Rules of Order for Synod 2026

What follows are the key/most pertinent rules of order. A more in-depth introduction is appended below.

I. **Motions**
   a. Initial Motion
      i. Approach a microphone
      ii. Allow the Chairman to recognize you
      iii. Introduce yourself (name, church, city)
      iv. State the motion.
   b. Motion restated by the Chairman: motion now belongs to the assembly.
   c. Second needed or not? If so, second.
   d. Debate
      i. Always address the Chairman, not other delegates.
      ii. Debate limits:
         1. For each motion, delegates are limited to 2 opportunities to speak and a maximum of 5 minutes each time (non-cumulative).
            a. This time limit is proposed as a departure from the standard time limit of 10 minutes in Robert's Rules of Order. However, motions to extend debate for a particular business item can be entertained.
   e. Vote

- **Additional clarifications:**
  - Lay on the Table (Tabling)
    - Delays the issue to a later time in this same meeting to make space and time for a more pressing matter, or because there is a matter which must be addressed before resolving the present motion. It must be seconded and is not debatable or amendable, though the mover may briefly state the reasoning for the motion.
    - At an appropriate time, a tabled motion is renewed by moving to Take from the Table.
  - Previous Question ("Calling the question")
    - One may believe that debate has gone on long enough and that it's time for a vote. One may therefore move the Previous Question, or "Call the Question," after being recognized by the Chairman. This motion must be seconded. It is neither debatable nor amendable.
    - "Calling the question" does not automatically cause debate to cease, nor may one interrupt debate with this motion. It must be made as a proper motion.

- **Etiquette:**
    - "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32)
    - Charity
        - Passion about the question at hand is expected. Passion directed at people, personalities, or motives is strictly forbidden. Harsh or insulting speech will not be permitted.
    - Restraint
        - Refrain from verbal affirmations like "Hear, hear" and "Amen" to maintain orderly proceedings and allow all voices to be heard clearly.
    - Perspective
        - A call to prayer is always in order. This is exercised at and in the manner of the Chairman's discretion to re-center the assembly.

- What if there is confusion about proper order? In such a case we will have a brief pause in the meeting, and our Parliamentarian will help us discern how best to proceed.

The proposal for Synod 2026 is to adopt these rules of order as summarized here appended below.

Robert's Rules of Order
For the Ordinary Person

(Mark E. Rudolph, mark@toknowchrist.org)

Abstract

This is a short summary of Robert's Rules as they pertain to the making, debating, and resolving of motions — the means by which business is conducted in deliberative assemblies. The authoritative resource is *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, 12th Edition*, 2020. Not everything herein will be strictly true, since this is a simplification of complex and extensive rules (nearly 650 pages!). Section numbers refer to the above edition. Last revised 2026-09.

1 Basic Rules of Conduct

- "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32)
- Harsh or insulting speech will not be permitted. Passion about the question at hand is permitted, but not about people, personalities, motives, or intentions.
- A call to prayer is always in order. The call to prayer is exercised at and in the manner of the chair's discretion.

2 Motions

2.1 Basic Structure/Main Motion

Assemblies take action by the making of motions, followed by discussion/debate, and concluding with a vote.

1. To make a motion: after being recognized by the chair, one says, "I move that [some positive action take place]." This is a main motion. The motion is then restated/presented to the assembly by the chair. At that point, the motion no longer belongs to the mover, but to the assembly. Motions should be clearly and precisely stated, preferably in writing.
2. A second is usually required. One exception to this rule is when a committee report contains a motion: then a second is presumed (§51.11). There are a few other exceptions as noted below. Without a second, the motion fails. Seconding a motion does not necessarily indicate agreement. One may be against, but believe that the matter should be debated.
3. Discussion/debate follows. This is conducted in an orderly fashion, generally with each speaker waiting to be recognized by the chair. Customarily, the mover may speak first after the motion has been seconded. Also, it is customary for any speaker to have two opportunities to speak for a maximum of five minutes each time.
4. When debate comes to an end, a vote is taken, usually verbally (unless other rules dictate differently) and the motion is either carried or defeated.

2.2 Subsidiary Motions

In principle, no other business is introduced until the present main motion is dealt with. In practice, it's not that simple. There are subsidiary motions which direct or change how a main motion is handled. Common ones are listed here in ascending order of precedence.

1. *Lay on the Table* (§17). One may wish to delay further consideration for a time when there is a more pressing matter, or because there is a matter which must be addressed before resolving the present motion. It must be seconded and is not debatable or amendable, though the mover may briefly state the reasoning for the motion. At an appropriate time, a tabled motion is renewed by moving to *Take from the Table* (§34). Note that this motion is not to be confused with a motion to *Postpone to a Definite Time* or to *Postpone Indefinitely* (see below).
2. *Previous Question* (§16). One may believe that debate has gone on long enough and that it's time for a vote. One may therefore move the *Previous Question* after being recognized by the chair. This motion must be seconded. It is neither debatable nor amendable. "Calling the question" does not automatically cause debate to cease, nor may one interrupt debate with this motion. It must be made as a proper motion.
3. *Limit/Extend Debate* (§15). This motion serves either to: 1) reduce the number or length of speeches or require that debate end after a certain time or length of debate, or, 2) extend the length or number of speeches. It must be seconded. It is not debatable, but it is amendable. It also requires a two-thirds vote because it calls for a suspension or change in the normal rules.
4. *Postpone to a Certain or Definite Time* (§14). This is a motion to put off deliberation (within limits) to a definite session, day within a session comprised of multiple days, meeting, or hour. It must be seconded; it is debatable and amendable.
5. *Refer/Commit to a Committee* (§13). This motion directs that some other body study the matter and report back to the assembly. It must be seconded. It is debatable and amendable.
6. *Amend* (§12). This is the tool to amend a motion. One can even move to amend an amendment! As with *Main Motions*, amendments should be clearly and precisely stated, preferably in writing.
7. *Postpone Indefinitely* (§11). This is used when one wishes the assembly to decline to take a position on the main question. It kills the *Main Motion* for the duration of the session. It must be seconded. It is debatable, but it is not amendable.
8. *Main Motion*: This is the motion that started the process in the first place!

