

## FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS

*All things should be done decently and in order.*

—1 Corinthians 14:40

*All things shall be done by common consent in the church, by much prayer and faith...*

—Doctrine and Covenants 25:1b

The purpose of congregational conferences (business meetings) is to equip the congregation for mission. This happens as leaders are elected, budgets are approved, and initiatives are supported.

Pastors are responsible for leading congregational conferences. Congregations must have conferences once a year to elect the pastor, sustain the financial officer, and approve a budget. Congregations also approve ordaining priesthood, buying or selling congregational property, and other important matters. (See pages 8–14 of the *Church Administrator's Handbook*, 2005 edition.) Congregational conferences should help unify the congregation as members make decisions together.

*Remember to consult with the mission center president about scheduling and agenda items for the congregational conference.*

### Theological Underpinnings of Common Consent

The church has enduring principles that call us to community and emphasize the worth of persons. Congregational conferences are a way for a faith community to make decisions in the spirit of common consent in which the voice of each member is valued. Members should feel free to share their opinions whether they agree or not, without fear of personal abuse.

Only Community of Christ members of the congregation have “voice and vote” in the congregational conference.

### Common Consent Is a Process

Congregational leaders and members should have plenty of opportunities to discuss significant issues and decisions. This means that on significant matters, there should be ample time for discussion prior to any voting. In many cases, these discussions will take place in more informal sessions in the hours, days, or weeks prior to the conference itself.

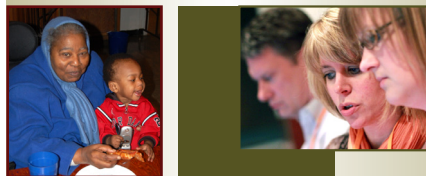
### Principles to Follow

As pastors plan and lead congregational conferences, they should follow these principles:

- At least two people need to speak to any concern or proposal (one to make a motion and one to second).
- Encourage full and free discussion of the issue (debate).
- Recognize and uphold the right of the conference to act, not act, modify, wait to act, or refer to another body (motions to approve, amend, postpone, refer can be helpful).

## Leading Congregational Conferences (Business Meetings)

by Leonard Young  
and Andrew Shields



### PRACTICES

1. TOOL: Leading Congregational Conferences (Business Meetings) Script

- Try to achieve the broadest consensus possible when making decisions.

## The Practical Side of Business Meetings

When the pastor leads a conference, the pastor is the “chair” of the meeting, facilitating the discussion. The following will be helpful in your preparation.

### ORDER OF BUSINESS

Preparing an agenda ahead of time helps the meeting run smoothly. Contact those who may be presenting at the meeting to make sure they are ready. Look for what could go wrong, and prepare solutions ahead of time. A script for leading a business meeting can be found following this article.

#### *Sample Agenda*

**Call to Order:** Say, “The meeting will come to order.”

**Spiritual Practice:** (opening hymn, scripture reading, invocation)

**Introduction of Guests:** (Mission Center or World Church ministers)

**Presentation and Approval of the Minutes:** Read by the secretary if a printed copy was not given to participants. It is always better to provide a copy to everyone. The chair asks for corrections and approves the minutes by unanimous consent (no need for a motion).

**Reports of Officers:** No action needed to “receive,” “accept,” or “approve” reports.

**Reports of Committees:** (if timely and appropriate)

**Reports of Special Committees:** Any committee with specific tasks.

**Special Orders:** Such items might include approving the budget or approving officers.

**Unfinished Business:** Any items not completed at the end of the previous meeting.

**General Orders:** Any item postponed to this meeting by the vote of a previous conference.

**New Business:** The chair should always ask, “Is there any other new business to be brought before the conference?”

**Presentations:** (including recognitions and special awards)

### Announcements

**Adjournment:** The chair asks: “Is there any further business to come before the conference?” If there is, handle it. If not, the chair says: “There being no further business to come before the conference, the conference is adjourned.” There is no need for a motion. The chair simply declares the meeting adjourned.

