

Statement of Etiquette for Maintaining Decorum

This statement was written and approved for inclusion in the General Synod workbook by the General Synod Council at its March 2017 meeting.

In order to have a fruitful, Spirit-led atmosphere on the floor of General Synod, it is important that all delegates observe some simple rules of decorum. These rules are not meant to stifle conversation or the expressing of opinions, but simply to ensure that all delegates are able to focus on the business before the synod. People should act in a courteous and considerate manner at all times and should be respectful of others, regardless of their opinions.

1. Come to General Synod prepared: read all of the reports in the workbook. Come to synod ready to ask questions for clarification and to speak to the reports through your prayerful discernment of the topics at hand.
2. When seated at tables with fellow delegates, be careful not to engage in distracting behavior. Silence your computers, tablets, and mobile phones. Take necessary phone calls away from the synod floor. In short, be courteous to those seated around you. Be aware that your conduct may affect the people around you.
3. When the time comes for debate on an item of business, you may desire to speak to that business. Stand and wait to be recognized by microphone number. When the chair recognizes you, begin by stating your name and the assembly from which you are a delegate. Then address your comments directly to the chair.
4. When it comes time to vote, you might be filled with joy or disappointment at the results. Remember that there are other delegates who feel differently than you do, and extend them the courtesy of not outwardly expressing your feelings. Maintain a respectful atmosphere, taking into account individual circumstances or opinions. This will show proper respect for the decision the synod has made.

Following these simple rules of decorum is each delegate's responsibility. There are no "police" to monitor your behavior. It is a matter of honor. However, those who are found to be in violation of these rules of decorum are subject to discipline at the discretion of the chair of the meeting.

Guidelines for Civil Discourse

The following guidelines were developed by the General Synod's Commission on Christian Action and are based on the fruit of the Spirit as revealed in Galatians 5:22-23. The 2021 General Synod commended these guidelines for use in the RCA, directed that they be included in the delegate workbook for General Synod each year, and encouraged their use in classes and congregations of the RCA (MGS 2021, CA 21-9, p. 210).

1. Show **love** to your fellow delegates. How are your words or silence affecting those around you? Are you creating an environment that is hospitable and allows for differing opinions and the work of the Holy Spirit? Are your words and actions rooted in love and showing respect for those around you?
2. Seek **joy** in the work of this body. We have been called together to do the work of Christ's church. We should look for opportunities to rejoice in the good work God has done in and through the Reformed Church in America.
3. Act to create **peace** and highlight areas of shared interest. One of the mottos on the RCA crest is "Eendracht Maakt Macht," which translates to "in unity/concord there is strength." The church is stronger when we can celebrate the many things we have in common.
4. Practice **patience** and follow proper Robert's Rules of Order. Wait for the moderator or president to call on you before speaking. This allows your fellow delegates time to process what each speaker preceding you has said.
5. Our words and actions should reflect **kindness**. Demeaning and belittling comments, including eye rolls, exasperated sighs, or rude remarks are always inappropriate and should be unwelcome on the floor of General Synod and in any space, let alone the church.
6. Assume **good intent** from the others in this body. Seek to understand the intention and content of speakers who are expressing ideas you disagree with. What message are they trying to convey? How might their experiences, which differ from yours, shape their thinking on this? Can we find empathy for their opinion even if we don't agree with it?
7. Show **faithfulness** to God, to one another, and to the church you've been called to serve. Have you brought a personal agenda into this meeting, or have you set it aside to hear the Holy Spirit, to learn with and from your fellow delegates, and to serve the Reformed Church in America faithfully?
8. Be **gentle** with yourself in times of misunderstanding or confusion. Ask clarifying questions; if you're unsure of something happening or being said, someone else will be too.
9. Practice **self-control**. Refrain from speaking over one another or engaging in outbursts of emotion. If side-conversations are necessary, respect those at your table and around you and take the conversation off the plenary floor.