

GENERAL SYNOD

FEBRUARY GROUP OF SESSIONS 2023

SEVENTH NOTICE PAPER

ORDER AND DECORUM DURING DEBATES

Points of order

From time to time, members raise points of order during debates. The Business Committee thought it would be helpful if members were provided with some guidance on this subject. The following guidance has been prepared by Synod staff.

The raising of points of order is covered by Standing Order 19(1) which is as follows—

A member may raise a point of order under the Constitution or these Standing Orders and may interrupt another speaker in order to do so subject to SO 30(3) (special procedural motions) and SO 150(4) (motion to clear public gallery etc.); when raising a point of order, a member must quote the relevant provision of the Constitution or these Standing Orders and make his or her point succinctly.

It is clear from SO 19(1) that a point of order must raise an issue under the Synod's Constitution or under the Standing Orders. A point of order cannot be taken in order to provide a member with the opportunity to intervene in a debate or otherwise to disagree with what another member has said. So,

for example, a member raising with the Chair the fact that the member just called to speak had already spoken in the same debate could be a legitimate point of order. But seeking to question something stated by a member in his or her speech would not be a legitimate point of order.

If a member wishes to interrupt a debate to raise a point of order, he or she must, once called by the Chair, immediately state what the point of order is by reference to the relevant provision of the Constitution or the Standing Orders.

A determination by the Chair on any question of order, business or procedure is final and is not open to debate or question (SO 15(2)). If a member interrupts a debate and the Chair determines that the matter raised is not a point of order, that member loses the right to speak further in the debate (SO 19(4)). A member must resume his or her seat immediately if the Chair determines that a matter raised by the member is not a point of order.

Special procedural motions

There are a number of motions which it is open to a member to move during the course of a debate. These are known as “special procedural motions” and include the motion for the closure, the motion for next business and the motion for the adjournment of debate. See SOs 30 to 35.

A member who wishes to move a special procedural motion must not interrupt another member’s speech but must wait until a member has finished speaking before doing so. The practice is for a member who wishes to move a special procedural motion to alert the chair by saying, “point of order”. The Chair will then ask the member for his or her point of order. The

member must then immediately say that he or she wishes to move e.g. a motion for the adjournment of debate, but without any further speech at that point (SO 30(4)). The Chair will then explain that motion to the Synod and then invite the member to speak to his or her motion.

A member who has already spoken in a debate is not allowed to move a special procedural motion during that debate (SO 30(2)).

Other provisions

Matters of order are also addressed by SOs 18 and 46 which are as follows—

18. Breach of order

The Chair must call a member to order for any of the following and may direct the member to stop speaking—

- (a) failure to address the Chair,
- (b) irrelevance,
- (c) tedious repetition, either of the member's own arguments or of arguments already well-rehearsed by other members,
- (d) unbecoming language,
- (e) disregard of the authority of the Chair, or
- (f) any other breach of order.

46. Decorum

(1) On the entrance of the Chair into the hall at the commencement of the sitting, the members and officers present must, if able to do so, rise and remain standing until the Chair has taken the chair.

(2) When the Chair addresses the Synod, every member and officer must sit down.

(3) Every member who speaks must, if able to stand, speak while standing and must address himself or herself to the Chair; and the member must resume his or her seat—

(a) immediately after the end of the speech, or

(b) before the end of the speech if addressed by the Chair or interrupted by another member raising a point of order or making a point of personal explanation in accordance with SO 19.

(4) No member may speak from an aisle or gangway or from the gallery of the hall.