



**Building Consensus
Making Decisions as a People of Faith**

I. What is Consensus?

Consensual decision-making processes are intended to help groups “think and feel together.” In the context of council meetings, *consensus* describes how council members work out a decision by thinking together as a group. It is a form of decision-making which enables a group to come to agreement without voting.

II. Why Not Vote?

Sometimes voting is fine. It can be useful when a group is making simple decisions, uncomplicated by strong feelings or opinions one way or another. Sometimes it's useful and time-saving simply to “take a straw vote” to get a sense of the group during a discussion.

At other times, however, voting results in “winners” and “losers.” When a great deal is riding on a decision, a great deal is at stake, or when the decision to be made is highly emotional for some or all council members, a vote can polarize the group and result in tension/conflict. In such instances a vote can prevent a council from witnessing to solidarity, harmony and unity.

III. What Are the Basic Guidelines for Consensual Decision-Making?

- Avoid blindly arguing for your own personal point of view.
- State your position as clearly and logically as you can.
- Listen closely to others' statements; observe their reactions carefully before pressing your point.
- Avoid changing your mind only to reach agreement or to avoid conflict with others. Support only solutions with which you are at least somewhat in agreement. Yield only to positions that have objective, logical-sounding foundations.
- Avoid resorting to “conflict reducing” measures like majority vote, coin toss, averaging, bargaining.
- Seek out differences of opinion (remember, it's natural to differ and differences should be expected and can be growth-inducing).



CONSTITUTION OF THE PRIESTS' COUNCIL

Appendix I
Diocese of Great Falls-Billings

- Try to involve *everyone* in the process. Differences of opinion or disagreements reflecting a wide range of information and opinion can create a situation in which better solutions can be reached.
- Discuss underlying assumptions. Listen carefully to one another and encourage all to express themselves. If discussion reaches a stalemate, look for the next most acceptable alternative for all members.

Don't confuse consensus with unanimity. Consensus doesn't necessarily mean that everyone agrees with every single point, or feels equally good about the final decision. It does mean that all agree this is the best decision for the faith community as a whole—taking into account the wisdom of the group.