

MANUAL FOR MEETINGS

Amendment to **1.6 SKILLS USED IN BUILDING COMMUNICATION**
approved by the Standing Committee, November 2014

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INTRODUCTION

The *Manual for Meetings* provides the official standing orders and rules of debate for the Uniting Church in Australia. This *Manual* is commended to all congregations, presbyteries, synods, and, of course, members of the Assembly as a resource that will enable their full and effective participation in the UCA's decision-making process.

The *Manual* is a very important development in the life of the Uniting Church. The Uniting Church believes that we hear the voice of God in the councils of the church. Church meetings that encourage community, and listening to one another in a spirit of openness and humility, are more likely to discern the will of God. It is the hope and expectation of the Assembly that the process present in the *Manual* will enable us to give expression to Christian community as we work together.

Many people have now had some experience of consensus decision-making. Consensus decision-making is more than orange and blue cards. Rather, it is a whole process that explores how to bring matters before a meeting in the most helpful way. The determining phase, where the cards are employed, is the last expression of the careful deliberation that is outlined in the *Manual*.

A review of the *Manual* has taken place since the Eight Assembly (1997) and some revisions have been included in this edition.

Consensus decision-making remains a learning experience for many of us. To ensure the full benefits of the consensus style of decision-making, it is helpful for people to revisit the *Manual for Meetings* regularly. I particularly commend the *Manual for Meeting* to those who have responsibility for chairing meeting of councils of the Uniting Church

Terence Corkin
Assembly General Secretary
April 2009

A. MEETING TOGETHER

CHAPTER 1 – THE FORMATION OF COMMUNITY

1.1 SEEKING TO DISCERN THE SPIRIT

When a council of the church makes decisions, it is aiming to discern the guidance of the Spirit in response to the word of God. In retrospect however, some decisions are considered to have been visionary and innovative, others inappropriate and destructive, whether or not they were seen that way at the time – discernment is not something for which we can set down the rules.

But the processes we use to create community and communicate in our meetings can themselves assist in the discernment process. This will be enhanced if people come expecting to be open both to the Spirit and to each other. By creating and sustaining effective communications in the context of a Christian community, we will be more likely to discern the guidance of the Spirit and reflect this in our decision-making.

That is not to say that community should be ‘nice’ all the time. We will struggle through pain and difficulty together as well as experiencing the joy of open and honest communication, being unified in our brokenness and our common identity under God. When members are left hurt or the community is broken, poor decisions are likely to be made and the church has failed to be true community. Pressure to make a decision while ignoring the hurt of some members is likely to lead to poor decisions.

1.2 THE CONCEPT OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN THE *BASIS OF UNION*

Christian community develops when members of a group share the life they have in Christ. Community is strengthened as members are open to each other’s insights and feelings in pursuit of the ideals and practices around which the group is formed.

The *Basis of Union* is rich with imagery which supports the concept of Christian community as foundational to the polity of the Uniting Church in Australia:

Paragraph 3: “... The Church’s call is to serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself...”

Paragraph 7: “... Baptism into Christ’s body initiates people into Christ’s life and mission in the world, so that they are united in one fellowship of love, service, suffering and joy, in one family of the Father of all in heaven and earth, and in the power of the one Spirit...”

Paragraph 15: “...The Uniting Church acknowledges that Christ alone is supreme in his Church, and that he may speak to it through any of its councils. It is the task of every council to wait upon God’s Word, and to obey God’s will in the matters allocated to its oversight...”

1.3 BUILDING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

The communal nature of the relationship expressed in the Trinity and re-expressed in the Body of Christ provides a model for the type of community we become, and both enlightens and sets limits to our agenda; for the church is a community created by Christ and sustained by the Spirit. Community-building activities for the church start with the acknowledgement of the headship of Christ and the individuals’ membership together as the Body of Christ. Gathering and affirming the church as a community of faith has traditionally been through the worship of God, formal and informal. The sense of belonging to a group is further enhanced when there is opportunity for members to share personal experiences about belonging to the group.

Within this context of worship and belonging, the work of a community group needs to encompass the conscious decision to develop an effective group. To be fully effective, group dynamics will include:

- a clear and co-operative approach to goal setting and working;
- accurate two-way communication among all members;
- widespread participation and distribution of leadership functions among group members;
- a way of reaching solutions and decisions with the support of as many members as possible;
- influence based on expertise and access to information and social skills, not on personal power;
- the stimulation that occurs with controversy;
- openly addressing differences of attitude and opinion amongst members and between members and the chairperson, and negotiating towards agreement across those differences;
- a high level of trust among members;
- a climate of acceptance and support among members and between group members and the chairperson;
- members valuing each other as persons of worth, and affirming each one’s right to their opinion;
- group standards which promote individual responsibility and accountability and the achievement of group goals;

- the development of group and interpersonal skills among members and a commitment to maintaining these skills.

The nature of a group depends on its reason for existence and on its meeting programme. Interaction between members and operating styles will differ between groups which come together over a limited period of time to achieve specific objectives and those which have a longer or undefined life.

1.4 MAKING TIME FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY

Establishing community does take time. Overall however time will be saved in the process of making decisions if care is taken to prepare the group effectively. As a guideline it is suggested that 20% of the time available be allocated for worship and community building activities.

When a group meets only for a limited time, as in meetings of the Assembly, a synod or a presbytery, members must be enabled to find ways to form and sustain community rapidly and to overcome the difficulties of developing a working relationship with those who are initially strangers.

When a group is formed to have a life which may continue for some time (months or years), the sense of community is likely to build more slowly and develop as people work together on a common task. It may be possible to arrange specific activities to facilitate the building of the group, either in introductory gatherings or as a separate function.

1.5 MAINTENANCE AND CONSTANT REBUILDING OF COMMUNITY

There is no guarantee after a group is established as a community that it will continue without further support and learning among its members. The membership may change; and each time members come together events will have happened which will have changed the lives of individuals. Hence the way those individuals now relate to the group will be different. In order to maintain a sense of community, it is helpful for members to be able to appreciate these changes. It may be through small group sharing of some personal highs and lows of the period since last gathering; it may be through taking time to reflect on the impact of processes and decisions taken previously by this council.

To help in this maintenance and re-building process, we can utilise skills which assist our interpersonal relationships, help the integration of new members and ensure we do not act in ignorance of others' changing needs.

1.6 SKILLS USED IN BUILDING COMMUNICATION

Listening skills: help us understand what another person is saying and develop new ways of responding. As a result of careful listening members are helped to feel that their problems and feelings have been understood. When good listening skills are

used appropriately, members are often enabled to solve their own problems or are encouraged to contribute their own ideas to the group without becoming dependent on others.

Assertion skills: refer to verbal and non-verbal behaviour enabling us to maintain respect, satisfy our own needs and defend our rights and point of view without becoming dominating, manipulative, abusive, aggressive, intimidating, bullying, or controlling of others. This includes whether verbally or in any written form including cyber bullying;

Conflict-resolution skills: enable us to deal with the emotional turbulence that typically accompanies conflict. When good outcomes are achieved, these skills are likely to foster closer relationships.

Collaborative problem-solving skills: help to resolve conflicting needs in such a way that all parties are satisfied. Solving problems in a collaborative manner helps to ensure that the solutions found are accepted by everyone and will continue to be acceptable.

1.7 SKILLS USED IN BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Developing and using good communication skills by themselves are not sufficient. Key qualities in our relationships as a Christian community include:

genuineness – being honest and open about our own feelings, needs and ideas;

non-possessive love – accepting, respecting and supporting other people in a way which acknowledges them as equals and frees them to contribute as important individuals;

empathy – understanding another person's perspective or point of view even if you don't agree.

Good communication flows out of basic attitudes as well as through specific methods and techniques. Techniques help specific situations and must be appropriate to that situation, but if we do not exhibit genuineness, love and empathy our technique is irrelevant or maybe even harmful.

1.8 IN TIMES OF CHANGE

Every group goes through periods of change in its life, and that change is frequently accompanied by stress. These are important times to remind us to check the maintenance and re-building of community. Some of these stress points include the following:

Times for leadership changes: When a group is new or a new task is accepted, leadership is usually given by someone who is strongly motivated to get the job done. When the task is well under way, different leadership skills may be needed (which may be available to be drawn on from among other members of the group).

