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Synopsis of *Robert's Rules of Order*

The following information is offered as an aid for those seeking assistance in using parliamentary procedure. All references are to the 12th Edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*. Charts summarizing the motions and the requirements for each appear on pp. 7–8 of this section of the *Bulletin of Reports*. (Note: Parliamentary procedure may be modified by the Churchwide Assembly's Rules of Organization and Procedure.)

Amendment of the Agenda, §41

An item of business can be taken out of its order in the Order of Business a) by adopting, by a two-thirds vote, a motion to suspend the rules (41:37), or b) by unanimous consent (41:38), or c) under a special assembly rule by majority vote when the change is proposed by the chair (41:39).

Amendments, §12

A motion may be amended (changed) before it is voted upon by inserting words, striking out words, striking out and inserting words, adding words at the end of a sentence, and substituting. A motion to amend must be germane to the motion to be amended. A motion to amend requires a second; is debatable, if the motion to be amended is debatable; can be amended; requires a majority vote (even if the motion amended requires a two-thirds vote for its adoption); and can be reconsidered.

Appeal, §24

If a member believes that the chair has ruled incorrectly, an appeal may be made. However, an appeal may not be made if the chair has expressed only an opinion (24:6). An appeal must be made at the time of the ruling; if any debate or business has intervened, it is not in order. An appeal must be seconded; is debatable, unless it addresses a matter of decorum or the matter appealed from is not debatable; is not amendable; and a majority vote or tie sustains the decision of the chair. An appeal may be reconsidered.

Courtesy, §3

Members always should act politely. Members should address only the chair, should refer to other speakers by title or some other designation, and should avoid mentioning names, if possible. A speaker's motives should not be called into question. During debate, presentations, and remarks from the stage, members should avoid conduct that would disturb the assembly (3:9–13, 4:30, 43:19–28).

Division of a Question, §27

A motion that focuses on a single question, but consists of two or more parts, each of which can stand as a distinct proposal on its own, may be considered and voted upon as separate parts following adoption of a motion to “divide the question.” The motion to divide must state clearly the manner in which the question is to be divided (27:4).

Germane

A “germane” matter is something closely related to or having a direct bearing on a motion before the assembly. A motion to amend must be germane to the motion to be amended. In other words, no new subject can be introduced under the pretext of a motion to amend (12:16). In debate a member's remarks must be germane to the question before the assembly. In other words, the statements must have a bearing on whether the motion being considered should be adopted (12:6).

Incidental Motions, §6, Chapter VIII

Incidental motions usually relate to questions of procedure and, unlike subsidiary motions, do not have a rank. They include:

Point of order	Motions relating to methods of voting and polls
Appeal	Motions relating to nominations
Suspend the rules	Parliamentary inquiry
Objection to consideration of a matter	Point of information
Division of a question	Request permission to withdraw or modify a motion
Consideration by paragraph or seriatim	Request to read papers
Division of the assembly	Request for any other privilege

Lay on the Table, §17

A motion to lay on the table is often misused and is only rarely appropriate. A motion to lay on the table is *only* appropriate if urgent business unexpectedly comes up (for example, if an important guest speaker arrives and must leave soon). If the intention is to delay consideration of a question, the appropriate motion is Postpone to a Certain Time. If the intention is to defeat a motion without voting on it directly, the appropriate motion is Postpone Indefinitely (see below).

A motion to lay on the table, if adopted, would permit the assembly to put aside temporarily a pending question so that a more urgent matter can be considered. This motion requires a second; cannot be debated; cannot be amended; requires a majority vote; and only a negative vote may be reconsidered.

Limit or Extend Limits of Debate, §15

The purpose of this motion may be 1) to shorten or to increase the time limit placed upon each speaker, 2) to limit the number of speeches, 3) to close debate at a specified time, or 4) to close debate after a specified period of time. This motion requires a second; can be amended; cannot be debated; requires a two-thirds vote; and can be reconsidered.

