

Report of the Common Consent Advisory Team

To the First Presidency and the World Conference:

Preface

The First Presidency is grateful for the extensive, innovative work of the Common Consent Advisory Team. The 2013 World Conference will be an opportunity for delegates to discuss this report, ask questions, and provide feedback to the team. During the next three years, the team will continue to conduct pilots, experiment with various approaches, and refine its recommendations for consideration by the 2016 World Conference. Some basic “tools” of the recommended process will be used at the 2013 World Conference to familiarize delegates with their use.

Introduction

As a prophetic people you are called, under the direction of the spiritual authorities and with the common consent of the people, to discern the divine will for your own time and in the places where you serve. You live in a world with new challenges and that world will require new forms of ministry.

—Doctrine and Covenants 162:2c

In August 2010 the First Presidency appointed a Common Consent Advisory Team and charged it with recommending additional methods of deliberation and discernment to be used by the World Conference in seeking common consent on matters of importance to the church.

After extensive exploration of foundational principles and possibilities the team developed a recommended system for deliberation and decision making that it believes offers the church the opportunity to grow as a prophetic people. The common consent process outlined below is based on using a more comprehensive system of sharing among delegates than has been the case under the parliamentary debate system used for many years. Careful attention has been given to inserting spiritual practices and healthy deliberation approaches.

After this report was submitted to the First Presidency, the Presidency authorized field trials of the common consent system in several USA mission centers, Africa, and Central America. Following these trials, adjustments were made, and the recommended system was presented to the International Leadership Council (ILC) for review and discussion in September 2012. The ILC used the system in a simulation and provided helpful feedback regarding its use and needed improvements.

The team commends this report to the First Presidency and the World Conference for its consideration and stands ready to be of further assistance as you may find helpful.

Historical Overview: Living Common Consent

The history of Conference decision making based on commonly accepted parliamentary procedure in the church goes back to the beginning of the Reorganization. *Robert's Rules of Order* was first published in 1876 and was not available to those who formed the Reorganized Church between 1853 and 1860. However, common parliamentary law was well known in the USA in that period.

American colonial governance was based on the rules and procedures of the British House of Commons and often was modified to meet the needs of various colonial legislatures

and local governments. Thomas Jefferson, while serving as vice president of the USA from 1797–1801, discovered that members of the US Senate, coming from various former colonies, did not possess a common view of appropriate parliamentary procedure. So he began a three-year project to codify the rules of the Senate to assist that deliberative assembly in its legislative work.

Jefferson's efforts culminated in 1801 in the publication of *Jefferson's Manual* by the clerk of the US Senate. The Senate and House of Representatives embraced this manual. For many years it formed the basis of recognized parliamentary processes in both houses.

Gradually, however, with the growth of the House of Representatives, it became necessary for the House to seek to control its debate processes and committee structure more stringently than the Senate, which remained relatively small. By the 1830s the House had evolved different rules less reliant on Jefferson's work. The main differences between these two bodies evolved in a way in which debate was strictly limited in the House, but practically unlimited in the Senate.

The key principle illustrated by this evolution is that a smaller group has the luxury of relatively unlimited and wide-ranging debate. The larger a deliberative body becomes, the more necessary it is to adhere strictly to limiting speeches and putting into place various parliamentary rules that allow the assembly to move through a large amount of business in a relatively expeditious and often shorter period of time.

As the USA began to spread west of the Appalachian Mountains and more communities sprung up far from the Eastern Seaboard, it grew increasingly difficult to maintain parliamentary consensus at the local, territorial, or state levels. Immigrants to the western areas came from all over the original 13 colonies and to a greater or lesser extent carried the decision-making rules and traditions of their former homes.

Luther Cushing's Manual

By the mid-1830s, it had become clear to Luther Cushing, clerk of the Massachusetts State Supreme Court and later clerk of the Massachusetts General Assembly, that it was necessary for the nation to have a book of parliamentary rules. Based on the common rules of the House of Representatives, it allowed great flexibility to local non-governmental organizations to craft rules based on solid parliamentary principles. But it still was flexible enough to meet their unique needs.

Cushing's *Rules of Proceeding and Debate in Deliberative Assemblies*, published in 1844 and was known generally as *Cushing's Manual*. It became the most generally accepted parliamentary authority by the middle of the 19th century. This was the situation in the Midwestern USA when the Reorganization was launched in 1853.

Early Reorganization

By the time Joseph Smith III assumed the presidency of the Reorganization, a tradition of making decisions with some form of parliamentary procedure in business meetings had been well established. A careful reading of the early minutes of the General Conference of the Reorganization shows the use of motions, seconds, amendments, motions to refer, etc. were common. As with many administrative procedures introduced or clarified during the long presidency of Joseph Smith III, the proper conduct of business meetings at all levels of the church became an increasing concern to him. At the annual Conference of April 1875 the

Conference approved setting up a committee to prepare a “book on Business and Parliamentary Usages and Rules.”

Rules of Order

Two authors, President Joseph Smith III and Apostle Thomas W. Smith, thereafter set about to codify rules of procedure for the church. They took as the basis for their work the then-current 1872 edition of *Cushing’s Manual*. In the introduction to the first book of *Rules of Order* for the church, published in 1876, the authors indicated *Cushing’s Manual* was the basis for their rules and precedents.

The question naturally then arises as to why the authors of the church’s first book of *Rules of Order* used Cushing as the basis for their work rather than *Robert’s Rules of Order*. Very simply, the first edition of *Robert’s Rules* was not published until 1876 and was unknown to the authors of the RLDS manual of procedure at the time of their work.

Gradually, however, over the next century, *Robert’s Rules* replaced *Cushing’s Manual* as the most popular and well-known parliamentary manual in the USA. *Robert’s* differs principally from *Cushing* in the detail it provides. Cushing’s philosophy was to provide basic principles of parliamentary process and then to suggest that each organization write for itself detailed rules of order. This is precisely what the committee that published the Reorganization’s 1876 *Rules of Order* did.

Robert, on the other hand, found that most organizations did not have people sufficiently skilled to develop such rules. By simply leaving to each organization the writing of its own rules of order, no consistency was being developed in the USA concerning parliamentary practice. Thus when individuals went from one place to another they continued to be unaware of prevailing parliamentary rules.

Joseph Smith III and Thomas W. Smith must have experienced this problem because in the preface of the 1876 *Rules of Order* they informed the church that “The apology offered for presenting this work to the Church is, the necessity for one of the kind.”

They went on to explain the expressed purpose of these rules of order was to unify the parliamentary practice of the church and to promote a common understanding of common consent so when the church gathered, members of the General Conference might effectively participate without confusion or conflict.

A General Conference committee of W.W. Blair, Mark H. Forscutt, and J.S. Patterson reviewed the rules of order and recommended to the General Conference of April 1876 that “said book has been...duly examined by us, and is now published and presented without recommendation that said book be adopted as a manual of practice and rules of order and debate to govern the legislative assemblies of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. We further think that credit is due to the compilers for the neat and compact manual they have furnished.” The General Conference unanimously adopted the committee’s recommendations.

Parliamentary Unity—Willingness to Adjust

This first book of *Rules of Order* for the church did promote parliamentary unity in business meetings. Even a casual review of the minutes of the General Conferences between 1875 and the death of Joseph Smith III in 1914 clearly shows the church was growing in its way of making decisions. Policies and procedures became regularized, and systems for promoting common consent became more standardized and familiar around the church.

