

**Parliamentary Procedure for the Consideration of a
General Revision of a Congregation Constitution
West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod (2025)**

N.B.: all references to *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised (RONR)* are to the 12th ed. Additionally, throughout *RONR*, the term, “bylaws,” also refers to constitutions.

Sometimes a congregation’s constitution is so old that the many changes required to bring it into conformity with the required provisions of *The Model Constitution for Congregations*¹ are daunting. *RONR*, s.v., “General Revisions,” states,

Changes of the bylaws that are so extensive and general that they are scattered throughout the bylaws should be effected through the substitution of an entirely new set of bylaws, called a *revision*.²

A *revision* (or *general revision*), while a type of amendment, is handled differently from what might be thought of as an *isolated amendment*. While the following chart offers a quick overview of the differences between a *revision* and an *amendment*, a careful reading of *RONR* (12th ed.) 57:5 should be undertaken by all parties intimately involved in the process.

	Isolated Amendment	General Revision
Notice	As stated in current constitution	Same as for amendment
Format of notice	Both original and proposed wording for all provisions under consideration are included; a redline version is acceptable but not required	Only necessary to inform members that a [general] revision will be considered (<i>i.e.</i> , that a new governing document will be considered); copies of current constitution and proposed revision should be available (by print or digitally), but they do not need to be included in the notice (although information on how to obtain these copies is required); a redline version is neither required nor recommended ³
Method of consideration	By any method allowed under the rules	<i>Seriatim</i> ⁴

¹*The Model Constitution for Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (hereafter, “*The Model*”).

²*RONR* (12th ed.) 57:5.

³*RONR* (12th ed.) 57:5.

⁴A method by which each title, chapter, article, or section (as seems best) is brought before the body, in order and one at a time, for discussion, debate, and possible amendment.

19	What can be amended	Limited to items identified in notice.	The entire document under consideration except as otherwise limited by current constitution ⁵
20 21	Amendments of 1 st and 2 nd degree ⁶	Limited to scope of notice ⁷	No limitation to scope of notice except as otherwise limited by other rules ⁸
22 23	Consequence of failure to adopt	The specific provisions that were successfully adopted are changed; otherwise, current provisions remain unchanged	Current constitution stays in force <i>in toto</i>
24	Votes required for adoption	As stated in current constitution	Same as for amendment
25	Can be offered by	Any member as permitted under the current constitution	Only a committee duly authorized to prepare the draft (or the Congregation Council) ⁹

26 Congregations with constitutions pre-dating 2016 may find the process of revision a better option
27 than handling the update through isolated amendments..

28 It is critical that the current constitution's provisions for amendment be reviewed. Those provisions
29 take precedence. Anything stated in this guidance assumes provisions similar to those found in *The*
30 *Model* as found in the 2022 *CBCR/ELCA*. There have been changes over the years. The older your
31 constitution is the more likely your provisions for amendment will deviate in one or more details
32 from what is here presented.

33 Required Provisions, Non-required Provisions, & Local Provisions

34 *The Model's* rules for constitutional amendments divide place proposed amendments into two
35 different classes.

- 36 • Provisions found in *The Model* (whether required or non-required are governed by *C16.04.
- 37 • Provisions that are either of completely local origin or that deviate in wording from that found in
- 38 the non-required provisions of *The Model* are governed by *C16.01-03.

⁵*RONR* (12th ed.) 57:5.

⁶That we are amending a governing document sometimes causes confusion because of the wording. A motion to amend, when applied to a main motion, is an amendment in the 1st degree. When a motion to amend is pending, a motion to amend is an amendment in the 2nd degree. Amendments in the 3rd degree are not allowed under *RONR*. The motion to amend a governing document is a main motion. Therefore, when a motion to amend a constitutional provision is pending, that motion may be amended (in the 1st degree) and the motion to amend a proposed amendment to a constitutional provision is an amendment in the 2nd degree (not an amendment in the 3rd degree).

⁷*RONR* (12th ed.) 35:4, 57:1.

⁸*RONR* (12th ed.) 57:5.

⁹*RONR* (12th ed.) 57:5.

With respect to notice requirements and adoption/ratification requirements, it is easier to effect a *C16.4 class amendment than a *C16.01 class amendment. Which rule, then, applies for a *general revision* of a constitution?

- If the proposed revision is a verbatim rendering of what is found in *The Model*, with the blanks filled and selections made for those places where options are presented, **and** no further amendment from the floor, the proposed revision may be adopted under the procedure found in *C16.04.
- In all likelihood, some non-required provisions have been modified and some local provisions have been added. Even one such deviation from the text of *The Model* throws the revision under the procedure in *C16.01-03.¹⁰

Assuming, then, the latter case (*i.e.*, general revision falling under *C16.01-03), the following procedure discussion applies.