Changeover times: Good hand-over procedures ensure that important records do not get lost, and that incoming members and office bearers understand the history of the group and can better appreciate the reasoning behind decisions already made. A good forward plan helps the changeover time, ensures past decisions are not forgotten and that leaders' and members' contributions are appropriately recognised as they end their period of involvement.

The stagnation blues: Sometimes this indicates personal boredom, and it may be people who need a change, not the group. But perhaps the group goals have changed while the means of achieving the new goals are still the old and inappropriate ones. This may be a sign of inflexibility in group members, or insecurity about taking up new ideas. It may be helpful to plan a workshop to reassess future goals and help members evaluate their roles within the group.

Focussing backwards: Try to have a plan for the year's activities. The goals of the group will dictate the type of plan necessary. A sure way to encourage boredom is an agenda that is full of *Business arising* and empty of *New proposals*.

Ignoring the sunset clause: When it is time to finish, stop. Not all groups have a continuing life and it is better to finish on a high note with a task completed than to drift on because the fellowship has been good. The good feeling among members can be killed by attempting to continue working in a task-oriented way when the task no longer exists. If appropriate, end the task-oriented group and start or join in with an appropriate fellowship-oriented group.

CHAPTER 2 – WHY WE MEET TOGETHER

2.1 THE ACT OF SHARING TOGETHER

For a meeting to be effective, the chairperson and all those participating need to agree on the purpose and on the ways in which that purpose will be achieved.

Despite an assumption by many people that the reason for going to a meeting is to make decisions, in reality the act of making a decision is often one which consumes the least amount of time.

If the purpose of the meeting is:

- to build community – let's welcome each other, share something of ourselves and start to develop trust as we worship and celebrate together;
- to be informed – let's learn as we explore ideas and concepts together, and are enthused by the challenge of shared knowledge;
- to develop new paths – then let's listen, struggle, devise and refine together;
- to share a cup of tea – then let's drink together!

The facilitating role of the chairperson is to recognise the needs of the group and of its individual members, and so to guide the council to allow those needs to be met as far as possible.

2.2 STATING AND CLARIFYING OBJECTIVES AS A COMMUNITY

For any community group, it is important that members are clear about its objective and purpose. A chairperson should never hesitate to ensure this. If the community has developed goals together and is confident in its personal relationships and individual communication skills, then stating and clarifying objectives will be made easy.

An agenda should provide a clearly understood list of signposts in order that the objective for this meeting can be achieved. The emphasis is on signposts, not immutable ruts on a dry dusty track!

Although the secretary and chairperson have prime responsibility for drafting an agenda, the council itself needs to accept it. Nevertheless, it is important that there be provision for changing direction, adding new issues and re-ordering priorities as the flow of discussion and discovery demands. This flexibility can be daunting for any chairperson, yet it is important in respecting the needs and wishes of the community and in attempting to find a wise way forward. It is the whole community which is endeavouring to achieve the objectives.

After the meeting is opened and the common purpose has been established, it is a helpful practice for the chairperson to invite the council to review its agenda before work commences. Signposts seen from a distance are better than barbed-wire fences encountered halfway along the track.

CHAPTER 3 – HOW WE MEET TOGETHER

We need procedures which help us meet together in different ways. A formal debating style is not appropriate for an act of worship, for example. We have always recognised the need for different procedures such as liturgy for worship and rules of debate for council meetings. However we have sometimes made the assumption that the only appropriate style for a church meeting is one which proceeds by way of motion, debate and formal voting.

This section indicates different types of sessions. The models include comments about when each might be helpful and some guidelines for their operation. Procedures for use within various types of sessions are recommended by the organising committee or those responsible for the agenda and other procedural arrangements.

A group may meet in separate sessions such as the following, but often information, deliberative and decision sessions will be part of the one sitting of a council:

- worship;
- general session;
- information session;
- deliberative session; or
- decision session.

3.1 WORSHIP

Worship is a vital element in meetings of any council of the church. Regardless of the reasons for meeting, we are called to recognise whose we are. While in some cases worship is an event which stands alone, there is an important place for worship during every gathering of a church council. Groups should consider how and when to include worship in each session.

3.2 GENERAL SESSION

General sessions include ceremonial occasions, formal addresses, opening and closing ceremonies, celebrations, public meetings and other sessions where a specific and fixed agenda is appropriate. During sessions of this nature the chairperson has responsibility for the agenda, and new business may not be introduced except by consent of the members present.

3.3 INFORMATION SESSION

Information sessions provide opportunity to share information in order to present reports and raise issues, and for the council to clarify such information. In many cases the information presented forms the basis for subsequent deliberative or decision sessions, or for the development of policies or strategies for future action.

During information sessions particular speakers from the range of anticipated perspectives are allocated a period of time by the organising committee, and this

time may be used in any agreed way to present the issues and outline possible outcomes. Questions for clarification may be received from members of the council; responses or comments from members are also allowed.

The chairperson moderates the session and may allow multiple questions or comments if time and fairness permit. The organising committee recommends procedures and a timetable for the session and may provide opportunity for a range of activities including discussion, small groups, short speeches and special presentations such as audio-visuals, drama or specialist speakers.

No proposals pertaining to the issues raised should be considered by the group during an information session.

3.4 DELIBERATIVE SESSION

A deliberative session provides opportunity for the group to discuss issues arising from information sessions. Proposals for developing policy or resolving particular issues are developed in deliberative sessions. Initial formulation or refinement of proposals can be undertaken at this time in order to benefit from the gathered wisdom of the council.

Both full council and small group activities may be used. Depending on the size and needs of the group, the style of discussion may range from formal to informal.

Small group participation is encouraged when an item of major significance is under consideration. This ensures as many people as possible can contribute to the group's deliberation. Small group sharing may be two or three in a brief buzz group just where they're sitting. It may be a formal process of breaking into predetermined groups of up to ten or twelve people, with feedback channelled through a Facilitation Group who may work with the original presenters to negotiate an agreed way forward.

While the group does not make decisions during a deliberative session, there is an expectation that it will result in clarification of the issues and a move towards development of particular proposals.

Suggestions about varying such proposals may be referred to a Facilitation Group at the conclusion of the session. This committee, in association with others such as the group responsible for raising the issue or the appropriate legal or technical advisers, ensures the competence of wording in the final proposals to be brought to the full council for decision.

During the development of proposals, the chairperson may accept suggestions for alternatives and assess the attitude of the group to particular suggestions. Any of the models for decision-making may be used during a deliberative session to assist in such clarifications.

Appendix A gives an example of the way small groups can contribute to the decision-making process.

3.5 **DECISION SESSION**

The way in which decisions are to be made must be clarified early in the life of a group. Unless a model has been established in some other way, such as through a previous policy decision or regulation, it is helpful for the chairperson to raise this question explicitly and to seek agreement that all will work together under the chosen model. (The expectation in the Uniting Church in Australia is that every effort will be made for its councils to reach decisions by consensus.)

These models are detailed in the following chapters:

- consensus;
- referral to a small group to make the decision;
- formal majority.

CHAPTER 4 – HOW WE MAKE DECISIONS

4.1 CONSENSUS

As we meet we are conscious that we are seeking the will of God and that we need to work together to discern the guidance of the Spirit. While there may be times when a clear decision between two alternatives needs to be sought by majority vote, there are many situations in which that approach is quite inappropriate.

Consensus is a process by which a common mind of the meeting is sought about the wisest way forward on a particular issue at the time.

Of course it can never be claimed that this way has determined the will of God – but as the *Basis of Union* declares, we rely on the gift of the Spirit in order that we may not lose the way.

Wherever possible in councils of the Uniting Church in Australia, we seek to make our decisions using consensus procedures. Reaching a decision by consensus takes account of the insights of each member. The process ensures issues are fully aired and all members feel they have been adequately heard. Decisions are taken not simply because one more than 50% of members are in favour of a proposal, but because all agree to a way forward. Some may feel it is not necessarily their first option, but all can support it and commit themselves not to undermine the decision.

It is important to realise the consensus decision may be agreement on further processes for dealing with the situation – consensus does not imply every issue has a single resolution.

True consensus is not the same as unanimity – we must be careful to recognise that real consensus arises out of real community, and often only through real tension as people express their insights with passion and integrity, and yet with respect for really hearing others' points of view.