Object to Consideration of a Matter, §26

This motion is used to test the assembly's desire even to consider an original main motion. It must be made immediately after the question is stated by the chair and before there has been any debate or higher-ranking motion stated by the chair. Its use is to prevent discussion on controversial or personal questions. A member may rise and, without waiting for recognition, say, "I object to the consideration of the question (or motion)." A second is not required, and the motion may not be debated or amended. A two-thirds vote is required to sustain an objection to consideration. A negative vote can be reconsidered.

Obtaining the Floor, §3

Prior to speaking in the assembly, whether to make a motion or to engage in debate, a member must obtain the floor, in other words, be recognized by the chair as having the right to speak at that time (3:30–35).

Microphones are placed at convenient locations so that members may address the chair when no one else "has the floor." Once recognized by the chair, the member is entitled to speak, subject to the limitations in the Rules of Organization and Procedure.

Each person recognized by the chair is asked to identify themselves by giving their name and the name of their synod.

In a few instances, it is not necessary to seek recognition of the chair before speaking. These include:

- to appeal a decision by the chair—appeal to be made before any debate or other business has intervened (24:1–13);
- to suggest amount, name, place, date, or numbers to "fill blanks" when invited by the chair (12:92–113);
- to call for division of the assembly, if a vote is doubtful (29:1–8);
- to call for a counted vote if the result of the division of the assembly is in doubt (30:1–3);
- to extend time for consideration of a pending question or until scheduled recess or adjournment, when the orders of the day are announced or called for (18:8(b));
- to call for the orders of the day (18:1–11);
- to raise a point of order, or a question of order (23:1–21);
- to make a parliamentary inquiry (33:1–5);
- to raise a question of privilege, unless a person is speaking or unless such interruption is unavoidable (19:1–17);
- to request permission to read a paper or a section of a book (33:1–2, 33:20–21);
- to move reconsideration of a motion previously acted upon (37:1–52);
- to request permission to withdraw a motion, or to modify a motion, that has been stated by the chair (33:11–19);
- to object to consideration of the question (26:1–9).

Orders of the Day, §18

A motion calling for the "Orders of the Day" is made for the purpose of requiring the assembly to conform to its adopted agenda. The chair will rule on the motion. Upon a call for the "Orders of the Day" by a single member, the assembly must return to the approved agenda, unless by a two-thirds vote the assembly refuses to proceed to the orders of the day or by a two-thirds vote the assembly adopts a motion to suspend the rules.

Point of Order, §23

If a member believes that the rules of the assembly are being violated, he or she may rise to a “point of order” or “raise a question of order.” This calls upon the chair for a ruling and enforcement of the assembly’s rules. A “point of order” may be made by raising a white paper from the member’s seat, even if someone has the floor; it does not require a second; is not debatable or amendable; is normally ruled upon by the chair; and cannot be reconsidered. It must be raised at the time the alleged breach of rules occurs, unless the breach is ongoing (23:5–6).

Postpone Indefinitely, §11

A motion to “postpone indefinitely” is used for one of three purposes: 1) to defeat an ill-considered motion without voting on it directly; or 2) to get a “reading” on the strength of those supporting and those opposing a main motion; or 3) to extend the limits of debate on a matter. The effect of the motion, if adopted, is to “kill” the main motion. The motion to postpone indefinitely requires a second; is debatable; cannot be amended; requires a majority vote; and only an affirmative vote can be reconsidered.

Postpone to a Certain Time, §14

A member has the right to make a motion to postpone action on another motion 1) so that it can be discussed more fully at a more convenient time, or 2) because arguments advanced during debate have indicated the need to make a decision at a later time. **The time to which the motion is to be postponed should be stated definitely in this motion.** The motion requires a second; is debatable, but only with respect to the proposed postponement; and can be amended. A majority vote is required unless the effect of the postponement is to create a special order, in which case a two-thirds vote is required; however, an amendment to the motion to postpone to a certain time requires only a majority vote. The motion to postpone to a certain time can be reconsidered.

