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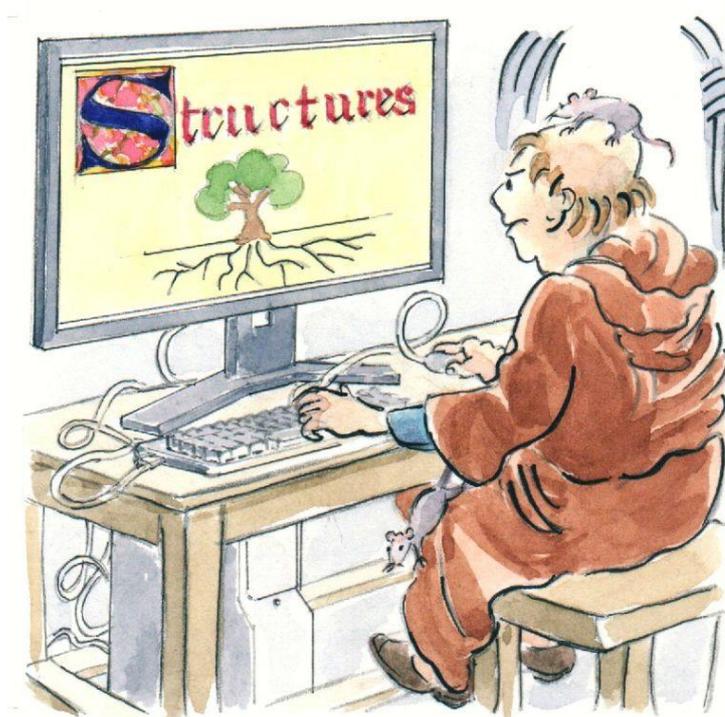
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Meetings, agendas and records

A morning for PCC Secretaries and Administrators



Diocese of Truro

14th March 2020

1: Understanding meetings

It's worth starting right back at square one

Why have a meeting? Why indeed!

But there are advantages in getting people together in the same room

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What goes wrong with meetings you have observed?

Describing what happened	Possible causes

Groups that meet include:

Consider the kind of people, the number, the culture, decision-making, the room and layout

- A House of Commons debate
- A School Governors' meeting
- The Allotments Society AGM
- The family meeting over supper
- A church PCC
- A committee you are involved in

The cost of a meeting

We shall try a quick calculation

The purpose of the meeting

Two questions to ask before you even start to think of an agenda

1: Why does the group exist in the first place?

Start your answer 'So that ...' and not 'Because ...'

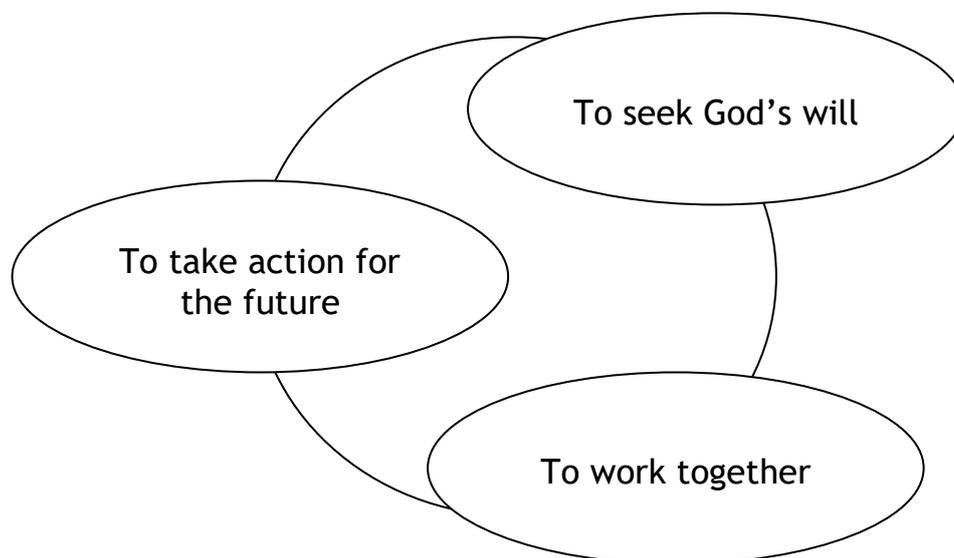
If you have any say in the matter, scrap the word 'committee' or 'board'!

2: Why are we having this meeting?

Because it is the first Thursday of an even numbered month? I hope not.

It is helpful if the agenda can guide people towards an answer, in addition to listing the ground to be covered.

The three-fold purpose of any Christian business meeting



The three key features for a PCC meeting might then be:

- 1 **You need to have a clear purpose** – definition rather than assumption
- 2 **You need to have a big agenda** – substance rather than trivia
- 3 **You need to work as an effective team** – people rather than meetings

These three points are worked up in Article A24, *Mission-shaped Church Councils*, in the Resources section of my website.

So what is the place for prayer and Bible study within a Christian meeting?

Take any recent PCC meeting you were involved in. How well would you score it for each of the three in the diagram? What might be changed to increase the score?