Some writers describe an outcome called 'pseudo-consensus'¹, and a moment's thought will allow many to recognise this not unfamiliar situation occurs in many councils of the church. Pseudo-consensus occurs when a group arrives at an apparently unanimous decision that has actually been subtly or overtly dictated by one or a few, where the issues have not been fully aired and where some members do not feel they have been heard – or even that they are free to express doubts or alternative ideas.

1 Scott Peck: *A World Waiting to be Born – Civility Rediscovered*

Considerable responsibility is placed on the chairperson to be sensitive to the mood of the meeting. It is frequently necessary to summarise or extract partial decisions. By feeding these back to the group it may be possible to make progress through a series of small steps rather than deferring all decisions to the end of the process.

At the same time members of the group must feel empowered to make their attitudes known and to raise issues about which they are not yet convinced or have different attitudes from those already expressed. At some point it is necessary for the chairperson to state explicitly what appears to be the common mind of the group, and to listen and watch carefully for signs of dissent before testing that assumption with the whole group.

At the start of this process neither the full scope of the issue nor the likely outcomes may be clear. During discussion a course of action is developed which eventually becomes the consensus decision.

As a consequence, recording can be difficult unless there is careful attention to the points at which the chairperson is seen to test the feeling of the group. It is essential once consensus is reached that a statement of the decision is recorded and agreed to by the members present. Usually this recording occurs during the session and is used as part of the checking for consensus with the group, to ensure that all relevant details have been captured.

Further details of the consensus process are found in Chapter 6: *Making decisions by consensus*.

4.2 REFERRAL: EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OR SMALL GROUP DELEGATION

This style of decision-making is suitable for a large group which needs to refer consideration of detail or finalisation of issues to a group empowered to make final decisions and act on behalf of the larger group. Consequently, the style of the original meeting is not really the issue here. Referrals to a small group can happen during any type of meeting, and can arise through suggestions or proposals made in meetings operating under any procedural model.

It is essential that the council referring the decision to the smaller group is clear about what powers are being conferred: whether the small group has the power to make a final and irrevocable decision or is to prepare a recommendation or report for the council at a later meeting. In either case, provision should be made for adequate reporting back to the referring council about the decisions taken and any actions initiated.

4.3 FORMAL MAJORITY

After presentation of a report, clarification of issues, and development and refinement of proposals, there may still on occasions be a need to make a decision by determining

the number of members in favour of, or opposed to, the recommendations developed. In such a case the process of determining a formal majority may be appropriate.

Through the use of information and deliberative sessions up to this point, the council has had opportunity to review and develop alternatives and members have had opportunity to explore the issue from different points of view. When formal majority procedures are being used to reach a decision, it is necessary to impose stricter requirements in terms of procedure. The assumption underlying this process is that it is possible to agree or disagree with the proposal before the council and that members can be expected to take one of these positions.

As the development of the proposal to this point has already involved opportunity for general discussion, it is possible to curtail the formal majority procedures in some way. Thus limits may be placed on the length of speeches, on the freedom of members to speak more than once and on the introduction of new material. The text of the proposal must be available to all members so there is no doubt about the details of the issue to be decided.

For the council to be well-informed about the arguments for and against the proposal, speakers may address the issues and present material to assist members in seeing the advantages or disadvantages of a particular decision. The chairperson may select speakers for and against the proposal alternately if this is likely to be helpful to the council.

Provision is made for variations through a process of amendment, giving members the ability to indicate formally a preference for a previously advised alternative to the initial proposal. If a majority does indicate that the alternative is preferred, this replaces the original proposal. When such amendments are presented, they will be discussed and decided one at a time before final discussion and decision about the issue.

Further details of the formal majority process can be found in Chapter 7: *Making decisions by formal majority*.

4.4 VOTING METHOD

When voting is used, it is by a method declared by the chairperson on the recommendation of the Business Committee. It may be by voices, by show of hands or coloured cards, or by written ballot.

Voting? Indicate by:

- ***voices***
- ***hands***
- ***cards***
- ***written ballot***

4.5 PROXY OR ABSENTEE VOTING NOT ACCEPTABLE

Only those council members present at the meeting of the council may vote. There is no provision for voting by proxy or as an absentee, because of the Church's

understanding that God's will is discerned as Christians gather to listen, discuss and pray together.

4.6 CHAIRPERSON'S ROLE

The procedures in this Manual make many demands on the person chairing a meeting. It is essential that the chairperson has a thorough knowledge of the whole of the Manual, including the understandings detailed in Chapters 1 and 2 which underpin the principles involved.

Careful training for any person appointed to chair a council of the Church should be expected by that council. Each synod has provision for such equipping in the necessary skills.

The chairperson's role can be summarised as presiding at meetings in a manner which assists the council to discern the will of God as far as possible, and meets the needs and purposes of the council and its members.

The chairperson has considerable discretion and responsibility in any meeting, including:

- reminding the council of its responsibilities and powers, and the purpose of that particular meeting;
- inviting the council to review its agenda;
- checking that council members agree to work together through a particular model of decision-making;
- declaring the method of voting on recommendation from the Business Committee;
- calling speakers, ensuring those both for and against the proposal are heard;
- calling for times of prayer or reflective silence as appropriate;
- ruling on matters of procedure;
- assessing whether it is time for the council to consider moving from one method of decision-making to another.

Under consensus procedures, additional responsibilities include:

- seeking response to speeches and advising the council of the mood of the meeting as it becomes apparent;
- summarising main themes of a discussion and suggesting a particular focus for the next stage;
- posing questions to check if consensus has been reached (sample questions in chapter 6, paragraphs 6.6 and 6.9);
- encouraging decisions step by step rather than only at the end of the consensus procedures.

The chairperson may be advised by a Business Committee and/or a Facilitation Group, but will certainly need to follow closely the content of the council's discussion as well as to preside over the process of discussion.

CHAIRPERSON'S ROLE

presiding at meetings in a manner which:

- *assists the council to discern the will of God as far as possible*
- *meets the needs and purposes of the council and its members.*

B. PROCEDURES

CHAPTER 5 – GUIDELINES FOR MEETING PROCEDURES

(applying to both consensus and formal majority decision making)

5.1 DEFINITIONS

In these procedures for consensus or formal majority decision-making:

agreement means a decision of the council where after careful consideration of options a small number is unable to accept the majority opinion but agree to stand aside so the matter may be resolved;

Assembly means the National Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia;

chair means the position of presiding at a session;

chairperson means the person presiding at the session of the council;

church means the universal church;

Church means the Uniting Church in Australia;

consensus means a decision of the council reached unanimously, or where a small minority of members of the council is willing to accept a proposal which is not their first preference, in order that the council may determine the matter;

council means the Assembly, a synod, a presbytery, a Church Council or a meeting of a congregation;

leave of the council means permission granted by the council by a three-fourths majority vote or by such other majority as may be specified by the council;

meeting means the gathering of the council over one or more sessions to attend to matters on its agenda;

member means a person who is authorised to participate in the activities and decisions of the council;

participant means a non-member who is given permission by the council to participate in the meeting for all or part of the proceedings as appropriate; leave of the council is required for this association to be approved;

private sitting means all those who are not members of the council must leave the meeting before discussion on a specific issue continues; members must treat the subsequent discussion in the strictest confidence, and must not divulge its content or process to non-members;

quorum means the minimum number of members present to allow a meeting to proceed – not less than 50%, or as set by the particular council;

session means the time from the commencement of a sitting until the following meal or end-of-day break; sessions may be by nature worship, general, information, deliberative or decision sessions (see Chapter 3);

voting method means voices, show of hands or cards, or written ballot as declared by the chairperson.

5.2 COMMENCEMENT

At the time at which any session has been convened to commence, or at the time to which any session may have been adjourned, the meeting commences with prayer or another form of worship.

5.3 QUORUM

After the opening worship, the chairperson ascertains that the prescribed quorum is present.

5.4 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE CHAIRPERSON

Everybody in the meeting at all times must respect any direction or request from the chairperson. When the chairperson stands, all present resume their seats and remain silent so the chairperson may be heard without interruption.

5.5 CHAIRPERSON TO CALL THE BUSINESS

At the commencement of each session, the chairperson ensures that members are informed of the nature of the session. If it is a decision session, the chairperson informs the council of the voting method to be used, and proposes to the council the style of procedures to be used for making decisions (see 5.16.1).