**Closing:** (closing hymn, benediction, sending forth)

### HANDLING A MOTION

Usually, the following six steps are essential:

1. A member makes the motion.
2. Another member seconds the motion. The name of the member who seconds a motion is not recorded in the minutes.
3. The chair commonly states: “It has been moved and seconded that (repeat the motion).... Is there any discussion?”
4. The members debate the motion. The chair recognizes (calls on to speak) a member before the member can speak to the group. The congregation can only talk about the motion that is “before them,” (the current topic). Everyone who speaks talks to the chair, not to other members in the meeting. Debate may be closed when no one else wishes to speak, or by adopting the “previous question” by a two-thirds vote. (After it has been moved and seconded.)
5. The chair takes the vote. Note:
  - Take the “yes” vote first, then the “no” vote
  - A majority vote means a majority of those *voting* for or against a motion—one-half of those voting, plus one vote. (Example: 30 people are present, but only 24 people vote. 13 people voting “yes” would be considered a majority and the motion would carry.)
  - The chair votes only when the chair’s vote affects the results—to make or break a tie vote (in a ballot vote the chair votes when other members do).
6. The chair announces the results of the vote.

### AMENDMENTS

Amendments require a second, are amendable, are debatable, and require a majority vote. An amendment should state exactly what is being done to the main motion. It is always handled before voting on the motion. The following provides examples on how a main motion can be amended:

**Main Motion:**

“That we reimburse expenses for our pastor to attend the Peace Colloquy and World Conference.”

**Amendment by Striking Out:**

“I move to amend the main motion by striking out the words ‘and World Conference.’”

**Amendment by Addition (or Insertion):**

“I move to amend the main motion by adding at the end the words ‘providing however that this congregation shall not be responsible for expenses over \$150.00.’”

**Amendment by Striking Out and Inserting:**

“I move to amend the main motion by striking out the words ‘our pastor’ and inserting the words ‘two congregation leaders.’”

All the above are examples of primary amendments, because they apply directly to the main motion. A secondary amendment is one that applies to another amendment. A secondary amendment could be applied to the amendment by addition, as follows:

**Secondary Amendment:**

“I move to amend the amendment by striking out ‘\$150.00’ and inserting ‘\$100.00.’”

Amendments of the Third Degree are not permitted. No more than one primary and one secondary amendment can be proposed at a time.

**Substitute Motion:**

Whenever it is desired to change the wording of a motion so substantially that several amendments would be required, a substitute motion may be used. A substitute motion has the same status as a primary amendment and must pertain to the same subject as the original motion.

For example: “That we encourage all of our members to attend the Peace Colloquy.” (This is a logical substitute for the main motion. It deals with the same topic: attendance at the Peace Colloquy.)

**PRESIDING**

Congregational conferences require a presiding officer and a secretary. The presiding officer should be familiar with the fundamental rules of parliamentary law, the Bylaws of Community of Christ, and any special rules adopted by the congregation.

The presiding officer (the “chair”) should be impartial and fair, not offering opinions or taking sides in the debate while presiding. Here is a list of other responsibilities:

- Maintain order.
- Announce each item of business, take the vote, announce the result, and then announce the next item of business on the agenda.
- Take an affirmative and a negative vote on all motions (except those of a complementary nature such as thanking a retiring officer for service).
- Do not recognize absurd motions.

**CONTENTS OF THE MINUTES**

The minutes of a meeting are the legal and historical record. The minutes reflect what was done rather than being a transcript of the debate and discussion.

The first paragraph of the minutes should contain the following:

- Name of congregation.
- Date of the meeting and the place.
- State the names of who presided and the secretary taking minutes.
- Note that the minutes of the previous meeting were approved; were they amended?

Added paragraphs should address each of the following items of business:

- Each main motion and the final wording in which each motion was adopted or disposed of. Include the name of the mover.
- If a financial report is given, attach it to the minutes.
- If an election takes place, state names nominated, for which office, and those elected.
- When a count has been ordered or the vote is by ballot, the voting results should be entered.
- All rulings and their explanations given by the chair.

In the last paragraph of the minutes include:

- The time of the meeting ended.
- The name and signature of the secretary.

***Special Parliamentary Situations*****ELECTION OF OFFICERS**

- The pastor may nominate one person for each elected position or request a nominating committee to do this.
- Nominations should be received from the floor for each elected office.