Again, be sure to review your current constitution's provisions for amendment as they may deviate in some detail from what you find here.¹¹

Procedures for consideration at the first Congregation Meeting

I. Presentation

- A. Who presents? This depends upon how the bylaws committee¹² assigned to prepare the draft was authorized.
 - 1. When the bylaws committee is a standing committee of the congregation, the chair of the bylaws committee presents, essentially delivering the report of the bylaws committee.¹³
 - 2. When the bylaws committee is an *ad hoc* committee appointed by the Congregation Meeting, the same procedure is used.
 - 3. When the bylaws committee is an *ad hoc* committee appointed by the Congregation

¹⁰As a revision culminates in a vote on the revision *in toto*, the vote (and process) required is the most stringent of all the individual elements. As mentioned, when all the elements are simply those of *The Model* (required or non-required), the vote (and process) is the one found in *C16.04. If, however, there is even one local provision (*i.e.*, a provision not found among the required and non-required provisions in *The Model*) or even one non-required provision that deviates in wording from that found in *The Model*, the more stringent requirements of *C16.01-03 apply. In some situations, a congregation may find it expedient to adopt *The Model* as is (thought any non-required provisions may be left out) and afterwards adopt local provisions or make amendments to *The Model*'s non-required provisions. Whether this is prudent depends upon the provisions in question in relationship to the congregation's comfort with the provisions of *The Model*. For example, a congregation may prefer to have a Call Committee or eight members instead of six (as found in *The Model*, C13.05). At the same time, the congregation may consider it important to move quickly in adopting a new constitution, so the congregation moves ahead with adopting *The Model*, living with the six-member Call Committee until it can change that through an isolated amendment at a later point.

¹¹If you are having trouble understanding the process outlined in your constitution, you may find it helpful to sentence diagram it and make a flow chart. If it is still inscrutable, contact your dean, synod parliamentarian, or synod office for help.

¹²We shall refer to the drafting committee as the bylaws committee. The name your congregation employs may be different.

¹³The chair of the bylaws committee is free to enlist other members of the bylaws committee to assist with the presentation.

- 62 Council, the secretary of the Congregation Council shall present.¹⁴
- 63 4. If the president presents, the president shall relinquish the chair to the vice president (or,
- 64 with the consent of the assembly, if the vice president is unwilling to assume the chair) a
- 65 chair *pro tem*.¹⁵
- 66 B. How to present?
- 67 1. Before *seriatim* consideration begins in earnest, the presenter may offer a synopsis of the
- 68 proposal.
- 69 2. During *seriatim* consideration, the presenter shall, as each chapter is brought up for
- 70 consideration, explain the chapter under consideration, making clear what is new and
- 71 how the chapter differs from the corresponding provisions in the current governing
- 72 documents.¹⁶
- 73 II. *Seriatim* consideration
- 74 A. General
- 75 1. The process (including helpful scripting) is found in *RONR* (12th ed.) 54:16-19. *N.B.*, the
- 76 process for a revision is the same as if bylaws were being adopted for a newly forming
- 77 organization with the exception that the votes, notices, and meetings required are those
- 78 of the current bylaws.
- 79 2. *Seriatim* consideration involves the review of the proposal chapter by chapter in the
- 80 order in which they appear in the proposal.
- 81 3. Effect of a motion to (re)commit:
- 82 a. The assembly has the right to (re)commit the proposed revision at any time during
- 83 consideration; this may be a good option if, during the course of debate, it becomes
- 84 apparent that there is a complex problem to solve or a question requiring
- 85 investigation or further thought.
- 86 b. If a motion to (re)commit is adopted, the proposed revision is committed to whatever
- 87 entity has been designated by the assembly with appropriate instructions (including a
- 88 schedule for reporting).¹⁷
- 89 c. If the consideration of the proposed revision is taking place at a regular meeting or a
- 90 special meeting with remaining business, the meeting continues but no further
- 91 consideration of the proposed revision (other than a motion to reconsider
- 92 (re)committal) will be in order; otherwise, the meeting adjourns (see *infra*).
- 93 4. Effect of adjournment

¹⁴The Congregation Council may appoint one or more of its members or of the membership of the risen bylaws committee to present in the place of the secretary. It is better to appoint someone to take the place of the secretary, especially in the case of a general revision. Having the secretary present is a default setting in *RONR* because the secretary normally reads formal recommendations from the Congregation Council to the Congregation Meeting. When the bylaws committee is an *ad hoc* committee appointed by the Congregation Council, the Congregation Council takes “ownership” of the draft upon the committee’s rising and reporting to the Congregation Council.

¹⁵*RONR* (12th ed.) 47:11.

¹⁶“In presenting the report of the bylaws committee to the assembly, the committee chairman should explain each section and—in the case of a proposed revision of bylaws—make clear what is new about each provision or how it differs from the corresponding provision of the existing bylaws.”(*RONR* 56:15)

¹⁷A motion to recommit will send the proposed revision back to the body that brought the proposal forward. This may be the Council, the standing committee on bylaws, or the originally appointed *ad hoc* committee if one was appointed by the Congregation Meeting. A motion to recommit sends the proposed revision to any standing committee or *ad hoc* committee newly created that Congregational Meeting designates.