When leave of the council has been obtained for that procedural proposal, the chairperson calls for business to be considered by the council.

5.6 MEMBERS WISHING TO SPEAK

A member seeking to speak indicates by standing or by other means signified by the chairperson, but may not speak until called by the chairperson. No member may interrupt a speaker except to raise a point of order. A member speaking to the council addresses the chairperson only.

Permission for a participant to speak but not to vote may be given at the discretion of the chairperson where either consensus or formal majority procedures are being used.

5.7 VACATING THE CHAIR

If the chairperson chooses to take part in the deliberations of the council, the person authorised to act in the absence of the chairperson presides during consideration of the issue.

5.8 BUSINESS COMMITTEE

The council may appoint a Business Committee comprising the secretary and other persons as the council may decide. If a Business Committee is not appointed, the secretary undertakes these duties.

The role of the Business Committee is:

- to consider the business to come before the council and propose the order in which business should be considered;
- to propose to the chairperson procedures to be used for making decisions for each item of business;
- to propose to the chairperson the voting method to be used, where this is appropriate;
- in formal majority procedures, to propose the order in which further amendments to a motion should be considered so that no proposition is disadvantaged;
- to bring proposals on any other matter relating to the effective consideration of the business.

5.9 FACILITATION GROUP

The council may appoint a Facilitation Group comprising a small number of people with a broad understanding of the church and the issues being faced, with good listening, analytical and negotiating skills, and with the capacity to craft carefully worded proposals for consideration by the council.

The role of the Facilitation Group is:

- to assist in co-ordinating responses from small group work;
- to ensure all insights are considered in working towards consensus about the way forward for any issue;
- to ensure re-worded proposals coming to the council have been negotiated with the original proposers and all small group leaders.

When a Facilitation Group presents the negotiated results of small group work, minority opinions not able to be included in the general trend of the proposal are reported to the council as possible variations or amendments.

The original proposers are involved with the Facilitation Group in assisting the council with clarifications and working towards consensus, if consensus procedures are being used.

If formal majority procedures are being followed, a varied proposal arising from small group work is dealt with as an amendment to the original motion.

5.10 BUSINESS TO BE SUBMITTED

Any issue for consideration, including any report or proposal, is submitted to the Business Committee in writing and signed by at least two members, unless otherwise

agreed by the council. As far as possible, the issue is distributed to members at least 24 hours before the time at which it is to be considered.

Leave of the council is required if an issue for decision is to be considered within less than 24 hours of being distributed to members.

5.11 SUBMISSIONS TO BE TAKEN AS READ

All previously circulated reports and proposals are deemed to have been read by members. However, a member presenting a report or proposal still has the right to speak in presenting it to the council.

5.12 QUESTIONS AND RECEPTION OF REPORTS

When a report has been presented to the council, any member may ask a question concerning the material presented. The chairperson may ask the presenter to respond or may rule that the question be addressed in some other manner.

A proposal for the reception of the report is implicit in the presentation of the report, and following questions the chairperson seeks agreement of the council to that proposal.

Reception of a report does not imply endorsement of any suggested changes of policy contained within it. Any policy changes need the approval of separate proposals.

5.13 LENGTH OF SPEECHES

Unless otherwise predetermined by the council, a member presenting an issue, a report or a proposal speaks for no more than five minutes and subsequent speakers speak for no more than three minutes for each speech. Leave of the council may be sought for an extension of time.

5.14 USE OF COLOURED CARDS

While cards are not essential for any of the procedures, it can be helpful for members to be issued with coloured cards for use in the meeting. Orange and blue are the preferred colours, as they are readily distinguishable even by people who are colour blind; orange can be used to indicate warmth towards a point of view or approval of a proposal, while blue can symbolise coolness about what has been heard or disapproval of a proposal.

5.15 POINTS OF ORDER

A point of order may be raised by a member of the council at any time during the meeting, whichever procedures are being used. A point of order must refer strictly to the proceedings of the council. A member wishing to draw a breach of order to the attention of the council may interrupt a speaker by standing and gaining the attention of the chairperson with the words: "Point of order."

On being recognised by the chairperson, the person raising the point of order simply states it and no other member may speak at this stage. The chairperson then:

- rules on the point of order immediately; or
- asks selected members to state their views and then rules on the point; and/or
- refers the point of order to the council for decision by discussion and vote.

If the chairperson's ruling on a point of order is challenged, the member who questions the ruling may be heard for no more than three minutes, the chairperson replies and a formal vote to sustain or disallow the ruling is taken without further discussion. Such a vote is decided by simple majority approval.

The following types of points of order may be raised:

5.15.1 OUT OF ORDER

A member may draw attention to a breach of *Manual for Meetings – Procedures*, or may claim that the speaker is digressing from the matter being discussed.

5.15.2 PRIVATE SITTING

A member may interrupt a speaker in order to bring the procedural proposal that the council sit in private.

5.15.3 ADJOURNMENT

A member may interrupt a speaker in order to bring the procedural proposal for adjournment.

5.15.4 PERSONAL EXPLANATION

A member may claim the right to make a personal explanation if, in the course of the discussion, remarks made by that member are grossly misrepresented by a subsequent speaker.

5.15.5 OBJECTION

A member may raise objection if the remarks of a speaker are deemed objectionable or reflecting on character, or have a personal reference to any person in a manner that is offensive or derogatory.

5.16 PROCEDURAL PROPOSALS

A procedural proposal is one whereby the council determines in what manner or when the council deals with a particular item on its agenda. Unless otherwise specified, it may be proposed at any stage in a meeting, requires a seconder and is determined by a formal vote in which a simple majority denotes approval.

To bring a procedural proposal, a member must wait for the call of the chairperson (unless it arises as the result of a point of order), after which the chairperson may call for a seconder in order for the proposal to proceed.

Procedural proposals may include the following:

5.16.1 USE OF PROCEDURES

A member proposes that an issue be considered using the procedures for *Making decisions by consensus* or the procedures for *Making decisions by formal majority*. Leave of the council is required for the passing of this proposal after it has been discussed. The chairperson may also introduce this procedural proposal at any stage, and is required to at the commencement of each session (see paragraph 5.5).

5.16.2 THE ORDER OF THE DAY

A member proposes that the council take up business previously set by the council for that time. It may be combined with a proposal for the adjournment of the current discussion and is voted on immediately without discussion.

5.16.3 ADJOURNMENT

A proposal for the adjournment of the discussion, the session or the meeting is voted on immediately without further discussion. Its disapproval does not preclude it being proposed again during discussion on the same issue. A proposal for adjournment may not be brought by a person who has already spoken.

If the adjournment is approved, any person whose speech was interrupted has the right to speak first when the session is resumed, or if no person was interrupted the person who proposed the adjournment has the first right of speech when discussion of the issue is resumed.

5.16.4 PRIVATE SITTING

A proposal that the council sit in private for consideration of a specific issue is voted on immediately without discussion. Its disapproval does not preclude it being proposed again during the same discussion.

The council continues to sit in private until the passing of a procedural proposal that the council cease sitting in private, which is voted on immediately without discussion.

5.16.5 REFERRAL

This is a proposal to refer the issue to another council of the church, or to some other body identified by the council in the procedural proposal. It is open to discussion.

5.16.6 DETERMINING THE NEED FOR A DECISION NOW

When the council is following the procedures for *Making decisions by consensus* the chairperson may propose that the council needs to resolve the question now. This motion can be discussed and requires leave of the council to be carried (see paragraph 6.10).

5.16.7 PROCEDURES DURING DECISIONS BY FORMAL MAJORITY

The following procedural proposals are described in chapter 7: *Making decisions by*

formal majority and may be moved if those procedures are being used.

- A motion that the motion or amendment be withdrawn (see paragraph 7.6).
- A motion that the motion, the amendment, or the motion and the amendment be not put (also known as the previous question) (see paragraph 7.7).
- A motion that the vote be now taken (see paragraph 7.10)

5.17 RECONSIDERATION OF AN ISSUE

A member, having voted in support of a resolution of the council, who wishes the council to reconsider the matter within that meeting, may propose its reconsideration. When the council is meeting in multiple sessions the Business Committee (where possible) schedules reconsideration for a later session, if the council agrees to the proposal.

