

# Ugh. Another Committee Meeting?!! **YUCK!**

Just some of the reasons most of us cringe at volunteering....

- "MEETINGS ARE BORING, TOO LONG, AND HIJACKED BY SOMEONE WHO ALWAYS GRANDSTANDS THEIR OWN SPECIAL INTEREST."
- "WE NEVER GET ANYTHING DONE"
- "NO ONE DOES ANYTHING AROUND HERE BUT ME!!! THERE ARE TOO MANY CHIEFS... AND NOT ENOUGH DOERS."
- "WE NEVER FOLLOW THE AGENDA AND ALLOW OURSELVES TO GO OFF ON TOO MANY TANGENTS."
- "NO ONE COMES PREPARED."
- "THERE IS NEVER ANY ACCOUNTABILITY OR FOLLOW THROUGH."
- "EVERYONE WANTS TO TALK. NO ONE WANTS TO LISTEN."
- "THE MEETING NEVER STARTS ON TIME. WE SPEND THE FIRST 10 MINUTES WAITING FOR LATE ARRIVALS!"
- "FOCUS PEOPLE! EVERYONE IS CARRYING ON SIDE CONVERSATIONS, CHECKING THEIR PHONES OR WRITING OUT THEIR SHOPPING LIST."
- "MEETINGS ARE A WASTE OF TIME!! I GOT OTHER THINGS TO DO TOO!"

## Ways to combat the meeting/volunteering saboteurs

- Consult the training guides and videos provided. Call a special meeting so everyone is "on the same page."
- Have AND STICK TO a well-planned agenda. Set time limits for each item on the agenda. Table new business for end of agenda or next meeting.
- Provide the agenda and supporting materials in advance of the meeting.
- Come prepared to the meeting. Review the agenda, notes from the last meeting, all materials supplied AND what you want to say before the meeting (so you can speak as succinctly and to the point as possible).
- Pray as a meeting group before starting. Ask for the Spirit to guide you as a group. Trust that He will.
- Promote open and honest discussion with respect for everyone's time.
- Understand and use CONSENSUS DECISION-MAKING (you may need to study up and hold a special training session).
- Conclude with clear ACTION ITEMS with due by dates and who is accountable.
- Enlist a secretary or note taker to provide clear, concise notes with ACTION ITEMS and accountability noted within a few days of the meeting.

## EFFECTIVE COMMISSIONS/COMMITTEES

*V. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful.*

*R. And kindle in them the fire of your love.*

*V. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.*

*R. And you will renew the face of the earth.*

*Let us pray.*

*Lord, may everything we do begin with your inspiration  
And continue with your help,  
So that all our prayers and works may begin in you  
And by you be happily ended.*

*We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

(Prayers to Begin Meetings, Book of Blessings)

Unlike business or civic groups, when parish committees meet, they **gather as members of a faith community focused on the mission of Jesus**. Each committee is dedicated to a particular area of mission or a specific ministry for which they have responsibility. The manner with which they go about their task serves as an example of unity in Christ. Every meeting becomes an opportunity to proclaim the Word, to worship, to heal and serve, to build and strengthen community.

## COMMITTEE GUIDELINES

1. **A well-prepared agenda** – the agenda is clear about who will present, what past and current items will be discussed and what action considered and the reports to be reviewed.

**Who:** The committee officers and assigned pastoral staff member

**What:** Plan the agenda for review and preparation by the committee members

**When:** Preferably 2 weeks to 10 days prior to the meeting date

2. **Agenda and meeting materials are sent in advance of the meeting** – the agenda and any accompanying materials should be sent in advance to all the members.

**Who:** The secretary

**What:** Prepare the agenda for distribution

**When:** At least one week before the meeting

3. **All members are prepared for the meeting** – each member should read the agenda, previous meeting notes, and any other materials prior to the meeting

**Who:** All committee members

**What:** Prepare for the meeting by reading the materials for the meeting

**When:** Prior to the meeting

4. **Prayer sets the tone and helps the group focus on the mission of Jesus and the Church**

**Who:** Prayer leader

**What:** Prepares and leads the prayer at the meeting. If the prayer involves a scripture reading, faith sharing can also be part of the prayer experience

**When:** Meetings usually begin and end with a prayer but prayer can be shared before a decision is reached on an important item

5. **Discussions are conducted in a respectful, inclusive and prayerful manner**

**Who:** All committee members

**What:** As individuals and a group, the entire committee needs to create an environment in which there can be honest, concise and open conversation

**When:** At the time items on the agenda are open to discussion

6. **Decisions are made by consensus**

**Who:** Chairperson

**What:** Facilitates the discussion to a resolution upon which all members agree

**When:** The time for discussion has been concluded and the chair summarizes the comments which are similar and those which are diverse

7. **Members follow up on agreed-upon actions**

**Who:** Any member who is assigned or has agreed to complete a task

**What:** Complete a specific task of reporting or gathering information

**When:** Between the current meeting and the next scheduled meeting

## BEING AN EFFECTIVE COMMISSION/COMMITTEE MEMBER

### PREPARING FOR THE MEETINGS

1. Submit any agenda items to the chair at least two weeks prior to the meeting.
2. Read the minutes of the previous meeting, the agenda, and any additional materials which the agenda committee has included for discussion or information at the meeting.
3. Bring all materials needed, including your personal calendar.
4. Plan to arrive on-time for the meeting. If you are unable to attend, inform the chair before the meeting.

