

Bourinot's Rules of Order

Bourinot's Rules of Order are the guidelines for business meetings at our church conventions. These are the same rules that govern debate in the parliament of Canada.

General Principles

1. Proper opportunity is given to all concerned for an expression of opinion.
2. Rights of a minority are respected.
3. Clear decisions are reached on the basis of a free majority vote.
4. Proceedings are governed by an assessment of the issues rather than by personality factors.

MOTIONS

An issue cannot be discussed unless a *motion* is formally presented, with the exact wording of the motion being the focus of debate.

Main Motion

A motion must be moved, seconded and accepted by the chair. The mover says "I move that..." If a motion is out of order or beyond the authority of the meeting, the chair can refuse to accept it. The chair then asks, "Is there a seconder." If another delegate "Seconds" the Motion, then it is open to debate by the assembly. Unless the motion is dealt with, all discussion must be addressed only to the motion. If the motion is not seconded, then it cannot be debated.

A motion should be worded in the affirmative and should express fully and clearly the intent of the mover. Its meaning should be clear to somebody who later reads the minutes. It is best if the motion is prepared in writing and made available to the secretary at the time it is moved.

When discussion is complete, the chair asks, "Are you ready for the question?" and repeats the complete motion. The members vote and if the majority votes in favour, the chair states, "Carried."

A motion may be withdrawn by its mover only with the assent of the meeting as a whole.

After a motion is declared carried or defeated, it cannot be brought up again at the same meeting. If it becomes necessary to rescind (repeal) a motion, it can be announced at the meeting and then discussed and voted on at a subsequent meeting.

Subsidiary Motions

These motions provide a way to handle main motions besides simply debating and voting on them. (They are listed in order of ranking.)

- **Postpone indefinitely** – this procedure kills the main motion without voting against it.
- **Amend** – This is the most widely used subsidiary motion. In the excitement of making a motion, the wording may be unclear or incomplete. Amendments must relate specifically to the main motion and cannot merely negate the motion. The wording used is “I move to amend the motion by substituting the words... with the words... so that the motion will read...” The chair will restate the main motion or even read it to show how the main motion would change if the amendment is passed. The amendment is voted on before the main motion.

An amendment may be amended and must be moved and voted on in the same ways as the first amendment. However, amendments to amendments should be avoided to maintain the sanity of the chair and membership.

- **Commit or refer** – this action sends the main motion to a committee. Use this procedure when the main motion requires more research and in-depth discussion. If used, this motion should include the size of the committee, how it is to be selected, the specific item, and a deadline for reporting to the main group.
- **Postpone definitely** (to a certain time) – This can mean later in the same meeting or a subsequent meeting. The reason would be to get more information or wait until another event has taken place on which to base a decision.
- **Limit or extend debate** – It imposes specific limits on the time allowed for a debate and the number of times any member may speak to the motion. It can also be used to extend the time. Needs two-thirds vote to carry.
- **Previous question** – The object is to immediately close debate and vote on the issue. This motion cannot be amended or debated. The value is in ending frivolous debate. The motion is made in the form, “I move that the question now be put.” Needs two-thirds to carry.
- **Lay on the table** – This is the highest ranking subsidiary motion. It temporarily sets aside the main motion and subsidiary motions. It differs from Postpone because it can be recovered later. It allows the meeting to go on to other business. A later motion by the membership can bring the matter back into discussion.

Privileged Motions (Housekeeping Motions)

These are variations of motions and rank above subsidiary and main motions. They never relate directly to a pending question but deal with issues that need immediate attention. They are not debatable.

- **Call for orders of the day** – to get the meeting back on track (return to the agenda)
- **Raise a question of privilege** – to get immediate action on simple matters such as asking speaking to talk louder. Does not require seconder or a vote.
- **Take a recess** – to ask for a short break. Requires a seconder and majority vote to carry.
- **Adjourn** – most frequently used to close the meeting. Any debate after adjournment is unofficial.

Incidental Motions

These motions deal with procedural matters but do not relate directly to business.

- **Point of order** (or question of privilege) – when debate begins on a motion that has not been seconded, or if someone tries to make an additional motion when one is already on the floor.
- **Appeal the decision of the chair** – to challenge a decision made by the chair. Must be made immediately after the chair's decision.
- **Suspend the rules** – to discontinue the rules when the group wishes to do something against its regular rules, but not in conflict with its constitution or bylaws. Requires two-thirds vote to carry.

This is a summary of information taken from Bourinot for the Baffled, a publication of the Communications Committee of the Eastern Synod, 1994.