

Open Meetings Policy (Revised July 2013)

INTRODUCTION: The Open Meetings Policy is intended to further expressions of faith, reason, and trust, be essential to the flourishing of healthy communities of faith. While open meeting policies for churches follow some of the same principles as open meeting policies or “sunshine laws” in a secular democratic society, the ground for this policy is the spirit of openness exhibited by Jesus Christ and the desire to speak the truth in love among his believers to further the work of his church.

APPLICATION: In the spirit of openness, accountability, trust, and unity, the following policy establishes the application of an Open Meetings Policy to as broad a representation of bodies in the church as possible; the criteria for Executive Sessions that allows for the appropriate conduct of certain types of business; and further aspects of implementation and notification.

All meetings of bodies within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) are encouraged to interpret this policy liberally, i.e., to function as openly as possible for as long as possible in the spirit of trust and transparency.

Specifically, this Open Meetings Policy applies to:

1. The General Assembly when in session,
2. The General Board;
3. The Administrative Committee;
4. Standing or special committees, task forces, commissions or panels of the General Board or Administrative Committee;
5. Any organizations that meet any of these qualifications:
 - a. Are formed by General Assembly action; and/or
 - b. Are given policy-making power by General Assembly action.
6. Any successors to bodies listed above.

Any working groups of the aforementioned bodies will report their work in an open session of the elected body. Such reports will be received by the elected body and included in its minutes. Such working groups or task forces may operate as open meetings, but they are not required to do so.

This Open Meetings Policy is commended to:

1. Boards of Directors, whether elected or appointed, for
 - a. all general and racial/ethnic, regional, and congregational ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ),

- b. organizations receiving support from Disciples Mission Fund or any successors,
 - c. "Recognized Organizations" as listed in the Yearbook of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and
 - d. subcommittees of said Boards of Directors;
2. Bodies organized by aforementioned ministries whose purpose is to study and/or recommend changes to structure, function, relationships, and funding at a general or regional level.

EXECUTIVE SESSION: Meetings that fall under this policy should remain open for as long as possible, as often as possible. However, circumstances or issues may arise that in the judgment of those present can only be handled in Executive Session. Such meetings may be permitted to enter into Executive Session when required by the body's Standing Rules and when certain criteria are met (see below). An Executive Session required by the body's Standing Rules should already be noted in the agenda. Where action is taken by the body to authorize an Executive Session, such action will be included in the minutes. Executive Sessions required by a body's Standing Rules will fully adhere to this policy.

When matters considered in Executive Session have been resolved, the body is encouraged to report the result of such matters while keeping in mind personnel policies and future consequences such as litigation or security. Financial matters should always be reported once a resolution has been reached. In matters where reporting is not possible following the closed session, such reporting may be delayed. In these instances, the chairperson and news reporters will come to an agreement on the future date for release of the material.

Criteria for an Executive Session:

1. Where not required by the body's Standing Rules the Executive Session is authorized by a majority of those present and eligible to vote;
2. The vote to authorize is taken during an open meeting and recorded in the minutes;
3. The reason for the Executive Session is stated publicly;
4. The Executive Session is limited to matters permitted to be exempt from an open meeting (noted below); and
5. When possible, decisions made in an Executive Session are publicly announced following the meeting and recorded in the minutes of the open meeting.

Matters that may be considered in Executive Session are limited to the following:

1. Transactions regarding real estate;

2. Negotiations, when public announcements may be harmful to the negotiating process;
3. Personnel matters;
4. Strategies regarding pending or potential litigation or collective bargaining (not simply the existence of a suit or negotiation);
5. Deployment of security personnel or devices;
6. Presentations wherein real or apparent danger may jeopardize the life or liberty of the presenter; and
7. The granting, evaluation, and removal of clergy standing.

Those people who are allowed to remain in Executive Session include:

1. Members of the body who are present
2. Others whose testimony or participation is deemed necessary to the Executive Session by a majority of the members present and eligible to vote.

Organizations meeting in executive session are strongly urged to take minutes so results of such meetings can be verified should a conflict arise. Such groups are encouraged to agree to a single set of minutes as soon as possible following the meeting. Minutes may remain confidential but should be provided to any neutral arbiter or third party brought in to resolve the conflict.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Open meetings as defined by this policy shall be conducted in areas having reasonable facilities for observation by the public. Observers to a meeting may be subject to any charges or registration fees paid by the official participants. Organizations hosting such meetings are not required nor expected to provide room and board for non-member participants.

The organization hosting the meeting establishes policy for public participation. This policy neither creates nor guarantees an individual's right to speak in meetings. This policy does not replace representational voting with individual voting.

NOTIFICATION: Notice of meetings that fall under this policy shall be published as follows:

1. By January 1 of each year, each entity to which this policy applies shall prepare a schedule of all regular meetings, including dates and places of such meetings for the ensuing year. The schedule of regular meetings shall be sent to OGMP and Communication Ministries, which will post notice on the denominational web site, www.disciples.org or its successors.
2. Special meetings may be scheduled. Notice of dates, times and places of such meetings shall be provided to OGMP and Communication Ministries at

- least ninety-six hours before the actual meeting. The announcements will be available through the OGMP.
3. When meetings are necessary to discuss unforeseen emergency conditions, an emergency meeting may be scheduled. Notice of the date, time and place of such an emergency meeting shall be made available through the OGMP.

REVISIONS TO THE POLICY: This policy may be revised by act of the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION: This policy will be implemented by act of the Administrative Committee on behalf of the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) during the calendar year, 2012. The policy will be submitted to the General Board and the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in 2013 for adoption. The policy will be reviewed by the General Board at least in 2014, but also beyond, for recommended revisions.