



# St. Joseph Music Foundation

## Parliamentary Procedure

Michael Fuson

Meetings can become very chaotic when making group decisions. Everyone talks at once, trying to sway others to a different point of view. The chaos that results does nothing but waste time and confuses the facts.

A basic knowledge of parliamentary procedure can make the group decision process more orderly. Parliamentary procedure is used by most groups as they conduct their meetings. A few examples where parliamentary procedure is practiced include Congress, city government, county government, school boards, local unions, large and small corporations, public utility companies and committees.

### **What Is Parliamentary Procedure?**

Basically, it is an organized method for a group to accomplish their goals in an effective, fair, and efficient manner.

It is effective by providing an orderly way to conduct the group's business and to make decisions. By following the order of business, meetings are quick to get to the point.

It is fair because it is a democratic process for making a decision. Everyone has an opportunity to speak and be heard. Discussion can go on until a decision is made.

It is efficient by keeping the group focused. One item of business is disposed of before moving on to another. Issues are not "swept under the table" and forgotten about. They are dealt with in a timely manner.

Whether you are a regular member at Foundation meetings or a visitor for the first time, you may not be familiar with the procedures we use. If you are not sure what is going on, feel free to stop and ask.

I remember attending my first meeting where parliamentary procedure was used. It was confusing and fascinating at the same time. It was confusing because I heard

people calling each other “Mr. President” and “Mr. Secretary”. I had no idea why. These people had been working together for years and, in many cases, were friends outside the business. What happened to using this guy’s real name? Bob, who had known John for 20 years, was now calling him “Mr. Chairman”.

It was fascinating because there was a level of respect and order that I had not seen before. The meeting was organized, respectful, efficient, and fair to everyone who wanted to speak and decisions were made quickly and easily.

Parliamentary procedure describes how to conduct items of business. There are several sources for parliamentary procedure. The most common in the United States are:

- [\*Jefferson's Manual of Parliamentary Practice\*](#) by [Thomas Jefferson](#)
- [\*Mason's Manual of Legislative Procedure\*](#), 2000, by National Conference of State Legislatures, [ISBN 1580241166](#)
  - earlier editions by Paul Mason
- [\*Robert's Rules of Order\*](#) by [Henry M. Robert](#), [ISBN 0515017019](#)
  - [\*Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised\*](#), 10th, 2000, [ISBN 0738209236](#)
- [\*The Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure\*](#), 4th, 2000, by American Institute of Parliamentarians
  - earlier editions by Alice F. Sturgis
- [\*Cannon's Concise Guide to Rules of Order\*](#) by Hugh Cannon
- [\*Demeter's Manual of Parliamentary Law and Procedure\*](#), 1969, by George Demeter
- [\*Webster's New World: Robert's Rules of Order Simplified and Applied\*](#) by [Robert McConnell Productions](#)

Parliamentary procedure has been around for a long time. It wasn’t until General Henry Robert published his *Rules of Order* in 1876 that the procedures were clarified and written down in one place. There were some books available before that and general parliamentary procedures were known and followed. Just read through the accounts of the meetings as the *Declaration of Independence* and the *Constitution of the United States* were being drafted. The problem was that many of the books contained conflicting information.

Originally only 4,000 copies *Robert’s Rules of Order* were printed and Robert expected them to last 2 years. The first run sold out in 6 months. The last edition Robert wrote was the Fourth Edition, published in 1915. Since that time, the book has been expanded and updated and in 2000 was published in its 10<sup>th</sup> Edition.

It is estimated that 90% of the organizations in the United States that follow parliamentary procedure follow some form of Robert’s as their authority. Sturgis is the second most popular. When an organization is formed, a Parliamentary Authority is

chosen. By choosing one of the above authorities, the organization can ‘get on with business’ without having to reinvent the wheel. Most procedures, such as order of business, elections, committees, minutes, reports, *etc.* are defined in the Parliamentary Authority. If the organization has different needs, they are written into the Corporate Bylaws. The organization is bound to follow procedures in this order:

1. Federal and State law
2. Corporate Bylaws
3. Parliamentary Authority
4. General Membership vote

The St. Joseph Music Foundation has adopted Robert's Rules of Order as its Parliamentary Authority. Specifically, *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised – 10<sup>th</sup> Edition*.

While you do not need to know all the details of parliamentary procedure to participate in a meeting, an understanding of the basics is helpful. From there, you can learn by doing. Again, when you do not know the answer or have questions on the proper way to handle a situation, ask. One of the officers will be able to answer your question. If the answer is not there, we will look to the Parliamentary Authority.

