

FAQ Business Meeting

Highland Baptist Church Business meeting: Common questions, answers, actions, and examples.

This document contains parliamentary references from "***Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised In Brief***". The scenarios, questions, and answers within the document are specific to Highland Baptist Church Shelbyville, KY **and subject to change**.

Business session is held the second Wednesday of each month at 7PM prior to the evening service. The business of the church is the responsibility of and conducted by the membership. Attendance and participation is important as we seek God's will in making decisions concerning the ministries of our church.

After the Articles of Faith and Church Constitution the highest body of rules for our business meetings would be the Bylaws. A copy of the church Constitution, Bylaws, and Job Descriptions shall be made available through the church office to any member upon request.

Our bylaws state that "[Robert's Rules of Order, Revised](#)" shall be the authority for parliamentary rules of procedure. However our conduct of business is more informal whereas, with Christian love, we should consider persons more important than procedure



Business Meeting Bits:

The business of the church is the responsibility of and conducted by the membership. Each member present has the option of contributing. The moderator is to guide the church in discussing business matters in an orderly fashion. We have various references for conduct including our Bylaws and Robert's Rules of Order Revised. We can work together in learning and applying procedures while balancing a business-like attitude with a Christ-like attitude.

• **Abstention**

Question: If I don't cast a vote (an abstention vote) or turn in a blank ballot is it counted?



Answer: The phrase "abstention vote" is an oxymoron. To abstain means to refrain from voting, and, as a consequence, there can be no such thing as an abstention vote. In specific circumstances not voting can have the effect of a 'no' vote. In the case of ballots, a blank ballot would be discarded.

Do your part: Your vote is a privilege in conducting the business of the church.

• **Amend**

Question: How can I suggest an improvement to the pending motion?



Answer: The **motion to amend** should say exactly where in the main motion the suggested change is to be made and precisely what words to use. This could allow inserting, adding, striking and/or replacing single words, sentences or entire paragraphs of the pending motion. The proposed amendment would be voted upon before returning to the main motion with the amendment incorporated or not.

Document: The moderator can require that amendments, like main motions, be submitted by the mover in writing. The meeting may need to pause, or "stand at ease" while this is completed.

• Division of Question

Question: When would a member move (request) "Division of Question"?



Answer: If a pending main motion (or amendment to it) contains two or more parts capable of standing as separate questions, the membership can vote to treat each part individually in succession by calling for a "Division of Question".

Example: *"I move that John Doe be hired to rewire the office based on the attached contract"*. This motion could possibly be DIVIDED so that we first vote on possibility of hiring John Doe then we would proceed to consider and vote on the contract itself.

• Highest Rules

Question: Is reference to "Robert's Rules of Order" always our first or final consideration?



Answer: After the Articles of Faith and Church Constitution the highest body of rules for our business meetings would be the Bylaws. A copy of the church Constitution, Bylaws, and Job Descriptions shall be made available through the church office to any member upon request.

Reality Check: Our bylaws state that "Robert's Rules of Order, Revised" shall be the authority for parliamentary rules of procedure. However our conduct of business is more informal whereas, with Christian love, we should consider persons more important than procedure.

• Lay on the Table

Question: What is the difference between the motions "**Lay on the Table**" and "**Postpone to a Certain Time**"?



Answer: The motion to "**Lay on the Table**" can be used to temporarily set aside a motion because something of immediate urgency has arisen, without a time to set to resume its consideration. However, there would be a provision that the motion could be taken up again whenever a majority so decides.

In our case: It would be unusual to have a matter of immediate urgency arise during the church business meeting. It would be more likely that the membership may wish to "Postpone to a Certain Time" thereby agreeing to finalize a specific motion at another time.

• Majority

Question: What is a majority? Fifty-one percent? Fifty percent plus one?



Answer: The word "majority" means "more than half." The false definition "51%" only applies to units of exactly 100; the false definition of "50% + 1" is only true for even numbers, and false for odd numbers.

The math: Our bylaws and any potential motions should ensure there is no misunderstanding about how votes will be counted and reported to determine an outcome. 'Majority', 2/3, 75%, 80% or whatever the criteria might be in a given situation.

• Parliamentary

Question: What does the parliamentarian do?



Answer: The parliamentarian's role is to advise the moderator in responding to points of order and parliamentary inquiries, and generally to provide advice on conducting the meeting according to the rules. The parliamentarian is to be at the side of the moderator during business meetings although the role is purely advisory.

Final word: The moderator is responsible to state and enforce the proper application of rules.

• Participation

Question: Will I be embarrassed if I don't state a question or motion properly?



Answer: If a member makes a motion that is not in order the moderator may suggest an alternate motion. If the moderator is unsure of procedure the Parliamentarian can advise.

Don't worry: Members should not hesitate to ask questions, offer information or participate in business discussions. It is best to clarify all concerns during a business meeting rather than in the parking lot after the business meeting.

• Point of Order

Question: How do I say that I think the moderator or another member is overlooking a procedure or rule?



Answer: At any point any member may stand and interrupt a discussion to say "**Point of Order**". All discussions stop. The moderator will recognize the member and ask them to state their "point of order" and specify what rules are being broken.

