



Meetings!!!

A key to effective meetings is to have a meeting only when it is needed. Many people dread meetings and don't want to serve a ministry if it means going to meetings! So, it is important to have meetings only when one is really needed.

Much committee or task group work can be accomplished via email, calls, or texts. A meeting is needed when face to face communication, collaboration, discussion and/or decision making is needed. So, when a meeting is needed, here are some tips for making the meeting efficient and effective.

Create a Covenant with your Team

If your group meets regularly, create a covenant with the group on what the common understandings, agreements, and promises made to one another will be for these meetings. (See Creating a Group Covenant)

Create and Distribute an Agenda before the Meeting

1. Create and distribute the agenda a few days before the meeting and ask for everyone's input.
2. Follow up with key participants to make sure they agree with the agenda and don't have any items to add.
3. Distribute all materials to be reviewed at the meeting prior to the meeting. Ask meeting participants to review the materials before the meeting.
4. Assign a specific duration for each item in the agenda. This is a good way to make sure people think about those items and whether there will be enough time, especially if each item is owned by a different person.
5. Assign the person responsible for facilitating discussion of each item. Have different participants take part in presenting the information, discussion topic or decision criteria. That way, you can facilitate the meeting, and your attendees have a stake in the meeting and its outcomes.
6. Confirm that agenda with everyone at the beginning of the meeting.

Provide Time and Opportunity for Relationships

People are social beings. People like to catch up with one another. Schedule a "check in time" at the start of the meeting, and invite everyone to briefly share what's going on in their lives. Pay attention to relationships and facilitate right relations, including mediation of disputes when necessary. If disputes are serious, the Committee on Ministries is available to help restore right relations.

Light a Chalice to Help Center Participants

As our meetings are a function of a ministry, it is important to center participants to the spiritual mission of the meeting. A relevant reading shared as the chalice is lit is a great way to center folks and focus on the tasks at hand.

Start and End on Time

Start the meeting on time. Honor the time commitment of people volunteering to attend a meeting by beginning and ending on time. Reward those who got to the meeting on time. Do not take time to review for latecomers. That can disrupt the flow of the meeting and is discourteous to those who arrived on time.

End the meeting on time. Respect the planning that participants did to come to the meeting and end the meeting when you said it would end. An exception to this is when you are in a discussion that everyone wants to finish. Take a poll and continue only if everyone agrees.

Designate Someone to Record the Minutes

If your team does not have a designated recorder, make sure to assign a recorder at the start of the meeting. Provide a format for recording the minutes if you like. This can help especially if you rotate the recorder at every meeting.

It is not fruitful to record all discussion. Record the agenda item, that is, what is being discussed. Record the outcome: decisions made, tasks for follow up, persons responsible for follow up tasks. Record discussion only when there is controversy or disagreement. Then, record the disagreement (without names) and the resolution. Document when items are tabled for discussion at a future meeting.

Keep the Meeting Flowing

A critical task in leading a meeting is facilitating the discussion. Make sure that everyone has an opportunity to participate. This may require using questions or statements such as, "Mary, would you like to add anything?" "Let's go around and make sure everyone is heard."

Stop any off-topic discussion by assigning a "parking lot" where those ideas will be recorded for later discussion.

Keep track of time and do a time-check every once in a while (for example, "I'm sorry to interrupt...")

Recap decisions and action items. Have the recorder write down decisions and actions to be taken, putting a due date and the name of the responsible person on each item. Repeat the actions, due date, and person responsible at the end of the meeting minutes. Ask the recorder to recap the agreements and actions at the end of the meeting.

If you want to determine whether your meeting was valuable, you might consider asking for feedback at the end of the meeting with questions such as: What did you find most valuable? How could we improve our next meeting?

Followup with Participants After the Meeting

Have the recorder distribute the minutes of the meeting within a day or two of the meeting and ask for any needed corrections from those present.

Follow up with members who have assigned tasks before the next meeting. Offer support and ensure that they are ready for the next meeting.

As a reminder, send out the action items and persons responsible from the last meeting to everyone when you send the agenda.