Previous Question, §16

To move the “previous question” is to bring the assembly to an immediate decision as to whether debate on another motion should cease. The maker of the motion must proceed to a microphone and be properly recognized by the chair. By assembly rule, the motion cannot be made by someone who has first participated in the debate. This motion requires a second; is not debatable; cannot be amended; requires a two-thirds vote; and can be reconsidered before any vote is taken under it. If adopted, the assembly proceeds, without further debate, to vote on the immediate pending question. By assembly rule, it is not in order to move the previous question on “all pending questions.”

Privileged Motions, §18-22

(In order of precedence from highest to lowest)

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1) Fix the time to which to adjourn | 4) Question of Privilege |
| 2) Adjourn | 5) Call for Orders of the Day |
| 3) Recess | |

Quasi Committee of the Whole, §52

The assembly can “go into the quasi committee of the whole” to discuss under conditions of freedom similar to those of a committee a matter that can best be discussed informally (52:19–23).

The motion to go into the quasi committee of the whole is a form of the motion to refer, and the motion may specify the format and applicable procedures. No binding decisions may be taken by a quasi committee of the whole; however, it may make recommendations to the assembly. Absent specification in the motion to refer, the rules of debate approved by the assembly apply in the quasi committee of the whole.

The chair of the quasi committee of the whole is the presiding officer (52:21).

During the period when the assembly is meeting as a quasi committee of the whole, even though the committee consists solely of members having vote and voice, it is technically not the assembly (52:22–28).

Reconsider, §37

Should it be deemed desirable to return to a motion already voted on, whether adopted or rejected, a motion is made to reconsider the vote on that subject, if such a motion is otherwise in order. Such motion may be offered only by one who voted on the winning side of the issue and may be made only on the day the previous vote on the subject was taken or on the next succeeding day of assembly business. If adopted, the question before the assembly is exactly the same question and it is in the same form as at the time the original vote was taken. The motion to reconsider requires a second; is debatable if the motion to be reconsidered is debatable; cannot be amended; requires a majority vote; and cannot be reconsidered.

Refer (or Commit), §13

This motion may be used to commit a main motion, with or without amendments and with or without subsidiary motions, to the Church Council, a churchwide unit or office to be designated by the Church Council for study and report to a future assembly (or for interim action), or to an assembly committee or a special committee for study and report back to the present assembly. The motion to refer requires a second; is debatable; can be amended; requires a majority vote; and cannot be reconsidered, if the committee has begun to function.

Rescind or Amend Something Previously Adopted, §35

These two motions may be applied to an earlier action of an assembly. If adopted, the motion to rescind has the effect of nullifying the earlier action; the motion to amend something previously adopted is to be used, if only a part of the earlier action is to be changed. The motion requires a second; is debatable; and can be amended. Under proposed assembly rules, a two-thirds vote is necessary to adopt, and constitution and bylaw amendments, once approved, cannot be rescinded or amended. Only a negative vote can be reconsidered.

Standing Rules for a Convention, Adoption of, §59

“Standing Rules of the Convention” cannot conflict with the constitution or bylaws of this church, but they can modify rules contained in the parliamentary authority, as well as other matters. These rules, known as the Churchwide Assembly Rules of Organization and Procedure, while applying to only the immediate assembly, often have become developed to a point where there is little change from one assembly to another. While the rules are presented under an enacting motion, they are in fact a group of separate main motions. Voting members may request separate consideration of particular rules for purposes of debate, amendment, removal, or addition. These requests for separate consideration will be set aside without being voted upon until after the other rules (those for which no requests for separate consideration were made) have been adopted by a two-thirds vote. Then each of the requests will be considered, with a two-thirds vote required if a parliamentary rule from *Robert’s Rules of Order* is being changed or a simple majority vote if no parliamentary rule is involved.