Let’s take a quick look at each section of a meeting.

## **I. The Call to Order**

This simply brings everyone’s attention to the President or Chairperson and the meeting begins. Often this is done with a gavel, especially in large groups. The President or Chair then says “The meeting of the St. Joseph Music Foundation is called to order” or “The meeting of the St. Joseph Music Foundation Project Committee is called to order”.

## **II. Roll Call**

Some organizations have roll call to record the members present. This is optional and, for the Foundation, it is generally not done in the General and Annual Meetings. It is, however, required in all Committee meetings.

## **III. Excuse of Officers Not Present**

Some organizations formally call for any officers not present to be excused. This, too, is optional and the Foundation includes it as part of all Executive Board, Board of Directors, General and Annual meetings.

## **IV. Call for a Quorum**

Some organizations call for a quorum present. Normally, a quorum is a majority of members. If your organization has 100 members, a quorum is 51. Some organizations

define a quorum to be less than a majority. In such a case, the quorum is defined in the Bylaws of your organization.

For the Executive Board, Board of Directors, General and Annual Foundation meetings, a quorum is a majority of the Board and the members present. Committee meetings require a simple majority of members to be present. The committee meeting may continue without a majority present but any actions the committee takes must be ratified at the next committee meeting where a quorum is present. Committee actions taken without a quorum present must be reported to the Board as soon as possible. At the next committee meeting, a motion is made to ratify the actions taken at the previous meeting. If the motion passes, the actions are legitimized. If the motion fails, the committee actions become the responsibility of the individual committee members who were present without a quorum.

As you can see, establishing a quorum at all Foundation and Committee meetings is important.

## **V. The Reading and Approval of Minutes**

The minutes from the previous meeting are read, approved and put into record. At this time, members may also disagree with what was recorded. For example, if a member believes that his statement was misunderstood, now is the time to correct it.

## **VI. Reports of officers, boards, standing committees**

Here the reports of officers, such as the President and Treasurer, are read. Standing committee reports are given here also. (Standing committees are permanent, on-going committees.) Reports do not need to be approved as do the minutes. The simple act of reading a report causes it to be entered into record.

The order of reports is:

- A. President
- B. Vice President
- C. Secretary
- D. Treasurer
  
- E. Board of Directors
- F. Media Executive
  
- G. Project Committee
- H. Education Committee
- I. Public Relations Committee
- J. Public Policy Committee
- K. Tellers Committee

## **VII. Reports of special (select or ad hoc) committees**

Special committee reports are given here. (Special committees are temporary committees formed for a specific task and are disbanded once the task is completed.) Reports do not need to be approved as do the minutes. The simple act of reading a report causes it to be entered into record.

## **VIII. Special orders**

Important business previously designated for consideration at this meeting.

## **IX. Unfinished business and general orders**

Business that has been started but is not yet finished. This is not to be confused with “Old Business”. Old Business is past, finished and closed, as in the Ward-Stock Benefit we presented in December, 2007.

## **X. New business**

Business that is new to the group as of this meeting is introduced here.

Inside the Unfinished Business and New Business sections are several procedures used to conduct and discuss the business at hand.

### **A. The Motion**

One of the basics of parliamentary procedure is how to move and dispose of a motion. Always use positive words to express a negative motion. The reason is simple – using negative words will cause a member to vote “Yes” on an issue they disagree with. Also, be specific in your motions. Do you move to

Form a committee to purchase a banner to promote an SJMF event or

Form a committee to research the cost of a banner to promote an SJMF event?

What about the hardware needed to hang it? How about the installation costs? Remember, be specific.

Here are the steps to follow:

1. **Recognition by the chair.** A member seeks permission to speak to initiate a motion by simply raising his/her hand or standing and saying "Mister/Madam President..." When the President recognizes the member, that member has the floor and may speak.

2. **The motion.** A member should say, "I move that we buy a ...." It is not correct to say, "I make a motion that ..."
3. **Second.** The motion must receive a second before any discussion begins. A member does not need to be recognized to second a motion but just states, "I second the motion" or simply "Second". Obtaining a second indicates that at least two people favor discussing the motion. If there is no second, the motion is dropped.
4. **Discussion.** Once the motion has been moved and seconded, its merits can then be discussed. A member of the group must first be recognized by the President. The member gives reasons for or against the motion to the group.
5. **Vote.** The discussions on a motion may end in three ways:
  - a. No one says anything;
  - b. A member says "I call for the question" which means that the member wants the motion brought to a vote, or
  - c. The President decides that there has been adequate discussion.

