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## Synod Guidelines – Report

### Mandate

GS 2016 (Art. 129) decided:

- 4.1 To mandate the officers of this Synod to take the necessary measures to have these suggestions acted upon.

“These suggestions” are the suggestions received from the GS 2016 Organizing Committee and a consideration by Synod in response to one of these suggestions. They are listed in the report that follows here.

### Changing Guidelines

GS 2016 (Art. 129) observed:

- [2.2] Synod Guideline J reads, “These Synodical Guidelines may be suspended, amended, revised or abrogated by a majority vote of Synod.”

Normally changes to Synod Guidelines are made by a synod as it comes to a close. GS 2016 failed to do so as a submission by the Dunnville CanRC – Synod Organizing Committee was almost overlooked. Hence GS 2016 last minute mandated the officers of synod to do what needed doing.

Hence GS 2016 did not formally make any changes to the Synod Guidelines. However, it did give leave to the officers of GS 2016 to submit advice to the convening church for GS 2019 on the matters raised by Dunnville.

We recommend that GS 2019 adopt whatever needs adopting with respect to Synod Guidelines, given the experience of the convening church for GS 2019 with the advice presented below.

### Filename

GS 2016 (Art 129):

- [2.1.1] “All electronically submitted documents to Synod should include a file name that makes it distinguishable e.g. The file name of the document should include the name of the submitting church and the topic of the submission. As an example a letter would have been easier to organize with a filename like Langley Letter to Synod 2016 re CWeb

**Rationale:** Many submitted documents simply name the topic which makes it difficult to properly file and organize especially when there are several churches submitting on the same topic.”

Experience indicates that not all those who submit something to a synod will stick to the guidelines. It makes more sense to allow the convening church to rename files appropriately. Our suggestion is that the convening church determine a system for file names that includes the following information: Provisional Agenda Item Number, Topic of document, Source of document, Date of document. Thus, for example, GS 2016 agenda item 8.3.2.2 might be called “8.3.2.2 – CCCNA Report – Carman-West CanRC – 160201”. And, for example, GS 2016 agenda item 8.6.7.2 might be called “8.6.7.2 – RSE 2015 appeal – A Sikkema – 160329”. We recommend to leave it in the freedom of the convening church how best to do this.

## 45 Submitting Hard Copies

46 GS 2016 (Art. 129):

47 [2.1.2] “We would discourage the use of spiral bound or comb bound paper copies of a  
48 submission.

49 **Rationale:** The five paper copies are placed in binders. Removing the sheets from  
50 a bound submission creates significant additional work. Duo-Tang or similar type  
51 paper folders made of cardstock paper or 3 ring binders are preferred.”

52 [2.1.3] “We recommend that if a submission is 15 pages or less no hard copy will be  
53 required.

54 **Rationale:** It is much easier and cost effective to print the hard copies from an  
55 email than to receive the documents, which often are folded papers, in an  
56 envelope. Subsequently trying to insert folded papers into a binder is cumbersome  
57 and unwieldy.”

58 [3.3] It is not clear why hard copies are needed, other than for archiving purposes.  
59 Hence it makes little sense to set a limit on the size of submissions as they would  
60 not require printing beforehand.

61 As consideration 3.3 suggests, there is actually no need to create a printed version of the  
62 submissions. At GS 2016, 5 copies were printed, encompassing two 3” binders. Of the five, only  
63 two were actually used by synod members (and one because his laptop had crashed). Both those  
64 binders were left behind. It would seem that all that is needed is one hard copy for archival  
65 purposes.

66 We therefore suggest that printed copies only be made upon request by individual synod  
67 delegates. When the time for archiving comes, a hard copy of all materials would be prepared for  
68 submission to the Archiving Church.

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70 This requires a change to Synod Guidelines I.E. It currently reads:

71 E. All material for Synod should be received by the convening Church (in digital format,  
72 and five paper copies) no later than six weeks prior to the convocation date of General  
73 Synod. Material received after this date shall ordinarily not be added to the agenda  
74 unless Synod is satisfied that the reasons given for later arrival are reasonable.

75 We recommend that the phrase “and five paper copies” be removed so that I.E. read:

76 E. All material for Synod should be received by the convening Church (in digital format)  
77 no later than six weeks prior to the convocation date of General Synod. Material  
78 received after this date shall ordinarily not be added to the agenda unless Synod is  
79 satisfied that the reasons given for later arrival are reasonable.