Subsidiary Motions, §11-17

Subsidiary motions are motions that assist the assembly in dealing with a main motion being considered. (*The following are subsidiary motions in order of precedence from highest to lowest*):

- | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1) Lay on the Table | 4) Postpone to a Certain Time | 7) Postpone Indefinitely |
| 2) Previous Question | 5) Refer or Commit | |
| 3) Limit Debate | 6) Amend | |

Substitute (Amend), §12

A motion to strike out an entire paragraph, section, article, or a complete main motion and to insert a different paragraph, section, article, or main motion is a motion to substitute. A motion to substitute is a type of motion to amend. The motion to substitute requires a second; is debatable, if the motion is debatable; requires a majority vote; and is amendable. Amendments can be made first to the original and then to the substitute motion. Unlike other motions to amend, debate may address both the original text and the substitute (12:70). When both have been perfected, the vote is taken on whether to substitute the proposed substitute (with any amendments to it that have been adopted) for the original paragraph, section, article, or main motion with any amendments that previously had been adopted. A majority vote is required. If the motion to substitute has been adopted, the substitute becomes the pending paragraph, section, article, or main motion, and then the substituted material cannot be amended except by adding something that does not alter the content of the substituted material. When material has been substituted for other material, the assembly must still vote on whether the substituted material is to be adopted.

Suspend the Rules, §25

If, by reason of the assembly’s rules, it is not possible according to *Robert’s Rules of Order* to take an action (such as bringing forward an action scheduled for later consideration), a member may move to suspend the rules, stating the specific purpose to be achieved, but not the specific rule.

Any such suspension of rules, however, may not conflict with the constitution or bylaws of this church, or with the fundamental principles of parliamentary law. A motion to suspend the rules requires a second; cannot be debated; and cannot be amended. Under a proposed assembly rule, a two-thirds vote is required to adopt. It cannot be reconsidered.

Take from the Table, §34

The purpose of a motion to “take from the table” is to enable renewed consideration of a motion that had previously been laid on the table. Such motion is in order any time after the business that interfered with consideration at an earlier time has been completed, provided no other business is before the assembly. A matter that has been tabled dies at the close of the assembly, if no motion is adopted to take it from the table. A motion to take it from the table requires a second; cannot be debated; and cannot be amended. A majority vote is required to adopt. It cannot be reconsidered.

Voting, §4

The Rules of Organization and Procedure of the assembly describe rules for voting. Most motions can be adopted by a majority of the members present and voting, provided a quorum is present. Under *Robert's Rules of Order*, the following motions require a two-thirds vote of members present and voting to adopt:

- Amend or rescind something previously adopted, if notice has not been given;
- Close nominations;
- Deal with an order for the day before it is pending;
- Extend time for consideration of pending question, or time until scheduled adjournment or recess;
- Limit or extend limits of debate;
- Make a special order;
- Previous question;
- Refuse to proceed to the orders of the day;
- Suspend the rules;
- Take up a question out of its proper order or take up an order of the day before the time for which it has been set.

Language for Introducing Motions

For clarity and consistency, voting members should use the standard language of parliamentary procedure when introducing motions on the floor of the assembly. The chart below offers standard phrases used when introducing motions for various purposes.

<i>If you wish to...</i>	<i>You say...</i>
End the meeting.	I move to adjourn.
Take a break.	I move to recess for [<i>specify time duration</i>] OR until [<i>time certain</i>].
Register a complaint.	I rise to a question of privilege.
Require the assembly to return to its agenda.	I call for the orders of the day.
Lay a matter aside temporarily to address an urgent matter that has arisen unexpectedly.	I move to lay the question on the table.
Stop debating a motion and vote on it.	I move the previous question.
Limit or extend debate on a motion.	I move that the debate be limited to...
Postpone consideration of a motion until a certain time.	I move to postpone the motion to [<i>time</i>].
Refer a motion to a committee.	I move to refer the motion to [<i>committee name</i>].
Change the wording of a motion.	I move to amend the motion by...
Dispose of a main motion without voting in it.	I move that the motion be postponed indefinitely.
Bring business before the assembly.	I move to... OR I move that...

