

Robert's Rules Simplified for Church Membership Meetings

Purpose - Etiquette and Orderliness

Roberts Rules were developed for the proper conduct of organizational meetings in a peaceable and courteous atmosphere.

Chairing A Membership Meeting

Your role as chairman is to maintain the integrity of the Constitution and Bylaws and thus guard the authority of the congregation. Roberts Rules of Order also guard the authority of the congregation procedurally. Your responsibility is to educate the congregation regarding the Constitution, Bylaws and Roberts Rules. The better the members know these guiding documents and procedures, the more confident and courteous they will be and the more confidence they will have in your leadership. Distribute copies of this and enjoy the meeting!

Behavioral Rules

1. Only one person can have the floor to speak.
2. That person must be recognized by the chair and *given* the floor – the floor is never *taken*.
3. The person who has the floor must speak only to the pending question before the assembly.
4. Debate is not dialogue between two members on the floor.
5. Non-member guests cannot be given the floor – membership has its privilege.
6. Anyone who breaks rules 1 – 4 is to be graciously called “out of order”.
7. Speeches that are unbecoming of Christian character such as angry outbursts, humiliation, accusation, etc. are likewise “out of order” and should be interrupted by the chair.

Passing of Motions

1. Simple Majority (one more than half)
 - A. Adoption of agendas and reports
 - B. Recommendations/motions from reports or the floor
 - C. Adjournment
2. Two Thirds (2/3's) Majority
 - A. Limiting Debate (i.e. 3 minutes per person/45 minutes total)
 - B. Stopping Debate – “Moving the previous question”
 - C. See Church Constitution especially Art. XII. Property and Records, Section 1. Property, and Art. XVI. Bylaws. Most churches require at least 2/3's majority to pass motions related to property and bylaws of the church.
3. Verbal Votes

“All those in favor say, ‘Aye’” (pronounced “I”)
“All those opposed say, ‘No’”
If it's obvious, the chair can say either,
“The motion is passed.” or “The motion is lost.”

4. Non-Verbal Votes

- A. If a verbal vote is unclear due to loud voting, the chair can call for “a division of the house”. A member may also call for “a division of the house”. This is not a motion and does not require a “second”. Immediately the vote is retaken by either a show of hands or standing (large assemblies). Tellers count the hands for each – “in favor” and “opposed” and report results to the chair.
- B. Elections by Ballot, see Church Constitution, Art. XIV, Elections. As a courtesy, the waiving of a ballot should require a unanimous (100%) verbal vote; in other words, one “no” vote results in the use of the written ballot.

Motions or Recommendations from Reports or the Floor

The chairman should repeat the motion or recommendation so members know what they’re acting on.

The chairman should then call for a “second” if one is not given by another member by saying, “Is there a second to get it before us?”

If there is no second say, “The motion is lost.”

If there is a second say, “The motion is before you for discussion.”

The chairman then moderates the discussion/debate (see behavioral rules).

- A. If someone asks a question the chair can answer it, but it’s usually best to have it answered by the person or committee that proposed the motion. Call on them.
- B. If multiple hands are raised, try to remember the order in which you saw them and call on them in that order as best you can.
- C. When debate winds down (people are saying the same things, for or against, or nothing new is being offered), there are three ways to end debate:
 - 1. The chair might ask, “Are you ready for the question?” In other words, are you ready to vote either Aye or No. This is not binding on the assembly – they can continue to debate.
 - 2. Someone may say, “I call for the question” or simply, “Question” which means, “I’m ready to vote.” This is not a motion to be “seconded” – it is not binding. The chair might say, “The question has been called for, is there any further discussion?” If there is none, the chair restates the motion to be voted on. Even at this point someone can raise their hand to gain the floor – debate doesn’t cease until the vote is called for – “All those in favor....”

(Ending Debate cont'd)

3. Moving the Previous Question

The only way to stop debate entirely is for someone to gain the floor and say, "I move the previous question". This requires a "second" and cannot be discussed/ debated. This motion must be passed by 2/3's of the assembly.

- If the motion passes, discussion of the previous question ceases and the previous question/motion goes immediately to a vote.
- The chair should repeat the motion to be voted on to remind everyone what they're acting on.

Clarifying Motions

Most motions are stated in positive language so that voting "in favor" or "opposed" is easily understood.

On rare occasions a motion is stated in negative language so that voting "in favor" is against the motion and voting "against" is in favor of the motion.

The chair needs to take the time to clarify the end result of the voter's options.

Debatable Motions (simple majority to pass)

1. Motion to Amend This motion is intended to improve or clarify the recommendation before the assembly such as:
 - a. to insert new wording or add wording at the end
 - b. to strike out wording
 - c. to strike out and insert or substitute wording
2. Motion to Refer This motion refers the recommendation back to the Governing Board or committee from which it came for further study and return to the membership, or to act with power. This is used when important questions are raised but answers are unavailable.
3. Motion to Reconsider The intention of this motion is to reconsider a motion that was passed earlier in the same meeting. The motion to reconsider must be made by someone who voted with the prevailing side.
4. Motion to Rescind The intention of this motion is to annul a motion made in a previous meeting. The motion to rescind may be passed by a simple majority when notice has been given previous to the meeting or two-thirds vote without notice.