



C-5 Report of the Special Committee in Response to WCR 1299

To the First Presidency and the World Conference:

Because the 2013 World Conference adopted WCR 1299, the First Presidency appointed a special committee of administrative and non-administrative members to review the principle of common consent. The review included, but was not limited, to our current official statement. The committee was asked to review, revise, and recommend changes to clarify the roles of presiders and participants in legislative assemblies at all organizational levels in the church. The committee also was asked to consider voting processes to be used and avoided when making decisions. The committee was requested to report to the 2016 World Conference.

The committee reviewed the current statements on common consent in the *2005 Church Administrator's Handbook* and other statements drawn from church history and publications. The committee felt the statement in the *Church Administrator's Handbook* was comprehensive and gave good guidance. In addition, the committee felt the following statement by late President Maurice L. Draper would help the church and should be considered for inclusion in future publications:

Common comes to the English from Latin and is derived from two terms, “com” and “munia.” The first means “with” and the second means “duties.” Together these terms mean shared responsibilities. “Consent” also comes to English from Latin, the term being “con” and “sentire.” This latter word means to think or feel. Thus the phrase “common consent” has a very rich meaning—to think or to feel together about shared responsibilities. Those who exercise common consent are learning to think and to feel together about responsibilities which they share through response to the divine will.¹

Throughout church history, the goal of conferences has been to come to common consent on important issues. Most often conferences have used parliamentary forms to achieve this aim. Parliamentary law focuses on protecting rights and expediting business. But common consent as defined by President Draper has a deeper and more comprehensive purpose. If we are to think and feel together about shared responsibilities, we also must focus on building unity within the body of Christ. The church's efforts to build common consent sometimes have lacked focus on this facet of conferring.

¹ Maurice Draper, *Saints' Herald*, February 27, 1961, 5–6.

The committee also wishes to offer the following guidance to presiding officers, as sought in WCR 1299:

1. Presiding officers need to take great care to operate with great impartiality. Guiding a business meeting is important, and the impartiality of the presiding officer will do more to create cooperation and mutuality than almost anything else.
2. Presiding officers should seek to assure that views of all participants are heard, and equality of opportunity to be heard is always upheld.
3. Presiding officers should assure the rights of the majority, the minority, individuals, and absentees are protected.
4. Presiding officers need to study the basic principles of presiding at a business meeting that are available through mission center president training modules, on the World Church website, and in the *Pastors and Leaders Field Guide*.
5. Presiding officers should avoid debating while in the chair. Should the presiding officer feel the need to speak in debate, the chair should be surrendered to another. The presiding officer then should speak as a member and remain out of the chair until the matter under consideration is settled.

The committee feels it is important for mission center officers and pastors to receive training in the presiding role and responsibility. Basic lessons need to be available. To this end, the committee sent many suggestions to the First Presidency for possible inclusion in the next edition of the *Church Administrator's Handbook*.

The committee observes that participation in common consent at all levels is a sacred duty. Attendance at business meeting and conferences is important and a way to express support for the continuing mission of the church.

Finally, the committee was asked to suggest what voting processes should be used and avoided when making decisions. There is a long tradition that proxy and absentee voting are prohibited in the business meetings of the church. In addition, our parliamentary authority, *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* (11th Edition) specifically prohibits these voting procedures.

Much discussion occurred about whether all decisions should be taken by a majority vote. The long-standing procedure of the church is to allow some decisions to be made by a two-thirds ($\frac{2}{3}$) vote and that bylaws require previous notice. The committee felt that generally majority voting is the norm in the church. But as we look at new ways to confer, the church ought to remain open to new ways of voting, including the use of "intensity of preference" voting.

The committee believes if we focus on common consent as "thinking and feeling together about shared responsibilities," the church will be able to give priority in our conferring to "building unity within the body of Christ."

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