<i>If you wish to...</i>	<i>You say...</i>
Make sure the assembly follows its own rules.	Point of order.
Ask the assembly to overrule a decision of the chair.	I appeal the decision of the chair.
Suspend the rules.	I move to suspend the rules.
Avoid considering a main motion all together.	I object to the consideration of...
Consider parts of a motion separately.	I move to divide the question.
Demand a rising vote.	I move for a rising vote.
Ask a question about how to do something according to parliamentary procedure.	Parliamentary inquiry.
Request information.	Point of information.
Return to considering a motion laid on the table.	I move to take from the table...
Reconsider an action taken by the assembly.	I move to reconsider...
Cancel an action previously taken by the assembly.	I move to rescind...

Chart of Ranking Motions

Name of Motion in Order of Rank	Section	Interrupt?	Does the Motion Require a Second?	Is the Motion Debatable?	Can the Motion Be Amended?	Percent of the Assembly that Must Vote in Favor to Sustain.	Can the Decision of the Assembly Be Reconsidered?
<i>Privileged</i>							
Fix the time to which to adjourn	22	NO	YES	NO*	YES	Majority (>50%)	YES
Adjourn	21	NO	YES	NO*	NO*	Majority	NO
Take a recess	20	NO	YES	NO	YES	Majority	NO
Raise a question of privilege	19	YES	NO	NO	NO	CHAIR*	NO
Call for the orders of the day	18	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO VOTE*	NO
<i>Subsidiary</i>							
Lay on the table	17	NO	YES	NO	NO	Majority	YES (-)
Previous question	16	NO	YES	NO	NO*	2/3	YES*
Limit or extend limits of debate	15	NO	YES	NO	YES	2/3	YES
Postpone to a certain time	14	NO	YES	YES	YES	Majority*	YES
Commit or refer	13	NO	YES	YES	YES	Majority	YES*
Amend	12	NO	YES	YES*	YES* (x1)	Majority	YES
Postpone indefinitely	11	NO	YES	YES	NO	Majority	YES (+)
<i>Main motion</i>							
Main motion	10	NO	YES	YES	YES	Majority	YES

NOTES FOR CHART:

- * = Exceptions exist.
- + = Only an affirmative vote can be reconsidered.
- = Only a negative vote can be reconsidered.

Chart of Non-ranking Motions

Name of Motion	Section	Interrupt?	Second?	Debatable?	Amendable?	Vote	Reconsider?
<i>Incidental</i>							
Appeal	24	YES	YES	YES	NO	Majority	YES
Consider by paragraph/seriatim	28	NO	YES	NO	YES	Majority	NO
Division of the Assembly	29	YES	NO	NO	NO	DEMAND	NO
Division of a question	27	NO	YES	NO	YES	Majority	NO
Nominations and polls (reopen)	31	NO	YES	NO	YES	Majority	YES (-)
Nominations and polls (close)	31	NO	YES	NO	YES	2/3	NO
Objection to consideration of a question	26	YES	NO	NO	NO	2/3	YES (-)
Parliamentary inquiry	33	YES	NO	NO	NO	CHAIR	NO
Point of information	33	YES	NO	NO	NO	CHAIR	NO
Point of order	23	YES	NO	NO*	NO	CHAIR	NO
Ratify/confirm	10	NO	YES	YES	YES	Majority	YES
Requests to withdraw a motion, read a paper, etc.	33	YES	NO*	NO	NO	Majority*	YES*
Suspend the rules	25	NO	YES	NO	NO	2/3*	NO
Voting	30	NO	YES	NO*	YES	Majority*	YES
<i>Bring Back Motions</i>							
Discharge a committee	36	NO	YES	YES	YES	2/3*	YES (-)
Reconsider	37	YES*	YES	YES	NO	Majority	NO
Rescind or amend something previously adopted	35	NO	YES	YES	YES	2/3*	YES (-)
Take from the table	34	NO	YES	NO	NO	Majority	NO

NOTES FOR CHART:

- * = Exceptions exist.
- + = Only an affirmative vote can be reconsidered.
- = Only a negative vote can be reconsidered.