

# **Vestry 101**

## **Module 5: Vestry Agendas**

### **Rev. Wendy Huber**

*The text of this section of the video is below. Please refer to it as necessary as you reflect on and answer the following questions about how your vestry or bishop's committee currently organizes its meetings, and ways you may wish to adjust it.*

1. Do your meetings match the "4 P" analysis?
  - a. Purpose—Why are you meeting?
  - b. Participants—Are all the people necessary to make decisions available at the time designated? If not, can some agenda items be tabled until they are?
  - c. Property—What resources, facilities, materials are needed to accomplish the meeting's goal?
  - d. Plan—Could this work or these decisions be accomplished through alternative communications?
2. Who plans your meeting agendas?
3. Do your meetings follow a more typical agenda structure?
  - (A) A clear start and end time which allows the participants to plan accordingly and focus discussion
  - (B) A request for written reports where appropriate so that valuable Vestry time is not used in regular reporting
  - (C) An opportunity for formation as a Vestry (some use a bible study to begin their work together) and we will consider a few agenda options in a moment
  - (D) Use of an executive session to consider personnel matters.

In what areas can you improve your structure and processes?
4. Have you explored ways you might employ a more Mission-Focused agenda and meeting style?
  - (A) Gathering & Formation through Bible study & prayer
  - (B) Minutes & Financial Report
  - (C) Discipleship
  - (D) Mission
  - (E) "Catch-all"
  - (F) Leadership School
  - (G) Sending
5. If your vestry is not quite ready for a Mission-Focused agenda, in what ways might you add or expand areas of your current meeting structure to allow for a more mission-minded and spiritually formational experience?

## **Structure: Meetings & Group Dynamics--Wendy**

As you heard from Brooks— meeting as a Vestry is an opportunity to transform your church as well as yourselves.

Many of us groan at the thought of yet another meeting on our already busy calendars. And yet we are a meeting society— in a world made up of small groups who come together to share information, plan, solve problems, criticize, praise, worship, make new decisions and find out what went wrong with old decisions. We need meetings to function-- Recall the words of Jesus always in Matthew chapter 18 verse 20 “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.” By grounding your work as extensions of the work of the church to share the good news of Jesus Christ— you will honor Jesus.

Meetings are a necessary part of your work together as a Vestry or Bishops Committee. Having some expectations and ground rules for meeting management can make your time together productive and faithful. It can be helpful to have a model for how to structure your meetings and develop your agendas so that the time spent allows you to focus on that which is most important, and also fulfill your responsibilities.

Meeting management includes the preparation of an agenda and developing group norms and expectations as well as the actual management of the Vestry or Bishops committee Meeting. Unlike the typical business meeting-the Vestry is charged with the spiritual and financial well-being of a congregation and the organization and the focus of the meeting is first on God and then on business.

An in-person meeting is often the best way to communicate information to others in a group where face to face interaction is necessary. In our busy world we tend to avoid in person meetings in favor of email or even texts. We all know the experience of receiving a text or email from someone and without the sound of the voice or body language accompanying the message we receive a different message than we were sent.

My late Mother was an early email adopter and we often corresponded regularly by email and one day I received an anxious reply to an email exchange from her: Why are you yelling at me?” she asked. I wrote back shocked— “What are you talking about?” She said, “You sent me an entire email in all-caps. You were yelling!” Had we been in person we might never have had moments of anxiety and upset about the all caps email. So you see, meetings are necessary for many reasons.

It is also clear that a group can often develop solutions collectively that the members could not have come up with as individuals. A good starting point is to develop a clear set of group norms and expectations. You should take the time each year to develop some of those expectations. Your group norms will always be a place to fall back as you work together.

When determining whether you need to have a meeting you should first look to your own bylaws and determine what they say about frequency of meetings. Some meet monthly and some meet as infrequently as quarterly and some meet weekly if there are many issues requiring the attention of the leadership of the church.

Preparation of the Agenda is typically done with the Senior Warden/ Bishops Warden and the Rector/ Vicar working together. If possible, the agenda and any written attachments should be

provided to the Vestry before the meeting, so Vestry Members may consider items being proposed and reported.

Considering whether a meeting is appropriate & necessary may be helpful for leaders. A simple tool: The 4 "P" analysis is helpful to determine appropriateness and necessity. The first P the purpose should be clearly identified with the concerns, problems, decision, work that must be completed. Once you determine you have a purpose, the other 3 are participants, properties and plan.

So remember, purpose—is why you are meeting. The next p Participants are all the people necessary to make decisions available at the time designated. The third p Property—what resources, facilities, materials are needed to accomplish the meetings goal. And finally, the Plan— could this work or decisions be accomplished through alternative communications. Once you decide you will conduct a meeting, there are some considerations for how you will actually organize your meeting time together.

Some elements of a typical Vestry agenda include

- (A) A clear start and end time which allows the participants to plan accordingly and focus discussion
- (B) A request for written reports where appropriate so that valuable Vestry time is not used in regular reporting
- (C) An opportunity for formation as a Vestry (some use a bible study to begin their work together) and we will consider a few agenda options in a moment
- (D) Use of an executive session to consider personnel matters.

In this new era the vestry and all leadership groups will seek to give the congregation the gift of missional leadership. The governance functions in this agenda are concentrated, allowing greater time for the development of an atmosphere of discipleship formation in the church so that the people will be equipped to serve the world in the Name of Christ. An example of the more missional focused meeting agenda might flow as follows.

The first 30 MINUTES Focus on Gathering through Bible Study and Prayer. The Minutes: are simply approved" as distributed with corrections received at any time.

Then In a short 5 - 10 MINUTES the Financial Report: Using language accessible to all with an executive summary person reporting. The financial Report should highlight key points and any matters requiring action. A norm to be honored is highly focused discussion; general financial positions may be discussed here or in Discipleship or Mission.

Next for 10 - 15 MINUTES You might have An activity of the parish that forms disciples: you might focus on worship, formation, fellowship, or generosity (stewardship). You might Receive and discuss any discipleship-related reports matters pending from previous meetings pertaining to Discipleship.

The next 15 - 30 MINUTES you might engage in Mission actions that will send the baptized into the world these might include service, financial support, evangelism, and social justice. Receive and discuss any mission-related reports matters pending from previous meetings pertaining to Mission.

Moving then to a short 0 - 10 MINUTES Other items needing vestry attention: This is the "catch-all" time of the meeting anything that doesn't fit elsewhere other actionable items pending from previous meetings.

And in your last 30 MINUTES you might hold a mini Leadership School: Leadership development is the focus of this segment including time for study and reflection.

Your last 1 MINUTE. You are being sent into the world to be a blessing and servant to others.

Using the rough guidelines above, either should be able to be conducted in 1 ½ to 2 hours, unless significant or critical issues have surfaced.