During these years, however, there was openness to adjust the rules from time to time, as the republication of the *Rules of Order* in 1893 and again in 1904 clearly shows. In addition, these minutes show that some fundamental processes of the church were evolving. This was true even for considering and approving inspired documents submitted by the president of the church to the General Conference.

An excellent example of the church's willingness to adjust its decisional processes is seen in the way the church has given consideration to inspired documents from the president of the church. This process had morphed in many interesting ways over the last 150 years. At first such documents were read to the General Conference, and voting took place only by quorum (there being only priesthood delegates and ex officio members). These quorums did not separate to meet and deliberate on inspired documents. At first the voting was done in the assembly with members of each quorum voting only when their quorum was called (i.e. only seventies voting for the seventy and then elders for the elder, etc.)

By the late 1880s this process had changed. Inspired documents first were referred to the councils and quorums (there being neither an Order of Bishops nor an Order of Evangelists at that time). Following the separate deliberation of these bodies, the assembly then was informed of their advice. A single vote was taken on the whole inspired document with no paragraph-by-paragraph consideration being found in the Conference minutes.

From 1923 to the late 1940s the process expanded further to include voting paragraph by paragraph on the document prior to a single vote on the whole document. During the 1990s the separation of calls of general officers, the presentation of the documents in printed form, and their release before World Conference were significant evolutions in considering inspired counsel.

Rules of Order Become Bylaws

The *Rules of Order* also have evolved. In the 1920s significant changes were made to the *Rules of Order* as President Frederick M. Smith succeeded his father. Fred M. sought to bring unity to the processes of the church and introduced concepts of central management and control that Joseph Smith III had not attempted.

The "Department System," as it was called, had a far-reaching effect on congregations, districts, and General Conferences. Previously a branch was considered fully organized when it had a presiding elder (elected by the branch elders), a presiding priest (elected by the branch priests), a presiding teacher (elected by the branch teachers) and a presiding deacon (elected by the branch deacons). These four persons together formed the branch council. This was the congregational management structure envisioned in the 1876 *Rules of Order*.

The Department System called for the election of the branch president by the whole congregation and then election by the congregation of others such as a women's leader, youth leader, music leader, Sunday school director, etc.

By the 1950s this system was well established in the church, and the *Rules of Order* were revised to become more like rudimentary bylaws for the church rather than rules of order for deliberative assemblies.

In 1970, the World Conference passed World Church Resolution 1071, which called for *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* to serve as the basic rules of order for the church's business meetings.

Finally, recognizing the church's Rules of Order was outdated, in 2002 the World Conference adopted the *Bylaws of the Community of Christ* to replace these Rules of Order.

How We Got Here

In recent decades Community of Christ has moved toward increased time for discussion and spiritual discernment in decision making about important issues. In reviewing our history, it is clear the church has tried to use the best systems available for decision making, often inventing tools to make the process accessible and inclusive of as many members as possible.

Community of Christ is attentive to the varied backgrounds of members in looking for new ways to make decisions in an international body with diverse concerns and cultures. From the beginning of the church, leaders have adjusted procedures to better fit the church's needs and composition. That trend continues now.

- **Central Role of Common Consent.** The meaning of common consent has been explored to some depth over the years. This idea continues to be fundamental as we look at possible systems for the future. We must carefully evaluate any potential system to make sure we preserve this value.
- **Theocratic Democracy.** The governing authorities of the church have an understanding of the will of God. Church members have an understanding of the will of God. These two forces should be in healthy relationship, neither overruling the other. One force does not “win” while another “loses.” Instead, the church makes the best decisions it can at a given time. Then the church continues to re-evaluate its direction in the face of experience as it responds to the ongoing leadings of the Holy Spirit. We must preserve this value.
- **Enduring Principles.** The essence of the church's identity, mission, and message should inform any potential system. We must continue to align our procedures and practices with our best understanding of our Enduring Principles.

Areas of Concern

We must consider the following key concerns in developing any system to seek common consent:

- **Community.** A stronger sense of sacred community at every level of church life will increase participation in collaborative decision making.
- **Agenda Development.** World Conference has too much business and too little time to effectively engage all issues. This is especially true for an international body that has not had enough preparation for effective participation.
 - *Routine Business.* How can we handle this with speed and effectiveness?
 - *Number of Items.* How can we focus the Conference's consideration on what “matters most” without decreasing participation?
 - *Time between Proposal and Consideration.* How can we ensure the church has the most time possible to prepare for consideration and consider the implications of proposals before final decisions?

The Common Consent Team also reviewed recent developments in church life and agreed the following two trends were significant for our future efforts to seek common consent:

- **Focus on Key Issues.** The 2010 World Conference focused mainly on two issues, allowing more in-depth engagement than previously possible. How can we regularly

provide more in-depth engagement instead of relying on a new section of *Doctrine and Covenants* to shift the tone and agenda each World Conference?

- **Preparation Matters.** There has been a trend to release important proposals to the church earlier than in the past. Engagement ahead of time has allowed delegates and mission centers to use prayer, study, and discernment activities to prepare for World Conference. This affects the tone and functionality of the Conference.

Lessons Learned and Direction Emerging

The Common Consent Team has identified four key factors that will have an impact on the future of church decision making:

1. World Conference is a massive decision-making body with a large agenda and limited time.
2. Effective discernment and true common consent take time. We should not rush either process.
3. The church seems ready to find ways to focus more energy at World Conference on issues that matter most.
4. Preparing items to be considered at World Conference must be detailed and informative. The Conference cannot seek God's guidance for the church and find ways to come together in common consent and unity of the Spirit without considerable advanced preparation.

Guiding Principles for Common Consent Team

The Common Consent Team began by developing 10 guiding principles for common consent:

1. **Be Faithful to Enduring Principles.** Our Enduring Principles call us to reflect and reconsider our decision-making practices when we assemble in Conference. We respect the Worth of All Persons and remember that All Are Called according to the gifts of God to them. Our ability to make Responsible Choices is a gift from God, a gift we take seriously. We pursue God's vision of peace on Earth. Together we listen for God's will through Continuing Revelation. God blesses us when we are together, giving us Unity in Diversity.
2. **Honor our Legacy of Common Consent.** We value our tradition of seeking common consent on important issues. Our legacy of "theocratic democracy" affirms that God speaks to and through church leadership and through the people.
3. **Value Wisdom in the Conference.** We affirm there is wisdom in the Conference assembled. We value a reliable and clearly understood process that develops common consent. We want to use methods that trust the people, make their perspectives visible, and invite the Holy Spirit to be part of the process.
4. **Listen to the Prophetic Voice.** Christian tradition teaches us that a single person or a few people often hear the call of God before the majority does. Listening for God and understanding the voice of prophecy across different cultural perspectives will improve how we make decisions together.
5. **Invest Time and Effort.** Effective decision making takes time, reflection, scripture study, intentional listening, spiritual preparation, and openness. The time we take together in seeking God's will before we make decisions helps implementation and broader acceptance of the decision.
6. **Seek Broad Participation.** Many people reaching common consent on a few issues is preferable to a few people making many decisions.
7. **Struggle Together in Love.** A healthy church expects disagreement and deals with it openly. We want to understand one another even when we disagree. Common consent is rooted in love, respect, and the unity of the body of Christ. Even when we disagree we seek to follow our best understanding of God's will in our time. We also seek to remain united as God's people. As we struggle together toward common consent we assume everyone in the discussion wants what is best for the church.
8. **Hear and Respect Minority Voices.** Everyone holds a minority opinion sometimes. As a group we commit to hear, respect, and learn from minority voices. We also commit to accepting the decisions of the Conference when we agree by common consent. Requiring unanimity in decision making probably would mean not being able to make important changes. When we seek common consent we respect all points of view. Minority voices can be a great blessing. They will be heard and respected, though the church as a whole will not be bound by their view.
9. **Focus on What Matters Most.** The mission of Jesus Christ is what matters most. Decision making that leads to common consent should bring about trust and unity, allowing all to take part.

