

Writing minutes like a pro

Safeguard the decisions made at your congregation's meetings for future reference by taking accurate minutes. Proper steps need to be taken to ensure that the minutes reflect accurately what was discussed at the meeting. The objective is to have a record of the actions taken at the meeting, which was properly announced and run, and that the decisions were approved by the required number of votes. The meeting minutes should report the decisions that occurred during the meeting.

It is the responsibility of the secretary to keep the minutes of all meetings of the congregation, the congregation council and the congregation executive committee, as well as the approval, distribution and publication of such minutes. Requirements of minutes may vary but should include at a minimum:

- Date, time and location of the meeting
- The names of all board members present and absent
- The names of any guests, indicating their affiliation
- The presiding officer's call to order, indicating the time
- Approval of the last meeting minutes (as modified, if necessary)
- The motions presented
- The vote on each resolution that was considered (as modified, if applicable)
- A list of any written reports that were received at the meeting
- If an oral report was received without a written report, a brief summary of the oral report
- Adjournment, including time adjourned
- Date and time for the next meeting

If there will be election of officers at the meeting, also include:

- The names of all nominees for elected offices
- The exact vote on each election for office

This is an important governance function and the congregation should provide guidance and procedures to assist volunteers and staff with this task. In some cases, an assistant secretary may be appointed to assist with these duties or each committee may appoint its own secretary. It is important that each governing body has a properly appointed individual to be responsible for the minutes of its meetings, and the individual in charge of recording this information should receive some basic training on how to record and keep meeting minutes. The congregation's bylaws may include a detailed description of the duties and responsibilities of the office.

Executive sessions of the council or board should be used to discuss legal issues, personnel and potential liability issues and no decisions are to be made. The contents of these sessions are not to be disclosed in the general minutes, but the minutes should note that the members participated in an executive session. There should be separate minutes of the executive session, which should be kept separately in a confidential file.

Details about the deliberations prior to the decisions or discussions between members regarding the matters brought up for consideration should not be included in the minutes. Neither should be any discussions with attorneys, certified public accountants or insurance adjusters that may contain privileged information. Decisions made as a result of such discussions should be included in the minutes.

Proper steps must be taken to maintain accurate minutes of every meeting. It is very important that the congregation secure these documents by placing them in a fire-proof safe or maintain copies in an off-site location, ultimately keeping them in the congregation's archives.