

The Catholic Women's League of Canada



Antigonish Diocesan Council

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*Ignite Your Passion, Empower His Mission*

TO: Parish Council Presidents  
FROM: Diocesan President, Anne McCormick  
DATE: April 25, 2026  
SUBJECT: Guidelines to Conducting Effective Meetings  
MEMO: # 7 (2024-2026)  
CC: Parish Council Presidents, Diocesan Officers, Life Members, Provincial Secretary (for distribution to provincial counterpart)

Sisters in the League:

Planning and presiding over meetings are very much a part of the life of a parish council president. Conducting effective meetings will ensure that meetings run smoothly, respect member's time, encourage participation, ensure that League work is accomplished and leave participants with a feeling of satisfaction. The following guidelines are intended to help CWL presidents in leading effective meetings.

**Prepare for the Meeting.** An effective meeting begins well before members gather.

- An executive meeting should precede each general council meeting. It saves time if the business details are discussed at the executive meeting and recommendations brought to the general meeting. Avoid, however, finalizing business at the executive meeting, as the general membership should share in the decisions made.
- Promote the meeting through bulletin notices, telephone calls, emails, etc.
- Prepare an agenda. An agenda sets expectations and keeps the meeting on track. Essential elements of an agenda include a spiritual program/reflection, approval of minutes, treasurer's report, necessary business and a fun/social activity. Estimate the time for each agenda item.
- Ensure the environment is welcoming, comfortable, and conducive to sharing information. Designate a member to act as a greeter and arrange someone to look after a guest speaker.

**Follow Basic Principles.** These principles allow business to be conducted in an orderly & democratic way.

- All members have equal rights to ask questions, to express views, to explanations and information, to have their views respected.
- Only one subject is discussed/considered at a time.
- Decisions are made after full and free discussion.
- The minority must be heard but the majority rules.
- Good will must prevail.

**Manage Time Effectively.** Time management is critical and respects members' time.

- Start and end the meeting on time. Waiting for late-comers is unfair to those present.
- Follow the agenda to keep discussions on track; limit discussion to a reasonable time.

- Consider reducing the number of reports being delivered; consider rotating reports of standing committee chairs monthly. Limit the time for delivery of reports.
- Place critical business and items requiring motions early on the business agenda.
- When issues require more time, consider referring them to a committee or tabling them.
- Be mindful of meeting length; ideally meetings should not be more than 60-90 minutes

### **Chair the Meeting with Courtesy and Proper Etiquette**

- Use a microphone if necessary: ask members to stand when speaking.
- Be attentive to new members; ensure they feel welcomed and informed.
- Invite quieter members to share and ensure no one dominates the discussion.
- Keep the discussion on topic; avoid holding private conversations; don't allow "across the meeting" conversations. Use your gavel if needed to bring order or side conversations to a close.
- Be impartial, fair and courteous.
- Allow for respectful dialogue and differing perspectives; manage conflict.
- Be sure that equipment needed for reporting or presentations is set up and working properly.
- Ask that all questions be addressed to the chair.

### **Ensure Clear Decision Making and Consensus**

- If necessary, ask leading questions to stimulate discussion.
- Listen and periodically summarize main points of discussion.
- Help members formulate motions, as required.
- Have a motion on the floor before permitting discussion.
- Clearly restate motions, ensure a seconder if needed, & confirm the outcome of the vote.
- Confirm who is responsible for action items and expected timelines.

### **Review each Meeting**

- What went well? What could be improved? How engaged were the members? What could be done to improve the meeting and/or decision-making process?
- Utilize resources on the national website: (636) President's Handbook, (645) Guide to Simplifying Meetings, (617) Parliamentary Procedure and (615) National Manual of Policy and Procedure.

### **Make your Meetings Different**

- Invite guest speakers. Invite and welcome women from the parish to attend. Allow time to socialize before/after the meeting. Incorporate faith, fun and fulfillment.

Conducting effective meetings is a learned skill—one that deepens with experience, reflection, and practice. Each meeting you chair is an opportunity to grow, to try something new, and to strengthen your confidence as a leader. Remember no one expects perfection, only a willingness to learn and improve. Small adjustments from one meeting to the next can make a meaningful difference.

Thank you for your passion, leadership and dedication to The Catholic Women's League of Canada.

Your sister in the League

Anne McCormick, Antigonish Diocesan CWL President