

## **Robert's Rules of Order in Parish Ministry**

For many, attending a parish meeting is akin to attending a Senate or House of Representatives session, with motions, quorums and votes determining the outcome of meetings. And for many a parish, little has been accomplished in meeting after meeting because there were not quorums present in order to vote on motions. So, “nothing got done.” In addition, many a person called by God to leadership in a parish has not answered the call because they are unfamiliar with or intimidated by Robert's Rules of Order. And finally, it is not at all unusual to see those Rules so loosely applied as to be shameful, but pulled out to put a stop to something someone who knows the Rules wants stopped. In other words, it becomes a roadblock rather than a meeting protocol.

Do Robert's Rules of Order, and all the many permutations of them found in Council Constitutions and By-Laws actually belong in an organization whose head is the Risen Christ and whose Spirit is defined as blowing where it will? Does God's Holy Spirit really require more than 2 or 3 gathered in Christ's name? Has God often called unlikely and under-equipped people to be His servants, those with untrained tongues and no familiarity with formal measures of democracy? In a hierarchical system, where Councils, Committees and staffs hold only consultant positions, are Robert's Rules of Order the way to arrive at recommendations?

What if God's Spirit is blowing where it will, and calling forth ideas and mighty deeds in our midst, and they are being stifled by Robert's Rules of Order? What if discerning spirits, prayerfulness, the study of the Scriptures and the understanding of the Church's vision are the ways to hear God speaking in our midst today? What if applying the forms of democracy to a system that is not democratic shortchanges both democracy and the Church?

What kind of discussion, dialogue, debate and decision-making belongs in a parish? How is God's will discerned? How is the Holy Spirit's movement identified, and the gentle whisper of God heard? These are the questions of parish leaders who wish to work as Jesus worked, to lead as Jesus did, and to continue to follow the Spirit's wishes today.