**Ground Rules for Facilitating Difficult Meetings**

When leading difficult meetings or meetings where divisive issues may be discussed, the chairperson or facilitator should establish ground rules at the beginning of the meeting.

**Anticipate when a meeting will be difficult. For example:**

* When people may become emotional
* When a potentially divisive issue will be discussed
* When the organization has experienced strife in previous meetings
* Where one or more individuals has manipulated, controlled, or intimidated people in previous meetings
* Where one or more individuals has used sinful behavior in previous meetings
* Where people may need guidance for Christian behavior

**Begin with a Devotion**

Have someone besides the chairperson or facilitator open with a devotion including a Bible reading and prayer. The devotion should include a focus on what Christ has done for us (Gospel).

**List and Describe the Ground Rules[[1]](#footnote-1)**

Begin by explaining that ground rules taken from Scripture may help guide the meeting. Next, read Ephesians 4:29-32 (this does not replace the devotions). Then itemize the following ground rules on a flip chart, PowerPoint, or handout, adding explanation as described on the right:

**Notes for Explaining the Rules**

• No name calling; no “unwholesome talk”

• Eph. 4:15 – “Speak the truth in love”

• Remember – only God knows another’s

heart. If concerned about another’s motives,

ask them about their underlying interests.

Do not assume or make declarations.

### • If you want to make a point while another is

### talking, take notes & wait until your turn

• Do not speak a 2nd time until everyone else

has had an opportunity to speak. Avoid

monopolizing the discussion.

*ak a 2nd time until*

## everyone has had a chance to speak

*positions*

**Ground Rules**

* Speak respectfully
* Be open & honest, but always in love
* Avoid speculating on others’ motives
* Avoid interrupting
* Speak one time until everyone else has had an opportunity to speak

**Get agreement on ground rules**

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* After reviewing the ground rules, the leader needs to ask for agreement:

*“If there is anyone who cannot agree to these ground rules, which are based on Scripture, please raise your objections at this time.”*

* If no objections are raised (which is most likely), make the following statement:

“Since I hear no objections to these ground rules, we will assume that everyone has agreed to them and we have all bound ourselves to these rules. Anyone who disrupts the meeting by violating the ground rules after being reminded once will be asked to leave the meeting.”

* If there are minor objections, make adjustments as needed. Then restate the statement above, with the following adjustment, *“Since I hear no additional objections…”*
* If there are major objections (which is rare), indicate that the group will follow *Robert’s Rules of Order* and ask for a motion to adopt the ground rules:

*“The chairperson requests a motion to adopt these ground rules for our meeting with the stipulation that anyone who disrupts the meeting by violating the ground rules after being reminded will be asked to leave the meeting.”*

* + Following approval of the motion, make the statement:

“According to the wishes of this group, these shall serve as our ground rules. Anyone who continues to disrupt the meeting after being reminded once will be asked to leave the meeting.”

**Pray for God’s blessing on the meeting.**

* After the final statement, lead the group in prayer. You may use the following:

*“Almighty God and Lord, as You have called us to labor in Your vineyard, so grant us now Your presence. Enlighten and guide us by Your Word that in all matters of deliberation we may always consider the best interests of Your Church and this congregation [school, district, etc.]. Let Your Holy Spirit rule and direct our hearts that, in the spirit of Christian love, we may present and discuss matters and be kindly disposed toward one another, to the end that all we say and do may please You; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen”*

(Prayer 139, p. 307, *Lutheran Service Book,* CPH, 2006).

**Hold people accountable.**

The leader should hold people accountable to the ground rules. If a person has been reminded about the rules but continues to violate ground rules and disrupt the meeting, the leader should ask the offender to leave the meeting per the group’s commitment to ground rules. If a person refuses to leave after being asked,[[2]](#footnote-2) *Roberts Rules of Order* indicate that a person may be physically removed. If this becomes too disruptive, the leader may ask for a motion to suspend or end the meeting until such a time that the meeting can be held in a God-pleasing manner.

1. In meetings where confidential information will be presented, you may add a ground rule “Hold confidences” referencing Proverbs 11:13; 20:19; and 25:9. When explaining the ground rule, indicate *specifically what* is to be held confidential – e.g., issues regarding employee matters, legal issues (especially legal vulnerabilities and legal advice), who said what in discussions, etc. If someone objects to this rule of confidentiality, do not discuss any confidential information during this meeting. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This may happen in rare circumstances. In such cases, it may be because the person is being affected by drugs, alcohol, or mental illness. When there is a refusal to abide by the agreed-upon rules including leaving the meeting, the best option may be to suspend or end the meeting until another time. Then the individual’s disruptive behavior can be addressed privately before the meeting continues. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)