

Requirements and Procedures for LEFC Congregational Business Meetings

1. Introduction

In most group meetings, some rules or procedures are necessary to move business along, while maintaining order and preserving the rights of members to speak to items of business.

This paper outlines rules of order and procedures that the Lancaster Evangelical Free Church (LEFC) will use in the conduct of its congregational meetings. It also details other requirements for these meetings. By having a written set of procedures, all participants can more fully understand their roles and responsibilities, and the manner in which the business of the church will be conducted. These procedures are intended to facilitate the conduct of congregational business.

2. Use of "parliamentary procedure"

"Parliamentary procedure" is the most commonly used set of rules of order by almost all democratic legislative bodies and organizations, and *Robert's Rules of Order* is the standard reference for parliamentary procedure. However, *Robert's Rules* is not used in its entirety by many organizations. LEFC also chooses to adapt and modify these rules, in the interest of consistency with its constitution and bylaws, and to ensure that its procedural guidelines are only those minimally necessary to facilitate the conduct of church business. The points and motions which we utilize are presented in the "Points and Motions" table in section 11 of this document.

3. Basic principles

There are six basic principles of parliamentary procedure which we seek to adhere to:

- Only one subject may claim the attention of the membership at one time.
- Each item of business presented for consideration is entitled to full and free debate.
- Every member has rights equal to those of every other member.
- The will of the majority (as defined) must be carried out, and the rights of the minority must be preserved.
- The personality and desires of each member should be merged into the larger will (that which prevails when an issue is brought to a vote).
- Non-members are welcome to attend congregational business meetings, but they may not make motions relative to or vote on business items on the agenda. Visitors may be recognized by the chairperson for the purpose of speaking to motions that are under discussion.

4. The chair

The chair at congregational business meetings, the chairman of the elder board (or his designee), is responsible for controlling the meeting. The responsibility of members is to participate, to support the purpose of the meeting above their personal interests and to yield to the chair on matters of order.

5. Quorum

Before any congregational meeting can begin (that is, before the conduct of any business which requires a membership vote), a quorum must exist. The number of members needed to constitute quorum at a regularly-scheduled or a special congregational meeting is 25% of all member households. (The one exception to this quorum requirement is stated below.)

In the absence of a quorum, the only business which can be conducted is to adjourn, recess or discuss measures to re-establish a quorum. It is the duty of the chair to ensure that a quorum is present before beginning a meeting. A quorum shall be presumed to continue to exist, unless the chair or a member suggests the absence of a quorum. The validity of a decision already reached may not be questioned on the grounds that a quorum was not present.

Should any congregational meeting be adjourned because of the absence of a quorum, a special meeting may be called by the elder board to act upon items requiring an affirmative vote by the members. The meeting date and agenda for this meeting shall be announced in each worship service on two consecutive Sundays, one of which must be the Sunday immediately preceding the meeting. The quorum for a special meeting called for this purpose shall be of all those members present at the announced starting time.

6. The congregational meeting agenda

Any items to be discussed or voted upon at a congregational meeting will be determined by the elder board and presented to the general membership at least two weeks before the meeting. No new items requiring a decision by vote may be added to the agenda from the floor. Information on proposed new members shall be accessible to the membership at least three weeks prior to the meeting when they are voted into membership.

Normally, the agenda will include an opening prayer, approval of minutes of the preceding congregational meeting, items requiring a decision by vote of the membership and then reports from church leaders and ministry heads — usually in this order. Other than the opening prayer invoking God's blessing and guidance in the business to be conducted, the order of consideration of items may be switched, by decision of the chair, especially if a quorum is barely present at the outset of a meeting.

7. Conduct of business

Before any business takes place the chair may wish to explain how the meeting will be managed and clarify the meaning of any particular terms which may be unfamiliar to some members. The chair should explain the meaning of a non-vote.