## VOTING PROCESS

- Nominees are voted on in the order in which they were nominated.
- A candidate must receive a majority of the votes cast (half plus one). The presider may not drop someone from the list because they received fewer votes. By the process of reballoting one candidate will eventually receive a majority.
- The chair declares the person with the majority vote elected.

## Sustaining of Appointed Officers

Some positions can be appointed by the pastor and sustained by the congregation. The positions of congregational financial officer, recorder, and historian are World Church positions and need sustaining. The following is a suggested procedure for sustaining appointments by the pastor:

- Motion made to sustain the appointments.
- The chair asks for the vote to sustain and the vote opposed.
- The chair declares whether the motion is passed or lost.
- If no one objects, the chair can request one motion to sustain all appointed officers and that one vote be taken to sustain them all.

## APPROVAL OF CONGREGATIONAL BUDGET

Budgets should be developed in consultation with the congregational financial officer, the mission center financial

officer, and other congregational leaders. It is approved by a majority vote. The following steps should be observed:

- Provide a printed copy at least one week before the business meeting (unless the congregation has passed previous legislation calling for an earlier time).
- Take a motion to approve the budget. Get a second.
- Present information about the budget and answer questions.
- Allow time for debate and amendments.
- Take a final vote on the approval of the budget as presented or as amended.

## APPROVAL OF PRIESTHOOD CALLS

After the pastor has received administrative approval and the person to be ordained has accepted the call to serve, the pastor should follow these guidelines:

- Provide the congregation two weeks before the business meeting the names and the offices to which they are to be ordained.
- At the business meeting, the chair asks for a motion to approve the ordination of the candidate(s). This motion is seconded.
- The pastor shares a testimony of the call.
- The candidate(s) makes a statement of acceptance.
- Others may be given opportunity to share supportive statements
- The pastor asks for votes of support and for votes not in support for each candidate by show of hands.
- The pastor announces that the ordination(s) has been approved (or not approved).

## QUESTION

1. How will the congregation's mission inform the agenda of your next congregational conference?

## LEADING CONGREGATIONAL CONFERENCES (BUSINESS MEETINGS) SCRIPT\*

**Congregation:**

**Date:**

**Place:**

**Presider:**

**Secretary:**

**Establish quorum:**

The bylaws call for at least six members of the congregation to be present to have a quorum at a business meeting. It is not necessary to point this out, but you should be sure at least that many eligible participants are present before continuing. (Bylaws of Community of Christ, Article V Section 5, [www.CofChrist.org/onlineresources/bylaws.asp](http://www.CofChrist.org/onlineresources/bylaws.asp))

**Call to Order:** Say, “The meeting will come to order.”

**Spiritual Practice:** (opening hymn, scripture reading, invocation)

**Introduction of Guests:** (Mission Center or World Church ministers)

Any mission center or World Church guests should be introduced from the person with the most responsibility to the person with the least. Allot time for these guests to briefly address the conference. Mission center presidents should be involved in scheduling congregational business meetings, or at least informed two weeks or more in advance.

**Presentation and Approval of the Minutes**

Read by the secretary if a printed copy was not given to participants. It is always better to provide a copy to everyone. The chair asks for corrections and approves the minutes by unanimous consent (no need for a motion).

**If distributed at least two weeks beforehand:** Say, “If there is no objection, we will not read the minutes of the [date] meeting, as they were distributed beforehand. Are there any corrections to the minutes? (pause) If there are no corrections, the minutes are approved as printed.”

**If not previously distributed:** Say, “The secretary will read the minutes of the [date] meeting. (secretary reads minutes) Are there any corrections to the minutes? (pause) If there are no corrections, the minutes are approved as read.”

**If there are corrections:** Say, “If there is no objection, the minutes will be corrected by [repeat correction]. (pause) Since there is no objection, the correction is made. If there are no further corrections (pause) the minutes are approved as corrected.”

**If anyone objects:** Say, “The question is on the adoption of the motion to amend the minutes by [repeat the correction or amendment]. Are you ready for the question?” (handle debate) Vote required: majority by voice.

“Those in favor of the motion, say ‘aye.’ (pause)

“Those opposed, say ‘no.’ (pause)

Announce results of the vote: “The ayes have it and the motion is adopted. The minutes are amended by [repeat amendment].”

