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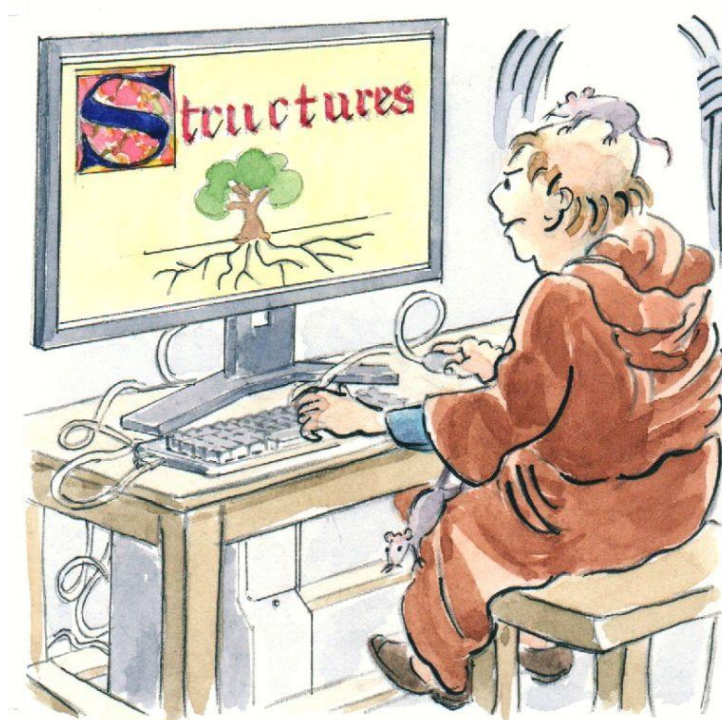
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Taking effective minutes

A Zoom session for all who take minutes for church meetings



Diocese of Truro

15th March 2022

If you want further copies, you may access this set of notes as a pdf today or later at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/News> and then the item for 15th March.

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1: Recap on church meetings

I ran a half-day event on PCC and other meetings almost exactly two years ago at Camborne. Today we look at one aspect of that in more detail.

On that morning in 2020 we covered a range of issues.

Why have a meeting at all?

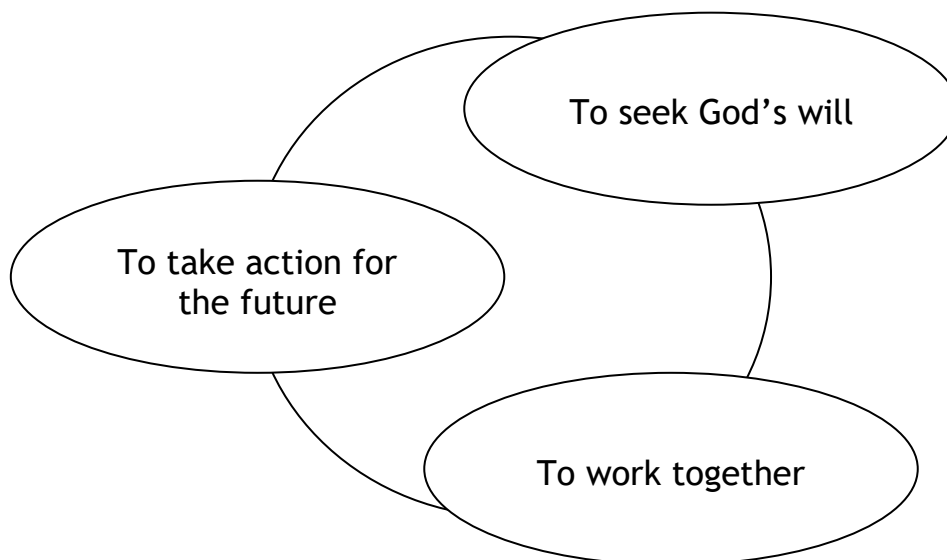
What goes wrong with meetings we have observed?

How much do meetings 'cost' in time?

Do we know why this group (PCC or whatever) exists?

How do we prepare for a meeting: timing, comfort, equipment, seating layout?

The three-fold purpose of any Christian business meeting



Principles for preparing good agendas

- 1 **Get the heading and overview right (the 'notice' section)**
- 2 **Think MAP not LIST**
- 3 **Group and order the items to help the meeting 'flow'**
- 4 **Clarify each action required**
- 5 **Provide sufficient background information**
- 6 **Let the agenda speak of Jesus Christ**

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

2: Keeping records

Don't restrict your thinking to the idea of minutes

Start with the Why? question

- 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 at the meeting what happened**
- 5 **You may be providing a record as part of a bigger-picture history**

What therefore matters is

- Accuracy
- Clarity
- Immediacy

Which of those three is an issue in your case?

