



**The United Church
of Canada
General Council**

GCE44 GOV 07 Use of In Camera Sessions for March 2025

True Document Date: March 7, 2025

1. What is the issue?

The decision-making procedures of The United Church of Canada are governed by: 1) the by-laws as stated in The Manual; and b), as noted in The Manual Appendix, Section 3.7:

“In any point not covered in The Manual, the parliamentary rules accepted in Canada (Bourinot’s Rules) will be followed.”

Both The Manual and Bourinot’s Rules are silent on the use of an in camera session by a decisionmaking body.

Bourinot’s Rules refer to “a committee of the whole”, a process by which a decision-making body sets aside the regular rules of parliamentary procedure to allow for a freer and fuller consideration of a matter. This changes how a topic is addressed but not who is present for the topic to be addressed. In recent years, the church has regularly employed a three-fold approach to business—learning, discussing, deciding—in which only the final stage involves parliamentary procedure. This has provided for the type of discussion that previously required a motion to move into a committee of the whole.

In the section on “Rules for Usages and Assemblies Generally”, Bourinot’s Rules note that some special motions which have come to be in use are not drawn from Canadian parliamentary practice and should be accepted only if there has been general prior agreement to their use and effect. The use of in camera sessions would fall within this.

There is no stated agreement as to when it is appropriate to use an in camera session and what the practice of decision-making associated with it should be.

As with “a committee of the whole”, an in camera session can provide an opportunity for a fuller and freer discussion of a topic. What distinguishes an “in camera” session is that it is only open to the voting members of the decision-making body and any resource people they elect to include.

2. Why is this important?

Clear guidelines on in camera sessions will help protect the practice from abuse, ensure required procedures are followed, and safeguard the transparency of decision-making in the councils of the church.

Because the standard for this is not set by Bourinot’s Rules, the church needs to clarify:

1. What are justifiable reasons for moving in camera? and
2. Are decisions able to be made in camera, provided the rules for quorum are met, and, if so, how are these decisions recorded and reported in the minutes of the public record of the council?

3. What might the Executive of General Council do?

The Executive of General Council might agree that: in meetings of the Executive and Sub-Executive of General Council:

1. **The decision to move in camera will be guided by the principle that the topic under consideration requires confidentiality for the protection of a particular person or the denomination as a whole. The following items may be considered in camera:**
 - **Legal matters;**
 - **Personnel matters, including the General Secretary’s Supervision Committee report to the Executive of the General Council when the General Secretary is not present;**
 - **Conduct of the Executive;**
 - **Advice for the General Secretary on an extraordinary topic with potential implications for the denomination**

This list is understood to offer guidance, not limitations or prescriptions.

- 2. The process to move in camera will require a motion naming who will be in attendance (i.e. voting members plus named resource people), duly seconded and passed.**
- 3. The requirements for quorum must be maintained within an in camera session.**
- 4. The matter discussed in camera will remain confidential among the participants in the session.**
- 5. The Executive or Sub-Executive will refrain from making decisions in camera but may agree upon a proposed way forward**
- 6. When the Executive or Sub-Executive reconvenes after an in camera session, there will be a motion duly seconded and passed to move out of the in camera session.**
- 7. Any decision (motion) on a matter discussed in camera will be considered in the reconvened meeting of the Executive or Sub-Executive and will be properly noted in the minutes of the meeting.**

And the Executive of the General Council might further agree that:

It will ask The Manual Committee to provide guidance on the use of in camera sessions for the other councils of the church.

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