions  
Messages

All documents issued in the name of the Council must conform to one of these categories and must receive the specified approvals or clearances before issuance.

- B. It is recognized that, in the course of conducting programs for which they are assigned responsibility, the Executive Board and the CWS Board (collectively “Boards”), Commissions and Committees develop numerous analytical materials for internal and constituency use as well as a variety of informational and interpretative releases for public use. These rules are not intended to prescribe procedures for the development and release of such material.

- C. A Board or General Assembly Committee may appropriately issue in its own name:
- Study Documents, Consultation Reports, Issue Papers and Messages which deal with concerns and issues which are primarily in its area of responsibility, the application of which is consistent with Council policy; and
  - Resolutions which make application to a specific field of principles or policies previously approved by the General Assembly.
- D. Boards of the Council may sponsor or issue jointly statements or documents approved according to these procedures.
- E. An individual or group participating in a Board or General Assembly Committee which develops a Study or Position Paper may file with the Chairperson of the entity a minority report (or digest thereof with appropriate citation made to enable a reader to secure the whole text), dissent, or protest and be assured of attachment thereof in such document or statement. Whenever the issuance of a document or statement shall be accompanied by a media release, the General Secretary shall assure that such release contains appropriate reference to any minority report, dissent or protest attached to such document or statement.

## **Section 2. Study Papers**

### A. STUDY DOCUMENTS

1. Definition: A Study Document is a study and analysis of a subject or a problem which involves substantial ethical, moral or religious elements and on which it is deemed important that the members of the churches be more thoroughly informed as an aid to the formulation of Christian opinions and judgments or on which the judgment of individuals or groups is desired.
2. A Study Document shall clearly and fairly set forth various points of view held by Christians.
3. Boards may determine what Study Documents shall be prepared and circulated in their respective fields.
4. Advance approval by the General Assembly of a proposed Study Document is not required but may be sought if deemed desirable by the entity concerned or by the General Secretary. The scope and plan for development of such a document shall be reported to the General Assembly in support of the request for approval.
5. When a Study Document is issued by a Board, the following statement shall appear in a conspicuous place: "This document is issued by the (name of entity). It is a Study Document; it is not a Policy Statement. It is not to be construed as an official statement of attitudes or policies of the Council." The introduction to the document shall include the substance of the definition of the term "Study Document" as set forth in "1" above.
6. A Study Document may be issued by the General Assembly in the name of the Council if circulated to members of the General Assembly four weeks in advance of the meeting and approved by a simple majority for issuance of a Study Document. When issued, it

shall bear an introduction similar to that specified in the preceding paragraph indicating that it is not a statement of the policy of the National Council of Churches.

#### B. CONSULTATIONS AND CONSULTATION REPORTS

1. Definition: A Consultation is a gathering called by an entity or officer of the Council of persons from the churches and elsewhere representing diverse points of view whose counsel is desired on a subject specified in the call.
2. A Consultation does not determine policy nor speak for the Council, but it makes its report or recommendations to the body or officer calling it, which will determine what use to make of them. In any such use, the report or recommendations shall be clearly identified as expressing the view of the participants but not necessarily those of the Council or its member communions. The following statement must be prominently displayed on its report: "This document is issued by the (name of Council entity). It is the report of a consultation; it is not a Policy Statement. It is not to be construed as an official statement of attitudes or policies of the Council."
3. Member Communions and Related Organizations of the Council shall be afforded the opportunity to participate in a Consultation in appropriate ways, including sending representatives and receiving the products of the Consultation.
4. Minority reports from a Consultation may be submitted to the convening entity, and protests or dissents will be noted and recorded by the Consultation.
5. A joint Consultation may be held by an entity of the Council in conjunction with any comparable agency or body, but participation by the Council entity will be governed by these Rules.

### **Section 3. Position Papers**

#### A. ISSUE PAPERS

1. Definition: An Issue Paper presents a particular position or stance. Because of its advocacy purpose, it need not include nor allude to other points of view.
2. An Issue Paper may be developed by or at the request of any Board or Commission of the Council.
3. Issue Papers shall not be distributed unless each such paper contains the following statement prominently displayed on the title page or equivalent thereof: "This Issue Paper presents information in support of a single point of view. It is not a statement of policy by the National Council of Churches of Christ (NCCC), which has requested preparation of this paper, or any of its member communions."

