Conducting the Church Board/Business Meeting

By Fulton W. Buntain

A well-managed board actually multiplies the efforts of the pastor and staff in accomplishing the ministry. The pastor/chairman of the business or board meeting must guide the meeting in an orderly manner and maintain an efficient schedule by observing parliamentary rules. The chairman does not dominate the meeting but simply leads the board or congregation through the items of business in a spirit that will bring honor to God’s kingdom. We must remember that even though we do all we can to be organized and operate within proper guidelines, we are serving the Lord and His work. Paul told Timothy, "I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15, NKJV). The meeting that conducts the business of the church is a spiritual meeting just as a Bible study or Sunday service is a spiritual meeting. The focus may be somewhat different, but the conduct of church business is essential to the health and proper functioning of the local church.

John Maxwell states: “Two common problems in board meetings are (1) each person has his own agenda, and (2) the pastor has a difficult time maintaining control of the meeting.” Maxwell is right. He recommends avoiding digressions by sticking to an agenda prepared before the meeting. He has a further helpful suggestion of dividing the agenda into three categories: information, study, and action items.

Informational Items

Every meeting should start off on a positive note, and the informational section of the agenda makes this possible. Include five or six positive reports on the ministry of the church. Report how many people attended membership class last week or the exciting ministry of the Holy Spirit at the women’s event the day before. Give news of upcoming events, meetings, or special services. Use this time to inform and remind of the reason for the meeting. This part of the agenda differs from the "old business/new business" plan, which is sometimes fruitless, boring, and negative.

In traditional meetings, more often than not, finance is the first topic addressed, and many meetings never move forward from there. Informational items, on the other hand, are chosen specifically because they are positive, exciting, and set the tone for the rest of the meeting. Spend no more than 5 minutes in this area—just enough time to inspire hearts and prepare them for the most productive segment of the meeting.

Study Items

This part of the agenda always contains the most items. Ninety-five percent of meeting time should be spent studying or discussing these issues and items of interest. Your goal
during this part of the meeting is to brainstorm ideas. Work to get every possible suggestion—and objection—on the table.

Never vote on any item that you have listed as a study item. The pressure of a vote causes people to take sides and discourages free and creative thought. Never vote on a study item before the next meeting.

You may keep some study items for months, allowing every option and objection to be put on the table and explored. Other subjects may be study items for only one meeting and then moved on in the next session. Keeping items in the study section of the agenda allows people to process information without feeling threatened, and eventually a consensus is reached. Only then is an item ready to be put before the body for action.

**Action Items**

The final section of the agenda contains action items, which have already been in the study section for at least one meeting, have already been discussed, and are ready for a vote. Never spend more than 5 minutes in this area. If your board has been candid and the discussion and study have been thorough, there is no reason to spend a lot of time in this section.

If you are currently frustrated by board meetings, you are not alone. Every pastor has been there, and most of us have dreamed of a world without committees. But the truth is we need our board members. They give us perspective, experience, and strength that we don’t have alone. A well-managed board actually multiplies the efforts of the pastor and staff in accomplishing the ministry.

The official minutes of a meeting should include (1) the name of the organization, (2) the nature of the meeting—regular or special, (3) time and place, (4) name of the chairman, (5) the devotional title or topic, (6) correction and approval of previous minutes, (7) business transacted, (8) adjournment, and (9) signature of secretary and date of approval. The pastor may take some liberty in arranging identifying information at the beginning or end of the minutes.