

Best Practices for Facilitators at Congregational Meetings

The role of the facilitator often includes the following:

- Invite us to listen to God and one another more deeply.
- Invite us to release our hoped-for outcomes and to open ourselves.
- Manage time. Ensure we don't go overtime. It's ok to end early, but usually not to end late.
- Reflectively listen.
- Seek all voices.
- Observe and respond to power dynamics.
- Moderate dominant voices. Limit the amount of time individuals speak, and the number of times an individual speaks.
- Guide us when we get off-track.
- Take the temperature and assess next steps in real time including closing discussions, testing for consensus, and tabling and rescheduling discussions.

(adapted from "A Primer on Consensus," Matt Pritchard, Central District Conference)

Parts of an Assembly Congregational Meeting

I. Beginning

- Bring an opening that gets people in appropriate mental space. We believe discernment is an extension of worship, and it's good to set that tone at the beginning.
- Inform folks of 1) the agenda; 2) the goal of each agenda item (is it to introduce a proposal? continue discussion? test for consensus? something else?); and 3) the length of the meeting.

II. Presentation of proposal & consensus decision-making:

- We're seeking broad participation and buy-in to congregational decisions. We do this by giving adequate space for people to respond to, question, and suggest changes to proposals.
- Consider what formats are best for each agenda item (large group discussion, small group discussion, placing oneself on a continuum, collecting written comments, etc.).
- When a proposal is presented, provide time for clarifying questions.
- After clarifying questions, invite people (in some fashion) to say what they like about the proposal, what concerns they might have with the proposals, and if they have any suggested changes to improve the proposal.
- Seek a range of voices. Ask for clarification of what people are saying if it's not clear to you.
- Paraphrase what you're hearing to check if you're hearing correctly.
- Doing consensus well takes time and work (see document titled: "Consensus: what is it and why we use it at Assembly"). Do not see your role as trying to help a proposal get quick acceptance. Pay attention to questions and suggestions for changes. Make sure those don't get overlooked or lost.
- If it's not a first-reading, summarize what happened to the proposal at prior meetings, and name any unresolved questions or suggestions (it's good to have the person or committee bringing the proposal give their responses to concerns or proposed changes offered in the previous meeting).

III. Testing for consensus

- Knowing when to test for consensus requires an ability to read the room. You may ask if people are ready to test for consensus or if they want more discussion.
- Before testing, restate the proposal so everyone is clear on what we're seeking consensus on.
- Always restate what the 5 fingers mean (don't assume people remember); and make sure you know what each number means.
- We're looking to see if this is a proposal everyone can live with; we're not necessarily seeking a proposal everyone is in love with.
- Announce that if people show a 3, 2, or 1, they will be invited to explain their perspective (if they haven't already done so).
- After a show of fingers, announce if the proposal has been adopted, or what the next step is.
- Celebrate when decisions reach consensus.

IV. Closing the meeting

- Close with prayer, song, or benediction

KSS

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