Five types of record

- 1 **Notes**
Quite sufficient for many groups – one side of A4 – bullet-point style – out within a day if possible – 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 week at the most – 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.*

GROUNDS/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.*

PCC20:11	<p>GROUNDS 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, Helen and Peter 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 Peter 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!*

3: Writing minutes

Taking notes at a meeting

Skills needed

- Good listening
- Compact note-taking
- Precise writing style
- A keen mind
- Attention to detail

What might you add to this list?

Preparation

- Have the right papers, laptop, diaries and other 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: its purpose, its way of operating
- 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

- 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 writing brilliant minutes

- 1 **Type up the minutes as soon as possible**
Ensure your memory of the meeting is still fresh, check with whoever chaired, distribute whether electronically or on paper within a week, ensuring everyone is included.
- 2 **Get the opening correct**
Have a checklist of what to include such as the heading, the full date, those in attendance and apologies for absence.

- 3 **Aim for less formality than in the past**
Write in an active not passive form (“we agreed...” rather than “it was agreed that...”), keep sentences short, normally use Christian names these days but be consistent, and try to avoid old-fashioned, stuffy terms.

- 4 **Word discussions towards the decision**
Remember the purpose of each item, and the purpose of minutes in general. You are not writing Hansard but listing what was decided and who is responsible for action with some idea of how you all reached the decision.

- 5 **Keep your own opinions out of the record**
You may have strong views but these should not come through, so avoid phrases and words which may come across as loaded in some way....

- 6 **Keep ‘narrative minutes’ short**
Aim for a list format for pro/con points or possible solutions from the arguments put forward, using bullet points for views expressed. Sum up a long debate by listing the main points rather than saying who said what. Learn from Acts 15:7!

- 7 **Avoid names wherever possible**
Unless providing an attendance list or formal proposers/seconders, or those responsible for actions or those giving a report, never use people’s names in discussions. Someone will complain you have left them out.

- 8 **Reference each item**
Find the best way for your needs

- 9 **Word the decisions with care**
With accurate details of voting, proposers, etc. if required. Make sure you get the wording of the decision spot on, so ask for clarification at the meeting if you need to.

- 10 **Clarify action responsibility**
Action names either in a column so they line up with the action to be taken, or put them all at the end by person, or put them in bold or a different colour within the main text.

- 11 **Take care over confidentiality**
Some groups tackle confidential items so tag the record correctly and keep quiet. PCCs leak far too easily.

- 12 **Make it look good**
Use plenty of spacing, with good heads and sub-heads, and a tidy layout that enables the messages to come through clearly.

For further details of these points, see Training Notes TN97, *How to minute a meeting*. This covers the same ground as these notes but in a slightly different way.

Other sets of notes from my website of particular interest to this topic include TN71, *Seatings for meetings*, TN88, *Advice to a new committee member*, and TN118, *Why, exactly, are we meeting?*

4: Exercise

Here is a set of PCC minutes. Mark everything you feel needs correcting or is not good practice. You may also feel the chairing of the meeting needed some improvement too!

ST PETROC'S with ST PETERS

Our PCC met on 15th March. 11 members were present and 3 did not attend. Coffee and cake was provided by Marilyn. The Vicar opened in prayer and the minutes of last time were agreed after one small amendment.

The new time for the main morning service was discussed at what some later felt was unnecessary length. Robert threatened never to come again if the Rector changed the time of the Parish Eucharist but one of our parents with young children countered this view as its too early as now. Mrs Tregonning suggested a time of silent prayer but this failed on a vote of 3 for 7 against and the rest abstaining. Why not put out a questionnaire to the congregation asked Captain Corner (RN)? The churchwardens said it was to soon after the youth survey. "Let's ask the Archdeacon" said Penny Farthing. There were some really good idea put forward but we had run out of time so went on to the next item.

The chiming of the church clock was discussed. People are complaining that it keeps them awake at night and a deputation had written to the local paper who had phoned the Vicar to ask if this was true. It was resolutued that Bill be asked to muffle the clock after 8 pm, proposed from the Chair.

Prof Property raised the urgent matter of rising gas prices under AOB and demanded to know what tarriff we were on. The Church Warden had gone home by this time as her aunt is far from well so we agreed to ask her after the meeting. Someone suggested we change suppliers and I said we should check out other local churches.

The meting closed after the Treasurers report of the current deficit and requests for action to be taken.

Signed.....

Action plan

So what are you going to do about it?

The main lessons I have learned this evening

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 July 2022

Books you may find helpful:

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

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

Practical Church Management by James Behrens (Gracewing) – latest edition

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

Church Representation Rules (Church House Publishing) – 2020 edition