Most business at congregational business meetings should proceed on the basis of a motion. Here is how a business item will typically be dealt with:

- A member obtains the floor (right to speak) after being recognized by the chair.
- They should state their motion carefully.
- Motions should be seconded and then recorded.
- The chair should repeat the motion, clarifying intent and adjusting wording, as necessary.
- Before opening discussion, the chair may want to establish rules of order for the debate. For example, they might limit each speaker to two minutes and rule that a person can speak a maximum of two times to the same motion. Members may speak only after being recognized by the chair. Normally, the chair will first recognize the maker of the motion to explain the motion, and then allow that person to address "points of information" (i.e., requests for information) which may be raised. Debate (discussion) follows any clarifications.
- Discussion is ended by an explicit request to end discussion (a motion to "call the question" --- see "Points and Motions Table") or implicitly (see discussion on "shortcuts" regarding "Three calls").
- The motion is restated (as amended) by the chair, and the vote is taken according to

our standing rules (voice, showing of hands, ballot).

To amend a motion is to change a motion in some way to make it more acceptable. There are four types of amendments. Those which:

- Add or insert words.
- Strike out or delete words.
- Substitute specific words in the motion.
- Substitute another motion for the one under consideration.

An amendment, once seconded, then becomes the order of business, and is discussed until it is voted. An amendment can itself be amended, but only two amendments may be pending on a main motion at any time.

LEFC has opted to utilize an abridged set of motions which are set out at the end of this document. It is not required or intended that business meetings be conducted by slavishly utilizing these motions. In fact, it is an expectation that the chair will resort to the use of shortcuts which bypass the "normal" parliamentary procedure in favor of a more conversational, cooperative style.

When properly used, these shortcuts can dispense with needless discussion and voting, speeding the business for everyone, without any negative effect on the fairness and completeness of church decision-making. These also require that everyone present pay attention (since things should be moving by pretty quickly), and both trust and cooperate with the chair.

Appropriate shortcuts include, but are not limited to, the following:

"Without objection": When the chair utters these words, followed by almost anything reasonable, if no one in the body voices an objection, the will of the chair is carried. Entire orders of business can be conducted with the sweep of these two words. Note: this requires the chair to be clear, and fair, i.e., members cannot be expected to allow the chair to get away with anything sneaky (nor should a chair ever try to get away with anything).

Three calls to end discussion: By convention, if the chair calls three times in a row for "Any further discussion," without anyone wishing to speak, discussion is automatically (or implicitly) closed; and a vote is immediately taken. This avoids the need to have a motion to end discussion (and a second), followed by a vote, just to end a discussion which no one wants to continue.

"Friendly" amendments: This shortcut bypasses the entire discussion/vote procedure, yet still enacts an amendment, but only with the permission of the proposer of the motion (or amendment) to be amended. In other words, if the amendment is pleasing ("friendly") to the proposer, it is immediately enacted, and the original motion (or amendment) is immediately changed, as if it had originally been proposed in the amended form.

"I withdraw": The proposer of a motion or amendment can, at any time before the vote, withdraw the motion from consideration. This is the fastest way to dispense with a motion which is clearly not in general favor. In fact, when the discussion makes it clear that the question at hand is not the will of the body, the chair should ask the proposer, "Do you wish to withdraw your motion?" If the proposer agrees to withdraw the question, the matter is immediately finished, without the need for a call and then vote for ending discussion and

then a vote on a motion.

“Straw poll”: Sometimes it is useful to have a measure of church members’ will, but without making a full motion, particularly if there are several options to choose from. By calling for a “straw poll,” the chair can request an informal show of opinion of the membership among the various options. This can be done very quickly.

Discussion limits: These may be established at the discretion of the chair. The chair must observe the will of the body, and move things along as appropriate; but at the same time, it may be more efficient just to let someone finish, especially if it is clear the people want to hear what’s being said. (The chair can often tell this from the faces in the assembly.)

