



EASTERN SYNOD of the
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

BOURINOT FOR THE BAFFLED

All in favour, raise your right hand. All opposed, raise your left hand. Right? — or wrong? Read on. It's not difficult to conduct a meeting. But it takes preparation, confidence, and some common sense. Leaders not completely familiar with *parliamentary procedure* can become frustrated when someone more knowledgeable makes a baffling comment. Without writing another book on procedures, the objective of this article is to give *basic* rules of order rather than *detailed* rules. It should remove some of the mystery for those who lead congregational council and congregational meetings. It briefly explains the team, the meeting process, types of motions and how to handle them. The paper concludes with a glossary of the most common procedural terms.

When I reviewed material to prepare this article, I discovered that various sources interpret some procedures differently, so I included the practices that occur most often. Many privileged motions do not come from Canadian parliamentary practice. Therefore, congregations should agree on how to use them. One suggestion is that congregations prepare informal guidelines for procedures. These guidelines can be updated as necessary. The only rule is that they must not contradict your constitution or bylaws. The main concern is that motions are made and approved correctly and that the meeting flows smoothly. To keep a meeting simple, a disclaimer in procedure books says if a meeting gets so bogged down in procedure that business cannot be conducted, use the most sensible solution.

To make it easier for the person conducting a meeting, some organizations appoint a *parliamentarian* to help at major meetings. The chair appoints the parliamentarian and the role is advisory only. In this way, the presider can conduct business assured that anything out of order will be corrected.

Parliamentary procedure may sound threatening, but it is simply a standard for conducting business at a meeting. The ELCIC follows *Bourinot's Rules of Order*. *Robert's Rules of Order* provided procedural order in the former Lutheran Church in America. Both are available in paperback at bookstores. Each congregation should keep a copy of its Rules of Order in its library and chairpersons should become familiar with the contents.

THE TEAM

Successful meetings are a team effort. Everyone attending a meeting has responsibility — from the officers who lead the meeting to the members who discuss the business and make the decisions.

CHAIR

While it sounds like a piece of furniture, inclusive language today recommends calling the person who conducts the meeting the *Chair*. The term may vary in organizations from presiding officer, president, chairman, or chairperson. The chair *leads* the meeting rather than *controls* it.

VICE CHAIR

A vice chair is the understudy of the chair (a chair in training and perfectly legal). This person leads a meeting if the chair is absent or during part of a meeting if the chair temporarily appoints the vice chair to preside. (The chair normally does not comment on issues and must turn the chair over to the vice chair if he or she wishes to comment or make a motion.)

SECRETARY

The secretary doesn't have to be female. This person prepares and distributes the notice of meeting and agenda, ensures that all material required for the meeting is available, takes notes of the proceedings, prepares and distributes the minutes and carries out any other duties arising from meeting actions. Knowing shorthand is not a requirement (but helps).

MEMBERS

Members are important and should be responsible. They arrive on time, are informed about the agenda, and are prepared to participate in the meeting. They read any material distributed before the meeting to intelligently discuss the issues. They are also courteous to others during a meeting.

CALL TO ORDER

1. THE MEETING BEGINS

The chair calls the meeting to order by saying, "The meeting will come to order." (See comments under *Quorum* in Procedural Terms section.) To get everyone's attention, the chair can strike the gavel on the desk.

The following items are covered at the beginning of a meeting:

- A. The secretary reads the notice of meeting.
- B. The chair decides whether there is a quorum. (If there is no quorum, an informal procedure may be declared that any decisions will be ratified by another meeting called for that purpose and the date is set for the meeting.)
- C. The chair gives any housekeeping announcements, such as the amount of time allowed to discuss particular items, points out where the agenda, minutes, reports or other material may be picked up, gives procedures members should use to speak, welcomes special guests, gives information on breaks, where the washrooms are, etc.

2. THE AGENDA

The chair says, "Are there any changes or additions to the agenda?" Additions and changes are noted and included in the minutes. The chair will recognize members who want to add items. Members will then give items and the reasons for them. If the chair agrees, they are added to the agenda. The chair will then say, "May I have a motion to approve the agenda?" The agenda is now moved, seconded and voted on as given or amended. As a matter of courtesy, members should discuss additional agenda items with the chair prior to the meeting. No surprises, please!

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The chair asks if there are any changes or additions to the previous minutes. A motion is made, seconded and voted to *adopt* the minutes as distributed, read, with changes, etc. Minutes should be distributed well before a meeting. (Any changes must be listed in current minutes.)

- Minutes should be prepared and distributed to the members as soon as possible following a meeting. Something important may be forgotten if the minutes are not distributed until the time of the next meeting.
- Financial reports and major reports from committees should be printed and distributed prior to a meeting, particularly annual meetings, so everyone is familiar with them.

Note: If elections are part of a meeting, they occur after the minutes.

4. CORRESPONDENCE (LETTERS RECEIVED)

Items of communication are normally moved and voted to be received as information. There is no discussion about communication when the items are reviewed at this time. Any action required on correspondence will be included under **New Business**.

