

GROUNDRULES FOR CHURCH MEETINGS

The following guidelines apply to all meetings in this parish. They also apply to outside groups using church facilities.

1. BE RESPECTFUL

Protect the dignity of every person. Jesus said, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Honor the image of Christ in the other person by treating them as you would treat Jesus Christ.

2. BE FACTUAL

Seek the truth in love. Avoid stating things as fact when you don't have accurate information to back up what you've said. Try not to take wild guesses that lead to statements that are not true.

3. BE ACCOUNTABLE

Take responsibility for what you say and how you say it. If you do say something that is disrespectful or not factual, be willing to apologize and try again to get it right. If someone challenges what you have said or how you have said it, be willing to listen and respond. This is sometimes referred to as "taking Christian counsel" or "watching over one another in love."

4. NO "OTHER PEOPLE ARE SAYING" COMMENTS

Speak for yourself. Each person's viewpoint has merit. U.S. Grant once said, "There are always more of 'them' until they are counted."

5. LET EVERYONE'S VOICE BE HEARD

Only one person speaks at a time. Everybody else listens. After the person speaking is finished, others might ask clarifying questions or restate the point being made to indicate that it has been heard. Invite those who have said nothing to speak. Stephen Covey said, "Seek first to understand, then to be understood." Listening contributes to understanding one another.

6. DEAL WITH PERSONAL CONFLICTS ONE-ON-ONE IN PRIVATE

Avoid embarrassing another person or putting someone else on the spot in a group. The ministry of reconciliation has been entrusted to the Church. If mediation is required in a relationship, the parties involved should seek the assistance of a priest.

5. SEEK A WIN-WIN SOLUTION TO EVERY MATTER

Everybody wants to win. Avoid forcing another member of the Body of Christ to be a loser so you can be a winner.

Guidelines for Dealing With Criticism

This policy-level statement on dealing with criticism is provided as a model or pattern, which can be adopted, for use in a congregation. This type of instrument can be especially helpful in assisting a congregation to deal with critical comments in an appropriate and healthful manner.

As a congregational leader please attempt to follow this policy and practice:

1. All members are affirmed in their right to express their opinions about the mission, programs, and other dynamics of congregational life, including the personnel.
2. All congregational leaders need to remember that an opinion expressed by a particular participant in the life of the congregation is just that – an opinion.
3. The congregation operates with a "direct democracy" form of governance, which allows the sharing of opinions directly with the called, employed, elected, and appointed leaders in the congregational system. Members are invited and encouraged to attend meetings within the congregation's system. If they want to speak, they must be added to the agenda in advance.
4. When there is an occasion for a member of the congregation to share an opinion, concern, question, or complaint with someone on the leadership team (clergy, other staff, elected or appointed members) the following response should be used, *"What would you like me to do with what you have just shared with me?"*

If the response is, *"Oh...nothing. I just thought you ought to know that I (we, they) are upset about what is (not) going on..."* Then the leader receiving the information should very intentionally indicate that nothing is going to be done with the comment; and, that the comment will be forgotten. (This is a very important response to the person unwilling to proceed in one of the following ways. It prohibits the development of the impression that just sharing an opinion will produce a response, which is acceptable to the petitioner.)

If the response is that an outcome is expected by sharing the comment...then the leader will instruct the person about how to communicate within the system.

- 5a. Matters concerning functional issues (programs, facilities, or organizational structure)
If the issue or concern is related to the "system," the person sharing the matter should be invited and encouraged to bring the information or opinion to the next meeting of the congregational group directly responsible.
- 5b. Matters related to relational (interpersonal) issues (clergy, other staff, or member-to-member)
If the issue or concern is related to personal or other interpersonal matters the person sharing the matter should be invited and encouraged to confer with the appropriate committee. (Staff support, Personnel, etc.) Send people who have something to say about another person to speak directly to that person, thus avoiding a triangulation. If the petitioner is not satisfied with the discussion with the person concerned, they may both come back to discuss it with the leader involved. Also, there are categories of serious allegations that are covered by the law or by the canons of the church (e.g., sexual harassment, abuse, misappropriation of funds, etc.). In those cases, the process is spelled out and should be followed precisely.
6. If the person sharing the concern does not desire to make an appearance or communicate with the appropriate group within the congregational system, the leader should ask for permission to use their name in reporting the issue. If permission is not granted, then the leader will say, *"I am sorry but I will not be able to report or share your concern since we do not deal with anonymous comments."* If permission to use the petitioner's name is granted, the leader will share information with the appropriate group or person in the system with the person's name included.
7. The minutes of the board, committee, or group receiving a member concern will make mention of the topic in the minutes of the meeting(s) at which it is discussed. Additionally, if an official action is deemed appropriate or necessary the person who has shared the concern should be informed of the decision made with regard to the issue.