10. **Be Realistic.** Work before Conference should be efficient and practical, mindful of other church priorities when using church resources like work assignments, time, and money. Some decisions within the assembly are important. Other decisions are best made through majority voting (such as sustaining priesthood calls, sustaining officers, electing boards). All tools used to help develop common consent should be accurate and reliable. People of all ages, languages, and cultures should be able to use them easily without confusion.

Four-step Common Consent Process Overview

From these guiding principles, the team developed tools and procedures it recommends for future World Conferences when seeking common consent on matters of significance. These tools are designed to allow in-depth discussion of the true issues underlying proposals.

The objectives for this method are to:

- capture a more accurate picture of the nuances involved in individual decision making, because few people are entirely for or entirely against most proposals;
- deliberately expose all delegates to the full diversity of perspectives, rather than only those delegates able to gain the floor;
- provide immediate and accurate information to the Conference on the extent of support for a proposal, and provide that information before making a final decision;
- use surveys to provide delegates with information on *why* a proposal has support or not and what concerns are limiting support;
- structure decision-making procedures so it is socially acceptable for delegates to adjust their opinions in light of group deliberation; and
- shift the voting process from a personal expression of opinion to a collective act of decision making.

Several major differences from the current decision-making model should be highlighted:

- Mission Centers may submit proposals, rather than pass resolutions as under the current system, for consideration by World Conference. The format will be simpler, yet provide more information. Proposals will be more fluid and subject to revision.
- World Conference delegates will prioritize the proposals at the outset of the Conference, assuring that topics of greater significance will receive more time for deliberation. Proposals with the lowest prioritization might not be considered by the World Conference.
- Proposals will be considered using one of two methods. Depending on how the Conference views the importance of a proposal, either a full discernment process or a shortened form of the discernment process may be used. The full discernment process will be used for the key topic(s) of primary importance.
- An attitude of discernment will be encouraged for all World Conference decisions. Suitable spiritual practices during proposal creation and during deliberation and voting will be encouraged. Spiritual practices and discernment will be more deliberate and extensive for topics of primary importance to the church during Conferences. This also can be done between World Conferences. Each proposal will be assigned to a Proposal Refinement Committee. Each committee will host an open forum(s), prepare surveys of

concerns, and suggest revisions to the proposal during World Conference in response to the expressed views of the assembly.

- Deliberation and decision making will be distinctly separate phases as each proposal is considered. A collection of tools (such as listening and surveying) is suggested to help the delegates hear and weigh perspectives on a proposal. These tools are instructive, but are not designed to reach binding decisions.
- When the delegates agree to proceed to decision making, voting will be on a five-point scale measuring the support delegates have for the proposal. The committee recommends the World Conference establish a rule that common consent is said to be achieved when at least 80 percent of the delegates who vote express their support by choosing levels 3, 4, or 5.

Several parts about this process are important to emphasize. What these bodies pass are *proposals* rather than formal resolutions. Proposals contain a statement of context, the proposal itself, any supporting information, and the name of a proposal steward from the originating body who will help refine the proposal as it goes through deliberation. Proposals are considered flexible to the point of final approval to avoid the necessity of using formal amendments to propose changes.

Discernment and spiritual practices will be expected components of proposal development by mission centers and World Church councils, quorums, and orders. The First Presidency will provide discernment guidelines and spiritual-formation resources.

The World Conference expresses its preference for those items it considers most important and timely for deliberation at present. This preference is given near the beginning of the Conference and is accomplished by delegates prioritizing the proposals.

The prioritization by World Conference delegates will be advisory for the First Presidency, which ultimately will be responsible for setting the agenda. Transparency in this process is especially important because the Conference probably will not consider some proposals.

The Conference will express its preference for priority of proposals through two methods: ranking for importance and timeliness by assigning a numerical weight to all of the proposals and responding to questions of clarification from the Presidency as follows:

1. All delegates will be asked to assign a numeric value to each proposal, signifying its importance and timeliness for consideration at the present World Conference. Each delegate will rate each proposal. The results then will be available for all delegates to see. This process is demonstrated below.

Question: How important do you feel this proposal is for the Conference to consider this week?

Not Important or Timely	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very Important and Timely
--	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	--

2. The First Presidency then will have the opportunity to ask questions of clarification to delegates based on responses. Because each Conference assembly is unique, it is unlikely a straight weighting of the proposals will give clear guidance to the First Presidency on

the will of the assembly. This opportunity to ask clarifying questions will allow the chair to learn more, such as:

- How important do delegates believe one topic (rather than proposal) is compared to another?
- When there are multiple proposals on one topic, on which would delegates like to begin deliberation?
- Which proposal do delegates consider more important or timely when the averages are tied?

These questions can be asked through an electronic-response system, allowing the chair and delegates to see the aggregated responses immediately. These questions can be asked immediately after the ranking of proposals, but it is likely the First Presidency will need to take the ranking results under advisement before forming the questions.

It will be important to give the Presidency time to reflect on the rankings and to identify additional questions. Because the first item under consideration by the Conference probably will be the major proposal receiving a full discernment process, it may be possible for the Conference to begin the first day without having the remainder of the agenda set for the week. In other words, the proposals could be ranked in the first legislative session, with the First Presidency taking the results under advisement. The second day could begin with questions of clarification and then proceed into discernment on the main topic. The full agenda for the remainder of the week then could be published on the morning of day three.

The Presidency still will have responsibility for developing the final agenda, but it will consider the expressed preferences of delegates when establishing the order for considering proposals. Because of time constraints, proposals receiving a low priority from the delegates may not be able to be considered.

This model envisions two levels of deliberation. Because of the time involved in a full discernment process, generally only one issue at each Conference will pass through a full process. However, there might be a Conference at which two key issues would be considered, using a full discernment process.

All other proposals will receive an abbreviated consideration. Passage still will require at least 80 percent of the voting delegates to express their support by choosing point 3, 4, or 5.

The consideration of each proposal will be assisted by an assigned **Proposal Refinement Committee**. Each of these committees will consist of trained facilitators, editors, knowledgeable church leaders, and the proposal steward from the proposing mission center or other quorum, council, or order. The Proposal Refinement Committees will gather feedback from surveying and discussion to propose any needed revisions to the proposal(s) that may be helpful and responsive to the will of the assembly and thereby help reach common consent.

