

Parliamentary Basics for Everyone

Meetings of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League should be marked by good order, guided by God's Word, and upheld in prayer.

Rules of procedure were developed over several centuries. With these rules in place, organizations can function more efficiently and fairly. Ideally each member will participate – proposing motions, making amendments, debating, and voting. If members do this, the group will avoid unwise decisions, and good ideas will be perfected for action.

Using parliamentary procedures consistently will result in the following:

- Courtesy to all
- One item considered at a time
- The majority will rule
- The minority will be heard
- Absent member's rights will be protected
- Partiality to no one, fairness to all

There are a variety of **rules governing an assembly** (from highest to lowest in authority):

- **Law** – federal, state, and local
- **Corporate charter** – required if and only if an organization is incorporated; varies from state to state
- **Bylaws/Constitution/Constitution and Bylaws** – a written agreement among an organization's members describing the structure and rules according to which they will take action
- **Rules of order** – the regulations for the conduct of business in meetings
 - Parliamentary authority – an established manual adopted by a group in their bylaws
 - Special rules of order – the rules a group adopts that supersede any conflicting rules in its parliamentary authority
- **Standing rules** – administrative details not important enough to be put in the bylaws and that do not relate to the conduct of business at meetings
- **Custom** – when a group does something over and over again until it comes to be followed practically as if it were a written rule

A group uses rules of order to make decisions. To begin the process of making any decision, a member **makes a motion**, a formal proposal that the group take certain action. The steps in this process are:

1. A member addresses the chair (the presiding officer).
2. The chair recognizes the member.
3. The member states her motion (proposal for the group to take action).
4. Another member seconds the motion.
5. The chair repeats the motion and opens the question for debate.
6. The members debate.
7. The chair states the question and takes the vote (positive and negative).
8. The chair announces the results and the action that will or will not be taken.

There are a variety of motions that may be used during a meeting. The **main** motion introduces a subject to the assembly. There can be only one main motion under consideration at one time. A **secondary** motion takes precedence (pre-see-dense) over a main motion. That means that it can be moved and voted on even though a main motion is already on the floor. There are twelve **secondary** motions (seven **subsidiary** motions and five **privileged** motions) which over the years have come to be used in particular order of rank. (Other secondary motions, called **incidental** motions, have no rank among themselves.)

When votes are taken, it is common meeting practice that the **majority** (more than half) of the voters make the decisions. However, there are times when the minority will prevail. Whenever motions are made that will affect the rights of individual members, parliamentary procedure requires that two-thirds (2/3) of the voting members must agree. This principle applies, for example, when amending bylaws, limiting debate on a motion, and suspending the rules. When a **minority** of more than one-third (1/3) of the voters objects to the motion, it is defeated.

As a participant in a meeting, a member should follow guidelines for **decorum**. A member should:

- Give full attention to the chair on rap of the gavel
- Address the chair to gain recognition
- Obtain the floor before addressing the assembly
- Willingly observe all rules of debate
- Confine remarks to the merits of the pending question
- Address all remarks through the chair (no cross-talk)
- Obey all legitimate orders of the presiding officer
- Avoid walking between the presiding officer and the assembly
- Refrain from disturbing the assembly and the presiding officer through whispering and restless behavior
- Accept appointments and carries out assignments graciously, or formally requests permission to be excused from the duty

“A prime value of parliamentary procedure is that it provides processes through which an organization, large or small, can work out satisfactory solutions to the greatest number of questions in the least amount of time. It can do this whatever detail or complexity may be involved. It makes meetings go smoothly when everyone is in agreement, and allows the group to come to decisions fairly when issues are bitterly contested.” (*Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised In Brief*, pp. 7–8)

Resources

National Association of Parliamentarians (NAP) <http://parliamentarians.org>
American Institute of Parliamentarians (AIP) www.AIPParl.org

Reference Material

Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (11th Edition)
Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised In Brief (2nd Edition)
The Complete Idiot's Guide to Robert's Rules, Nancy Sylvester
Robert's Rules for Dummies, C. Alan Jennings
The Guerilla's Guide to Robert's Rules, Nancy Sylvester
The Complete Idiot's Guide to Parliamentary Procedure Fast-Track, Jim Slaughter