

ORIENTATION TO THE CONFERENCE ANNUAL MEETING

The purpose of the Conference Annual Meeting is the same as the purpose of the Church of Jesus Christ--at all times and in all situations--to discern and to do the will of God. Depending on the circumstances, there are several ways this may be done; the circumstances of the Annual Meeting--the size of the delegation, the complexity of the issues that will come before us--require that we proceed more formally than is usually necessary in smaller Christian gatherings. We proceed according to the Conference Bylaws (copies are available for consult by delegates at the meeting) and *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*. At first some of the language used on the floor of the Meeting may seem strange to you, but you will soon understand it as a kind of oral "shorthand" that keeps the business moving along. A brief glossary of some common parliamentary terms is at the end of this paper. The reason for a rather strict adherence to these rules may be stated as follows:

- It protects the right of the majority to decide
- It protects the right of the minority to be heard
- It protects the rights of the individual members, both those present and those absent
- It prevents a "railroad" of the Meeting by manipulation
- It prevents an emotional "stampede" of the Meeting

Though other elements are factors, three elements basically determine the direction of each Annual Meeting: the delegates; the Boards and Commissions of the Conference, particularly the Executive Board; and the Chairperson.

I. THE DELEGATES

The individual delegate is the principle "building block" of the meeting. This person must act to receive the reports, to approve recommendations, and to question and debate the issues, to vote on motions.

As a delegate you need to do the following:

1. **Keep alert.** A meeting can seem to be fruitless and even boring to a member who doesn't pay attention and participate.
2. **Listen carefully and think about the motion before the group.** If possible, read up on the motion and resolutions prior to the start of the meeting.
3. **Study the most important parliamentary motions** and their order of precedence so you will know what to do and when to do it.
4. **Remember that silence may be interpreted as consent.** You have an obligation to participate and an obligation to object if you think something is not proper or wise.

Discussion, debate, the exchange of ideas and information are at the heart of the process, so these are encouraged. Every delegate has the right to speak in the meeting. Here are some guidelines if you wish to speak on the floor of the meeting.

1. Approach a microphone and wait for the Chairperson to call on you.
2. Seek the floor only when the subject you want to talk about is under discussion.
3. When you have been recognized, speak to the Chairperson and state your name. Say what is on your mind. You do not have to make a speech to the Assembly; you are speaking to just one person, the Chairperson, and the others are listening in.
4. If you have a question about procedure, ask the Chairperson; if you have a question about the subject under discussion, the Chairperson will call on the person who is most likely to have the answer.
5. You may speak once to an issue, and not again on the same issue as long as someone else, who has not yet had a turn, is seeking the floor.
6. Once you have spoken a second time you have used up your rights of debate on that issue.

If you have an item that does not relate to the proposed Agenda and you wish to present it to the Meeting, you must write a description of your presentation and give it to the Chairperson. If the Chairperson agrees that it is in order, a majority vote of those present and voting will then add it to the Agenda, and you may make your presentation when called up to do so.

A BRIEF GLOSSARY OF COMMON PARLIAMENTARY TERMS

AMEND, MOVE TO. Most motions may be amended on the floor of the Meeting, particularly when they deal with the business rather than the procedures of the Meeting. All amendments must be germane to the original motion. Amendments can be made in three (3) ways: addition, deletion, or substitution. When an amendment has been seconded, it must be debated and decided, or otherwise dealt with, before the motion it seeks to amend may be further considered.

APPEAL FROM THE RULING OF THE CHAIRPERSON. A delegate is testing the Chairperson's ruling against the opinion of the Meeting. The motion to appeal requires a second. An affirmative vote by the Meeting sustains the Chairperson's ruling.

BALLOT, TO ORDER THE VOTE ON A PENDING QUESTION TO BE TAKEN BY. The Bylaws and Rules specify that certain questions be decided by ballot. Questions other than these may also be decided by ballot if a majority of the Meeting concurs with a request from a delegate for it.

DIVISION OF THE ASSEMBLY. This is a vote by rising. It may be demanded by any delegate to verify a vote taken by voice or by a show of hands, or may be ordered by the Chairperson when a vote by show of hands or by voice has been "too close to call." If it is still not possible to discern the outcome visually, the Chairperson may order a count by the Sergeants-at-Arms. A majority of the Meeting may also order a count.

INFORMATION, POINT OF. Asking a question about the business at hand.

MR. or MADAME CHAIRPERSON. The traditional form for addressing the Chairperson from the floor of the Meeting.

ORDER, POINT OF. A delegate calls the Chairperson's attention to a possible breach of the Rules. If the delegate is not satisfied with the Chairperson's subsequent explanation, he or she may appeal if the point has been raised concerning an actual ruling of the Chairperson.

PARLIAMENTARIAN. An advisor to the Chairperson on Parliamentary Law.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY, POINT OF. Asking a question about the application of the Rules in the business at hand.

PERSONAL PRIVILEGE, POINT OF. A delegate believes that his or her rights or the rights of another are being infringed upon.

POSTPONE TO A CERTAIN TIME. A delegate may move to postpone the item under discussion until a later point in the Meeting. The motion requires a second and is debatable.

PREVIOUS QUESTION, MOVE THE. A motion to cut off debate on an issue which requires a second, and a two-thirds majority. An affirmative vote merely cuts off debate and is not a vote on the motion under debate.

PUTTING THE QUESTION. Taking a vote.

RECONSIDER, MOVE TO. A motion to reconsider an item previously voted upon may be made at any time, though it may have to wait until other business has been dealt with before it can be taken up. If a majority decides that the item previously voted upon will be reconsidered, debate on it re-opens, and another vote is taken (or it is otherwise disposed of, by referral etc.) The motion to reconsider has unique characteristics: It may be made only by a delegate who originally voted with the prevailing side on the item; it may be made no later than the day following the original vote; it cannot apply to an item when provisions of it have already begun to be carried out (such as the signing of a contract); and it cannot be itself reconsidered.

REFER, MOVE TO. (Not to be confused with a motion to table.) A referred motion goes to a Board or Committee as designated by the Motion to Refer. It requires a second and is debatable.

SECOND. A seconder need not agree with the motion or vote for it. The seconder need only agree that the motion deserves the attention of the Meeting.

SUSPEND THE RULES. It is possible to suspend a rule that is standing in the way of accomplishing what the Meeting clearly wants to do either by motion or by unanimous consent. Bylaws may not be suspended unless they are in the nature of "rules of order." This is a complex issue, with each instance subject to the interpretation and ruling of the Chairperson.

TABLE, MOVE TO. (Or "LAY ON THE TABLE"). Unlike a referred motion, a tabled motion goes nowhere. No one considers it, or studies it, or does anything with it until a motion passes to "take it from the table." If this does not happen at this Annual Meeting, the motion is dead; i.e., we could not move to "take something from the table" that was put on the table at a previous Annual Meeting.