

In addition to the general purposes/objectives of every conference meeting (as described on page 23 of the Rule), every meeting should have at least one specific objective. Proper planning and running of a meeting will help ensure the objective is met.

1) Preparation 1 – agenda

- **Frequency, day & time** – The Rule and National Council recommend that meetings be held every two weeks. For some conferences, this is not practical since a number of members are also working full time. The day and time will, of course, be set to accommodate as many members as possible.
- It is probably best to have a **standard format** for your meetings, so that members are comfortable with it and generally know what to expect. P.20 of the Rule provides a sample agenda.
- Although you will have a standard format, don't get **stuck in a rut**. Be creative; be flexible; be responsive to changing needs and circumstances. For example, sometimes the spiritual reading may be a passage from the bible. At other times it may be a one-line quote from Jean Vanier or St. Vincent de Paul. Sometimes members will report on all visits. At other times they may just discuss particularly challenging situations or ones where they learned something special.
- What **one, specific thing do you want the meeting to accomplish?** E.g. getting all the members to participate more in discussions; working out a better system for allocating calls; deciding how to address particular client needs; educating the members about services available in the community (perhaps with the assistance of a guest speaker); planning an address to parishioners re.the work of the Society and need for donations; planning to recruit more members; discussing ways of making the meetings more productive and enjoyable. **Ideally, every agenda should include some training component, even if it's very brief.**
- Since you generally don't want the formal meeting going longer than **1 hour**, plan your agenda accordingly. Be realistic in terms of how much time you allocate to each section of the agenda. Don't assume five minutes will be long enough to work out a resolution to an ongoing problem
- **How are you going to achieve this objective?** Simply wanting to achieve the objective isn't enough. Don't leave things to chance. Decide how you are going to run the meeting so that the chances of success are greatly increased. (see # 2-4 below)

2) Preparation 2 – room

- How we arrange the seating in a room says a lot about how we see ourselves and the others, and how we want to operate. E.g. If I, as president, sit at a table facing a row or more of members I am saying that I am the boss and little meaningful discussion is expected. Placing the chairs in a circle, where everyone is equal and facing their fellow Vincentians, gives a very different message. Depending on what you want to accomplish, the seating arrangement may vary
- Although a conference generally has few options as far as meeting rooms, try to find a space that is private and comfortable. Help the pastor to understand the importance of doing so.

3) Preparation 3 – materials

- Although members will have volunteered to do the prayer and reflection, ensure that you have a reflection available in case the person is absent. Also, make sure there are sufficient prayer cards.
- Go back through your agenda carefully. Is there any material that might help to accomplish the objective? E.g. a flyer; excerpts from the Rule; a new policy statement or announcement from Toronto Central Council; the phone number for a community service; a TV and VCR to show a video; an article from the Register or newspaper. Having the material ready (and copied, if appropriate) says the matter is important and that you respect their time. Fumbling through papers looking for something you're not sure you have says something very different.

4) Running the meeting

- **If you prepared properly**, the meeting will almost run itself, **except:**

i) Rules of order

- ◆ In small, fairly informal meetings, this is not a big issue. A few points:
 - Any decision that is important (especially in terms of having a written record), should be done with a recorded motion, with the name of the mover and seconder recorded. During the discussion an amendment might be suggested. A discussion and vote is taken on the amendment and then on the amended motion.
 - Try to lead a good, healthy debate of the issue but don't let the discussion become repetitive/circular or wander off the motion.
 - Members should get in the habit of speaking through the chair and not directly debating each other. It may seem a little too formal but when difficult issues arise, you'll be glad you started the practice.

ii) Dealing with storytellers

- ◆ Some people have a great deal of trouble staying focused on a topic or perhaps can't see what the group is trying to accomplish. They regularly slip off into little anecdotes that might be interesting over a cup of coffee but use up valuable meeting time and take the focus off the matter at hand. You need to gently, respectfully get them back on topic or suggest maybe they could tell that story at the end of the meeting or over coffee afterward. The person's pride may be slightly hurt but the other members will be very appreciative of your willingness and ability to keep the meeting on track. Some storytellers even appreciate being brought back in focus.

ii) Dealing with antagonism

- ◆ One or more members may be antagonistic toward you, as president, toward another member, or the world in general. If it is affecting the meeting or the other members, it needs to be dealt with. In almost all cases this should be addressed **one-on-one** outside of the meeting. If the situation becomes unmanageable, consult with your Particular Council president. In some cases the member may be asked to resign from the conference. **We can not allow a member to bring harm to clients, the conference, or the Society.**

iii) Through discussion, develop some standards and expectations related to meeting behaviour and then ensure they're followed. For example, it's **not appropriate** for the president or any member to:

- ◆ use body language, tone, or words to belittle, diminish or dismiss another participant;
- ◆ interrupt another speaker;
- ◆ disregard other members' feelings or interests;
- ◆ waste people's time with self-indulgent storytelling or sermonizing;
- ◆ dominate the discussion;
- ◆ consistently wander into meetings late.

- **Ensure that proper minutes are maintained.** A lot of detail is not required. It is generally easiest to make points under each part of the agenda. For motions or other decisions, the decision should be clearly recorded, with movers and seconders for formal motions (although these aren't often required). For discussions, simply capture the main points (not who said them) and the consensus, if one was reached. Reports on visits don't need to be detailed in the minutes since they exist in the client files.
- **Ensure appropriate handling of finances and records.** All members should be informed at each meeting re. income and expenses for the month and current balance. There will generally be a decision also as to how much money to send up to the Particular Council. This information and decision will be carefully recorded in the minutes.

5) Follow-up

- Do any follow up while it's still fresh in your mind.

6) General –

- **All members**, and not just the president, are **responsible** for ensuring appropriate, effective meetings. Discuss this with the members and have them indicate how they can help.
- **Designate** – This spreads the work and accomplishments around and also helps to develop leaders who are willing and able to take over when your term is through.