At the conclusion of World Conference, delegates will have an opportunity to express their preference for the topic they believe should be the focus of discernment during the inter-Conference period. During the inter-Conference period, resources will be released to help with education, preparation, and discernment on the selected topic. In the future, mission centers each could propose a topic they believe should be the subject of such a period of church-wide discernment.

Seven Tools for Common Consent

Seven tools are recommended to help the World Conference consider matters of importance. Delegates are expected to come having prayed individually and listened carefully to become familiar with the perspectives of those in their home congregations and mission centers.

In preparation for World Conference, mission centers will be encouraged to engage in discernment activities to prepare delegates for seeking God's will for the church through the Conference deliberations. Once at World Conference, delegates are encouraged to be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit as they listen to one another and seek together God's will for the church.

Each proposal will be assigned to a **Proposal Refinement Committee**. The committee will help with considering that proposal during Conference. Rather than being a representative committee, it will be a committee of skilled people whose task is to help the World Conference consider a proposal. If necessary, the committee will revise a proposal to express the will of the assembly.

A Conference **Discernment Process Team** will be charged with observing Conference proceedings to discern points when a specific spiritual practice or process observation may be helpful. The chair also will have the privilege of discerning needed spiritual reflection or processing observations.

The tools available to the Conference for this type of deliberative process fall into two categories: **Tools for Deliberation** and **Tools for Decision Making**.

The tools for deliberation are used to foster the full exchange of perspectives. They help to give an accurate picture to the assembly of how the delegates feel about the issue raised in the proposal. These tools are not used to make any decisions. All formal decisions on proposals are made only with the tools for decision making. Following are brief descriptions of the recommended tools:

Tools for Deliberation

1. Focused Listening

Central Question: *What perspectives does the assembly hold on this issue?*

While delegates may be used to hearing others speak for and against a proposal, such a system does not ensure they are hearing the full range of perspectives. Focused listening is proposed as a tool to allow delegates to hear and consider various perspectives, rather than just two sides. This tool includes a deliberate selection by the Proposal Refinement Committee of people to speak to each perspective the committee has identified about the proposal.

2. Survey of Perspectives

Central Question: *How widely are these perspectives held within the assembly?*

A **survey of perspectives** follows the period of focused listening. This allows the delegates and the chair to see the extent to which various perspectives are represented within the assembly. Delegates will be asked to register all the perspectives that match their own. When using this tool, delegates are free to enter more than one response. If they hold a perspective not already expressed, delegates may select "other." The term "survey" is used to make clear to the delegates that this is not a vote.

3. Survey of Support

Central Question: *What is the current level of support for this proposal?*

A **survey of support** is used to allow delegates to express the extent of their support for the proposal. These surveys may be used periodically throughout the deliberation to help delegates gauge their progress toward common consent. These surveys use a five-point scale and will be registered anonymously through an electronic-response system. Delegates who are undecided when a **survey of support** is conducted may indicate by choosing “U.”

1	2	3	4	5
<p>No Support <i>I have no support for this proposal. I have major concerns that cause me to believe this is not where God is calling the church to go at this time.</i></p>	<p>Little Support <i>I have little support for this proposal. I have some concerns that cause me to believe this may not be where God is calling the church to go at this time.</i></p>	<p>Moderate Support <i>I have moderate support for this proposal. I may have some concerns, but I believe this probably is where God is calling the church to go at this time.</i></p>	<p>Significant Support <i>I have significant support for this proposal. I may have a few concerns, but I believe this is where God is calling the church to go at this time.</i></p>	<p>Full Support <i>I have full support for this proposal. I have little or no concern and believe strongly this is where God is calling the church to go at this time.</i></p>

4. Combined Survey (Support and Perspectives)

Central Question: *What are the primary reasons behind delegates’ degree of support?*

A combined survey overlays the degree of support each delegate has for the proposal with the primary perspective each has expressed. It collects information on the intensity of preference and the reason for that preference. It goes beyond surveying to ask the question, “Why?” A collective consideration of the primary perspectives behind their votes can help delegates see where their perspectives fit in the larger whole. It also can give church leaders and delegates a sense of where changes to a proposal might be helpful.

Collecting data for a combined survey begins with summarizing the perspectives shared during the listening phase. Trained facilitators, skilled “listeners,” and scribes are charged with summarizing the perspectives into a manageable survey. There also will be an option for “other.” If “other” surfaces as a top perspective, the assembly will know the full range of perspectives has not yet been expressed.

5. Survey of Issues

Central Question: *What issues, problems, or concerns are limiting your support for this proposal?*

This tool is used mainly to inform the Proposal Refinement Committee how a proposal might be adjusted to better reflect the issues of delegates. This tool is most useful once it is clear there is not yet common consent. It ensures that efforts to improve the proposal address the real issues of the delegates, without changing those items on which there is widespread support. The issues used in this survey are gathered from delegates by the Proposal Refinement Committees in open hearings.

Tools for Decision Making

6. Vote to Proceed

The “vote to proceed” lets delegates decide whether they are ready to proceed to a final vote on the proposal under consideration. To do this, there must be a clean separation between deliberation and decision making. For that reason, it is proposed the transition from deliberation to decision making should require an affirmative vote of at least 80 percent of the delegates voting. If 80 percent or more signal they are ready for a final vote, the assembly moves forward to the “vote of common consent.”

7. Vote of Common Consent

A central challenge to implementing common consent is the question of what makes up common consent. Using a voting mechanism that records intensity of preference creates new possibilities for defining this term.

When considering matters of primary importance to the church, it is proposed that common consent be measured by the following standard:

1	2	3	4	5
No Support <i>I have no support for this proposal. I have major concerns that cause me to believe this is not where God is calling the church to go at this time.</i>	Little Support <i>I have little support for this proposal. I have some concerns that cause me to believe this may not be where God is calling the church to go at this time.</i>	Moderate Support <i>I have moderate support for this proposal. I may have some concerns, but I believe this probably is where God is calling the church to go at this time.</i>	Significant Support <i>I have significant support for this proposal. I may have a few concerns, but I believe this is where God is calling the church to go at this time.</i>	Full Support <i>I have full support for this proposal. I have little or no concern and believe strongly this is where God is calling the church to go at this time.</i>

Common consent is achieved when at least 80 percent of the delegates voting express their support for the proposal under consideration by choosing level 3, 4, or 5.

Outline of World Conference Common Consent Process (Full Four-step Consideration)

Step 1: First Consideration by Delegates: *What perspectives are held by delegates on this proposal?*

1. **Field Perspectives Obtained.** Before consideration, the Proposal Refinement Committee identifies the primary perspectives on the issue underlying the proposal. These are distilled from discussions during field ministry and tested in field settings before World Conference.
2. **Proposal Consideration.** Called for by the chair.

