

## GUIDELINES FOR CONGREGATIONAL DECISION-MAKING

### A. Preparing Recommendations

1. An individual, group or committee with a concern needing a decision by the congregation contacts a pastor or the chair of the congregation.
2. Using criteria set by the leadership group, the pastoral team and the chair decide how the concern should be handled. They may delegate a concern to an appropriate committee, ask those raising the concern to make a recommendation, develop a recommendation themselves, or simply bring the concern to the leadership group.
3. The designated pastor and the chair are responsible for prioritizing concerns and creating an agenda for the leadership group meeting. Any pastor or elder may add an item during the review of the agenda at the beginning of the meeting.
4. The leadership group agrees on a process for how the congregation is to work with the concern. They may assign a current or ad hoc committee, or an individual, to seek further information, clarify or brainstorm. The congregation as a whole may need time for teachings, discussion, or other ways of approaching the concern.
5. The leadership group prepares a recommendation for the congregation. Three methods:
  - a. Present at a members' meeting, for action at a later meeting.
  - b. Present to small groups through Small Group Reps Meeting.
  - c. Present by a written proposal available prior to the meeting.
6. Small groups discuss to clarify questions, points of agreement/disagreement, any concerns.
7. Groups report to Small Group Reps Meeting or to designated elders.
8. The leadership group hears reports and plans further process if necessary. This may include a special meeting for hearing and clarifying differing views.
9. The recommendation is brought to a members' meeting for decision.

### B. Members' Meetings

1. Meetings will be held on a monthly basis. Additional meetings may be scheduled.
2. All members are expected to be present to assist with the decision process. If unable to be present, members are expected to keep themselves informed concerning on-going discussions (through reading minutes, checking in with small group, or with elders) and to abide by decisions made by the group. If an absence is unavoidable when a member has a concern about the issue to be discussed, the concern should be brought to the chair or pastoral team (preferably in brief written form) and be taken into consideration in planning the process.
3. Regular attenders may participate in discussion. Final decisions are made by members.
4. The leadership group is responsible for preparing and announcing agenda for a meeting.
5. The leadership group is responsible for naming a record keeper, for approving minutes after a meeting and for making minutes available to the congregation in a timely fashion.
6. The leadership group is responsible for naming two co-facilitators for the meeting. One will normally be the chair of the congregation and the other will be drawn from a pool of facilitators. This pool will be made up of people whose gifts in leading meetings have been recognized and who will work together at improving their skills in working with consensus. They may also apprentice those who show potential but lack experience.

7. Prior to the meeting, the co-facilitators are responsible to divide the tasks of leading the meeting between them. Their role is to focus the discussion (guiding agenda, clarifying and rephrasing, identifying common threads, summarizing, testing for agreement, and confirming final decisions), to maintain a safe, productive environment (encouraging participation, identifying interpersonal or communication problems, and helping others to express and deal with conflict in healthy ways) and to help the group hold itself open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
8. Before discussion of an item, basic information and the recommendation should be presented or previous information and work should be summarized.
9. If small groups have been asked to discuss and report prior to the meeting, a summary of the reports should be presented.
10. The co-facilitators should periodically test for agreement as a decision seems to be emerging. They should not take silence for consent. If a negative query is used to test for agreement, opportunity should be given for the group as a whole to affirm the decision. Consensus is declared when everyone agrees that the decision is acceptable enough that they can support the group in choosing it.
11. If two or more points of view emerge, the co-facilitators should try to have each view presented separately, with initial testing only for understanding. Discussion follows.
12. If new considerations emerge or considerable questions and feelings are present, a break, a period of silence, work in small groups or postponing the decision may be necessary. If the decision is postponed, the leadership group is responsible for the continuing process.
13. If, after appropriate time for discussion, the group seems to be moving towards consensus except for a few, the facilitators should ask those few if their concerns have been heard and considered by the congregation. If they have not been heard or considered, steps such as in 12 and 13 should be taken. If they have been heard, the facilitators should ask them if they would be able to stand aside, to allow the congregation to proceed with the proposed action. The congregation may offer that:
  - 1) the dissenting ideas will be recorded in the minutes,
14. or 2) the decision is not precedent-setting,
15. or 3) the decision be implemented for a trial period, with a well-defined set of criteria for evaluation.
16. If there are some not able to stand aside, the decision should be postponed. The leadership group is then responsible for establishing an approach that attempts to resolve the differences. This might mean:
  - 1) meeting with the individuals who were not able to stand aside.
17. or 2) creating a committee with members representing the various opinions, asking them to develop a new proposal within a set period of time.
18. If the differences cannot be resolved after the steps above, the leadership group may determine that the congregation make the decision by an 80% majority vote of resident members, to be taken by written ballot at a later meeting.
19. After a vote, the leadership group will lead the congregation in continuing dialogue with those holding a minority view.