8. Approval of items requiring a vote of the membership

Adoption of motions requires approval by a majority of 75% of the votes cast. Exceptions to this are the calling of a new senior pastor, affirmation of sitting or non-sitting elders and acceptance of persons into membership, each of which requires approval by a majority of 85% of the votes cast. Further, a motion to reconsider a decision already made at a congregational meeting shall require approval by a 90% majority of the votes cast. (See Section 11.)

9. Use of a parliamentarian

Unless the chair is well-versed in parliamentary procedure, they should seek to have a parliamentarian present at each meeting. No chair can be expected to know immediately how to best handle every situation, so it is best to always have at least one person they can rely on for quick advice and confirmation of choices regarding procedure.

10. Keeping control

Above all, the chair needs to keep the meeting together and focused on the business at hand. The most important job is to maintain order of the meeting, and keep everyone clearly aware of exactly what is (and what is not) being discussed.

For most chairs, a good deal of their effort should be put into clarifying wording and parliamentary procedure. If someone has a suggestion, the chair should not just call them “out of order,” or tell them they can’t suggest that. Instead, the chair should clarify what the person is suggesting, and if the item is truly out of order, explain how they might wish to introduce their idea in proper fashion.

If the item is in order, but improperly or unclearly stated, the chair should help the proposer restate just what they mean. If the item is out of order, but seems to be popular, the chair should not ignore that. A quick “straw poll” could be used to determine if people would rather move to discussing this new point. This often happens. Although it doesn’t fit within Robert’s Rules, sometimes it is best to discuss several alternatives simultaneously, since a compromise might be worked out that ends up being far better than any of the individual motions. The chair should remember the basic reason for the meeting, and while maintaining order, use whatever system of discussion best accomplishes the task at hand, to the benefit of the majority of the members assembled.

Inevitably, some member may feel “wronged” and may choose to make life difficult for everyone else by insisting on strict interpretations of the “rules,” objecting to every move of the chair, etc. This is where the power of the chair, *with the backing of the majority*, can really move things along. With this backing, the chair can simply rule any of these dilatory motions out of order, and thus not consider them. When the aggrieved member questions

the chair (by a motion appealing the decision of the chair), the body, in voting to support the chair, expresses their desire to see the meeting move along without unnecessary delays.

11. Table of points and motions in order of precedence

The table below explains points and motions, their purpose and the manner in which they must be dealt with.

Points and Motions	Purpose	Second Required?	Amendable?	Debatable?	Approval Required	May Interrupt Speaker?
Point of order	Draw the chair's attention to error in procedure or lack of decorum.	NO	NO	NO	Chair decision	YES
Point of information	Request clarification of motion or the substance of amendment.	NO	NO	NO	None	YES
Point of privilege	Urgent request or statement about comfort, convenience, rights, etc.	NO	NO	NO	Chair decision	YES
Appeal chair's decision	Motion challenging chair's ruling or decision.	YES	NO	NO	75%	YES
Suspend rules	Motion to suspend formal meeting procedures for limited time.	YES	NO	NO	75%	NO
Reconsider	Motion to reconsider a vote already taken (must be made by person who voted with the side that prevailed on the vote).	YES	NO	YES	90%	NO
Adjourn	Motion to end the meeting.	YES	NO	NO	75%	NO
Recess	Motion for short break for specified time period.	YES	NO	NO	75%	NO
Call the question	Motion to end discussion and bring motion to a vote.	YES	NO	NO	75%	NO
Limit or extend debate	Motion to set or extend time allotted for discussion of motion.	YES	YES	NO	75%	NO
Amend	Motion to alter original motion.	YES	YES	YES	75%	NO
Main motion	Motion introducing any proposal requiring approval of membership.	YES	YES	YES	75% *	NO

* Exceptions: 85% of voting members must approve of acceptance of prospective members, affirmation of sitting and non-sitting members of the elder board and calling of a new senior pastor.

Approved by 96% of members voting at 5/20/12 Congregational Business Meeting.