OR

“The noes have it and the motion is lost.”

“If there are no further corrections (pause) the minutes are approved as corrected.”

### Reports of Officers

**The next item of business is hearing the reports of the officers.**

Officers are called on. The chair should check ahead of time and only call on those who have reports to make. Reports for information only are “placed on file.” If an officer’s report contains a recommendation, another member may make a motion to implement the recommendation. If you have a short business meeting, perhaps to approve the budget only, then officers may not have anything to report, and this section can be skipped. It is probably still best to hear from the financial officer.

**After each report has been presented:** Ask, “Are there any questions?” (pause) If there are no questions or if all the questions have been answered, the report will be filed.

**Regarding the annual financial report:** (It should be detailed and already audited before presentation to the conference.)

**Entertain questions:** (following the report)

**Receive a motion:** “If there are no further questions, the chair recognizes [someone identified beforehand] for a motion.” (Member moves to accept the auditor’s report. A second is not required.)

**Handle debate:** “The question is on the adoption of the motion to accept the auditor’s report. Are you ready for the question?” (handle debate) Vote required: majority by voice.

**Call for vote:** “Those in favor of the motion, say ‘aye.’” (pause) “Those opposed, say ‘no.’” (pause)

**Announce the results of the vote:** “The ayes have it and the motion is adopted. The auditor’s report is accepted and will be included in the minutes.”

### Reports of Committees

“The chair recognizes [name] for a report from the committees [building, leadership, worship, Christian education, pastoral care, stewardship, community outreach, missionary, communications, etc.]”

No action is required, the reports are informational. The reporting member may make a motion at the conclusion of the report. These motions are handled as main motions. Ideally, those reporting for committees have been contacted, and committees without reports are not called upon.

### Reports of Special Committees

Any committees appointed to do specific tasks should report in the order they were created. Check with the committee in advance, and do not call on them if they do not have anything to report. Reports for information are “placed on file.”

**Special Orders:** (Such items might include approving the budget or approving officers.)

1. If there are no special orders, go on to unfinished business. Examples for handling follow: “At the last meeting, the motion relating to [state topic of motion] was postponed to this meeting and made a special order. The question is on the motion that [repeat the motion]. Is there any discussion?” (handle debate and voting normally)
2. **The annual budget.** Refer to page 12 of the *Church Administrator’s Handbook* (2005 ed.) for information on how budgets are prepared and presented. If helpful read aloud: “The proposed budget that is developed is presented to the congregation for approval. This process should invite and encourage the general membership to review, understand, comment upon, and ultimately endorse both the program of ministry and the supporting budget for

the congregation. The congregational budget is not valid unless it is approved by formal action of the congregational conference.” The budget can be presented as a special order, followed by a motion to approve the budget (it helps to identify who will do this beforehand, allowing for the normal process of debate and amendment).

3. **Election of officers. Article V Section 2 of the bylaws.** *Church Administrator’s Handbook*, Section 2, headings 8, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18 are helpful to consider. The pastor and secretary are elected. The pastor may appoint program leaders to be sustained by the congregation with the exception of the congregational financial officer (CFO) who is appointed by the mission center financial officer; the recorder, appointed by the mission center recorder; and historian, appointed by the World Church historian upon recommendation by the pastor. Persons should be selected three months beforehand so they can become familiar with the task (and so people can discreetly object if necessary).

“The following persons have been nominated for the office of [office]. We will vote in the order in which they were nominated. All those in favor of [first name] raise your hands. Thank you. Now, all those in favor of [next name] raise your hands.”

Announce result of the vote: “[name with the most votes] has received a majority of votes and is elected to [office].”

For elections, put up the nominations of those who have agreed to let their names stand beforehand, then open it up for nominations from the congregation. Write the names (one office at a time) on a flip chart or dry erase board everyone can see. When there are no further nominations, give people a moment, then go on to the vote. The usual practice is to vote with a show of hands, in the order of nomination. Retake the vote until you get a majority; do not remove the nominee with the lowest vote.

When only one nominee is put up, the chair can take a voice vote, or declare that the nominee is elected, effecting the election by unanimous consent or “acclamation.”

