



A toolkit for Deaneries

Effective Meetings & Effective Conversations

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A deanery meeting plays many functions. There are aspects of a meeting that are predominately about building relationships or sharing information, this may mean that presentations and conversations in Deaneries are focussed on absorbing or sharing information. There are occasions however, when decisions are required following a discussion on a particular item or topic. The role of the chair in such meetings is significant, but it will also help if participants in these meetings are better aware of what they are being asked to do.

The following tools are useful to structure such meetings, and conversations within meetings, to enable effective decision making.

1. ID your Agenda

The first tool is to set the agenda for your meeting with a regular structure which identifies whether items are for information or for discussion and a decision.

An ID Agenda helps participants to know what their role is in the meeting i.e. whether they are noting information or whether they are being asked to make a decision. Participants need to know if they are required to act on information as well as receive it and what their role in any decision making will be. Depending on the type of decision this is will be better undertaken if preceded by discussion. Such discussion might be possible in the same meeting as the decision is to be taken. However, larger issues might need several prior information and discussion items.

Wherever possible, information relating to decision making should be sent in advance. It is also helpful to trail any item for decision making with relevant previous information items.

The following example of three sequential agendas illustrates this.

| <i>Kingford Deanery Synod Agenda 25/10/18</i> | <i>Action required</i> |
|---|---|
| <i>Information Items</i> Setting God's People Free: A guide for Deaneries and PCCs. Note the release of national report. | Members to distribute to PCCs and gather information on top three priorities. |
| <i>For Discussion/Decision</i> Deanery Model Rules (previously circulated). Proposal for adoption of model rules in Kingford Deanery. | Decision required on adoption. |

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| <p>Kingford Deanery Synod Agenda 7/02/19</p> <p><i>Information Items</i> Bishop's annual skydive (publicity).</p> <p><i>For Discussion/Decision</i> Setting God's People Free: A guide for Deaneries and PCCs Discussion of PCC priorities - to identify common themes.</p> | <p><i>Action required</i></p> <p>Note date and available publicity. Seek sponsorship from parishes.</p> <p>Identify common themes for potential Mission Fund application to be compiled by Standing Committee.</p> |
| <p>Kingford Deanery Synod Agenda 9/05/19</p> <p><i>Information Items</i> Bishop's annual skydive (update).</p> <p><i>For Discussion/Decision</i> Discuss and agree Deanery Mission Bid (see draft bid from Standing Committee).</p> | <p><i>Action required</i></p> <p>Get well soon card available to sign.</p> <p>Vote to approve following discussion.</p> |

2. Hold CLEAR conversations

Structuring conversations around discussion items is a useful way to help decision making. This tool suggest that effective conversation is a CLEAR conversation.

A CLEAR conversation identifies stages of:

1. contracting
2. listening
3. exploration
4. action
5. review¹.

Contracting

At the start of the meeting or item the chair should clarify the following:

- the item for discussion
- the time available
- the intended decision and the mode of discussion.

It is helpful here to have thought through beforehand how an item might best be discussed. For instance, is it helpful to discuss in small groups? Is it beneficial to take questions from the floor? It is also worth bearing in mind any ground-rules that may be in place for all meetings.

¹ CLEAR from Hawkins and Smith

Listening

This stage is all about actively listening to the variety of views on a topic, seeking to understand the diversity of opinions in the room - or from others people represent. The aim is to gauge the temperature on the topic under discussion and to identify if there are particular areas that require further focus. In introducing a substantial item, this might be the focus of discussion in a single meeting.

Exploring

This stage comprises three elements:

1. summarising the outcome of listening and restating the decision required
2. considering the implications of making (or not making the decision)
3. considering the implementation tasks required following the decision.

Action

Restating the decision required at the meeting (and deferring a decision if necessary).

Review

Close the item or meeting with an effective summary of the decision and the next steps.

One of the key elements of this CLEAR model is to be quite stringent on timings and to keep these as a 'catalyst' to help keep conversations on task. This means being focussed on managing the process of discussion.

Note produced by the Deaneries Advisory Group

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