Be nice: Your positive contribution to ensure the proper conduct of business is appreciated.

• Point or Privilege

Question: When would a member move (request) "**Question of Privilege**"?



Answer: If a pressing situation is affecting a right or privilege of the assembly or of an individual member such as a distraction or member is unable to hear discussion then a member can raise a "**Question of Privilege**".

Action: The moderator will attempt to address and resolve the issue so the meeting can continue

• Postpone

Question: How do we save the current motion for another time in order to discuss more pressing business?



Answer: '**Postpone to a Certain Time**' if adopted by a majority vote (after debate) puts off further consideration of the main motion to a later time or meeting named in the motion.

Rule of thumb: typically a motion should only be postponed until later in the same meeting or possibly in to the next scheduled regular meeting.

• Previous Question

Question: How can we stop the endless debating and get to the voting of the pending motion?



Answer: The motion to close debate immediately is “**I move the previous question**”. A 2nd would be required. The moderator would seek an immediate 2/3 vote approval from the membership to proceed accordingly.

Do it right: You should be properly recognized by the moderator to speak. Calling out “Question” or “Vote” repeatedly does not qualify and is out of order.

• Quorum

Question: What is a quorum?



Answer: It is the minimum number of voting members who must be present at a meeting in order to conduct business, usually specified by the bylaws.

FYI: Our bylaws state: “A *quorum shall consist of those members who attend the business meeting, provided it is properly announced.*” Please note that our regular business meetings have a standing announcement per the church calendar as being held the 2nd Wednesday of each month. However, special business may require special announcement when specified.

• Recess

Question: Can I ask that we all take a 5 minute break? I think it would help us to relax.



Answer: A short intermission in a meeting, even while business is pending, can be proposed by moving to “**Recess**” for a specified length of time.

Even at church: Strong opinions can lead to strong debate. We can take a break if needed. Hopefully a spirit of Christian warmth and love will prevail.

• Recognize

Question: I want to say something but I don't know how to jump into the discussion.



Answer: In order to make a motion or to speak in the discussion you would gain the attention of the moderator who would recognize and designate you as the next speaker. At this point you “have the floor”. It is also proper that all questions, points and discussion be directed through the moderator rather than directly between members.

But how?: To gain the moderator's attention a member might raise their hand or stand until called upon. You might even politely call out “Mr./Madam Moderator” once the previous speaker has finished. Be considerate by not interrupting.

• Refer

Question: How do I send a pending motion “back to the drawing board” for improvement outside of this meeting?



Answer: A motion to “***Commit (Refer)*** to a committee) allows for this. A majority vote is required after any relevant debate or amendments.

Who and When: Such a motion should specify the committee to which the motion will be referred, when that committee must report back to the membership and any other specific requirements.

• Relevant

Question: Can or should we discuss just about anything when considering a motion?



Answer: Questions and debate should be relevant and specific to the pending motion. Consider if the question or discussion will have direct bearing on whether the pending motion should be adopted or not.

Remember: An important rule of debate is that the proposal, not the member, is the subject of debate. Under no circumstances should you attack or question the motives of another member. Direct accusations or using negative terms such as “fraud”, “liar”, “secretive”, “scheming”, and so on is unacceptable. Nor would it reflect a Christ-like attitude.

• Second

Question: Does seconding a motion indicate that I am in favor of that motion?



Answer: When a member has made a main motion, it must be seconded indicating that at least two members want the motion considered. This does not mean that the seconder agrees with the motion itself but supports that it should be discussed.

Info: If there is no second, the motion is not put before the group for a decision. To second a motion, you simply call out “Second!” You do not need to stand or be recognized by the moderator to second a motion.

• Two Thirds Vote

Question: How hard is it to understand what is intended by a two-thirds vote to carry a motion?



Answer: A two-thirds vote means two-thirds of the votes cast, ignoring blanks which should never be counted. This must not be confused with a vote of two-thirds of the members present, or two-thirds of the members, terms sometimes used in by-laws. To illustrate the difference: Suppose 14 members vote on a question in a meeting of a society where 20 are present out of a total membership of 70, a two-thirds vote would be 10; a two-thirds vote of the members present would be 14; and a vote of two-thirds of the members would be 47.

What is the intent: Our bylaws and any potential motions should ensure there is no misunderstanding about how votes will be counted and reported to determine an outcome. ‘Majority’, 2/3, 75%, 80% or whatever the criteria might be in a given situation.

• Unanimous Consent

Question: Can we get through the routine non-issue motions more quickly?



Answer: Unanimous consent enables a motion to be adopted or some action to be taken without the necessity of having the moderator state the question on a motion and put the motion to a vote.

How does that work?: The moderator can simply ask the membership if there is any objection to taking the desired action of the motion, and if no member then objects, the moderator declares the motion is adopted. If there is an objection raised then the standard motion and vote process is continued.

- **Unfinished Business**

Question: Why do we say “unfinished” versus “old” business?



Answer: It is incorrect to call for “old business” which literally would allow members to bring up again matters that were considered or disposed of at a prior meeting.

What it is: ‘Unfinished business’ is the last item being discussed but not concluded before adjournment of the prior meeting. It would also include items on the agenda of the prior meeting that could not be considered before adjournment.

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