

How To Run An Effective Meeting (Using Robert's Rules of Order)  
 2014 Leadership Training Day  
 Presbytery of Detroit  
 February 8, 2014  
 Ed Koster

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F-3.0203 Gathered in Councils  
 These presbyters shall come together in councils in regular gradation. These councils are sessions, presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly. All councils of the church are united by the nature of the church and share with one another responsibilities, rights, and powers as provided in this Constitution. The councils are distinct, but have such mutual relations that the act of one of them is the act of the whole church performed by it through the appropriate council. The larger part of the church, or a representation thereof, shall govern the smaller.  
 F-3.0204 Seek and Represent the Will of Christ  
 Presbyters are not simply to reflect the will of the people, but rather to seek together to find and represent the will of Christ.  
 F-3.0205 Decision by Majority Vote  
 Decisions shall be reached in councils by vote, following opportunity for discussion and discernment, and a majority shall govern.  
 G-3.0105 Meetings  
 Meetings of councils shall be opened and closed with prayer. Meetings shall be conducted in accordance with the most recent edition of Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, except when it is in contradiction to this Constitution. Councils may also make use of processes of discernment in their deliberations prior to a vote as agreed upon by the body.

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ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER???

Accusations against

- Too complicated  
*It is. But all the motions I have heard at the Presbytery of Detroit can fit on the front and back of a single sheet of paper.*
- Parliamentary hassles  
*Hassles do occur, and bodies can spend a lot of time trying to determine what the "right" motion is and what rules apply. In every case, it is because of a lack of preparation and/or understanding of RONR.*
- Interferes with freedom to decide  
*It simply does not. "Interference" is frequently claimed when people want to do something against the rules, without opposition, or without fair and due process.*
- Won't let us do things we want to do  
*There are things one cannot do: violate the Constitution, violate Bylaws, violate state law, or violate the fundamental rights of members. Otherwise, RONR allows a body to do what it wants.*
- Is the cause of our various conflicts (because it forces yes/no positions)  
*If we have conflicts that are intractable, it is because parties insist on demanding yes/no votes without compromise.*

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Origin and Intent of RONR

- Group decision making is an issue going back to tribes and city-states.
- In England, the need to make group decision entered into a new phase when various local governing bodies came to rely on the notion of majority rule.
- By the time the American Colonies were founded, the term "parliamentary" law was common.
- There were various manuals and sets of rules developed under the general rule (found in the Constitution) that deliberative bodies could set their own rules of procedure.
- Henry Robert, a officer in the engineering corps of the Union Army was called on to preside at a meeting on planning for the defense of New Bedford, Mass in 1863. After that meeting, he vowed never to do that again without a better understanding of procedure.
- The manual he wrote, now called *Robert's Rules of Order* is the most common (but not the only) parliamentary model used in the US.
- It has undergone many revisions and editions. The most recent edition, published by the Trustees of the Robert's Rules Association, is *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised 11<sup>th</sup> edition*.

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Fundamental Precepts

The rules of parliamentary law found in this book will, on analysis, be seen to be constructed upon a careful balance of the rights of persons or subgroups within an organization's or an assembly's total membership. That is, these rules are based on a regard for the rights:

- of the majority,
  - of the minority, especially a strong minority—greater than one third,
  - of individual members,
  - of absentees, and
  - of all these together.
- RONR (11th ed.) p. ii

A member of an assembly, in the parliamentary sense, as mentioned above, is a person entitled to full participation in its proceedings, that is, as explained in 3 and 4, the right to attend meetings, to make motions, to speak in debate, and to vote. No member can be individually deprived of these basic rights of membership—or of any basic rights concomitant to them, such as the right to make nominations or to give previous notice of a motion—except through disciplinary proceedings.  
RONR (11th ed.) p. 3

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Why You Want to Know and Use RONR

- **Fairness**  
*RONR ensures everyone is informed, has a chance to present their case, and has the opportunity to vote.*
- **Permanence of decisions**  
*If proper procedures are followed, the only practical challenge to a decision is that it was substantively illegal.*
- **Politics**  
*Presbyterians will almost always go along with a decision made by a vote. A major exception to this observation is when there is a claim that the outcome was somehow "fixed," that they did not get an opportunity to defend their position, or that procedures were violated.*
- **Clarifies authority**  
*Since the Book of Order requires decisions of councils be made using Robert's Rules, the effect is that where the Book of Order is silent, Robert's Rules prevails.*

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### Basic and Helpful Motions

- **Amend**  
*Allows changes to proposals. RONR (11th ed.) § 12*
- **Postpone**  
*When you want more time to think or for any reason you don't want to decide now. Can debate the merits of postponing. RONR (11th ed.) § 14*
- **Refer**  
*Sends a motion to or back to a committee for more deliberation*
- **Division of a question**  
*Where a motion can be discussed separately. Either by motion and vote. RONR (11th ed.) § 27.  
Demand to divide: RONR (11th ed.) p. 274*

TABLE Kills a motion with no vote

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### Basic and Helpful Motions (2)

- **Point of Order**  
*When you believe the moderator or the body has made a mistake. RONR (11th ed.) § 23*
- **Appeal**  
*When you believe the moderator has decided wrongly on a point of order. RONR (11th ed.) § 24. (Permits judicial action.)*
- **Rescind or amend something previously approved**  
*To correct an action made at any earlier meeting. RONR (11th ed.) Chapter IX*
- **Reconsider**  
*To debate and vote again on a matter decided earlier in a meeting. RONR (11th ed.) § 37*

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### PROCEDURE IN SMALL BOARDS.

