

“Procedure is more than formality. Procedure is indeed the great mainstay of substantive rights Without procedural safeguards, liberty would rest on precarious ground and substantive rights would be imperiled.”

William O. Douglas

SOME WORDS ABOUT PROCEDURES/RULES OF ORDER

The purpose of parliamentary procedure is to facilitate the transaction of business and to promote cooperation and harmony. The rules of parliamentary procedure are based on a regard for the rights of:

- The majority,
- The minority, especially a strong minority, greater than one third,
- Individual members,
- Absentees, and
- All these together

Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised (RONR)(11th ed.), p. li

“The courts hold that all deliberative groups . . . must follow general parliamentary law whenever they are meeting to transact business.... When a group meets for the purpose of presenting proposals, discussing them, and arriving at democratic decisions, parliamentary procedure is not only helpful but indispensable. In all organizations the rules of procedure must be observed if the actions of the assembly are to be legal.” *The Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure (4th ed.)*

Where the procedures/rules come from. In order to facilitate the process of decision-making, include all members in orderly discussion, and ensure fairness, equality and common sense, the presiding officer (the Bishop at Convention) will follow more formal procedures than many of us are used to in other settings. The procedures are derived from a number of sources. These are listed below in order of their rank (which means the one above takes precedence over the one below).

RCW 24.03 Washington Nonprofit Corporation Act. *Cannot be suspended or amended by the convention.*

Articles of Incorporation, Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church of the United States of America. *Cannot be suspended and can only be amended by the national convention.*

Articles of Incorporation of the Diocese of Olympia. *Cannot be suspended and can only be amended by the Diocesan convention.*

Constitution and Canons of the Diocese of Olympia. *Cannot be suspended and can only be amended by the diocesan convention with notice and 2/3 vote at two consecutive conventions.*

Any convention special rules of order. *Can be amended or rescinded without notice by 2/3 votes. Specific rules can be suspended at the convention for a specific purpose by a 2/3 vote during the convention.*

Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised (11th ed.). *Specific rules can be suspended at the convention for a specific purpose by a 2/3 vote during the convention.*

Custom. *Usually followed unless in conflict with parliamentary authority and a point of order citing the conflict is raised.*

Using Rules and Procedures in the meeting—the role of the presiding officer: The presiding officer (The Bishop) is the servant of the assembly gathered in convention. His job is to help the convention reach the decisions it needs to make in a manner that is efficient, yet allows all to be heard, all to be respected, and also allows for the spirit to move within the convention as it deliberates. This is a much different role than his roles as leader and administrator away from the convention. While the ultimate authority for decisions remains in the assembly, the convention grants to the chair the authority to make the procedural decisions during the convention so that the delegates can concentrate on the business at hand.

He will exercise that authority to:

- remind the convention of the common faith that underlies all actions and decisions of the convention.
- move in and out of more formal procedures as the need arises.
- keep the convention informed about what is happening, what is being voted upon.
- prevent the violation of the principles of parliamentary procedure.
- protect delegates from unfair treatment or abuse.
- recognize members impartially and alternate between those for and those against a motion/resolution.
- be impartial and not enter into debate while presiding.
- Give each member the opportunity to speak while preserving proper conduct & decorum during debate.
- explain complex motions.
- prevent members from using parliamentary procedure as a distraction or a manipulation.
- use unanimous consent to move ahead quickly when the matter is not controversial and there is no objection.
- make necessary rulings on questions of parliamentary law.

Using Rules and Procedures in the Convention—how to participate as a member: The two charts below have the format to help you word the most commonly used motions and some reminders about some common procedures. (modified from *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised in Brief*, Da Capo Press, 2011)

After Being Recognized by the Chair to Speak:	
If you want to make a motion	I move that . . .
If you want to amend a motion	I move to amend the motion by striking out by inserting by adding by striking out ... and inserting by substituting for the pending motion the following
To get the vote counted on a motion	I move that the vote be counted.
To close debate and vote immediately	I move the previous question
Recess	I move to recess for ___ minutes
If you want some informal discussion on a topic without a motion on the floor	[if no motion is pending:] I move that we discuss [name topic] informally for __ minutes. [if a motion is pending:] I move to suspend the rules so that this issue can be discussed informally for ___ minutes.
If a motion/resolution needs more work than is reasonable during the meeting	I move to refer the resolution and its amendments to the Diocesan Council for discussion with recommendations to be presented at the next convention.

Without Needing to Be Recognized By the Chair to Speak	
Second a motion (seated)	Second!
To doubt a ruling made by the chair (stand)	I appeal from the decision of the chair
To ask the chair information on a matter of the procedures bearing on the question at hand (stand)	I rise to a parliamentary inquiry
If you think the rules are being violated (stand)	Point of Order!
To request information relevant to the business at hand, but not related to parliamentary procedure (stand)	Request for information.

Some Procedural Reminders:

To make a substantive motion or amendment, state the wording of the motion; do NOT say “I so move. Immediately provide a written copy to the Secretary of the convention.

Only two amendments (a primary amendment amending the main motion and a secondary amendment amending the primary amendment) **can be pending on a main motion**. Remember, the main motion must always be voted on after all amendments have been dealt with.

Motions to extend, limit, or end debate require a 2/3s affirmative vote.

To find out how to use procedures or if unclear what is happening procedurally, rise to a parliamentary inquiry, and the presiding officer will inform you if the motion is in order or what your options for action are for what you want to do.

Unanimous consent. For routine matters, particularly where there seems to be no opposition, the chair will use unanimous consent or general consent by saying “If there is no objection, ...” If you have any objection to the action being suggested by the chair, say “Objection” and the chair will take a vote.

Ending Debate. If you think that debate has continued long enough and would like the motion voted on immediately and yet other people are still standing up to speak, you can obtain the floor by being recognized at a microphone and move the previous question. (DO NOT just shout out “question” from your seat as this is not a motion for the previous question and is disorderly if another delegate is speaking or seeking recognition.) The language to use is “I move the previous question” (which applies only to the immediately pending question/motion – an amendment for instance) or “I move the previous question on all pending questions” (which brings a vote on all questions/motions before the assembly on that main motion in reverse order. The motion for the previous question requires a second and a 2/3 affirmative vote to cut off debate.

Dropping a motion without a vote. The proper motion to use is “to postpone indefinitely.” This motion requires a second, is debatable, and takes a majority vote. (DO NOT use the motion “to table” which is only used when some emergent business must be dealt with when another motion is on the floor. The motion to table is out of order to kill a motion as its cuts off debate with only a majority vote.)