For further ideas on this issue, see Training Notes TN118, *Why, exactly, are we meeting?*, on the website.

Preparing the meeting

Timing

- 1 Time of day
- 2 How people are as they arrive
- 3 Length of meeting

Comfort

- 1 Surroundings: heat, light, air, sound, distractions
- 2 Furniture
- 3 Refreshments and breaks

Equipment

- 1 Flipchart / iPads or laptops
- 2 Communication tools
- 3 Resources (including spares)

Seating layout

- 1 Formality
- 2 Equality
- 3 Sight-lines

We shall look at four possible room layouts for a PCC meeting.

For A B C D	Against
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For further details of layouts see Training Notes TN71, *Seatings for meetings*, in the Resources section of the website. For fresh ideas for APCMs see Article A20, *Annual meetings can be different*.

The Secretary's role

- **Back up** (anticipating what might go wrong: who forgets to come / bring papers)
- **Information** (reference books, diary, meeting rules such as quorum, background)
- **Reminders** (if the person chairing forgets something or fails to sort out action)
- **Action lists** (to ensure that nothing gets forgotten before the next meeting)

For material on the role of all Council members see Training Notes TN88, *Advice to a new committee member*.

2: Agendas

Think route-map rather than shopping list

Who is responsible for the agenda?

There is no one answer to this question. It could be any of:

- 1 The team leader
- 2 The person who will chair the meeting (this may not be the same as No. 1)
- 3 The Secretary – that's you! (Even if it is ratified by Nos. 1 or 2)
- 4 A leadership group of some kind or a Standing Committee (potential time-waster)
- 5 No one (can be OK for regular informal meetings with no surprises....)

But, at some point, it will probably come through you to format and despatch.

Three elements

- 1 The 'notice' of the meeting – know the rules here: period, method, information to include, etc.
- 2 The 'agenda paper' (strictly) for the meeting
- 3 Notes or background papers to support the agenda

These can be three different items, or can all be combined into one (if No. 3 is not complicated).

The route-map

It needs to include all the business and in a wise order, grouped in an appropriate way

It may need all kinds of back-up for reading, explanation, etc.

There needs to be some idea of Plan B if anything goes wrong (eg. timing)

PUB QUIZ

It's helpful to know some of the basics, just to impress everyone.

- 1 What do agenda items 'Matters Arising' and 'AOB' actually imply?
- 2 What distinguishes a 'unanimous' vote from one 'nem con'?
- 3 When is a meeting non-quorate? What can you do in this situation?
- 4 In a formal meeting which has a motion before it and an amendment is then proposed, what do you vote on and in what order?
- 5 When does a formal motion not require a seconder?

Principles for preparing good agendas

- 1 **Get the heading and overview right (the 'notice' section)**
 Consider details to include and the style of introduction. It is your job to get everything right and follow the rules – so no one can complain that a meeting is out of order. Get everything out on time in the correct format that has been agreed.

- 2 **Think MAP not LIST**
 Ensure the agenda shows an overview of the whole, a logical ordering, any necessary background, any supporting explanation. It needs to be a guide to help the meeting work well, not a shopping list of items. Make the layout look really good with a neat layout, plenty of spacing, use of fonts, etc.

- 3 **Group and order the items to help the meeting 'flow'**
 Better to have six items as main headings each with two or three sub-items than 16 different points. Break a complicated item down into parts and show what action is needed for each (see next point). You do not have to follow a traditional order but ensure the order is logical. Highlight the major item.

- 4 **Clarify each action required**
 Help everyone understand what each item is all about – for preparation and list the action required. Typical actions are for information, for discussion and for decision. But consider, too, for team-building, for research, for reporting back, for review, for blue sky thinking.

- 5 **Provide sufficient background information**
 You can include backing papers, but a short sentence of explanation for each item, printed on the agenda itself, may well be better in many cases. What you write or fail to write here can help the Council meeting to work really well – or for people to be unsure of what items are about and so you waste time at the meeting.

- 6 **Let the agenda speak of Jesus Christ**
 What does the agenda say about prayer? Can you stop before a key decision and spend time praying – without using this to make a point! Some church meetings seem to open and close with prayer but assume that God is not present for the business items.

A note on timed agendas

For	Against
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For further details of agendas see Training Notes TN61, *Mapping out a meeting*, in the Resources section of the website. For the idea of annual agendas, see Article A40, *Going deeper into meetings – planning issues*.

3: Records

Don't restrict your thinking to the idea of minutes

Start with the Why? question again

- 1 **You are recording decisions taken for your group members**
- 2 **That includes the actions being taken and by whom**
- 3 **Some explanation of how you got there can be helpful**
- 4 **You may want to tell others not in the group what happened**
- 5 **You may be providing a record as part of a bigger-picture history**

What therefore matters is

- Accuracy
- Clarity
- Immediacy

Five types of record

- 1 **Notes**
Quite sufficient for many groups – one side of A4 – bullet-point style – out within an hour – not official – limited circulation
- 2 **Minutes**
Required for official groups – two or three sides of A4 – headings and brief prose or lists – out within a day or two – becomes an official record – confidential
- 3 **Report**
Designed for non-members – one or two paragraphs – newspaper/TV news style – out within a day or two – selective and unofficial – public
- 4 **Verbatim record**
Possible for some public meetings – as long as the meeting – full text – out when required – official – usually public
- 5 **Nothing at all**
Perhaps

See Training Notes TN45, *Are you sure it's minutes you need?* within the Resources section of my website. To see how to prepare a 'report' from a meeting read TN38, *We've got news for us!*

St Petroc’s PCC

The February meeting included a 30 minute discussion on whether to organise another work-party this year.

