

**Minimum Voting Age in Congregational Meetings**  
**L. Roy Taylor**  
**Stated Clerk, PCA**

The minimum voting age of communicant members in electing church officers was addressed by the General Assembly in 1982. The General Assembly ratified the following advice of what was called then, “The Permanent Sub-committee on Judicial Business.”

That Reference 3 (refer p. 50 [of the *Minutes of the General Assembly, 1984*]) which reads as follows:

The Session of Vineville Presbyterian Church as its stated meeting November, 1981 requested that the General Assembly’s Judicial Committee provide an interpretation of 24-3 and 24-4 of the *Book of Church Order* with Respect to what constitutes a voter (one who casts a vote for one or more candidates or one who casts a blank ballot).

Be answered with the following advice:

A person eligible to vote is defined in *BCO* 24-3 as a communing member in good and regular standing who is present at the congregational meeting to elect officers. A majority vote of the voters present is required to elect.

Grounds:

This recommendation is a ratification of the answer previously given by the Permanent Sub-committee on Judicial Business.

The General Assembly addressed the matter again in 1984 by means of a constitutional inquiry. In 1984 the issue was voting on a meeting of the corporation. Again the General Assembly ratified the following advice of the Permanent Sub-Committee on Judicial Business.

Constitutional inquiry 9, from Texas Presbytery.

That the General Assembly ask the General Assembly’s Permanent Committee on Judicial Business if a congregation may be permitted to set a minimum age for voting in view of *BCO* 6-2,6-4, 24-3, 25-2 and 25-3.

ANSWER:

The *BCO* does not provide for the setting of [a] minimum age for voting in a congregational meeting even when constituted as a meeting of the corporation, except when the state provides for a minimum age for those voting in the corporation.

The *Book of Church Order* indicates that congregations must act in accord with applicable civil laws (*BCO* 25-11).

It is expressly recognized that each local congregation or local church shall be competent to function and to take actions covering the matters set forth herein *as long as such action is in compliance with the civil laws with which said local congregation or local church must comply*, [emphasis added] and this right shall never be taken from said local congregation or local church

without the express consent of and affirmative action of such local church or congregation.

An amendment to the Book of Church Order was proposed in 1996, *but was not ratified in 1997 by the General Assembly* that would have allowed for the setting of a minimum voting age:

6-5 A congregation may, at its discretion, set the minimum voting age for its communing members, provided it is not greater than eighteen (18) years of age. The congregation may also; at its discretion set a different minimum voting age for different matters provided it is not greater than eighteen (18) years of age.

That proposed amendment was *not* ratified. It is *not* properly part of the *Book of Church Order*, though some advance copies of a revised BCO were sold in 1997 that erroneously contained that paragraph.

In short, the *Book of Church Order* does not provide for the setting of a minimum voting age except in cases where the civil law requires a specified age of majority for one to vote on legal matters (the purchase or sale of church property, for example). Therefore, Sessions should bear in mind that, when they admit young children to communion, they are also admitting them to voting privileges in congregational meetings in all matters except in cases where the civil law requires a specified age of majority for one to vote on legal matters.

Interpretations of *The Book of Church Order*, *The Westminster Standards*, “The Rules of Assembly Operation,” “The Operating Manual of the Standing Judicial Commission,” and/or *Robert’s Rules of Order* by the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the PCA or staff members of the Office of the Stated Clerk are for information only and are not authoritative rulings that may only be made by the courts of the Church. Responses to inquiries are based on information supplied by the inquirer, which may not necessarily be comprehensive. The Office of the Stated Clerk does not represent parties in ecclesiastical judicial cases. Parties to potential cases or cases in process are responsible for their own constitutional and procedural knowledge and understanding. The Office of the Stated Clerk does not give legal advice. When legal advice is needed, professional legal counsel should be secured from one familiar with applicable laws and regulations.