The reconsideration is dealt with in the following manner:

- Leave of the council is sought for the issue to be re-considered. The member seeking leave may speak for no more than five minutes about the reason for wishing to have the issue re-considered. A seconder is required and the proposal may be discussed. The chairperson ensures that any discussion is restricted to the reasons for re-considering the issue.
- If leave of the council is granted, then the member may propose either:
 - (a) that the decision in question be rescinded; or
 - (b) that the decision in question be rescinded and replaced by other words.
- This proposal is considered and determined using procedures agreed by the council.

This process does not apply if a proposal to vary the terms of an earlier resolution of the council is brought to a subsequent meeting. Each meeting of a council is free to make its own decisions, and is not bound by previous decisions of the council.

CHAPTER 6 – MAKING DECISIONS BY CONSENSUS

In this chapter, guidelines are offered for the steps which may be used in making decisions by consensus. Not every step will be appropriate for every meeting or decision, but when using this method for meeting procedure and decision making, it will be helpful to follow these guidelines as closely as possible.

Often one step merges with the next without a clear break in the flow of the meeting; and there will be occasions (particularly in smaller councils) where the information, deliberative and decision sessions are not separated. Nonetheless, each step is part of the progression towards reaching consensus.

THE INFORMATION SESSION

6.1 PRESENTING AN ISSUE

The aim is to resource the council with information from the range of possible perspectives so that an informed way forward may be discerned. Background information that has led to this issue being raised is shared. Any relevant information that will help people understand the issue is presented. A possible course of action may be presented.

6.2 CLARIFICATION OF THE ISSUE

Members of the council are free to seek clarification, to ask questions on the issue and to seek information from differing view points. This is the time to ensure that all relevant information is available.

THE DELIBERATIVE SESSION

6.3 OPEN DISCUSSION, INCLUDING THE POSSIBLE USE OF CARDS (SEE 5.14)

Discussion of the various viewpoints and vigorous debate around different opinions are encouraged.

The use of coloured cards (preferably orange for support, blue for opposition) as indicators of response to speeches is helpful as the discussion progresses, particularly in larger meetings. At the conclusion of a speech, those in general agreement with the speaker display orange cards while those in general disagreement display blue cards.

If cards are not easily visible to all present, the chairperson advises the council on the proportion of each being shown. Care should be taken not to hold the two cards back-to-back while indicating responses, as the wrong impression can be given to those behind if the rear card indicates the opposite from the holder's intended response.

As an indication of opinion that the council should move on to the next step in the

business procedures, members may display their orange and blue cards crossed, so the chairperson can see both together. This indication may be given both during and after speeches.

These indications of opinion help to avoid repetitious speeches and enable the chairperson and the whole meeting to gauge the strength of feeling for various ideas. Movement towards consensus is thus assisted.

6.4 DEVELOPING PROPOSALS

As open discussion proceeds, several specific proposals may emerge or general agreement with the broad proposal initially put to the council may be expressed. This step provides opportunity for helpful ideas for resolving the issue to be presented. Small group work, either formally structured or through brief buzz groups with immediate neighbours, is often a fruitful way of drawing on individual insights – particularly in larger meetings. The use of small groups in this way is strongly recommended, to enable more participation of members in the deliberations (see 3.4).

If the issue is straightforward and the number of ideas for its possible resolution is small, the chairperson or any other member of the council may summarise a firm proposal for discussion.

However, it may be necessary to refer all the ideas to a Facilitation Group or to those who first presented the issue for discussion, to draw together responses and assist in negotiating an agreed form of words as a firm proposal for the council to consider (see 5.9).

THE DECISION SESSION

6.5 DISCUSSION OF A SPECIFIC PROPOSAL

The benefits and disadvantages of the proposal are now canvassed by various speakers. It is important to hear from those with enthusiasm for the proposal as well as from those indicating disquiet or disapproval. Members are encouraged to indicate their agreement or disagreement (see 6.3).

Minor changes of wording may be agreed by the council from time to time as viewpoints are heard and considered.

From time to time the chairperson may check whether the council is nearing consensus. After summing up where it seems the council is heading:

(A) “What is your response to this proposal?” may be asked of the council.

6.6 CHECKING FOR CONSENSUS

When the chairperson believes that consensus has been reached (whether to support or to not support), the council is asked to affirm this. The chairperson states an understanding of the position reached and asks for an indication of agreement or

disagreement. Typical questions could be:

(B) “Do you believe we have consensus in support of this proposal?” or

(C) “Do you believe we have consensus to not support this proposal?”

If there is no strong response to this checking for consensus, discussion may continue to enable doubts and questions to be raised and further viewpoints to be shared.

If there is unanimity to support or to not support the proposal, then consensus has been reached and the council proceeds to the declaration of the consensus result (see paragraph 6.7).

However, there is a third possibility. After vigorous sharing of ideas, there may be strong but not unanimous support for the proposal. In order to estimate the strength of opinion, the chairperson may ask questions such as:

(D) “Who supports the proposal?”

(E) “Who does not support the proposal as your first option, but is prepared to accept it?”

(F) “Who is not prepared to accept the proposal?”

If there is no response to the last question (F), the chairperson may ask the council:

(G) “Is further discussion needed?”

(H) “Are you prepared to have the issue declared resolved by consensus?”

If all agree to the chairperson declaring that a consensus has been reached, the council moves to that step (6.7).

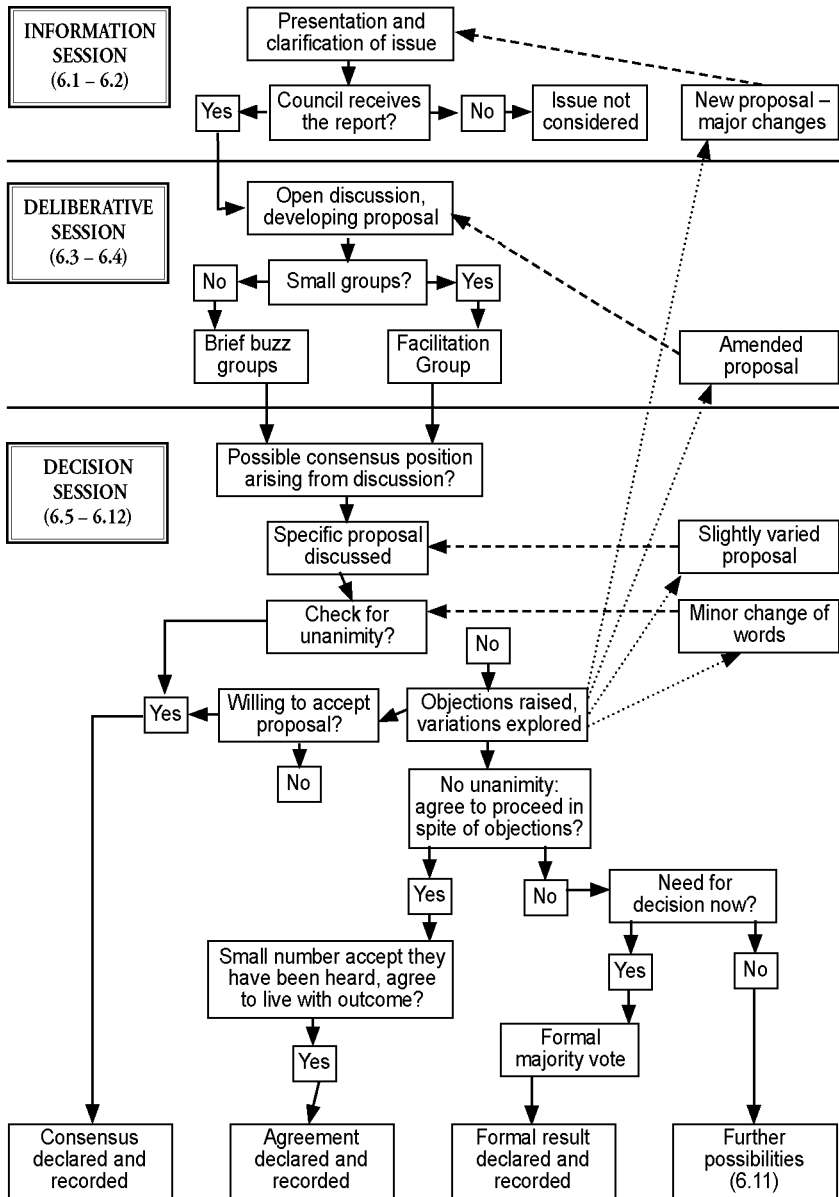
If there are those not able to accept the proposal (response to question F), the chairperson invites these people to share their misgivings directly with the whole council and discussion can continue. Where a small number is unable to agree with the majority after a reasonable time, the council may move on to the procedures outlined in 6.8. Skilful chairing is necessary here, to enable the council to be not unduly delayed at this point.