To sustain officers, distribute a list (or put it up on the board), arrange for someone to move “to sustain the appointment of [name] to the office of [office],” or “this list of appointments” and vote to sustain (without objection, the entire list). If there is an objection, vote to sustain each one from the top down. Majority is needed.

“It has been moved and seconded that we sustain [name] to the office of [office].” OR “It has been moved and seconded that we sustain this list of appointments.”

“All those in favor, raise your hands. Those opposed, raise your hands.”

Announce the result of the vote: “The motion is passed (or lost).”

- 4. Election of delegates to higher jurisdictional conferences.** Most mission centers do not have delegate conferences. Congregations in those jurisdictions that do will receive from the mission center the number of delegates they can elect. For most congregations, the chair can ask for nominations and then write the names on a dry erase board or flip chart, then give everyone a number of votes equal to the spaces to fill. Have someone record a vote by raised hands, and the ones with the most votes are elected. Larger congregations may want to use ballots; have tellers ready to count the ballots and report back during the meeting if possible.

#### **Priesthood Calls**

Names must be presented to the congregation one at a time and voted on; a majority is needed. This is an opportunity for the congregation to demonstrate that it will support the new priesthood member.

- Receive a motion: “To approve the ordination of [name] to the office of [office] after all appropriate required preordination training is completed.”
- Get a second.
- Pastor shares testimony of the call.
- The candidate makes a statement of acceptance.
- Receive statements of support from others.
- Ask for votes of support and for votes not in support for each candidate by show of hands.
- Announce that the ordination(s) has been approved (or not approved).

#### **Unfinished Business and General Orders**

The chair does not ask if there is any unfinished business; it is announced only if there is unfinished business or general orders. Unfinished business refers to questions that have

come over from the previous meeting (other than special orders) as a result of that meeting having adjourned without completing its order of business. General orders are matters that were postponed to, or made general orders for, the present meeting—taken in the order in which they were made. If none, go to new business.

“Under unfinished business, the first item is the motion relating to [state the topic of the motion] that was pending when the previous meeting adjourned.”

“The question is on the adoption of the motion [repeat motion]. Are you ready for the question?” (Handle as a main motion. This is repeated for each item of unfinished business.)

“Under general orders, the first item is [state the topic of the motion]. The question is on the adoption of the motion [repeat motion]. Are you ready for the question?” (Handle as a main motion. This is repeated for each general order.)

#### **New Business**

Any proposals which have been turned in ahead of the meeting should be taken up first. The chair should always ask if there is other new business to be brought before the conference. This is any member’s opportunity to introduce items of business.

Ask, “Is there any new business?”

#### **Presentations**

Any recognitions, program, or special awards should take place at this point in the agenda.

#### **Announcements**

The chair makes announcements first, then asks if others have announcements. Introduce anyone coming forward to make announcements. Do not “turn over the chair” to the speaker, as that complicates the minutes, and the announcer is not running the meeting at that point. Thank those who offer announcements.

#### **Adjournment**

Ask, “Is there any further business?” (pause) “Since there is no further business, the meeting is adjourned.”

**Closing Ceremonies** (closing hymn, benediction, sending forth)

## \*Notes

The main outline (adapted) was provided by Leonard M. Young, a former apostle, past president of the National Association of Parliamentarians, and a Professional Registered Parliamentarian; and by Andrew Shields, World Church secretary.

Script text and format provided by the *Parliamentary Playbook: A Guide to Script Writing*, from the “Pathways to Proficiency” series offered by the National Association of Parliamentarians and *Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised: 10<sup>th</sup> Edition*

Community of Christ bylaws are an important resource in preparing for business meetings, especially Article V—Congregations.

*Church Administrator’s Handbook* (2005 ed.) has several helpful sections:

Part 2.8, “Congregational Conferences” Part 9, “Planning and Conducting Conferences”

This script should allow pastors to edit a tailored script for each business meeting, making preparation easier and cutting down on stress and surprises.

It is advisable to take to the meeting copies of bylaw text or motions that are expected.

If there is someone in the congregation who is familiar with parliamentary procedure, it may be helpful to ask if they would serve as the business meeting parliamentarian, so you have a resource at hand in case a complex procedural situation arises. Look over the script together and try to anticipate problems.

Advance planning and a well-prepared script will make running business meetings easier!