#### B. POLICY STATEMENTS

1. Definition A Policy Statement is an expression of the Council outlining its basic policy conviction or position with respect to Christian principles and their general application to today's society and world. It may be approved only by the General Assembly. Policy Statement are developed for the following purposes:

- for guidance of the Council and its program operations;
- for consideration by the member communions;
- for the influencing of public opinion.

A Policy Statement shall be concise. It shall be so phrased as not to bring into question the Christian commitment of those who do not agree. Should any new statement reiterate, elaborate upon or further refine any existing Policy Statement, the General Assembly shall indicate at the time of its adoption whether it takes precedence over or replaces all or part of the earlier statement.

2. The General Assembly may consider proposed Policy Statements from the following sources:
  - a member communion;
  - a Committee of the General Assembly or of one of the Boards if within its field or work; or
  - any individual member of the General Assembly, provided that ten other members sign the proposal indicating their endorsement and support.
3. The procedure for presentation of a proposed Policy Statement to the General Assembly shall be as follows
  - a) a sponsorship sheet, specifying the following, accompanies the proposed Statement:
    - originating body or persons;
    - Council bodies recommending approval; and
    - proposed distribution and bodies to assume responsibility;
  - b) a supporting document, including the following, accompanies the proposed Statement:
    - identification of the circumstances or situation which makes the Statement advisable and timely;
    - specific purpose for Statement;
    - theological basis of Statement;
    - a brief exposition and evaluation of other major viewpoints on the issue not embodied in the Statement;
    - titles, dates, and nature of previous actions dealing with the same subject which have been taken by the Council and by its member communions; and
    - indication of whether it is to take precedence over or replace in whole or in part an earlier Statement by the Council;
  - c) the text, accompanied by the sponsorship sheet and supporting document, is submitted for a first reading in one meeting and brought for action at a subsequent meeting; provided that the requirement for a first reading may be waived by consent of three-fourths of the members of

the General Assembly present and voting upon recommendation of the Executive Board or the CWS Board; and

- d) the General Assembly may waive any or all of the requirements for presentation listed in this subsection B.3 with the consent of nine-tenths of the members present and voting.
4. If substantive changes have been made in the text since first reading, the Reference Committee shall determine whether it is substantially the same document and, if not, may either recommend to the General Assembly that the new proposal be received for first reading only or that the substantive changes be received for first reading only or that the substantive changes be offered on the floor by the sponsoring body as committee amendments. If the amendments are accepted without objection, a new first reading is not necessary. If objection to any is heard, the General Assembly, by majority vote, may order a new first reading, postponing action until the next regular session of the General Assembly.
5. Immediately following a meeting of the General Assembly at which any proposed Policy Statement is given a first reading, the General Secretary shall transmit copies of the proposed statement, sponsorship sheet, and supporting document to all members of the Assembly and to the headquarters offices of all member communions. All communions are to be requested to study the proposed statement according to their own procedures, to submit suggestions with respect to substance or editorial change to the General Secretary for transmission to the sponsoring body and, at their individual discretion, formulate communion positions with respect to the matter. An Assembly member or Committee, a communion or a Board may prepare an Issue Paper to set forth an alternative view for circulation to the General Assembly.
6. A Policy Statement adopted by the General Assembly on behalf of the Council must be approved by at least a two-thirds vote of members present and voting, and must receive the affirmative votes of at least one-fourth of the total votes of all members.
7. A Policy Statement when issued, shall be accompanied by an analysis of the voting of the General Assembly, including the number of approvals, disapprovals, and abstentions.
8. During the course of each Quadrennium the Boards and every Commission or General Assembly Committee of the Council shall each review all previous Policy Statements initiated by that body or its program antecedents, or logically related to it, which have not been reviewed or revised in the preceding Quadrennium, and report its findings to the President. The purpose of this policy review shall be to assess the need for updating or combining or retiring past policies as embodied in the Policy Statements which relate to current policy concerns. Any deletions, combinations, or revisions require treatment as new proposed Policy Statements.