There may be some who are uneasy about a proposed way forward, yet not able to verbalise their concerns. The prompting of the Spirit may be expressed in disquiet as much as in creative suggestions for wording a proposal. All people are worthy of respect as they indicate their position, and no-one should feel pressured into agreeing with a position against their better judgement.

6.7 DECLARATION OF CONSENSUS

On the affirmation of consensus, by whatever means is considered appropriate (voices, show of hands or cards), the chairperson declares the proposal resolved (either approved or disapproved) by consensus.

CONSENSUS PROCEDURES – FLOW CHART



6.8 IF OBJECTIONS PERSIST

Sharing misgivings about the proposal may in itself clarify the concerns of some individuals or result in the changing of a word or two, thus bringing either support for the proposal or acceptance of it. The council may express its support or otherwise for any minor wording changes, and the process can proceed towards a declaration of consensus.

Alternatively, the concerns shared may mean that further discussion is required. The process proceeds as indicated in paragraph 6.5.

It may be that major objections come to light. This disagreement may be such that it affects the wording of the proposal in a major way. If it can be resolved easily, it may be possible for an amended proposal to be considered by the council (paragraph 6.4), or a Facilitation Group may need to rework the proposal before bringing it back to the council. In this case the process returns to the steps outlined in paragraph 6.4.

Even at this comparatively late stage in the process, a major consideration may be aired which has escaped the council until now. Where the chairperson considers this to be the case, the process returns to the clarification of issues stage (paragraph 6.2), allowing development of the new point and appropriate discussion of the attendant issues.

6.9 AGREEMENT – NOT UNANIMITY

If (after careful attempts to work towards consensus) there is a small number who are unable to support or accept the majority position, the chairperson may ask:

- (I) “Do those unable to support the proposal and not prepared to accept it, believe your point of view has been listened to, even though you don’t agree with the proposal and are not able to accept it?”
- (J) “Do those who support or who are prepared to accept this proposal believe you have heard what the others of our council are saying?”

Given assurance that dissenting views have been both expressed and understood, the chairperson may ask for an indication of viewpoints on these two questions:

- (K) “Are those who are in the minority on this proposal prepared to live with the majority view and allow the council to record an agreement?”
- (L) “Does the council therefore wish to record agreement on this proposal?”

If there is no person indicating against these two questions, then agreement is recorded. If one or more indicates against either of the two questions, then the council proceeds to the next step (paragraph 6.10).

6.10 NEED FOR A DECISION NOW

If consensus or agreement cannot be reached, the council reviews the need for a decision at this meeting. It is important for the health of any organisation to reach

a conclusion about proposals brought before it, and therefore procedures to enable this to occur are required.

The council discusses by consensus procedures the need for a decision at this meeting. If there is no consensus on this after a reasonable length of time, the chairperson brings the procedural proposal (see 5.16.6):

(M) “That the council needs to resolve the question now.”

If the council does not agree that a decision is required at this meeting, there is opportunity for further work and the process may continue in accordance with the options in paragraph 6.12.

6.11 DECISION BY FORMAL MAJORITY

If there is consensus that a decision is necessary now, or proposal (M) is carried by leave of the council, the council moves immediately to discuss the question and decide the matter using procedures for *Making decisions by formal majority* (chapter 7).

6.12 FURTHER POSSIBILITIES

Where the council has not reached consensus or agreement, or it has resolved that a final decision on the issue is not needed at this meeting, several options are available.

Some possibilities which may be considered include:

- referring the issue to another council or body for determination;
- referring the issue back to the original party or to another special group for further consideration and later re-submission to this council;
- deciding that the matter be no longer considered.

In one of these ways the issue is at least dealt with in the mind of the council. It is not left in the air, for even a decision that the matter be no longer considered should indicate the reason for its lapsing, perhaps leaving the door open for further research and presentation, or closing the door firmly and stating the reasons for so doing.

CHAPTER 7 – MAKING DECISIONS BY FORMAL MAJORITY

7.1 NOT THE WHOLE PROCESS!

It is anticipated the general procedures outlined in earlier chapters will have been followed for information and deliberative sessions. When procedures for making decisions by formal majority are to be used in a decision session, the procedure to be followed is detailed in this chapter.

7.2 MOVING A MOTION

A motion may be moved for the approval of a proposal before the council. If it is not seconded, the motion lapses and is not recorded in the minutes of the meeting. The chairperson may call for an indication that another member is willing to second the motion before the mover is allowed to speak to the motion.

The mover of the motion speaks first to the motion, and may not reserve the right to speak to it subsequently.

The seconder of the motion may speak second to the motion, but if the option is not exercised the seconder may reserve the right to speak to it subsequently.

7.3 MOVING AN AMENDMENT

A member who has not spoken to the main question may move an amendment to the motion. If it is not seconded, the amendment lapses and is not recorded in the minutes of the meeting. The chairperson may call for an indication that another member is willing to second an amendment before the mover is allowed to speak to the amendment.

The mover of the amendment speaks first to the amendment, and may not reserve the right to speak to it subsequently.

The seconder of an amendment may speak second, but if that option is not exercised the seconder may not reserve the right to speak to it subsequently.

7.4 AMENDMENTS TO THE MOTION

A valid amendment varies the subject matter of the motion currently being debated, either by varying the terms or by omission or addition. It may not directly negate the intentions of the original motion.

When an amendment is before the council, discussion is confined to the matter addressed by that amendment.

A further amendment may not be submitted until the current one is disposed of, but any speaker to an amendment may give notice of intention to propose another amendment. The order in which any further amendments are taken is advised by the Business Committee so that no proposition is disadvantaged.

Any member giving notice of further amendment does not speak to the proposed amendment then, but is entitled to speak to the amendment when moving it.

7.5 DISCUSSION OF THE MOTION

Following speeches by the mover and seconder, the chairperson calls for anyone wishing to speak to the motion.

The chairperson may at any time call for speakers against or for the motion. If there is none, the chairperson puts the motion to the vote immediately. If debate continues, the chairperson may then call for speakers for or against the motion alternately.

An amendment constitutes a separate question from the original motion and from any other amendment.

The mover and seconder of the motion may speak to an amendment to their motion, but must restrict their speech to the subject matter of the amendment. The mover of the motion's speech on the amendment does not constitute the right of reply.

No member may speak more than once to any question except the mover of the motion in exercising the right of reply.

7.6 WITHDRAWAL

The mover of a motion or an amendment may move the procedural proposal that the motion or the amendment be withdrawn. This requires a seconder and is put to the vote immediately without debate. Leave of the council is required for approval.

The defeat of such a motion does not preclude it from being moved again by the mover of the motion or the amendment during the debate.