3. **Different Perspectives Given.** Four to six speakers are asked to address the proposal. The speakers offer a diversity of perspectives (arranged in advance depending on the number of perspectives identified). During this time delegates are charged with focused listening, setting aside their own viewpoints to see the issue as others see it.
4. **Open Discussion.** Delegates are given the opportunity to clarify the perspectives they have heard and offer other perspectives not presented.
5. **Spiritual Practice.** After a time of focused listening, delegates receive opportunity to reflect and discern through suitable spiritual practices as they consider how the Holy Spirit is working within the body. Participation in **Discernment Communities** (spiritual-practice groups) will be expected of delegates. Trained facilitators will guide these groups, using specific spiritual practices and discernment principles.
6. **Instructions on Further Reflection.** Delegates also receive information and resources for engaging in further reflection and discussion as the Conference proceeds (for example journaling on directed questions; prayer and meditation; opportunities for small-group discussion; and guided discussions and spiritual practices in quorums, councils, orders, mass meetings, and caucuses). The consideration of the pending proposal then is suspended for consideration again later during the Conference.

Step 2: Second Consideration by Delegates: *How widely are these perspectives held? What is the degree of support, and what perspectives underlie that degree of support?*

1. **Proposal Called Up.** At a later time during the World Conference, the chair again calls for consideration of the proposal. Delegates are led in a time of reflection, using a spiritual practice to consider how the Holy Spirit is working within the body. The chair, with the advice of the Discernment Process Team, will determine a suitable spiritual practice and facilitator.
2. **Survey of Perspectives.** The chair then conducts a **survey of perspectives**, asking, “How widely are these various perspectives held by the Conference delegates?” This is done to see how widely the previously voiced perspectives are held within the assembly. Delegates may select more than one choice. If more than 20 percent of the delegates choose “other,” the chair may open the floor, inviting delegates to share added perspectives not already represented in the survey.
3. **Survey of Support.** The chair then conducts a survey, asking, “What is your degree of support for this proposal?”
4. **Survey:** The chair then takes another survey, asking, “Which one of these perspectives most closely matches your thinking on this proposal?”
5. **Display Results.** The results then are displayed, showing the top three perspectives identified by the level of support.
6. **Open Discussion.** Delegates receive the opportunity to openly discuss the survey results and to express their concerns or share their ideas for improving the proposal.
7. **Spiritual Practice.** Delegates receive opportunity to reflect and discern through suitable spiritual practices as they consider how the Holy Spirit is working within the body.
8. **Consideration Paused.** The consideration of the pending proposal then is suspended and will be considered again later during the Conference.
9. **Instructions for Further Reflection.** Delegates then receive instructions on how they could engage in further reflection and discussion on this topic (for example journaling on

directed questions; prayer; meditation; opportunities for small-group discussion; and discussions in quorums, councils, orders, mass meetings, and caucuses).

10. **Open Forums.** Sometime after the business meeting the Proposal Refinement Committee hosts an open forum(s) to hear from delegates what concerns are limiting their support. The committee then compiles these concerns into a survey of concerns for use during the next consideration of the proposal by the assembly. These concerns are submitted to the World Church secretary for printing in the next day's *Daily Bulletin*.

Step 3: Third Consideration by Delegates: *Given prayer, deliberation, and exchange of information, what is the degree of support for the proposal now? Are we approaching common consent, or are concerns limiting support that can be addressed?*

1. **Proposal Called Up.** The chair calls for consideration of the original or revised proposal, and delegates are led in a time of reflection, using a spiritual practice to consider how the Holy Spirit is working within the body.
2. **Survey of Support.** The chair then conducts another survey to describe the current state of support for the original or revised proposal. The results are displayed.
 - a. If **80 percent or more** of the delegates who vote express support for the proposal by choosing levels 3, 4, or 5, the chair then asks the delegates if they wish to decide on the proposal in its current form. A **vote to proceed** is taken. If there is support of 80 percent or more by those who vote, the assembly moves into decision making, and the chair conducts a **vote of common consent** on the proposal.
 - b. If fewer than 80 percent show they are ready to proceed, the chair conducts a **survey of issues**, asking, "What issues or concerns are limiting your support for this proposal?" For this survey, the Proposal Refinement Committee submits a list of distinct issues it heard during focused listening and open forums. Delegates are asked to choose the primary concerns limiting their support. The results are displayed, showing the top three issues at each level of support.
3. **Open Discussion.** The assembly receives 30 minutes of open discussion to help the Proposal Refinement Committee understand the issues, problems, or concerns limiting support for the proposal.
4. **Send to Committee.** The matter then is referred to the Proposal Refinement Committee to explore whether revisions can be made that will better align the proposal with the assembly's views. The consideration of the pending proposal then is suspended for consideration again later during the Conference.

Step 4: Fourth Consideration by Delegates: *Given the revisions suggested by the Proposal Committee, what degree of support is there for the proposal now? Are the delegates ready to move to decision making?*

1. **Report to Conference.** Before the fourth consideration, the Proposal Refinement Committee submits a written report to the Conference in the *Daily Bulletin*. It offers a new proposal containing revisions the committee feels are likely to bring about more support for the proposal among the delegates. Any revisions are made in response to the concerns of the assembly expressed in the survey of issues.

2. **Proposal Refinement Committee.** The chair again calls for consideration of the proposal. The Proposal Refinement Committee reviews the revised proposal as printed in the *Daily Bulletin*, and explains the revisions it offered.
3. **Spiritual Practice.** The delegates are led in a time of reflection, using a spiritual practice to consider how the Holy Spirit is working among the delegates as they consider this proposal. The chair, with the advice of the Discernment Process Team, will decide a suitable spiritual practice and facilitator.
4. **Survey of Support.** The chair then conducts another **survey of support** to describe the current support for the revised proposal. The results are displayed.
5. **Open Discussion.** The chair opens the floor for discussion on the merits of the revised proposal. Time for deliberation is limited to one hour. Effort is made to ensure speakers represent both those with strong support and those with little support for the proposal. This time may be shortened or lengthened by the chair in response to the mood of the assembly.
6. **Spiritual Practice.** The delegates again are led in a time of reflection, using a spiritual practice to consider how the Holy Spirit is working among the delegates as they consider this proposal.
7. A **vote to proceed** then is taken by the chair.
 - a. If the **vote to proceed** passes, the chair, with advice from the Discernment Process Team, will decide a suitable spiritual practice and facilitator. This will serve to focus the Conference on the movement of the Spirit before the vote of common consent. A **vote of common consent** then is taken. The results are displayed. If the standard for common consent is reached on the proposal, the chair declares that it is adopted.
 - b. If the **vote to proceed** fails, the chair asks delegates whether:
 - they want to continue deliberation on this proposal at the current World Conference;
 - they want to refer the proposal to the First Presidency for possible refinement and presentation to a future World Conference; or
 - they simply want the matter defeated.
 The results are displayed, and whichever option receives the most support is considered the will of the assembly.
 - c. If the **vote to proceed** passes, but the standard for common consent is not reached during the **vote of common consent**, the chair asks the delegates whether:
 - they want to continue discussion on this proposal at the current World Conference; or
 - they want to refer the proposal to the First Presidency for possible refinement and presentation to a future World Conference; or
 - they simply want the matter defeated.
 Whichever alternative receives the most support is considered the will of the assembly.

Example of Four-step Common Consent Process

The following is an example of how the four-step common consent process might work in deliberating a theoretical proposal. The theoretical proposal is:

We propose the church meet in World Conference in some nation other than the USA within the next decade.