5. REPORTS

Executive members and chairpersons of committees present their reports. If action is required on any report, it becomes an item of New Business. To save time, it is acceptable to present one motion to receive the reports as given or as distributed after they are all reviewed.

6. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

(Avoid the term "business arising from the minutes.") This section includes items deferred from a previous meeting.

7. NEW BUSINESS/OTHER BUSINESS

This section includes items not previously presented, items from correspondence received, or given to the chair after the agenda was prepared.

8. DATE, PLACE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The date, place and time of the next meeting are given and included in the minutes.

9. ADJOURNMENT

A motion is made and seconded to adjourn a meeting. A seconder is required, and it cannot be debated. A majority vote is required to carry.

MOTIONS

Motions can be the most baffling items at a meeting. Four types of motions can be made during a business meeting: main motions, subsidiary motions, privileged motions and incidental motions. Not all types of motions will occur at every meeting and some may never occur because the members may not know they exist.

As a favour to everyone, the mover may write the complete motion on a *motion slip*, particularly if it is a significant or long motion. The mover and seconder will sign the motion slip and give it to the chair. This practice avoids confusion as to the wording, who moved and seconded it, and makes the secretary a whole lot happier.

TYPES OF MOTIONS

Main Motion

A motion must be moved, seconded and accepted by the chair. The mover says, "I move that . . ." If a motion is out of order or beyond the authority of the meeting, the chair can refuse to accept it. The chair then asks, "Is there a seconder." Another person is recognized by the chair and says, "I second the motion." A seconder is important because that means there should be at least two people who agree on the point. However, the seconder doesn't have to agree with the motion. Someone may second a motion only to get discussion started, but this is not recommended. If there is no seconder, the motion dies. When there is a seconder, the chair asks if there is any discussion. (No discussion is allowed until a motion is seconded.) If the motion is amended, it is not voted until the amendment is voted.

When discussion is complete, the chair asks, "Are you ready for the question?" and repeats the complete motion. The members vote and if the majority votes in favour, the chair states "carried." If the motion is defeated, the chair states, "motion defeated".

A mover may wish to withdraw a motion. A motion can be withdrawn only if the meeting as a whole agrees to it.

After a motion is declared carried or defeated, it cannot be brought up again at the same meeting. If it becomes necessary to rescind (repeal) a motion, it can be announced at the meeting and then discussed and voted on at a subsequent meeting.

Subsidiary Motions

These motions provide a way to handle main motions besides simply debating and voting on them. (They are listed in order of ranking):

- **Postpone indefinitely** — This procedure kills the main motion without voting against it. It requires a seconder and majority vote to carry.
- **Amend** — This is the most widely used subsidiary motion. In the excitement of making a motion, the wording may be unclear or incomplete. Amendments must relate specifically

to the main motion and cannot merely negate the motion. The wording used is, "I move to amend the motion by substituting the words . . . with the words . . . so that the motion will read . . ." The chair will restate the main motion or even read it to show how the main motion would change if the amendment is passed. The amendment is voted on before the main motion. It requires a seconder and majority vote to carry.

An amendment may be amended and must be moved and voted on in the same way as the first amendment. However, amendments to amendments should be avoided to maintain the sanity of the chair and membership. When voting on amendments, or sub-amendments, the chair should make it quite clear to the meeting what is being voted on.

- **Commit or refer** — This action sends the main motion to a committee. Use this procedure when the main motion requires more research and in-depth discussion. If used, this motion should include the size of the committee, how it is to be selected, the specific item, and a deadline for reporting to the main group. This motion needs a seconder and majority vote to carry.
- **Postpone *definitely* (to a certain time)** — This can mean later in the same meeting or a subsequent meeting. The reason would be to get more information or wait until another event has taken place on which to base a decision. This motion needs a seconder and majority vote to carry.
- **Limit or extend debate** — This is rarely used in small groups or at routine meetings. It imposes specific limits on the time allowed for a debate and number of times any member may speak to the motion. It can also be used to extend the time. This motion needs a seconder, can be amended and needs two-thirds vote to carry.
- **Previous question** — The object is to immediately close debate and vote on the issue. This motion cannot be amended or debated. The value is in ending frivolous debate. The motion is made in the form, "I move that the question be now put." This motion needs a seconder, cannot be amended, and needs two-thirds vote to carry.
- **Lay on the table** — This is the highest ranking subsidiary motion. It temporarily sets aside the main motion and subsidiary motions. It differs from postpone because it can be recovered later. It allows the meeting to go on to other business. A later motion by the membership can bring the matter back into discussion. This motion needs a seconder, cannot be debated or amended, and needs majority vote to carry.

PRIVILEGED MOTIONS (HOUSEKEEPING MOTIONS)

These are variations of motions and rank above subsidiary and main motions. They never relate directly to a pending question but deal with issues that need immediate attention. They are not debatable. The privileged motions that follow are listed from lowest to highest rank.