80 The same deletion would have to occur in Guideline I.A.:

81 A. The convening Church shall set the date on which Synod shall meet (cf. Art. 49, CO). The  
82 convening church shall publish the date along with the rule:

83 All material for Synod should be received by the convening Church (in digital  
84 format, ~~and five paper copies~~) no later than six weeks prior to the convocation date  
85 of General Synod. Material received after this date shall ordinarily not be added to  
86 the agenda unless Synod is satisfied that the reasons given for later arrival are  
87 reasonable.

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## 90 Submitting Digital Copies

91 GS 2016 (Art. 129):

92 [2.1.5] “All scanned submissions should be in .pdf, .doc. or .docx. file format.

93 **Rationale:** Some scanned copies were in formats that needed to be converted from  
94 photo and other picture formats. This creates extra unnecessary work.”

95 [2.1.6] “Proper electronic signatures will be accepted as a suitable means of verifying the  
96 authenticity of a submission.

97 **Rationale:** A proper electronic signature created with a trustworthy software  
98 program designed with the capabilities to create a verifiable signature will  
99 diminish the need for scanned copies.”

100 The digital world constantly changes. Your committee sought and received advise from br. G.  
101 Bos. Br. Bos was a member of GS 2016 and thus knows synod’s needs. By profession, he works  
102 at IT security at the University of Guelph, and thus he is well placed to comment on these  
103 matters.

104 With regard to 2.1.5 he suggested to limit it to PDF. These submissions should not be picture  
105 PDF but text PDF. The convening church can ask a church submitting a picture PDF to submit a  
106 text PDF.

107 With regard to 2.1.6 he suggests that this is not practicable. Proper electronic signatures require  
108 software, which most will not have. It is also not as secure, he figures, as it could be. Br. Bos  
109 suggests further this level of security is not necessary in our church community. There are other  
110 ways to verify whether a letter is authentic or fraudulent. Simply checking the email address via  
111 which something is submitted is already sufficient in most cases.

112 We recommend that the convening church ensure all agenda items for a synod are in text PDF  
113 format. We further recommend that the convening church and synod decide for themselves how  
114 to verify the authenticity of a submission.

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## 116 Separate Submissions for Separate Topics

117 GS 2016 (Art. 129):

118 [2.1.4] “If submissions are scanned copies it is highly recommended that submissions  
119 dealing with separate topics be scanned as separate documents.

120 **Rationale:** To separate topics that have all been lumped into one scan creates extra  
121 unnecessary work.”

122 [2.1.7] “If at all possible and feasible submitters should stick to one topic in each of their  
123 submissions.

124 **Rationale:** We received submissions that covered more than one topic making it  
125 difficult to file and find an appropriate placement on the agenda.”

126 Regarding 2.1.4, it indeed makes sense for the convening church to request that individual  
127 submissions be sent as separate files. If a file contains more than one submission, the convening  
128 church may divide the material itself or request that the material be divided by whoever  
129 submitted it.

130 Regarding 2.1.7, this is common sense. The challenge is, though, that the convening church  
131 and/or synod determines what forms an individual topic. Moreover, one could argue that letters  
132 in relation to a Committee Report (e.g. CCCNA) cover more than one topic. While the  
133 convening church can request that submissions deal as much as possible with one topic, the  
134 convening church will still need to check the contents of a letter to see whether it covers more  
135 than one topic.

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## **General**

In the end, the suggestions coming from Dunnville actually only require one minor change to the Guidelines. Everything else concerns matters a convening church could itself decide. The issue seems to have been that Dunnville was unsure how far it could go beyond the Guidelines. This being so, we recommend the following addition to Guideline I.A.

The convening church is free to undertake whatever measures are needed to improve the operations of a synod. Such measures include, but are not limited to, standardizing file formats to text PDF; standardizing file names to include the agenda item number, the topic, the source, and the date; verifying the authenticity of submissions.

## **Summary of Recommendations**

That Synod decide:

1. To remove the phrase “, and five paper copies” from Guidelines I.A and I.E.
2. To add to the end of Guideline I.A: “The convening church is free to undertake whatever measures are needed to improve the operations of a synod. Such measures include, but are not limited to, standardizing file formats to text PDF; standardizing file names to include the agenda item number, the topic, the source, and the date; verifying the authenticity of submissions.”

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R. Aasman, R. Schouten, R.C. Janssen, E. Kampen.