

Doing God's work in committee

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I know some people who refuse to sit on church committees because they think it's a waste of time. I've known some church committees that prove them correct. In one case, the chair has become something of an establishment. She's rather undisciplined, drags meetings out needlessly and talks excessively herself.

Careful agenda planning is a necessary antidote to ensure that committee members' time isn't wasted. Having a printed agenda in the hands of all members several days in advance of a meeting is crucial. Inviting members of the committee to suggest agenda items ahead of time gives them a sense of ownership in the meetings and helps avoid unnecessary surprises.

It is also important to suggest ahead of time why each item is on the agenda and what the intended outcome is. Is an item placed on the agenda merely for reporting? For reporting and discussion? For brainstorming? For action of some sort or discussion now and action at a later meeting? Proposed actions also help focus discussion on items that need a decision (so long as committees don't act as rubber stamps).

It is also useful to think ahead of time how much time should be allotted to each agenda item, even if this isn't hewed to slavishly. Members of the committee can then discipline themselves to help keep discussions within certain boundaries. One trick: if you anticipate an agenda item will take longer than it should, perhaps because someone has an axe to grind on that issue, place it near the end of the meeting, when people are getting ready to wind down.

Church committees shouldn't be purely business, however. The [Worshipful Work](#) organization has helpful ideas about how to infuse church business with a spiritual dimension. It's not a matter of simply bookending a committee meeting with an opening and closing prayer.

Rather, the potential is there for making committee work an act of worship, while at the same time an occasion for spiritual discernment.

In my own congregation we've adopted *lectio divina* in church business meetings and committee meetings. A slow, repetitive reading of a scripture text at the outset can infuse the whole meeting with a sense of God's presence. Occasional periods of silence, listening for the voice of the Spirit and even returning to the text at points throughout the meeting have changed the culture of the way we do God's business together.