2.3 Incidental Motions

Incidental motions are housekeeping motions which are in order at any time, taking precedence over *Main Motions* and *Subsidiary Motions*. They include:

1. *Point of Order* (§23). Only points having to do with the rules or a breach thereof may be raised. This is not a motion *per se* and is one of the few cases where one need not be recognized by the chair before speaking. This incidental motion will suffice to cover Parliamentary Inquiries, Requests for Information, and the like (§6:17).
2. *Appeal Decision of the Chair* (§24). One may call on the assembly to over-rule a decision of the chair. This motion requires a second, may be interruptive, is debatable, and is not amendable.
3. *Division of the Question* (§27). If a motion has more than one part, one may call for the division of the question into separate parts for consideration, debate, and vote. A second is required. It's neither debatable nor amendable. When considering larger chunks of a motion (such as whole paragraphs), see xxx.
4. *Division of the Assembly* (§29): This motion calls for other than a voice vote to determine an outcome. Alternate methods include a show of hands, rising from one's seat, or the use of a balloting system.
5. *Request to Withdraw a Motion* (§33:11–19): Up until the chair restates/presents a motion to the assembly, the motion belongs to the mover and it may be withdrawn. Thereafter, the motion belongs to the assembly and permission must be granted by the assembly to withdraw a motion. Should permission not be granted, a vote must be taken to withdraw the motion.

2.4 Privileged Motions

Finally, there are a few points of privilege that are in order at any time and must be disposed of prior to resuming discussion of *Incidental*, *Subsidiary*, or *Main Motions*. Privileged motions include these, listed in descending precedence.

1. *Fix the Time to Adjourn* (§22). Used to set the time and/or place for another meeting. Takes first precedence, must be seconded, is not debatable. It is amendable as to date, hour, or place (which amendments are not debatable).
2. *Adjourn* (§21). This motion is used to bring the meeting to an end. A second is required and is neither debatable nor amendable. Alternatively, instead of a motion, the chair can ask if there is any further business. If there is no response, the chair can say "since there is no further business, the meeting is adjourned".
3. *Recess* (§20). Moving a temporary break in the meeting, this motion should state the time at which the meeting will resume. A second is required, it is not debatable, and is amendable as to length.
4. *Raising a Point of Privilege* (§19). When an urgent matter that concerns the welfare of the assembly needs to be raised (one can't hear those who have the floor, the room is too cold), then a *Point of Privilege* can be raised, even when another person is speaking. No second required, not debatable, not amendable, and the chair's rule is final.
5. *Call for the Orders of the Day* (§18). This is a demand that the assembly return to the agenda. This call can be made when another person is speaking, no second is required, it is neither debatable nor amendable, and no vote is required. However, with a two-thirds vote, the assembly may continue contrary to the agenda.

3 Debate

In addition to the Basic Rules of Conduct (above), here are a few pointers about discussion/debate.

- Full and free debate must be allowed.
- One may not speak until recognized by the chair, nor may one interrupt another who has the floor, except in the case of certain *Incidental* or *Privileged Motions* as noted above.
- The chair should remain neutral in their conduct of the debate, or they should relinquish the chair to another for the duration of the motion in which they intend to involve themselves.
- All speech is directed to the chair, not to other members of the assembly. The chair will typically alternate between *pro* and *con* speakers when recognizing those who wish to speak.
- A member's remarks must be germane to the question before the assembly.
- Typically, the mover will speak first after the motion is made and a second is received. Afterwards, it is customary for all speakers to be limited to two addresses, each no longer than ten minutes.
- It's generally good manners to refrain from speaking a second time until others have been heard.
- Perhaps the most important point is that *issues* are in question, not personalities.

4 Voting

Usually, motions will be carried or defeated by voice vote with a simple majority, except when Robert's Rules, the canons, or other rules indicate the contrary. Note the following.

- Greater volume does not equal a greater number of votes.
- There are generally three classes of votes.
  - Simple Majority: more than one-half voting. Unless otherwise specified, a simple majority usually suffices.
  - Two-thirds Vote: more than two-thirds voting. This vote will typically be taken by a raising of hands or by standing.
- The chair will announce the outcome of all votes. In the case of a hand or rising (standing) vote, one keeps one's hand raised or remains standing until otherwise notified. Balloted votes will be conducted according to the canons or other subordinate rules.

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