Effective Church Meetings

Church Meetings - Heaven or Hell?

If you are reading this article, you have probably been to both of these events: the church meeting from hell and the church meeting from heaven. A hellish church meeting begins late, has little or no agenda, decision making does not take place, spawns multiple side conversations about small details, and lasts forever! On the other hand, a heavenly church meeting is a greatly satisfying experience. We grow closer to our fellow church members, ideas and dreams are discussed, decisions are made and each person leaves feeling that they have made a contribution and accomplished something important for God’s kingdom. So how do we move towards heaven in our meetings and avoid that other place? Here are some keys.

Time, Time, Time

For much of the last century, the church enjoyed a vast labor force or stay-at-home moms who had time to volunteer. In this century, both spouses work, leaving little time for the church. Therefore, a church meeting that wastes peoples’ time is a heavy liability for any church, and this will remain true into the indefinite future. Leaders of church meetings should have a primary objective of being respectful of the time of others. In general, meetings should start and end on time, and should accomplish a set purpose. Having an agenda and agreeing ahead of time about any additions is important for more formal meetings. The chair should also be alert for decisions that cannot be made at a particular meeting or that can be delegated to a subcommittee. For example, the church board may decide it needs a new vacuum cleaner and vote to purchase one. So far so good. However, if a discussion ensues about how much the new vacuum cleaner will be, what brand is best, what store has the best prices, members of the group may want to suggest that this be delegated to a smaller group. Being respectful of peoples’ time is crucial in the 21st century. Good, productive meetings will attract leaders who are motivated to move the church forward.
The Friends Factor

While time is important, people do not join churches because they enjoy attending meetings! Church meetings are an opportunity for members to make friends and maintain relationships. A good meeting allows for socializing, sharing and humor. Gaylord Noyce, in his book, “Church Meetings That Work”, stresses that time spent building community can be helpful later in making decisions, because members know and trust one another. The key, of course, is to allow for community time, but still get work done.

People Are Different

Thankfully, no two people are the same. God created each one of us with a unique set of gifts and talents. In meetings, this can sometimes be frustrating. Some members like to laugh and joke, others are all business. Some are constantly generating new ideas, some are more comfortable sticking to the facts. Some members enjoy analysis and problem solving, others care for the feelings and life situations of others. These differences can also make for great church meetings, if the chair and members are aware of the differences and how they can be employed effectively.

One helpful model is the Myers-Briggs personality inventory. This view identifies four major personality groups, identified by two-letters. NFs, intuitive feelers, focus on relationships and feelings. NTs, intuitive thinkers, do well at analysis and new ideas. SJs, sensing and judging, care for the institution and pay attention to facts and details. SPs, sensing perceivers, add excitement and action taking to the mix. A wise chair can identify the general personalities of members and place them in roles where they will excel and make a contribution.

Another approach is the “HOTS” model, described by Robert G. Allen and Mark Victor Hanson in their book, “The One Minute Millionaire”. In their view, “Hares” are the idea people who consistently come up with new plans and approaches. “Owls” are analytical and can select the best of the ideas. “Turtles” slow down the process and check for problems or errors. “Squirrels” implement the final product and make things happen.
The Good Church Meeting

In summary, church meetings are more complicated than they look. In a good meeting, people feel that their time is respected. Their individual gifts are appreciated and recognized. Not only that, but they are granted the opportunity to use those gifts in cooperation with others to achieve good results for the church. Along the way, there are opportunities to maintain relationships, make friends and build community. At the end of an effective church meeting, members leave feeling satisfied and optimistic about the future of their organization.

--The Rev. David Keill