*If the meeting had had **NOTES**, the item might have looked like this. Note their brevity, staccato approach, clear record of decisions and actions, but minimal attention to the debate.*

GROUND/KITCHEN DAY

Another Saturday work-party: 9th May, 10 am. to 3 pm. Hope for at least 20 people. Dig and plant in beds, lop trees, lay concrete path, spring-clean kitchen.

- Publicity - Sarah
- Lunch - Helens H and O with team
- Equipment - Dawn

*If this group was formal enough to have **MINUTES** they might have looked like this. Note the reference number, action column, some idea of the discussion, the use of the past tense. But, it could be argued, that it might be a better minute if it more closely resembled the notes shown above in that many minutes are too detailed.*

ODAG/42	<p>GROUND AND KITCHEN WORK-PARTY</p> <p>The meeting discussed whether to hold another grounds work-party this year. Most present were strongly in favour but there was also a view that too many demands were being made on staff’s Saturdays following the recent Barn Dance. We eventually agreed to organise such a day on Saturday 9th May from 10 am. until 3 pm. Sarah would arrange publicity around the church, Helens H and O would get a team to provide lunch, and Dawn agreed to sort out equipment needs.</p> <p>We would aim to dig and plant in beds, lop trees, lay a concrete path to the back door and, indoors, spring-clean the kitchen. We would need at least 20 people to do this.</p>	Sarah Helen H Helen O Dawn
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*If the group had, in addition, wanted to tell the whole church what had happened at their meeting (perhaps in a weekly notice-sheet), the **REPORT** might have said something like this (and not covered any other items). Note the populist approach, the lack of committee detail, the clear message.*

CHURCH GROUNDS TO GET MAKEOVER!

The PCC agreed to organise another attack on the grounds and a spring-clean of the kitchen at their meeting last week. They are hoping that this year will see the attendance record smashed once again.

The big blitz will take place on Saturday 9th May from 10 am. to 3 pm. and a free lunch will be provided to encourage everyone to come!

Book the date NOW! More details in a few weeks’ time.

*Something closer to a **VERBATIM REPORT** would need more space than we have here!*

Taking notes at a meeting

Preparation

- Have the right papers, diaries and equipment
- Sit next to the person chairing with a table, laptop or iPad, paper and pens!
- Keep all files meticulously
- Take a real interest in the group's work
- Read up all the paperwork yourself
- Try to be in good shape!
- Get to know each member as well as you can

As the meeting takes place

- Sit in an appropriate place
- Be aware of the purpose of each item
- Take more detailed notes than you think you need
- Try to follow the overall shape of a discussion more than the detail
- Ask for clarification whenever necessary
- Be ready to answer questions from your notes
- Check back exact words of decisions and actions (and voting figures) immediately
- Look out for what the person chairing has forgotten

Principles for good minutes

- 1 **Type up the minutes as soon as possible**
Mind fresh, rapid distribution, check with whoever chaired
- 2 **Get the opening correct**
Have a checklist of what to include
- 3 **Aim for less formality than in the past**
Write in active not passive form, sentences short, Christian names
- 4 **Word discussions towards the decision**
Remember the purpose of each item, and the purpose of minutes in general
- 5 **Keep your own opinions out of the record**
You may have strong views but ...
- 6 **Keep 'narrative minutes' short**
List format for pro/con, bullet points for views expressed, learn from Acts 15:7!
- 7 **Avoid names wherever possible**
Unless lists, proposers, actions, requests – never in discussions
- 8 **Reference each item**
Find the best way for needs
- 9 **Word the decisions with care**
With accurate details of voting, proposers, etc. if required
- 10 **Clarify action responsibility**
Action names either in a column or all at the end
- 11 **Take care over confidentiality**
Some groups tackle confidential items so tag the record correctly and keep quiet
- 12 **Make it look good**
Plenty of spacing, good heads and sub-heads, layout

For further details of these points, see Training Notes TN97, *How to minute a meeting*.

Action plan

So what are you going to do about it?

The main lessons I have learned this morning

Some new ideas which I have picked up today

The main actions I need to take now as a result of today

The people I need to talk to in connection with this

The time I shall set aside (within one week) to review my notes and plans

My target for achievement by the summer

Books you may find helpful:

Handbook for Churchwardens and Parochial Church Councillors by MacMorran and Briden (Bloomsbury) – latest edition

An ABC for the PCC by John Pitchford (Continuum) – latest edition

The PCC Member's essential guide by Mark Tanner (Church House Publishing)

Church Representation rules (Church House Publishing) – 2020 edition