First Morning

The chair calls for consideration of the proposal and reads it to the assembly. The chair explains the Conference will hear from a group of people selected in advance based on their ability to share different perspectives on this issue. The people are asked to speak briefly from their personal experiences with the issue. The following is a summary of examples of the perspectives that might be shared:

- This would compound the cost of delegate travel. It makes financial sense to hold the Conference where the most delegates are able to pay their own way and subsidize travel for the rest.
- We have invested sacrificially in building and maintaining the buildings at International Headquarters. It would be wasteful to leave these unused while we rent another building for our Conference.
- So many delegates come from the USA. It would be expensive to require them to travel to an international location and could prevent them from attending. This would result in a Conference that is unrepresentative.
- Having World Conference in another nation would create good public relations and outreach opportunities for the church.
- Currently, we ask all non-USA delegates to come to a nation different from their own to take part in Conference. If delegates from the USA had this same experience, it would help them develop empathy for their brothers and sisters in the church.
- US government travel controls have made it difficult for many delegates to get visas to attend Conference. Holding Conference in another location would make it possible to have a more international gathering.
- Our church membership is increasingly international, but our Conference remains dominated by delegates from the USA. Gathering in a World Conference outside the USA would create a Conference that better reflects the reality of Community of Christ today.

The delegates are asked to take part in designated discernment communities (spiritual-reflections groups), engaging in guided spiritual practices and prayerfully listening for how the Holy Spirit is working within the body.

Delegates also will be given information and resources for engaging in further reflection and discussion as the Conference continues. (For example journaling on questions, prayer and meditation offerings, opportunities for small-group discussion, and guided discussions and spiritual practices in quorums, councils, orders, mass meetings, and caucuses).

Consideration of the pending proposal then is suspended. Continued discussion will take place later during the World Conference.

Second Morning

The chair calls for the Conference to continue to consider the proposal from the first morning. Delegates are led in a time of reflection, using a spiritual practice to consider how the Holy Spirit is working within the body.

The chair then conducts a **survey of perspectives**, showing how widely the previously voiced perspectives are held within the assembly. **Delegates may select as many perspectives as they hold.** The results are displayed:

- A. World Conference should remain in the USA to preserve finances. **17 percent**
- B. It would be wasteful not to use church facilities at International Headquarters that we sacrificially have built and maintained. **23 percent**
- C. Holding World Conference outside the USA would limit the number of USA delegates who could attend, making the Conference unrepresentative. **55 percent**
- D. Having World Conference in a country other than the USA would create good public relations and outreach opportunities. **35 percent**
- E. Holding a World Conference in a country other than the USA would give all delegates a broader international experience. **67 percent**
- F. Having more delegates from countries other than the USA would make a Conference that better reflects the church's membership. **76 percent**

The chair then conducts a **survey of support** to find the level of support delegates have for the proposal. The results are displayed:

- 1. Not supportive—**9 percent**
- 2. Little support—**34 percent**
- 3. Moderate support—**34 percent**
- 4. Significant support—**9 percent**
- 5. Full Support—**14 percent**

Survey of Perspectives: *Why do you hold this level of support?*

The chair then conducts a survey to discover why the delegates hold each level of support for the proposal. Those who hold each level of support are asked **separately**: “Which statement most closely matches your perspective on this issue?” Please note, there is an “Other” option. The results are displayed in groupings of 1 and 2, 3, 4 and 5 with the top three results for each grouping displayed. “Other” would be displayed only if it was one of the top three results.

Those Voting Levels 1, 2:

- A. World Conference should remain in the USA to preserve finances. **31 percent**
- B. It would be wasteful not to use the church facilities at International Headquarters that we sacrificially have built and maintained. **23 percent**
- C. Holding World Conference outside the USA would limit the number of US delegates who could attend, making the Conference unrepresentative. **17 percent**

Those Voting Level 3:

- A. Holding World Conference outside the USA would limit the number of US delegates who could attend. **35 percent**
- B. Holding a World Conference in a country other than the USA would give all delegates broader international experience. **31 percent**
- C. Having World Conference in a country other than the USA would create good public relations and outreach opportunities. **19 percent**

Those Voting Levels 4, 5:

- A. Having more delegates from countries other than the USA would make a Conference that better reflects the church's membership. **37 percent**
- B. Holding a World Conference in a country other than the USA would give all delegates a broader international experience. **27 percent**
- C. Having World Conference in a country other than the USA would create good public relations and outreach opportunities. **15 percent**

Delegates are instructed on engaging in open discussion to express concerns or share their ideas for improving the proposal. After the session, the Proposal Refinement Committee hosts an open forum (or forums) for further discussion of these concerns.

The chair also tells delegates how they could discuss the significance of these results in small groups, quorums, or other gatherings. The chair reminds the delegates to continue in prayer, conversation, and personal discernment of God's will for the church now.

Consideration of the pending proposal is then suspended. Continued discussion will take place later during the World Conference.

Second Afternoon

The Proposal Refinement Committee hosts an open forum (or forums) to hear from delegates what concerns are limiting their support. They compile those responses into a survey of issues for use during the next consideration of the proposal by the assembly. The committee tries to summarize the issues expressed for use in a survey, if needed, during the later consideration of the proposal by the assembly. In this case, the issues might include:

1. We should subsidize travel for US delegates who could not afford to attend a World Conference outside the USA.
2. Having a Conference outside the USA would not necessarily make it less expensive for all delegates to attend. We still will need to support the delegate travel fund as we currently do.
3. If few delegates from the USA were to attend, we would miss an important community-building event that keeps the church connected.
4. Would US delegates have to use proportional voting if few delegates from the USA could attend?
5. The logistics of organizing a Conference in a location other than International Headquarters could be overwhelming. Renting facilities can be expensive. Not all countries have the capacity to house so many delegates.
6. USA delegates who cannot afford to travel internationally should be given the opportunity to take part electronically from Independence.
7. The proposal is asking us to commit to do something that may be expensive. We should do a feasibility study first so we have an idea of the cost before we commit to it.
8. This is a matter of justice and fairness. Attendance always will be limited by the location of Conference, and we currently make the same delegations feel that limit every Conference.

Third Morning

The chair again calls for consideration of the proposal. The delegates are led by those previously identified in a time of reflection, using a spiritual practice to consider how the Holy Spirit is working within the body. Delegates will be encouraged to make space for collective discernment, thinking beyond their personal opinions. They instead will be invited to focus on the ways they believe the Holy Spirit is guiding the World Conference.

The chair then conducts another **survey of support**.

1. Not supportive—**9 percent**
2. Little support—**31 percent**
3. Moderate support—**36 percent**
4. Significant support—**10 percent**
5. Full support—**14 percent**

Sixty percent indicated a level of 3, 4, or 5. Because the common consent standard is not met, the chair calls on a representative from the Proposal Refinement Committee to give a summary of the issues expressed in the dialogue session.

Those Issues:

- A. We should subsidize travel for US delegates who could not afford to attend a World Conference outside the USA.
- B. Having a Conference outside the USA would not necessarily make it less expensive for all delegates to attend. We still will need to support the delegate travel fund as we currently do.
- C. If few delegates from the USA were to attend, we would miss an important community-building event that keeps the church connected.
- D. Would US delegates have to use proportional voting if few delegates from the USA could attend?
- E. The logistics of organizing a Conference in a location other than International Headquarters could be overwhelming. Renting Conference facilities can be expensive. Not all countries have the capacity to house so many delegates.
- F. US delegates who cannot afford to travel internationally should be given the opportunity to take part electronically from Independence.
- G. The proposal is asking us to commit to do something that may be expensive. We should do a feasibility study first so we have an idea of the cost before we commit to it.
- H. This is a matter of justice and fairness. Attendance always will be limited by the location of Conference, and we currently make the same delegations feel that limit every Conference.
- I. Other

The chair then conducts a **survey of issues** to discover the primary reasons of members who hold each level of support for the proposal. Those who hold each level of support are asked **separately**: “Which statement most closely matches your primary concern with this issue?”