7.7 THE PREVIOUS QUESTION

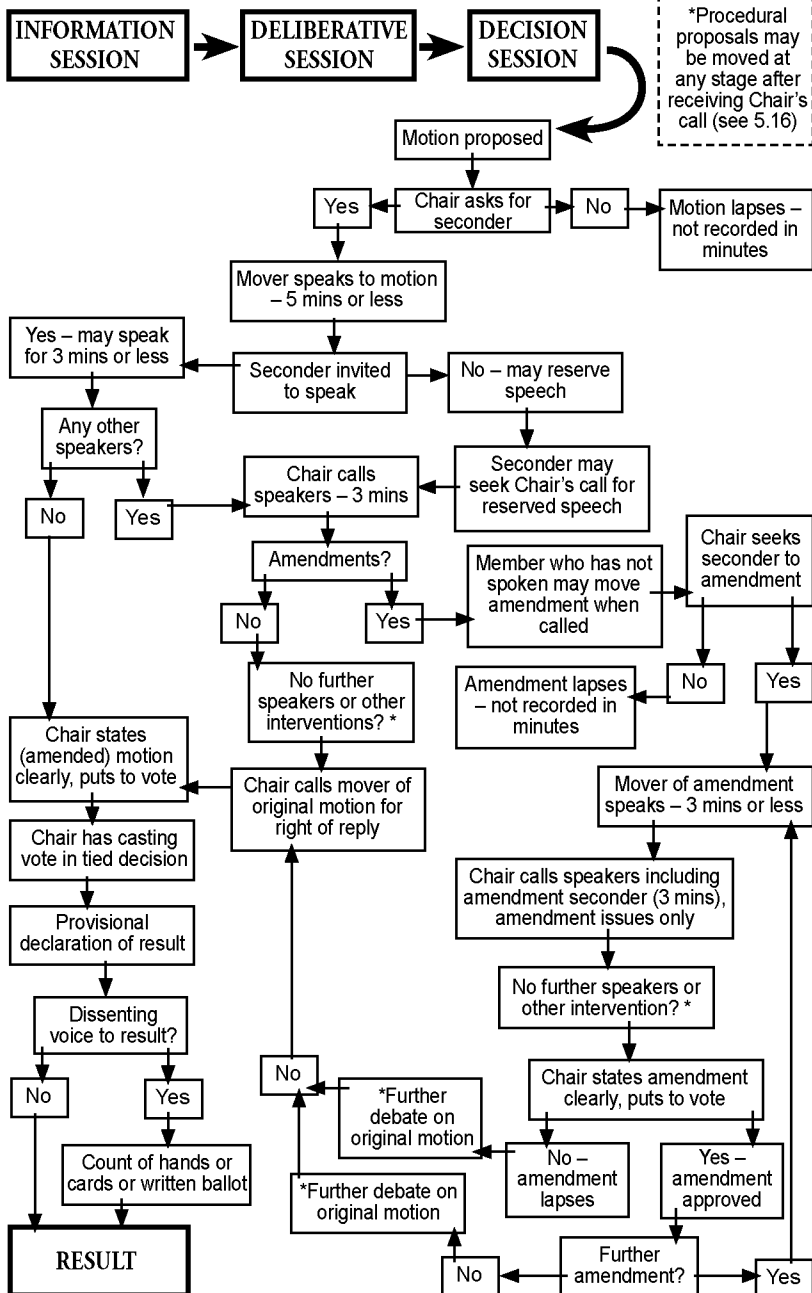
This procedural proposal is moved in the form that the motion, the amendment, or the motion and the amendment be not put. It requires a seconder and is open to debate.

The vote on this procedural proposal may be taken at any time during the debate, but must precede the vote on the motion or the amendment before the council.

If the procedural proposal is approved in the form: "that the motion (or the motion and the amendment) be not put", the council moves immediately to the next item of business. If the procedural proposal is approved in the form: "that the amendment be not put", the council moves immediately to consider any further amendment or the motion. The minutes of the meeting carry no record of the business against which this procedural proposal has been carried, nor of the procedural proposal itself.

If the procedural proposal is not approved, the debate continues. Rejection of the procedural proposal does not preclude it being moved again during the same debate.

FORMAL MAJORITY PROCEDURES



7.8 RIGHT OF REPLY

The mover of a motion has the right of reply immediately prior to the vote on the motion (or the motion as amended) being taken. The reply is limited to the answering of matters raised in opposition to the motion and may not introduce any new arguments.

7.9 VOTING PROCEDURES

Prior to calling for any vote, the chairperson ensures that all members are clear about the wording of the question about which the vote is to be taken.

Unless the method of voting has been previously determined by the council, the chairperson declares whether voting is to be on the voices, by show of hands, by showing coloured cards or by written ballot.

If voting is:

- on the voices – the chairperson calls first for those who approve the proposal to say “yes” and then those who disapprove to say “no”;
- by show of hands – the chairperson calls for an indication by a raised hand of those who approve the proposal and then those who disapprove;
- by showing cards – the chairperson asks to see the response of the council: orange cards displayed to indicate approval of the proposal and (at the same time) blue cards displayed to indicate disapproval;
- by counting or written ballot – counting of votes is undertaken by scrutineers appointed for that purpose by the council, the result being signed by the convenor of scrutineers before being handed to the chairperson.

After the vote the chairperson declares whether the proposal is approved or not.

For voting methods where an estimation of numbers has been made (voices, show of hands or cards), the chairperson pauses to allow for the possibility of a dissenting voice; and if there is none, the result is recorded. If there is a dissenting voice, the chairperson calls for a count of hands or cards, or a written ballot, to confirm or vary the declaration by a simple majority vote.

The chairperson does not exercise a deliberative vote but exercises a casting vote when a result is tied.

7.10 CLOSURE OF THE DEBATE

The debate is closed:

- when there are no further speakers for or against the motion, or the motion and an amendment; or
- when a motion “that the vote be now taken” is carried by leave of the council. This procedural proposal may be submitted by any member who has not taken

part in the debate, after receiving the call of the chairperson. A seconder is required. If in the opinion of the chairperson the debate has apparently covered all the ground and is becoming unduly extended or repetitious, the motion may also be submitted by the chairperson. This motion is put to the vote immediately without debate; or

- as a result of another procedural proposal (see 5.16).

If there is a motion with an amendment before the council:

- the chairperson puts the amendment to the vote (with no right of reply by the mover either of the amendment or of the original motion at this stage);
- if the amendment is lost, debate resumes on the motion;
- if the amendment is carried, debate continues on the amended motion;
- further amendments may be proposed or notices of amendment dealt with in an appropriate order (as advised by the Business Committee).

If there is no amendment or no further amendment to the motion:

- the chairperson calls the mover who may exercise the right of reply, speaking only to matters that have been raised in the course of the debate;
- the motion is immediately put to the vote (by the previously agreed voting method);
- the chairperson has the casting vote in the event of a tied decision;
- the chairperson declares the result;
- if there is a dissenting voice to the declaration, counting may be required by the chairperson (see 7.9);
- the chairperson declares the result which is now recorded.

7.11 SIMPLE MAJORITY

When using formal majority procedures, a simple majority is sufficient to approve a motion unless the council has predetermined that a higher percentage will be required.

CHAPTER 8 – APPLICATION OF THIS MANUAL FOR MEETINGS

8.1 COUNCILS OF THE CHURCH

The Manual for Meetings was adopted as the Standing Orders and Rules of Debate by the Sixth Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia in 1994. It has since been published in the same volume with each revision of the Constitution and Regulations, and is the standard for meeting procedure throughout all councils of the Church.

This 2000 edition was approved by the Ninth Assembly in July 2000, following the revision foreshadowed in 1997.

8.2 TRAINING

It is expected that every council of the Church will make provision for the chairperson to be carefully trained in the procedures of this Manual for Meetings.

8.3 AMENDMENT

These procedures may be amended from time to time by the Assembly Standing Committee after appropriate review and consultation.

APPENDIX A

AN EXAMPLE OF SMALL GROUP PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

Paragraph 3.4 of the Manual refers to the use of small groups in the Deliberative Session. Small group participation can appropriately be used where a council is considering items of major significance and where sufficient time is available (eg. where the council meets over several days or where the different steps can be spread over two or more meetings).

This appendix details how working groups at the Uniting Church's 1994 National Assembly proved to be very helpful in the decision-making process, especially in the seeking of consensus. Most Assembly members felt they had opportunity to contribute to the decision, that their opinions were heard and taken seriously, and that proposals were refined and precisely worded.

Each working group consisted of 8-10 Assembly members, one of whom had previously been designated as leader. Members were allocated to their groups by random selection, ensuring a cross-section of Assembly members in each except that representatives of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress chose to gather in one group. Leaders attended a 60-minute briefing session on the first day of the Assembly.

The Business Committee, following consultation with proposers of Assembly business, selected several agenda items to be considered by each of the working groups. These items were considered to be among the most important and controversial facing the Assembly.

THE AIMS OF THE WORKING GROUPS WERE:

- to facilitate discussion on key proposals by involving people more closely in the process of decision-making;
- to enable the opinions of individual members of the Assembly to be expressed and to be heard and explored by others;
- to help build a sense of community within the Assembly;
- to ensure communication between Assembly members, the Business Committee, and the agencies and commissions of the Assembly.

