

LIVENING UP THE CHURCH AGM

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I hate AGMs – there is nothing more boring than listening to annual reports and adopting annual accounts. What's more, how can we reconcile an AGM with the church meeting's stated desire of 'submitting ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and standing under the judgement of God that we may know the mind of Christ'? Technically maybe a Baptist church meeting could dispense with an AGM, for in the eyes of the law it is the ministers and deacons who are the trustees of the church – so presumably the AGM could become the preserve of the ministers and deacons. However, the reality is that all Baptist churches need an occasion when – at the very least – the annual accounts are adopted, the church officers are re-appointed, and annual reports are given. So, faced with this reality, how do we overcome the boredom factor? A number of suggestions come to mind. First of all, every AGM needs to take place within the context of worship – for at an AGM we come above all to thank God for all his goodness over the past year. The emphasis needs to be not on what we have done, but on what God has done through his people – and praise him accordingly. This does not mean that we do not recognise the time and effort that people have given. Far from it – an AGM is a place for cheers as well as praise. Secondly, to ensure that the meeting is not overwhelmed by a multiplicity of reports from the various organisations and activities, there is a lot to be said for all reports being brought together in a booklet and distributed prior to the meeting – on the understanding that members will indeed bother to read the reports. The minister or the church treasurer might still want to highlight certain aspects of their reports – but hopefully this can be done visually (if not using PowerPoint, then at least using an OHP) rather than verbally. Thirdly, although detailed church accounts should always be available to those who want to see them, the presentation of the accounts should be restricted to basic headlines – there is no reason why church members should, for instance, know how much was spent on toilet rolls in the past year (for the record, this is not an exaggeration: I was actually present at a church meeting when the treasurer was asked to account for the church's expenditure on toilet rolls!). Fourthly, the AGM provides an opportunity for the church to look forward. This is the moment when the leaders of the church 'cast the vision' for the coming twelve months. AGMs are a place for the church to engage in 'possibility-thinking' as the members reflect on what God might be calling them to do. Fifthly, AGMs can be an excuse for eating and drinking together. The business might be done more quickly if members know that at the end there be coffee and cake for everybody – better still, why not bring out some sparkling white and celebrate the goodness of God in style (Confession: this last idea I have yet to put in practise!). The fact is: AGMs can be occasions to be looked forward to!

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