The chair then asks the Proposal Refinement Committee to consider the survey results for possible refinement of the proposal.

The chair also tells delegates how they could discuss the significance of these results in small groups, quorums, or other gatherings. The chair reminds the delegates to continue to pray,

engage with one another in conversation, and personally seek to understand God’s will for the church.

Consideration of the pending proposal then is suspended. Continued discussion will take place later during the World Conference.

After the session, the Proposal Refinement Committee meets to refine the proposal to address the concerns of delegates. Based on these results, the committee might revise the proposal as follows:

We, the 2013 World Conference, express our support for the idea of meeting in World Conference in a nation other than the USA sometime in the next decade. We ask the Conference Organization and Procedures Team to study the feasibility and cost of doing so and bring a proposal for such a Conference to the 2016 World Conference. This proposal should include:

- a recommendation on which countries could host the Conference, including information about:
 - Conference facilities
 - Logistics and support services (including translations)
 - Delegate housing
 - Visa availability for international delegates
 - Cost comparison (with cost of World Conference at International Headquarters)
 - Other issues
- A recommendation on how, if possible, some delegates could participate remotely.

Fourth Morning

The chair again calls up the proposal. Changes by the Proposal Refinement Committee are printed in the *Daily Bulletin*. The chair asks a representative of the Proposal Refinement Committee to explain the changes and the reasons behind them.

The delegates then are led in a time of reflection, using a spiritual practice to consider how the Holy Spirit is guiding the body as they consider the adapted proposal.

The chair then conducts a further **survey of support**, asking, “What is the current level of support for this proposal?” The results are displayed.

What Is Your Level of Support?

1. No support—**2 percent**
2. Little support—**7 percent**
3. Moderate support—**26 percent**
4. Significant support—**38 percent**
5. Full Support—**27 percent**

The chair then suggests it appears the delegates may be ready to make a decision. The chair conducts a vote to see if the Conference is ready to stop discussion and vote. The question would be asked, “Are you ready to move from deliberation to decision making?” The results are displayed.

In Favor: 87 percent

Opposed: 13 percent

Because there is the required 80 percent in favor of voting, the assembly would vote on the proposal. The chair explains the decision must be made by common consent. The chair then asks, “What degree of support do you have for this proposal?”

Vote of Common Consent

Proposal: We, the 2013 World Conference, express our support for the idea of meeting in World Conference in a nation other than the USA sometime in the next decade. We ask the Conference Organization and Procedures Team to study the feasibility and cost of doing so, and bring a proposal for such a Conference to the 2016 World Conference. This proposal should include:

- A recommendation on which countries could host the Conference, including information about:
 - Conference facilitates
 - Logistics and support services (including translations)
 - Delegate housing
 - Visa availability for international delegates
 - Cost comparison (with cost of World Conference at International Headquarters)
 - Other issues
- A recommendation on how, if possible, some delegates could participate remotely.

The results are displayed:

1. No support—**1 percent**
2. Little support—**3 percent**
3. Moderate support—**16 percent**
4. Significant support—**41 percent**
5. Full Support—**39 percent**

Percentage voting 3, 4, or 5 = 96 percent

Because at least 80 percent of those voting have voted 3, 4, or 5, the chair declares common consent has been achieved and the proposal is adopted.

Outline of Abbreviated Consideration (Two-step, Shortened Consideration)

Not every issue can be the subject of a full discernment process during World Conference. Some proposals may be considered, using a less-intense process. The shorter process uses some tools for common consent, but less time is given to listening and spiritual practices. The intent to frame all Conference deliberations in a spirit of discernment and prayerful reflection will remain constant. Spiritual practices will be an integral and expected part

of the shorter process. The Discernment Process Team will be prayerfully observant and available to the chair as needed.

First Consideration by Delegates (Step 1)

What are the perspectives on this proposal? What is the degree of support for this proposal? Are there issues limiting support that can be addressed?

1. **Dialogue Forum.** Before consideration of a proposal, the assigned Proposal Refinement Committee hosts an open forum(s) to identify the primary issues. The committee develops a list of these issues to be used in a **survey of issues**, if needed during consideration of the proposal by the assembly.
2. **Consideration.** The chair calls for this action.
3. **Spiritual Practice.** The delegates are led in a time of reflection, using a spiritual practice to consider how the Holy Spirit is guiding the assembly as it considers this issue.
4. **Perspectives on the Proposal.** The chair then opens the floor for discussion, asking, “What are the perspectives on this proposal?” The chair attempts to balance speakers so all perspectives can be expressed. Speakers are invited to share only a perspective that has not already been shared. Total discussion on the issue is limited to 30 minutes, with discretion for the chair to end discussion sooner if perspectives begin to be repeated.
5. **Survey of Support.** The chair then conducts a **survey of support**, asking, “What is your degree of support for this proposal?” The results then would be displayed.
 - a. If **80 percent or more** of responses indicate **3, 4, or 5**, the chair asks the delegates if they wish to proceed to decision making on the proposal in its current form.
 - If the **vote to proceed passes**, the assembly then moves into decision making, and the chair conducts a **vote of common consent** on the proposal.
 - b. If **fewer than 80 percent** of responses indicate **3, 4, or 5**, the chair conducts a **survey of issues**, asking, “What issues are limiting your support for this proposal?” The issues presented are those identified by the Proposal Refinement Committee from the earlier open forum(s). Delegates are asked to choose the one primary issue that is limiting their support.
 - c. If **more than 20 percent** of responses select “**Other Concern Not Expressed**,” the chair opens the floor again for delegates to identify the concern(s) that have not been expressed. The **survey of issues** then is conducted again with the additional issues included. The results are displayed, showing the priority given to each issue by delegates.
6. **Send to Committee.** The chair then refers the survey results to the Proposal Refinement Committee for possible refinement of the proposal.
7. **Continued discussion.** The chair also gives further instruction for how delegates could discuss the significance of these results in small groups, quorums, etc. The chair reminds the delegates to continue prayer, conversation, and personal reflection to seek God’s will for the church.
8. Consideration of the pending proposal then is suspended for consideration again later during the Conference.

Second Consideration by Delegates (Step 2)

Given the revisions by the Proposal Refinement Committee, what degree of support is there for the proposal now? Are the delegates ready to decide?