STEPS IN THE GROUP PROCESS:

- The agenda item was introduced by the proposers in an “information and deliberative” session of the Assembly. Proposers had between 5 and 20 minutes to present their case (as determined by the Business Committee, depending on the size and complexity of the business). Then a period of up to 30 minutes was allowed for comment and question, with the main purpose being clarification of the issues rather than argument. However, where the Business Committee was aware of opposition to the proposals, care was taken to ensure that the opponents stated their case during the time of deliberation.
- Shortly after (mostly later that same day) the working groups met to discuss the item. As resource papers, each group had the Assembly working papers, the proposed motions, a ‘key phrases summary sheet’ (placed in view on the floor between group members), and a response form prepared by the Business Committee. The proposers were available on request to provide clarification and comment to any group.
- After about 30 minutes of discussion the group completed its response form. The forms sought indications of group consensus or the degree of opposition to the proposals; allowed for suggestions of amendments or new proposals; asked if there was group comment to be made to the Assembly and/or the proposers of the business; and gave opportunity for any individual or minority comment to the Assembly or the proposers which the group felt needed to be communicated.
- The forms were quickly passed to the Facilitation Group, four people selected by the Business Committee because of their deep understanding of the church and of the issues facing the Assembly, their listening, analytical and negotiating skills, and their capacity to craft well-worded proposals for consideration by the meeting. The Facilitation Group reviewed all response forms, then negotiated with the proposers of the business and with working group spokespersons, with a view to seeking a consensus resolution on that business. On a few proposals unanimity was quickly reached. On most proposals the Facilitation Group was able to negotiate a proposed resolution supported by the proposers and most working groups, with a listing of several proposed amendments each supported by one or more working groups, for the consideration of the Assembly. The Facilitation Group was generally allowed 24-48 hours for its work, but it was acknowledged later that 48 hours was usually needed because the business items were large, complex and controversial.
- After consulting with the Business Committee to determine the most appropriate process, the Facilitation Group then reported to a “decision” session of the Assembly on the outcome of the working groups process. Individual and minority voices were heard by the Assembly. The revised proposals were presented and discussed, and any amendments or new proposals were considered. The Assembly made its decisions, usually by consensus.

WORKING GROUP RESPONSE FORM

Group leader:..... Group number:

(Space for topic to be listed)

1. Has the group reached consensus in support of the proposal? (paragraphs 5.1, 6.6) YES/NO
2. If no to question 1, has the group reached agreement (paragraphs 5.1, 6.9) in support of the motion? YES/NO
3. If further work is needed, does the group suggest:
any minor change of words? (paragraph 6.5) YES/NO
any amended proposal? (paragraph 6.4) YES/NO
any new proposal? (paragraphs 6.1 & 6.2) YES/NO
4. Does the group simply oppose the proposal? YES/NO
Write in proposed changes here (or on separate sheet):
5. Does the group have any comments (suggestions, explanations, statements, critique, insights):
– for the council in session?

– for the proposers or for any agency of the Church?
6. Is there any individual or minority comment which the group feels should be communicated, either in speaking to the revised proposal or in proposing amendments to the majority opinion:
– to the council in session?

– to the proposers or any agency of the Church?

APPENDIX B

SHORTCUTS FOR CHAIRPERSONS

SUMMARY NOTES FOR CHAIRPERSONS ON STARTING A MEETING

[Ref:4.6 overview of Chairperson's role]

1. Start with worship (worship + community building activities are expected to take about twenty per cent of the meeting time).
[Ref: 1.3, 1.4, 3.1, 5.2]
2. Chairperson ascertains that there is a quorum (not less than fifty per cent of membership or as set by the particular council).
[Ref: 5.1, 5.3]
3. Chairperson announces the nature of the session (general, information, deliberative, decision – or a combination).
[Ref: 3, 5.5]
4. If it is to be a decision session, chairperson announces the voting method to be used (cards, hands, voices, written ballot).
[Ref: 4.4, 5.5]
5. Chairperson proposes the style of decision-making procedures to be used (consensus or formal majority); this procedural proposal needs leave of the council (seventy-five per cent) for approval.
[Ref: 5.5, 5.16.1]
6. Chairperson calls for the business to be considered; if an issue is not circulated at least twenty-four hours ahead of the meeting, it needs leave of the Council (seventy-five per cent) to be considered.
[Ref: 5.5, 5.10]
7. Presenters of reports may speak for no more than five minutes, subsequent speakers no more than three minutes (unless extended by leave of Council [75%]).
[Ref: 5.13]
8. Chairperson calls for any questions for clarification.
[Ref: 5.12]
9. Chairperson asks if the Council is prepared to receive the report (not proposal is necessary – that the report be received is implicit in presenting the report).
[Ref: 5.12]

10. Chairperson then invites discussion on matters within the report. Any policy matters need to be addressed as separate proposals for the Council's consideration and decision.
[Ref: 3.3, 5.12]
11. Variations to any proposal may arise during discussion. Chairperson may often need to summarise where the discussion is heading, and/or encourage agreement in small steps before the final decision is reached. Use the questions to help discern when consensus is reached.
[Ref: 4.1, 4.6, 6.5-6.10]
12. Treat everyone's contribution as valuable, and be expectant that the Spirit is guiding the Church. Don't be afraid to encourage brief buzz groups when it seems things are getting bogged down, or to pause for prayer from time to time, or even to adjourn the discussion to a later session for more thought/prayer/work/discussion to be done.
[Ref: chapter 1, chapter 2, 3.4, 4.1, 4.6, chapter 6]

CRIB SHEET FOR CHAIRPERSONS

Proposal	Interrupt speaker	Mover	Seconder	Chair able to propose
POINT OF ORDER (5.15):	Yes	<i>After Chair calls, states point</i>	No	No
<i>If ruling challenges</i>	No	<i>Not more than 3 mins</i>	No	<i>Chair replies</i>

POINT OF ORDER MAY INCLUDE:

Out of order (5.15.1)	Yes	States point	No	No
Private sitting (5.15.2)	Yes	Seeks to bring procedural proposal	No	No
Adjournment (5.15.3)	Yes	Seeks to bring procedural proposal	No	No
Personal Explanation (5.15.4)	Yes	If current speaker misrepresents	No	No
Objection (5.15.5)	Yes	To offensive statements	No	No

PROCEDURAL PROPOSALS MAY INCLUDE:

Use of procedures (5.16.1)	No		Yes	Yes
The order of the day (5.16.2)	No		Yes	No
Adjournment of discussion session or meeting (5.16.3)	Yes	Not spoken to current issue	Yes	No
Private sitting (5.16.4)	Yes		Yes	No
Cease sitting in private (5.16.4)	No		Yes	No
Referral – to another council or other body (5.16.5)	No		Yes	No
Determining the need for a decision now (5.16.6, 6.10)	No	Chair only	No	Yes

FORMAL MAJORITY PROCEDURAL PROPOSALS:

That motion (or amendment) be withdrawn (7.6)	No	Mover of original motion or amendment	Yes	No
That motion (+/or amendment) be not put: = 'The previous question' (7.7)	No		Yes	No
That the vote be now taken (7.10)	No	Not spoken to current issue	Yes	Yes

RECONSIDERATION (5.17):

That the issue be re-considered	No	Supported issue. Not more than 5 mins.	Yes	No
That the decision in question be rescinded +/- replaced	No		Yes	No

Discussion allowed	Simple majority > 50%	Leave of council > 75%	Consequences
No			<i>Chair may: *rule immediately; or *seek selected views, then rule; or *put to council for discussion and vote</i>
No	Yes	No	

No	Yes	No	
No	Yes	No	If sustained: leads to procedural proposal, which needs a seconder
No	Yes	No	If sustained: leads to procedural proposal, which needs a seconder
No	Yes	No	
No	Yes	No	

Yes	No	Yes	
No	Yes	No	May be combined with procedural proposal for adjournment.
No	Yes	No	May be brought again in same debate. If approved: interrupted speaker has call when resumed; or mover has call if there was no interruption.
No	Yes	No	May be brought again in the same discussion. If approved, remains in force till procedural proposal to cease sitting in private.
No	Yes	No	
Yes	Yes	No	
Yes	No	Yes	If approved: issue is decided by formal majority; if not approved: move to other options (6.12)

No	No	Yes	May be moved again in same debate.
Yes	Yes	No	Move to next business, no minuted record of issue or procedural proposal.
No	No	Yes	

Yes	No	Yes	Not relevant if this is subsequent meeting to when resolution approved
Yes			Procedures to be used as agreed by council

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