- **Call for orders of the day** — This term is used to get the meeting back on track (return to the agenda) if the chair has digressed. The motion does not need to be seconded and requires two-thirds majority vote to **defeat** it. Another term for this item is *let's get on with our business*.
- **Raise a question of privilege** — This question can be raised at any time to get immediate action on simple matters such as turning the heat up or down, more lights, ask the speaker to talk louder, etc. This action does not require a seconder or a vote.
- **Take a recess** — Just like in school, a recess is a short intermission for humane reasons, lunch or for a break. The motion should state how long the recess should last. This

motion requires a seconder and majority vote to carry. (Note the difference between *recess* and *adjourn*.)

- **Adjourn** — A motion to adjourn is always in order, but its most frequent use is to *close* the meeting. It must be seconded and requires a majority vote to carry. Any debate after adjournment is unofficial and off the record. Usually the chair will ask if there is any further business and if there is none, declares the meeting adjourned.

INCIDENTAL MOTIONS

These motions deal with procedural matters but do not relate directly to business. Incidental motions are not ranked. In most cases the chair uses common sense to deal with these motions.

- **Point of order (or question of privilege)** — A member may make the comment "point of order" when debate begins on a motion that has not been seconded, or if someone tries to make an additional motion when one is already on the floor. The chair will correct the situation before any other debate can continue. No seconder or vote is required.
- **Appeal the decision of the chair** — The purpose of this motion is to challenge a decision made by the chair. This motion must be made immediately after the chair's decision. It must be moved, seconded and a majority vote to carry. It cannot be debated or amended.
- **Suspend the rules** — This motion is used to discontinue the rules when the group wishes to do something against its regular rules, but not in conflict with its constitution or by-laws. A reason for this is to allow a speaker to deal with a piece of business that is out of order such as hearing someone who has to leave the meeting early, or to hear a guest speaker not listed on the agenda. This motion cannot be debated or amended and requires a seconder and two-thirds vote to carry.

CONCLUSION

Do you vote with your right hand or left hand? Actually, the chair should say, "Those in favour please raise your hand." Because most people are right-handed, the right hand is usually used. However if you use your left hand, your vote will also be counted.

Article adjourned.

Agenda

Every meeting **must** have an agenda, the order in which business will be conducted. The formal parliamentary term is *orders for the day*. An agenda lists the items of business and their order. The leader's best preparation for a meeting is to be familiar with the agenda. If a nervous chair sticks with the agenda, the meeting has a better chance of flowing smoothly. The agenda should be moved, seconded and approved before any business begins.

(*The Congregation Communicates* includes a sample agenda.)

Amendment

An amendment is a motion that addresses the current motion. The amendment can only be amended after it is voted on and only one amendment can be on the floor at one time. Too many amendments are confusing.

Business arising

This term should never appear on an agenda. The correct term is *unfinished business* and should list the items to be discussed.

Challenge the chair/Appeal the decision of the chair

Every member has the right to question a decision by the chair. The member can say, "I challenge the chair" and receive a seconder. Debate is not allowed, and a majority vote is required to carry.

Debate

After the motion is seconded, discussion begins. Anyone speaking should start by stating whether for or against the motion.

Dissent

If someone votes against a motion, that person may ask to have his or her opposition recorded in the minutes.

Minutes

The official record of a meeting, not a transcript. Remember — the term is *minutes*, not *hours*. Keep them as short as possible and include only items discussed and action taken. Individual feelings and emotions are not recorded. Minutes should follow the order of the agenda.

Motion

A motion is a proposal that the organization take certain action on a matter or that it adopt an official policy on an issue.

Order

- To call the meeting to order
- "Order, please" — the Chair's statement to return the meeting to order if the discussion has strayed from the item on the floor.

Point of order

Any member may interrupt a speaker only if he or she sincerely believes that the matter cannot wait. The speaker must recognize the interrupter and ask the reason. The chair will then act on the information or say the interruption is unjustified. If unjustified, the interrupter should apologize to the speaker.

Point of privilege

During debate on an item, a member may rise to say "Mr. Chairman (or Madam Chair), I rise on a point of privilege. The speaker is not quoting me correctly." The speaker will pause for clarification. After clarification, the meeting proceeds.

Put the question

After discussion on a motion, the chair asks whether the meeting is "ready for the question." The chair then reads the motion or describes the issue and asks for the vote.

Quorum

Quorum is from Latin which means *of whom*. In today's language it means the minimum number of people required to conduct a meeting. The bylaws of the organization state the quorum as a percentage of active members. Quite often the quorum is set quite low to ensure that a meeting can be held when there may be difficulty rounding up a majority of eligible voters. If there is no quorum, the meeting cannot be called to order and no business can be conducted for ratification at a later date (unless informal procedure states this may occur). If people leave during the meeting and less than a quorum remains, the meeting can only continue if the remaining members wish, or if a bylaw or procedure states otherwise. Visitors at a meeting are not counted to determine the quorum.

Unfinished business

Business not concluded at a previous time.

Vote of thanks

A member may rise to say, "I move a vote of thanks to _____." This motion does not need a seconder or a vote. It's usually followed by applause. It recognizes someone who has done a fine job of something or other. Nothing tangible is involved and no one should object.

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