### PREPARING FOR THE MEETINGS

- ✓ Honor your **commitment** to the group
- ✓ Take **interest** in other members of the committee
- ✓ Study the **area of mission and ministry** to which you have committed
- ✓ Volunteer to **assist** with committee tasks as your availability allows
- ✓ Keep your discussion comments **brief, on topic**, and without tangents or sidebars
- ✓ Listen to others in the group with **respect** and without judgment
- ✓ Share **responses** but do not dominate the discussion
- ✓ Seek **consensus and results**
- ✓ Ask for **clarification** when a comment is unclear or could be misunderstood
- ✓ Protect the **rights of others** to have opinions and feelings shared
- ✓ Encourage **silent members** to speak
- ✓ Avoid **communication that disrupts** the group – sarcasm, diversions, side conversations
- ✓ Make your **own notes** on the agenda

## AFTER THE MEETING AND BETWEEN MEETINGS

1. Complete any assignments
2. Know that a report of the committee action will be submitted to the Commission and Council
3. Be prepared for the notes and agenda for the next meeting to be distributed

## LEADING EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

The **committee chairperson facilitates the meeting** by following the agenda, encouraging participation and discussion, adhering to a timeline, and guiding the committee to resolve the action items. The work of the chairperson begins well before the committee meets.

### BEFORE THE MEETING

1. Read the minutes of the previous meeting and work with appropriate parish staff member and officers of the committee to **prepare the agenda**. Timelines should be estimated for each agenda item. Items should be prioritized according to importance. The agenda should be distributed 7 – 10 days prior to the meeting.
2. **Bring all materials**, including a personal calendar, to the meeting.
3. **Arrive ahead of time** to ensure that the meeting room is open and set up.
4. Complete the **meeting room checklist**:
  - ✓ The room has enough seating to comfortably accommodate the participants
  - ✓ There is adequate lighting and ventilation
  - ✓ The room is free of distractions and interruptions, such as telephones, loud noises, bouncing balls, etc.
  - ✓ The chairs are comfortable enough for the length of the meeting
  - ✓ All necessary materials are available or prepared, such as projector, handouts, newsprint, etc.
  - ✓ Refreshments are available as appropriate and customary

### BEST MEETING PRACTICES

- Begin the meeting **on time**. Meetings should not exceed a two-hour time limit.
- Lead the **introductions** of members and/or guests.
- **Overview the meeting** briefly so that all members are clear about agenda items and proposed actions.
- **Follow the agenda** as published or as revised.
- If there are **latecomers**, briefly acknowledge them as they arrive and indicate the current agenda item.
- Manage the **time for each agenda item**. The agenda should be set up so that less important items are last on the agenda and can be carried over to the next meeting.
- **Conclude the meeting** when the agenda is completed or when the two-hour time limit has been reached. Agenda items can be carried over to the next meeting. Meetings may exceed the time limit only with the approval of the members and with an agreement upon specified amount of time – 10 minutes, 15 minutes, etc.

## FACILITATING DISCUSSIONS

Below are some suggestions and examples for ways to promote discussion and effective decision-making.

### ASK QUESTIONS

- What are the committee's thoughts about this item?
- How do you feel about this issue?
- How would you answer John's question?
- How does the committee want to proceed on this matter?

### ASK FOR A SUMMARY

- Lots of good ideas have been suggested in the last few minutes. Can someone summarize the major points before we go on?
- Can someone summarize what we have agreed upon so far?

### ASK FOR EXAMPLES

- Can you give us an example of what this would look like?
- Can you tell us about other parishes that already do this?

### TEST FOR CONSENSUS

- Does it seem to you that we have reached agreement on certain points?
- Could we test our agreement on this issue with a show of hands?

### SURVEY THE GROUP

- Let's go around the table quickly and ask people to share an initial reaction to the proposal.
- How many of you like this section of the report?

### BE SUPPORTIVE

- Let's give those who disagree an opportunity to explain why they disagree.
- That's a very good point you have raised.

### CHECK FOR BEST OUTCOMES

- Are we asking the right questions?
- Do we need more information about this?
- Is this the most effective way to proceed?
- Have we considered all the possibilities?

### CONFRONT DIFFERENCES

- Could you explain to the group why you are so opposed to this?
- What could be changed in the proposal to make it more acceptable?

### LOOK INTO THE FUTURE

- What is the worst case scenario if we move forward (or don't move forward) with this?
- How will this impact our future?

## MANAGING CONFLICT

From time to time, committees will experience tension between members which has the potential to lead to annoyance, disengagement, heated exchanges, angry outbursts, and a member leaving the meeting. Below are some common situations in which conflict can develop and some suggestions for mediation.

### KEEPING THE DISCUSSION ON TOPIC

- Intervene quickly but sensitively if the discussion moves off topic
- Acknowledge the speaker's point and re-connect with the discussion topic
- Suggest that the off-topic issue can be discussed as a possible future agenda item
- Committee members who consistently speak off-topic should meet with the chair in a private setting outside of the meeting time

### NAVIGATING A DISCUSSION ON CONTROVERSIAL OR CONTENTIOUS TOPICS

- Address the potential conflict by clearly identifying the opposing sides or issues
- To the extent possible, keep the discussion rooted in the facts and ask people to state when they are sharing an opinion
- If necessary, suggest a moment of silence or lead a prayer to keep the group focused on its important ministerial task, then resume the discussion

## ENDING THE MEETING

1. End on time or negotiate for additional time with the committee members.
2. Summarize the results of the meeting:
  - What was accomplished
  - What has moved closer to being accomplished
  - What action needs to be taken before the next meeting
  - What communication is needed regarding the meeting results
3. Request possible agenda items for the next meeting
4. Thank all for their work and commitment to the parish
5. Close the meeting with prayer