C. RESOLUTIONS

1. **Definition:** A Resolution is an expression of the Council or of one or more of its Boards or General Assembly Committees with respect to a current moral, ethical, or religious situation confronting the churches, the nation, or the world. It is based upon Policy Statements of the Council and applies existing policy to a particular problem. It has application only to the immediate situation and does not in itself add to the body of Council policy. It represents agreement by a substantial preponderance of the members of the adopting body that the conviction or view expressed is based on Christian foundations and insights and is a part of their witness to Jesus Christ. It shall be phrased so as not to bring into question the Christian commitment of those who hold different opinions. A proposed Resolution which contains new policy must be processed as a proposed new Policy Statement.
2. The introduction and background of each proposed Resolution shall make reference to the Policy Statement upon which the Resolution is based and shall also clearly state the objective to be accomplished by the Resolution and the manner in which its effectiveness may be evaluated.
3. A Resolution may be adopted by the affirmative vote of at least two-thirds of the members present and voting and, in that vote, by at least one-fourth of the total members of:
  - a) the General Assembly,
  - b) the Executive Board or CWS Board, or
  - c) a Committee of the General Assembly.
4. Each proposed Resolution shall be supported by such documentation as may be required to facilitate discussion of the proposed Resolution.
5. A proposed Resolution may be presented to the General Assembly (or the Executive Board acting on its behalf if urgently required by the situation) for consideration and adoption:
  - a) by a member communion;
  - b) by either Board or by a Commission if the subject of the proposed Resolution is primarily within the field of work of that entity;
  - c) by a Committee of the General Assembly if it is within the field of work for which it was elected or appointed; or
  - d) by any individual member of the General Assembly, provided that at least ten other members sign the proposal indicating their endorsement and support.
6. All Resolutions that either Board (or any of its Commissions or committees) proposes to present to the General Assembly shall be referred to the other Board for review.

7. A Resolution may be adopted and issued by a Board or General Assembly Committee in its own name provided that it shall have found that the Resolution proposed is a clear application of existing Council policy and is clearly within the mandate of that Board or Committee. A Resolution adopted by a Board or Committee shall be reported to the next following General Assembly meeting by the Board or Committee chairperson.
8. A proposed Resolution may be presented directly to the General Assembly if the text with required documentation shall have been received by the General Secretary six weeks in advance of the meeting at which action is proposed. The General Secretary will be responsible for mailing it to all members four weeks in advance of the meeting. Resolutions so processed need not go through the Committee of Reference.
9. Proposed Resolutions may be received by the General Assembly without being mailed out in advance if they:
  - a) relate to issues and situations developing within thirty days of a meeting;
  - b) address situations which are national or international in scope;
  - c) provide supportive documentation; and;
  - d) contain a data sheet stating:
    - why the Resolution is being submitted late;
    - to whom the Resolution is addressed;
    - reference to the policy base;
    - content outline; and
    - nature of action requested.
  - e) The General Assembly may waive any or all of the foregoing requirements for presentation with the consent of nine-tenths of the members present and voting.
  - f) A proposed Resolution that is introduced by eleven members of the General Assembly shall be classified as New Business and shall be handled by the Committee of Reference, which may recommend concurrence, non-concurrence, modification, postponement, referral to a Board, a Commission, a Standing Committee, or a special Committee or any other disposition it considers advisable. The recommendation of the Committee of Reference shall be reported to and acted upon by the General Assembly.

#### D. MESSAGES

1. Definition: A Message is a statement developed and issued by the General Assembly, either of the Boards, a Commission or the President in connection with a meeting or an observance with other religious and secular bodies.
2. Each Message should indicate clearly the issuing body or person, the purpose of the Message, and the audience to which it is addressed.

3. Messages proposed for issuance by a Board or Commission must be clearly within the policies approved by the General Assembly and clearly within the province of that body as defined in the Bylaws.

### **ARTICLE III — PAYMENT OF TRAVEL EXPENSES**

#### ***Section 1. Officers***

Provision shall be made within the amount budgeted for General Assembly meetings to reimburse authorized travel expenses, as submitted, for attendance at Executive Board meetings by the President, President-Elect and Vice-Presidents.

#### ***Section 2. “Up to 15% Additional Category of Membership”***

The member communions are expected to pay the travel expenses of those within their communions who are in the “Up to 15% Additional Category of Membership” to meetings of the General Assembly. Where this is impossible, provision may be made within the amount budgeted for General Assembly meetings to reimburse travel expenses of such members.

#### ***Section 3. Committees of the General Assembly***

The member communions are expected to pay the travel expenses of their members who serve on Standing and Special Committees of the General Assembly. Where this is impossible, provision may be made within the amount budgeted for General Assembly meetings to reimburse travel expenses of such members.