- 94 a. The assembly has the right to adjourn, in the midst of its proceedings, to an
95 *adjourned meeting* (a future meeting that continues the session); this may be a good
96 option if people are exhausted or indicate that they need more time to think about the
97 matter at hand.¹⁸
98 b. If the proposed revision has been (re)committed, the date for the adjourned meeting
99 should be set on the basis of the reporting requirements in the motion to (re)commit.
100 c. If the body adjourns *sine die* (and the proposed revision has not been referred), the
101 proposed revision *falls to the ground*¹⁹ (though it may be introduced afresh at any
102 future session).²⁰
103 B. Reading/presentation
104 1. Each chapter is read by the presenter, the presenter explaining significant changes and/or
105 providing rationale, answering any questions that may be raised from the floor.
106 2. The reading (or presentation) of any individual chapter may be dispensed with upon
107 either a general consent motion to do so or a successful motion to suspend the rules.
108 C. Amendment
109 1. After the presenter has addressed the chapter, the chair opens the floor for amendment of
110 the elements of that chapter in the proposal.
111 2. Amendments of the first and the second degree are permitted.
112 3. When an amendment is complex, it is best that it be presented in writing; if this is not
113 immediately possible, it may be wise to have the individual offering the amendment step
114 aside, write it out, and come back when it has been written out, thus allowing the
115 assembly to move on to other material.²¹
116 D. Once all amendments to provisions of the chapter being reviewed have been disposed of, the
117 chair instructs the presenter to move on to the next chapter.
118 III. Conclusion of *seriatim* consideration
119 A. After the final chapter has been reviewed and any amendments disposed of, the chair opens
120 the floor to any other amendments.
121 B. After all amendments have been disposed of, the proposal is voted upon in its entirety as
122 amended.

¹⁸It is a common mistake to think that a special meeting is required when work cannot be completed at any given meeting. It is much better form to *adjourn the meeting to another time*. The standard requirements for notice of special and regular meetings are not applicable because those at the adjourning meeting decide when and where the adjourned meeting will take place. N.B., an *adjourned meeting* is not the meeting that is ending; it is the next meeting in the same *session*. A *session* can be a series of *meetings* governed by one order of business (agenda). In such a case, one *meeting* ends, then, at the appointed time and place, the next *meeting* begins where business had left off. For a fuller discussion of the concepts of meetings and sessions and the effect of adjournment on each, read *RONR* (12th ed.) 8.

¹⁹*Falls to the ground*, i.e., dies without ever coming to a final vote.

²⁰*RONR* (12th ed.) 21:7(c).

²¹If the offered amendment to a proposed revision is complex, the chair should not state the question. Until the question is stated by the chair, the motion is not before the assembly. Once the question is stated, however, the motion is pending and cannot be withdrawn except with the permission of the assembly. When an amendment to any provision in a proposed revision is pending, a motion to either *postpone debate* or to *lay on the table* carries the entire revision with it, thus preventing consideration of other provisions in the proposed revision until the postponement conditions are satisfied or the question is *taken up from the table*. By not stating the question, the chair maintains the flexibility of the assembly. The member offering the complex amendment, upon writing out the amendment, should serve notice that the amendment has been written out, and the chair, after disposing of the pending question, assuming it is another amendment, should recognize the member for the purposes of offering his/her amendment.

- C. A simple majority is required for approval at this point (but a ratification is required at the subsequent annual meeting for full adoption).²²

Procedures for ratification at the annual meeting

I. Who presents?

- A. As this is a second reading, the secretary reads the proposed revision.²³

II. Ratification

- A. Ratification takes place at the next regular meeting.²⁴

- B. Reading of the proposed revision (as approved at the preceding meeting) may be dispensed with if there is general consent to do so or a successful motion to suspend the rules.

C. Amendment

1. No further amendment of the proposed revision is permitted.²⁵

2. If there is some significant issue that suggests further amendment, there are two options:

- a. The assembly may vote down ratification, in which case,

- (1) The assembly subsequently refers the matter of revision of the governing documents with whatever instructions it likes; or

- (2) Council can debrief the matter at a future date and decide what course of action it would like to pursue; or

- b. The assembly may ratify and seek mitigation of the issue in question through either

- (1) Referral of the matter with instructions or

- (2) Adopting a motion that satisfies the requirements of *C16.01.

D. Provisos

1. Provisos may be offered as part of the motion to adopt.²⁶

2. Provisos may be amended, amendments in the first and second degree being permitted.

3. A proviso indicating effective date should be included.²⁷

4. A proviso authorizing the secretary to make any corrections of a purely editorial nature and necessary adjustments to numbering should be included.²⁸

- E. A 2/3-majority is required for adoption.²⁹

✠Riegel, 7/12/25

²²*C16.02(a)

²³Council or the chair may appoint someone else to do so.

²⁴*C16.02(b); older constitutions may state, "...the next annual meeting...."

²⁵*C16.02(b).

²⁶RONR (12th ed.) 57:15-17.

²⁷*C16.02(c).

²⁸RONR 57:19.

²⁹*C16.02(b).