1. **Report back to the Conference.** Before the second consideration, the Proposal Refinement Committee submits a written report to the Conference in the *Daily Bulletin*, proposing revisions in response to the **survey of issues**.
2. **Proposal Refinement Committee.** The chair again calls for consideration of the proposal, and a representative of the Proposal Refinement Committee reviews the revised proposal as printed in the *Daily Bulletin* and explains suggested revisions.
3. **Spiritual practice.** The delegates are led in a time of reflection, using a spiritual practice to consider how the Holy Spirit is guiding assembly as it considers this issue.
4. **Survey of Support.** The chair then conducts another **survey of support** to describe the current state of support for the revised proposal, and the results are displayed.
5. **Open Discussion.** The chair then opens the floor for discussion on the proposal as revised. The chair attempts to balance speakers representing those with all levels of support for the proposal. Speakers should not repeat points already presented. Discussion is limited to 30 minutes, with discretion given to the chair to end discussion sooner if it begins to be repetitive.
6. **Vote to proceed.** The chair then asks if the Conference is ready to move from deliberation to decision making, and a **vote to proceed** is conducted.
 - a. If **fewer than 80 percent** of votes indicate the delegates are ready to proceed, the chair may provide additional time for discussion at this Conference, recognizing that if further deliberation takes place it may come at the expense of considering another proposal.
 - b. If **80 percent or more** of votes are ready to proceed, the chair indicates the Conference is ready to conduct a **vote of common consent**. The chair reminds the Conference of the standard used for such a vote.
7. A **vote of common consent** is taken, and the results displayed.
 - a. If **80 percent or more** of votes indicate **3, 4, or 5**, the chair declares common consent has been achieved, and the proposal is adopted.
 - b. If **fewer than 80 percent** of votes indicate **3, 4, or 5**, the chair asks the delegates whether:
 - They want to continue deliberation on this proposal at the current World Conference; or,
 - They want to refer the proposal to the First Presidency for possible refinement and presentation to a future World Conference; or
 - They simply want the matter defeated.

Whichever option receives the most support is considered the will of the assembly.

Illustration of World Conference Legislative Agenda

Having these two methods of consideration running parallel can be difficult to imagine. To illustrate, a sample World Conference legislative agenda is shown below. This sample assumes that 10 proposals were submitted by mission centers, councils, quorums, or orders as follows:

- P1 Statement on international relief efforts
- P2 Proposed revision to mission center structure
- P3 Hold World Conference in nation other than USA
- P4 Hold World Conference in South Pacific
- P5 Always hold World Conference at International Headquarters in Independence, Missouri, USA
- P6 Statement affirming the ministry of members serving in the military
- P7 Amendment to the Bylaws of the Community of Christ
- P8 Proposal to increase church support for children and youth ministry
- P9 Statement on nuclear disarmament
- P10 Second statement on nuclear disarmament

Before World Conference, the First Presidency announces the Conference will deal with the question of where to hold World Conference, using the full discernment process. Therefore, P3, P4, and P5 will be addressed using that process.

At an early legislative session delegates hear a brief presentation about the remaining proposals made by proposal stewards, describing the basis for their proposal. Delegates then are asked two questions:

1. *What priority would you assign to the remaining proposals before the Conference?*

Delegates will prioritize the remaining proposals, recognizing that those with the lowest priority probably will not be considered by the Conference. The results are displayed. Those proposals receiving the highest average ranking will be placed on the agenda for consideration.

For this illustration, we can imagine the following ranking of proposals:

- P2 Proposed revision to mission center structure
- P8 Proposal to increase church support for children and youth ministry
- P6 Statement affirming the ministry of members serving in the military
- P1 Statement on international relief efforts
- P9 Statement on nuclear disarmament
- P10 Second statement on nuclear disarmament
- P7 Amendment to Bylaws of the Community of Christ

2. *As we discuss together the proposals to have World Conference outside of the USA, which proposal would you prefer to serve as the starting point for our consideration?*

Delegates choose which of the two proposals they believe should serve as starting point. The proposal receiving the most support becomes the starting proposal in the four-step discernment process.

For this illustration, imagine P3 receives the most votes. That proposal then is designated as D1, signifying it is being considered through the full discernment process. The legislative agenda then is arranged to allow time for the full discernment process regarding D1 and for consideration of the other items using the shorter discernment processes available to the Conference.

Most Commonly Asked Questions

- Q:** Why does the Common Consent Advisory Team consider its recommended approach better than using *Robert's Rules of Order*?

A: The team believes there is a place for decision making using *Robert's Rules of Order* for ordinary and routine business of the Conference. The parliamentary processes for use for many years provide an expeditious way to deal with many items of business during World Conference. In fact, it might be difficult to use the common consent processes outlined for all or even most business of the Conference because of the additional time required to fully use the suggested common consent system. The team believes one or at most two key issues at each Conference might be able to be processed using the new system. These should be matters of overriding significance for the church that would arrive at a better sense of the body through the use of the common consent process.

The common consent process seeks to expose the delegates to the range of perspectives within the assembly and to allow the testing of alternative approaches. These are hard to test, using the traditional parliamentary processes.
- Q:** Some are concerned that 80 percent indicating 3, 4, or 5 is too high a standard for common consent and could mean that change is difficult to achieve in the worldwide church. Why is this percentage recommended?

A: According to decision-making research and experience, when 80 percent of an assembly indicates moderate, significant, and full support for a proposal, there is sufficient consent for a proposal to be implemented with minimal conflict and resistance.
- Q:** Why is a “neutral” option not provided?

A: Delegates are responsible for making a decision after sufficient consideration has occurred.
- Q:** Why not have the same number of non-supportive and supportive options such as four or six choices?

A: The committee considered these possibilities but decided against having an even number of options. When there is an even number of options, we were concerned people would see this as half being “for” and half being “against.” Instead, the range of choices from 1 to 5 tests the degree of support from no support through full support. There is no midpoint. The use of 80 percent voting levels 3, 4, or 5 is a sufficient safeguard against the voting being weighted in favor of a proposal.
- Q:** Some are not comfortable with the conclusion, “I believe that this is where God is calling the church to go at this time” and related support statements. Why can we not just state our personal opinions or preferences?

A: The call to be a prophetic people who discern divine will is a call to gain a clearer sense of where God is leading the church at a particular time or in a specific circumstance. We are called to go beyond personal desires or opinions to “listen together” to God’s guidance.
- Q:** What if the recommended process is too time-consuming?

A: The full approach will be used only for very important items. In these cases discernment will begin far in advance of World Conference. Discernment regarding significant proposals

should require more time to avoid hasty decisions. Using the full approach probably does mean the World Conference will deal with fewer items, but the items dealt with will focus on “what matters most.”

7. Q: What if we try the recommended approach and discover we need to adjust it to improve the process?

A: We fully expect to make adjustments as we experiment, learn, and gain experience with the recommended process.

8. Q: How will delegates be trained in the consensus process so they can participate effectively?

A: There will be various opportunities for delegates to train and gain practical experience before and during World Conferences.

9. Q: What about the reliability of the technology and electricity?

A: There will be backup plans and redundancies in case technology or electricity fails.

Conclusion

The ongoing divine call to the church is to become a prophetic people who collectively discern God’s will today. Common Consent Advisory Team members have appreciated the opportunity to work together on this project. We believe the recommendation is better than could have been developed by any of us. Our hope is that this process may have a transformative effect as we become better at listening, deliberating, and discerning together.

Common Consent Advisory Team

Carolyn Brock

Sandy Gamet

Kelly Phipps

Kathy Sharp

Andrew Shields

Art Smith

Greg Stolsteimer

Larry Tyree

John Wight

Kara Vojcsik

Leonard Young, *team lead*