RONR (11th ed.) pp 487ff

The rules governing such meetings are different from the rules that hold in other assemblies, in the following respects:

- Members may raise a hand instead of standing when seeking to obtain the floor, and may remain seated while making motions or speaking.
  - Motions need not be seconded.
  - There is no limit to the number of times a member can speak to a debatable question.\*
- Appeals, however, are debatable under the regular rules—that is, each member (except the chair) can speak only once in debate on them, while the chair may speak twice.
- Informal discussion of a subject is permitted while no motion is pending.

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PROCEDURE IN SMALL BOARDS.

(2) RONR (11th ed.) pp 487ff

- When a proposal is perfectly clear to all present, a vote can be taken without a motion's having been introduced. Unless agreed to by unanimous consent, however, all proposed actions must be approved by vote under the same rules as in larger meetings, except that a vote can be taken initially by a show of hands, which is often a better method in small meetings.

- The chairman need not rise while putting questions to a vote.

- If the chairman is a member, he may, without leaving the chair, speak in informal discussions and in debate, and vote on all questions.\*\*

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PROCEDURE IN SMALL BOARDS.

(3) RONR (11th ed.) pp 487ff

\*\*Informal discussion may be initiated by the chairman himself, which, in effect, enables the chairman to submit his own proposals without formally making a motion as described on pages 33-35 (although he has the right to make a motion if he wishes).

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COMMITTEE PROCEDURE. RONR  
(11th ed.) pp 500ff

In small committees,

- the chairman usually acts as secretary, but in large ones and many standing committees, a secretary may be chosen to keep a brief memorandum in the nature of minutes for the use of the committee.
- The informalities and modifications of the regular rules of parliamentary procedure listed on pages 487-88 for use in small boards are applicable

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COMMITTEE PROCEDURE. (2) RONR  
(11th ed.) pp 500ff

- the rules governing the motions to Rescind, to Amend Something Previously Adopted, and to Reconsider are modified as stated on page 306, line 34 to page 307, line 2, and pages 329-30.
  - In a committee, motions [to rescind or amend something previously adopted] require a two-thirds vote unless all committee members who voted for the motion to be [page 307] rescinded or amended are present or have received ample notice, in which case they require a majority vote.

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COMMITTEE PROCEDURE. (3) RONR  
(11th ed.) pp 500ff

- RECONSIDERATION IN STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES. Reconsideration in a standing or a special committee (50) differs from reconsideration in a meeting of the assembly in the following respects:
  - ❖ 1) A motion to reconsider a vote in the committee can be made and taken up regardless of the time that has elapsed since the vote was taken, and there is no limit to the number of times a question can be reconsidered. Likewise, the rule requiring unanimous consent to renew a defeated motion to Reconsider does not apply in committees.

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COMMITTEE PROCEDURE. (4) RONR  
(11th ed.) pp 500ff

- ❖ 2) The motion can be made by any member of the committee who did not vote with the losing side; or, in other words, the maker of the motion to Reconsider can be one who voted with the prevailing side, or one who did not vote at all, or even was absent.
- ❖ 3) Unless all the members of the committee who voted with the prevailing side are present or have been notified that the reconsideration will be moved, it requires a two-thirds vote to adopt the motion to Reconsider.

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COMMITTEE PROCEDURE. (5) RONR  
(11th ed.) pp 500ff

- In committees, the chairman is usually the most active participant in the discussions and work of the committee.
- In order that there may be no interference with the assembly's having the benefit of its committees' matured judgment, motions to close or limit debate (15, 16) are not allowed in committees.\*
- Committees of organized societies operate under the bylaws, the parliamentary authority, and any special rules of order or standing rules of the society which may be applicable to them.

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COMMITTEE PROCEDURE. (6) RONR  
(11th ed.) pp 500ff

- When a committee is to make substantive recommendations or decisions on an important matter, it should give members of the society an opportunity to appear before it and present their views on the subject at a time scheduled by the committee. Such a meeting is usually called a hearing. During actual deliberations of the committee, only committee members have the right to be present.

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Resources

Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (11<sup>th</sup>. Ed) \$12 paper. \$29 hardcover.

CD-ROM version. American Legal Publishing Corporation. [www.amlegal.com](http://www.amlegal.com) \$70

RONR Newly Revised In Brief, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. \$6.00

From the Presbytery Web Site

- Some Parliamentary Principles for Practical Purposes for Presbyterians
- Parliamentary Crib Sheet for Moderators and Chairs

National Association of Parliamentarians.  
<http://www.parliamentarians.org/>

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