Some methods of voting include: voice vote (aye/nay), a show of hands, standing, roll call, or by secret ballot. The President should always call for both sides of the vote even if the vote appears to be unanimous. The President announces the result of the vote. "The motion passes/fails." A majority is needed to pass a motion. A majority is more than half of the members present and voting.

There are some important points to remember regarding votes:

1. Each member has one vote;
2. Proxy and proxy vote is not allowed and
3. Silence equals consent

## **B. Amendments**

There are times when members of the group will want to change the motion while it is in the discussion phase. This is called an amendment. It is recommended that only one amendment be permitted per motion. An amendment generally strikes out, adds, or substitutes words in the main motion. A motion has been moved and seconded and is being discussed. To amend a motion:

1. A group member is recognized by the chair to speak, then says, "I move to amend the motion to buy a banner by adding the words 3 ft. x 5 ft."
2. A second to this amendment is required.
3. Discussion follows and is for only the amendment, not the original motion. In the example, members may discuss the merits of a 3 ft. x 5 ft. size of a banner, not if they are to purchase a banner (original motion).
4. When it is time to vote, the President conducts a vote to determine if the amendment passes. A majority is needed.

5. If the amendment passed, discussion follows on the motion as amended. In this example, "I move that we buy a 3 ft. x 5 ft. banner".
6. After discussion, a vote is taken on the motion as amended. A majority is needed.
7. If the amendment did not pass, discussion on the original motion continues, which in this example, is "to buy a banner."
8. After discussion, a vote is taken on the motion. A majority vote is needed.

Normally, the Foundation has found that it is best to introduce ideas by discussion before the motion is made. This eliminates the need for most amendments.

### **C. To Lay On Or Take From The Table**

There are times when there is a reason to set aside pending business in order to attend more urgent business. For example, this motion was used several weeks ago when we had a guest speaker appear at a General Meeting and normal business had not been completed. The motion was used to set aside business and move directly to the speaker. The procedure to do this is called "laying on the table". By the time the speaker had finished his presentation, it was too late to continue business. At the next meeting, a motion was made to continue the unfinished business from the last meeting. The procedure to do this is called "take from the table".

1. During discussion of a motion, a member is recognized by the chair and says, "I move to lay the motion on the table".
2. Once again, a second is required.
3. There is no discussion permitted. The group proceeds directly to vote whether to table the motion or not. A majority is needed.
4. To bring back the motion so it can be discussed and acted upon, is called "taking from the table". While in unfinished business, a member says, "I move to take from the table (motion's name)".
5. A second is required.
6. There is no discussion permitted. The group proceeds to vote whether to bring the motion from the table or not. A majority is needed. Once a motion has been brought back from the table, it is the next item of business.

Generally, a tabled motion comes back for consideration at the next regular meeting. You must not use the motion to table as a way to "kill" a motion.

### **D. Postpone to a Certain Time (Postpone Definitely)**

There are times when business may be set aside because you do not have enough information to make a wise decision. Maybe you have not had time to digest the information or key people are not present to vote.

Normally, the business is taken up at the next Regular Meeting however, a specific time or meeting may be specified. Be careful though. If you Postpone Definitely to a

date that is 3 meeting away, you cannot take it up before that time unless you reconsider the motion to postpone.

### **E. Postpone Indefinitely**

This is used to make a motion go away without having to vote on it. In effect, a motion to Postpone Indefinitely kills the motion.

### **F. Commit or Refer**

This is the motion used to send the main motion to a committee. For example, using our motion to buy a banner, a motion could be made to Refer it to the Project Committee.

## **XI. Announcements**

Here announcements are made. These can include Foundation sponsored events, concerts, fundraisers or basically anything deemed appropriate. Also included here, the date, time and place of the next Foundation or Committee meeting.

## **XII. Adjournment**

Adjournment is used to end the meeting.

- A. To adjourn the meeting, a member is recognized by the President and says, "I move that we adjourn."
- B. Once again, a second is required.
- C. There is no discussion permitted. The group proceeds to vote whether to end the meeting or not. A majority is needed.

A motion to adjourn can be given at any time during a meeting, but hopefully will not be misused by members to adjourn prematurely when there is important business yet to be addressed.

Well, there you have it - a quick, easy guide to Parliamentary Procedure.