

The Clerk's Corner

Have you ever had a really meaningful debate in the comments section on facebook? How about had a sustained dialogue on a complicated issue with multiple people on email that didn't end up getting confusing with multiple replies out of order or someone getting dropped off the reply-all chain? Yeah, me either. Which is why we do not generally recommend that sessions use email to make important decisions. [In fact, as I discussed last week, the best practice of electronic decision-making is for everyone to be able to hear and be heard simultaneously, which rules out email votes entirely!](#) However, the Presbytery Council does use email votes sometimes between meetings and I suspect most sessions do too. While those votes are not strictly following our polity they can be an important tool to getting the work of the church done so long as you agree to a few simple rules to keep things decent and in order. Here are my recommendations for holding a vote by email:

1. Only use email votes for business that BOTH needs to be decided before your next stated meeting AND is not controversial in nature.
2. Require all session members to use "reply-all" so that their votes can be seen by everyone as they would be in a session meeting.
3. Set a deadline for voting to end so that there is no confusion on when the decision has been made. Try to give as much time as you can for voting to happen while also allowing the approved action to be implemented.
4. Establish a quorum for email votes. I recommend using the same quorum as for session meetings.
5. Require that any "No" vote will end the email voting process and trigger a called session meeting where a full debate can be held. Announce the time and place of that potential meeting along with the vote.

None of that makes the vote in order; however, it will help you maintain transparency while making a rushed decision and hopefully you will avoid either making mistakes or causing controversy as you act between meetings. The last step is what actually makes those decisions in-order:

6. Vote at your next stated session meeting to validate the action approved via email and include that action in the minutes.

Do you have a question for the Stated Clerk? Contact him at barry@eastminsterpresbytery.org. Your question might help another congregation by being featured in a future article.

May the Peace of Christ be with you,
Barry