

## **A CHURCH MEETING DOES NOT HAVE TO BEGIN WITH MINUTES**

*Baptist Times* 26 May 2005

In most church meetings, the minutes of the past meeting tend to come toward the beginning – immediately following a brief act of worship. In our church the minutes of the monthly church meeting always come 30 minutes after the beginning – and so ideally one third through the meeting.

Like most churches we begin with a hymn and a prayer and a reading. Whereas I tend to choose a hymn at whim, I like the discipline of reading and then commenting on one my readings for the day.

The opening worship is then always followed by ‘news of the fellowship’. On the screen I always beam up the names of a number of people. Some will be unwell, others may have a new job or may have passed an exam. Without divulging confidences (the church meeting is not the place for medical diagnoses) I talk about the people concerned. I also put up on the screen names of people new to the church, and talk about them too – hopefully whetting the appetite of church members to get to know for themselves these new friends.

From news of individuals, I then turn to news about the church. At our last church meeting I note that I talked about the need for members to get involved in the process of nominating new deacons for election. I talked too about Alpha. And, of course, I talked about the forthcoming Sunday’s services – about my hopes for each one of them.

At this point we turn to prayer. Ideally I would like to break the meeting up into small groups and get everybody to pray, but time is normally against us. Instead, I lead the praying from upfront, as we bring before God the needs of the fellowship.

Then comes a highlight of the evening! A distribution of cards (designed by one of our church members, always bearing an encouraging text, and printed simply on coloured card) and pens. For the next five minutes every member is scribbling away a message to one of the people mentioned in our ‘news’ time. Strictly speaking people are only allowed to take one card and therefore are only allowed to send one message, but it is amazing how many people ‘cheat’ and take two or more cards! I always stress that it is not necessary to know people in order to send a message and tell them we have been praying for them. The cards are then collected and given to the leader of the pastoral team: the following day, she sorts out the cards and delivers them (or puts them in the post) to the people concerned. Needless to say, these cards are always greatly appreciated and are often treasured for a good number of weeks, if not months.

By the time we have then sung another hymn or song, we are ready to begin the formal business of the evening, and so at this point the minutes are read. But in fact, we have already done some of the most important business of the evening. Thank God, church meetings do not have to begin with the minutes.

Paul Beasley-Murray