**BYLAWS AMENDMENTS FOR ELECTRONIC MEETINGS**

***Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised***, **11th Edition, pages 97-99**

**Electronic Meetings**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most congregations are holding electronic meetings of the session, committees, and even the congregation. It is important for congregations to have a section in their bylaws defining electronic meetings as an authorized meeting, along with rules and procedures for holding such meetings.

Electronic meetings are a situation where G-3.0105 applies: “Meetings shall be conducted in accordance with the most recent edition of *Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised*, except when it is in contradiction to this Constitution.”  The critical thing is to use a process that allows for what *Robert’s* (RONR) calls “simultaneous aural communication,” where everyone participating can at least hear what is being said and speak when necessary. Options today include telephone conferences or some form of internet conferencing platform such as Zoom or Go-to-Meeting,

The following information is from *Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised* (11th Edition), pages 97-99.

**EXTENSION OF PARLIAMENTARY LAW TO ELECTRONIC MEETINGS.** Except as authorized in the bylaws, the business of an organization or board can be validly transacted only at a regular or properly called meeting—that is, as defined on pages 81–82, a single official gathering in one room or area—of the assembly of its members at which a quorum is present.

Among some organizations, there is an increasing preference, especially in the case of a relatively small board or other assembly, to transact business at electronic meetings—that is, at meetings at which, rather than all participating members being physically present in one room or area as in traditional (or "face-to-face") meetings, some or all of them communicate with the others through electronic means such as the Internet or by telephone. A group that holds such alternative meetings does not lose its character as a deliberative assembly (see pp. 1–2) so long as the meetings provide, at a minimum, conditions of opportunity for simultaneous aural communication among all participating members equivalent to those of meetings held in one room or area. Under such conditions, an electronic meeting that is properly authorized in the bylaws is treated as though it were a meeting at which all the members who are participating are actually present.

If electronic meetings are to be authorized, it is advisable to adopt additional rules pertaining to their conduct (see Additional Rules for the Conduct of Electronic Meetings, below).

**TYPES OF ELECTRONIC MEETINGS.** Various provisions for electronic meetings are possible, so that more than the minimum standard of an audioconference may be required. Thus, if the bylaws provide for meeting by videoconference (but not merely by "teleconference" or "audioconference"), the meeting must be conducted by a technology that allows all participating members to see each other, as well as to hear each other, at the same time. Provision may also be made for the use of additional collaborative technology to aid in the conduct of a meeting.

It is important to understand that, regardless of the technology used, the opportunity for simultaneous aural communication is essential to the deliberative character of the meeting. Therefore, a group that attempts to conduct the deliberative process in writing (such as by postal mail, e-mail, "chat rooms," or fax)—which is not recommended—does not constitute a deliberative assembly. Any such effort may achieve a consultative character, but it is foreign to the deliberative process as understood under parliamentary law.

**ELECTRONIC MEETINGS IN COMMITTEES.** As in the case of a board or any assembly, committees that are expressly established by the bylaws can hold a valid electronic meeting only if authorized in the bylaws to do so. A committee that is not expressly established by the bylaws, however, may instead be authorized by a standing rule of the parent body or organization, or by the motion establishing the particular committee, to hold electronic meetings.

**ADDITIONAL RULES FOR THE CONDUCT OF ELECTRONIC MEETINGS.** If an organization authorizes its assembly, boards, or committees to hold electronic meetings, such a provision should indicate whether members who are not present in person have the right to participate by electronic means, or whether the body may choose to allow or disallow such participation; and, conversely, whether there is required to be a central location for members who wish to attend meetings in person. The notice of an electronic meeting must include an adequate description of how to participate in it (for example, the telephone number to call for a teleconference must be provided). Various additional rules (in the bylaws, special rules of order, standing rules, or instructions to a committee, as appropriate) may also be necessary or advisable regarding the conduct of electronic meetings, such as rules relating to:

* the type of equipment or computer software required for participation in meetings, whether the organization must provide such equipment or software, and contingencies for technical difficulties or malfunctions;
* methods for determining the presence of a quorum;
* the conditions under which a member may raise a point of order doubting the presence of a quorum, and the conditions under which the continued presence of a quorum is presumed if no such point of order is raised;
* methods for seeking recognition and obtaining the floor;
* means by which motions may be submitted in writing during a meeting; and
* methods for taking and verifying votes.

In addition, depending on the character of the organization, it may be advisable to adopt provisions for ensuring that nonmembers cannot participate in meetings (unless properly invited to do so), especially during any meeting or portion of a meeting held in executive session.

**EXAMPLE OF BYLAWS**

As an example, Central Florida Presbytery has the following section on meetings in its bylaws:

**B-4.00 -- ARTICLE IV. MEETINGS**

**B-4.01 -- Stated Meetings**

Meetings of Presbytery shall be held at least quarterly, ordinarily in March, June, September and December. The Council shall set the time, place and dates of meetings.

1. The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper shall be observed once each year and at such other times as the Presbytery orders.
2. All Presbytery meetings shall include a time for worship.

**B-4.02 -- Special Meetings**

A special meeting (G-3.0304) may be called at the request, or with the concurrence, of two teaching elders and two ruling elders, the latter being of different churches. The call shall be issued by the moderator, or if the moderator be unable to act, the stated clerk shall, under the same conditions, issue the call. The synod may direct the presbytery to convene a special meeting for the transaction of designated business. Notice of a special meeting shall be sent not less than ten days in advance to each member of presbytery and to the session of every church. The notice shall set out the purpose of the meeting, and no other business than that listed in the notice shall be transacted.

**B-4.03 -- Electronic Meetings**

An electronic meeting may be held and business conducted, so long as the meeting provides conditions of opportunity for simultaneous aural communication among all participating members equivalent to those of meetings held in one room or area. (See RONR, pp. 97-99)

* Technology used for an electronic meeting may include a telephone conference call, Skype or other internet teleconference means (such as Go-to-Meeting.com).
* The notice for the electronic meeting shall include an adequate description of how to participate in it.
* Provision shall be made for a common meeting location for those who prefer to attend in person.
* All existing rules for determining a quorum, participating in debate, and voting shall apply to electronic meetings. Taking votes by email is not a proper extension of this bylaw.
* These rules shall also apply to meetings of committees and entities of the Presbytery.