

Unmasking a System of Privilege Using Questions of Privilege (Like Jesus Did!)

Many of our churchwide and synodical leaders have used Roberts Rules to suppress the will of the majority of during the 2016 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. The following strategy probably won't get any resolutions passed, but **it's a way of protesting within the rules of the assembly and probably should only be carried out within the last 15 minutes of the plenary.**

More importantly though, it's a way to give voice to the frustrations of this assembly and all voices who were suppressed this week in New Orleans.

It's all based on Roberts Rules Article III "Privileged Motions," Section 19 "Questions of Privilege" which reads the following:

19. Questions of Privilege. Questions relating to the rights and privileges of the assembly, or to any of its members, take precedence of all other motions except the three preceding relating to adjournment and recess, to which they yield. If the question is one requiring immediate action it may interrupt a member's speech; as, for example, when, from any cause, a report that is being read cannot be heard in a part of the hall. But if it is not of such urgency it should not interrupt a member after he has commenced his speech. Before a member has commenced speaking, even though he has been assigned the floor, it is in order for another member to raise a question of privilege. When a member rises for this purpose he should not wait to be recognized, but immediately on rising should say, "Mr. Chairman," -- and when he catches the chairman's eye, should add, "I rise to a question of privilege affecting the assembly," or "I rise to a question of personal privilege." The chair directs him to state his question, and then decides whether it is one of privilege or not. From this decision any two members may appeal. The chair may decide it to be a question of privilege, but not of sufficient urgency to justify interrupting the speaker. In such a case the speaker should be allowed to continue, and, when he has finished, the chair should immediately assign the floor to the member who raised the question of privilege to make his motion if one is necessary. Whenever his motion is made and stated, it becomes the immediately pending question and is open to debate and amendment and the application of all the other subsidiary motions just as any main motion. Its high privilege extends only to giving it the right to consideration in preference to any other question except one relating to adjournment or recess, and, in cases of great urgency, the right to interrupt a member while speaking. It cannot interrupt voting or verifying a vote. As soon as the question of privilege is disposed of, the business is resumed exactly where it was interrupted; if a member had the floor at the time the question of privilege was raised, the chair assigns him the floor again. Questions of privilege may relate to the privileges of the assembly or only of a member, the former having the precedence if the two come into competition. Questions of personal privilege must relate to one as a member of the assembly, or else relate to charges against his character which, if true, would incapacitate him for membership. Questions like the following relate to the privileges of the assembly: those relating to the organization of the assembly; or to the comfort of its members, as the heating, lighting, ventilation, etc., of the hall, and freedom from noise and other disturbance; or to the conduct of its officers or employees; or to the punishing of a member for disorderly conduct or other offence; or to the conduct of reporters for the press, or to the accuracy of published reports of proceedings.

Privileged questions include, besides questions of privilege, a call for the orders of the day and the privileged motions relating to adjournment and recess. This distinction between privileged questions and questions of privilege should be borne in mind.

So, here's what you could do:

Go to a microphone whenever you want with a white card (you can cut the line and interrupt), and say the following: "Bishop Eaton, I rise to a question of privilege affecting the assembly. We love you, we do, and you have a really hard job, but Article 12.31.04 of our Constitution says, "The arrangements for agenda... shall be under the supervision of the presiding bishop." Could you have changed our agenda to make sure all memorials got an up or down vote?"

Related Text - Constitution & Bylaws

12.31.04. The arrangements for agenda, program, and worship shall be under the supervision of the presiding bishop.

Or you could do this:

Go to a microphone whenever you want with a white card (you can cut the line and interrupt), and say the following: "Bishop Eaton, I rise to a question of privilege affecting the assembly. I ask this out of Christian love. In Article X, Section 58 of Roberts Rules of Order it states, "The chairman should not permit the object of a meeting to be defeated by a few factious persons using parliamentary forms with the evident object of obstructing business." In your view did a few elite individuals obstruct the business of this assembly?"

Related Text - Roberts Rules of Order

Article X, Section 58 Chairman or President On the other hand the chairman should not permit the object of a meeting to be defeated by a few factious persons using parliamentary forms with the evident object of obstructing business. In such a case he should refuse to entertain the dilatory or frivolous motion, and, if an appeal is taken, he should entertain it, and, if sustained by a large majority he may afterwards refuse to entertain even an appeal made by the faction when evidently made merely to obstruct business. But the chair should never adopt such a course merely to expedite business, when the opposition is not factious. It is only justifiable when it is perfectly clear that the opposition is trying to obstruct business.

Or this:

Go to a microphone whenever you want with a white card (you can cut the line and interrupt), and say the following: "Bishop Eaton, I rise to a question of privilege affecting the assembly. Article VI, Section 40 of Roberts Rules of Order states, "By taking advantage of parliamentary forms and methods a small minority could practically stop the business of a deliberative assembly." Bishop Eaton, I prayerfully ask you, "Do you believe a small minority took advantage of parliamentary forms to stop the business of this assembly?"

Related Text - Roberts Rules of Order

Art. VI., Section 40 Dilatory, Absurd, or Frivolous Motions.

For the convenience of deliberative assemblies, it is necessary to allow some highly privileged motions to be renewed again and again after progress in debate or the transaction of any business, and to allow a single member, by calling for a division, to have another vote taken. If there was no provision for protecting the assembly, a minority of two members could be constantly raising questions of order and appealing from every decision of the chair, and calling for a division on every vote, even when it was nearly unanimous, and moving to lay motions on the table, and to adjourn, and offering amendments that are simply frivolous or absurd. By taking advantage of parliamentary forms and methods a small minority could practically stop the business of a deliberative assembly having short sessions, if there was no provision for such contingency. Congress met it by adopting this rule: "No dilatory motion shall be entertained by the speaker." But, without adopting any rule on the subject, every deliberative assembly has the inherent right to protect itself from being imposed upon by members using parliamentary forms to prevent it from doing the very thing for which it is in session, and which these forms were designed to assist, namely, to transact business. Therefore, whenever the chair is satisfied that members are using parliamentary forms merely to obstruct business, he should either not recognize them, or else rule them out of order. After the chair has been sustained upon an appeal, he should not entertain another appeal from the same obstructionists while they are engaged evidently in trying by that means to obstruct business. While the chair should always be courteous and fair, he should be firm in protecting the assembly from imposition, even though it be done in strict conformity with all parliamentary rules except this one, that no dilatory, absurd, or frivolous motions are allowed.

Or hell, if that doesn't work, PRAY ALOUD, SING A SONG OF LAMENT TO GOD REALLY, REALLY LOUD, NAIL SOMETHING TO A DOOR OR GO HOME PRAYING TO OUR GOD IN CHRIST ABOUT HOW WE CAN FIND A BETTER WAY TO CONDUCT OUR BUSINESS AS A CHURCH THAT ALLOWS THE VOICE OF ALL TO BE HEARD.

#LeaveTheLegacyOfBeingATroublemaker - Leymah Gbowee