

VESTRY PAPERS



EPISCOPAL
CHURCH FOUNDATION
Learn. Lead. Give.

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To inform, inspire and affirm Episcopal leaders in their work

'Why not, if it is for Christ?'

by Denis C. Brunelle

Allow me to tell you about a member of a parish where I was rector. He was a man who possessed incredible faith. "Roy" would sit at vestry meetings and listen to all the plans and dreams and proposals presented. Then he would ask searching questions. After he was satisfied, he would always say the same thing, "Why not, if it is for Christ and his kingdom?"

His words were so predictable that some of the vestry decided to see how far they could go and still get the same response. They came up with a lavish proposal, an idea that seemed totally ridiculous. No way could the

which we serve be successful. Our hope is to insure that when we step aside, our congregations exist stronger and more faithful for the next generation. No easy task in today's environment.

In essence Roy had a discerning heart — if the parish is doing this for Christ, why not! Discernment is the spiritual discipline of seeking clarity in identifying the mission of the parish and how the parish (vestry) will respond to God's call. **Discernment means that every member of the vestry comes together not for his/her own purpose, but for the well-being of the larger community,**



parish ever work hard enough to see the proposal accomplished. But they presented it and this man listened. He asked his searching questions, and when they were through, he said, "Why not, if it is for Christ and his kingdom? If we are doing this for Christ, and God is a part of it, why not?"

Roy shared with us all the longing to invest in things that matter, and to have the parish in

putting it first in both vision and decision making. Discernment means making a habit of noticing and reflecting on what each member hears God calling the parish to be and to do.

Discernment does mean prayer. Not just a hurried prayer "lifted up" just prior to making a decision, but an established life of prayer.

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*This Issue:
Vestry Meetings
Circulation 24,500*

Three things are sure bets in churches: Christmas, Easter and vestry/bishop's committee meetings. How best to make those meetings most effective? How best to invite the Holy Spirit, to help all present do the sacred work of the church? Here our writers explore both the practical and theological underpinnings of that essential but often underrated gathering: the vestry meeting.



How to lead effective vestry meetings

by Neal O. Michell

Ugh. How many vestry meetings have you attended that went late into the night? The later the time the longer the meeting drags on.

I inherited the “Approval of the Past Minutes — Treasurer’s Report — Old Business — New Business” approach to

sharing, either personal sharing, or “good news” stories of what God is doing in the parish through Evening Prayer, devotions, or Eucharist. *Skill* is the time for learning best practices, how to read a financial report, balance sheet, and so on. Then, the business part of the meeting can begin. As formation

Large or small, vestry meetings have remarkably similar characteristics. Google pops up 386,000 references to them, most dealing with pledging, mission and clergy activities. They seem remarkably polite, at least on paper.



agenda making. If you want to have really long meetings, use this tried and tired method. Oh, and don’t send out an agenda beforehand, either. Instead, hand out the agenda at the beginning of the vestry meeting. Better yet, ask the vestry at the beginning of the evening what should be on the agenda for that particular meeting. This approach will guarantee a long and drawn out meeting where much is discussed and probably very little accomplished. There is a better way!

Planning around these four areas is the way to both a shorter and a more effective vestry meeting.

Formation in the Christian community is the first priority for the vestry. When does the vestry learn the skills necessary to be an effective vestry? When and how are members formed as a community? When do they learn the best practices of effective churches? A helpful acronym for what to do during vestry formation is VHS – *Vision, Huddle, and Skill*.

Vision concerns the “big picture” of what the church is about. *Huddle* is the time for

is job one of the vestry, thirty to forty-five minutes at the top of each meeting for this task is key.

Information needs no discussion or decision by the vestry: it is keeping people in the loop. This section includes items such as: new members, upcoming events of note, announcement of new staff members or administrative issues.

Discussion covers those things where feedback is needed to do some brainstorming, but about which the vestry is not ready to decide. I strongly recommend that nothing be presented to the vestry for an immediate decision without having been discussed for the month prior. To engage in discussion without pressing for a decision allows for a much freer exchange of ideas and without feeling the pressure of having to convince others right on the spot.

Decisions should be made by the vestry only after an issue has been discussed for the prior month(s) — unless it is a “slam dunk,” and there are very few of those. Using this

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Next Issue:
Planned Giving

Effective vestry meetings

approach to setting the agenda results in the decision-making items taking up the least amount of time, because all of the discussion will already have taken place. The wise pastor will know not to put anything on the decision agenda unless he or she already knows the outcome.

Another point should be made about the month (at least) between the time that an item is put on the discussion part of the agenda and the time for making a decision: the pastor should spend that month talking to vestry members, listening and addressing concerns, and convincing where appropriate. Again, the wise pastor will not put anything on the decision agenda unless he or she already knows the outcome.

Finally comes the treasurer's report. Placing the treasurer's report at the end of the meeting does two things. First, it emphasizes that finances follow mission and vision rather than determine mission and vision. Second, after spending all that time and energy on these other issues, vestry members are usually too tired to fuss much about finances (grin).

The Rev. Canon Neal O. Michell is the canon missionary for the Diocese of Dallas, which has shown consistent growth in attendance, membership, and income over the past ten years. He is a recognized leader in congregational development throughout the Episcopal Church.



What seems to work well: posting 5 x 7 pictures of vestry members in the hallways. It identifies the vestry for newcomers, adds life to a possibly dull space, and reminds vestry members of their important ministry.

THREE TIME-SAVERS

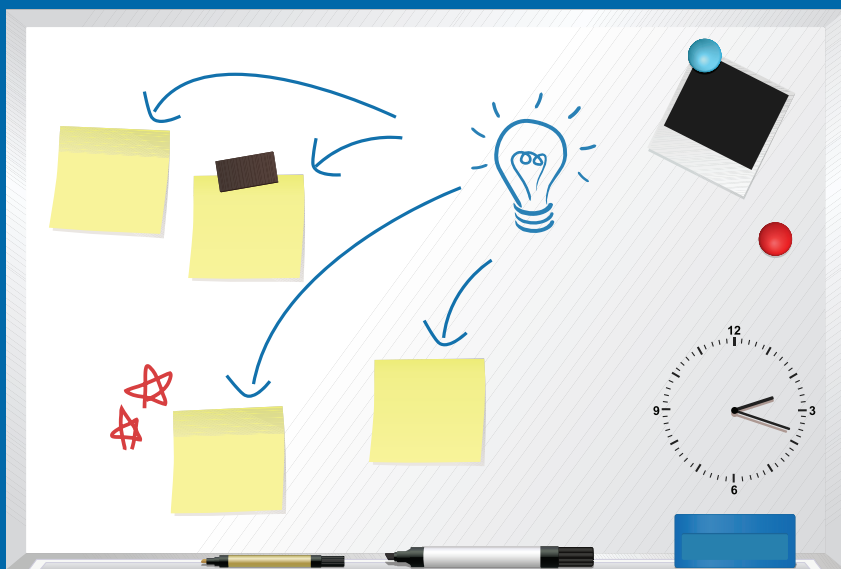
Excerpts from Beyond Business as Usual by Neal O. Michell, reprinted with permission from Church Publishing.

The agenda and the treasurer's report should be distributed to vestry members a week in advance of the meeting. No new item of business can be placed on the agenda once it has been mailed out, unless it is an emergency (and there should be very few emergencies). Spur-of-the-moment discussions make for long meetings and can derail an otherwise productive meeting.

Individual financial questions should be addressed to the treasurer ahead of the meeting. When asking a financial question, the guiding principle should

be: Is this information for the good of the vestry as a whole, or is it simply based on my need to know or my need for clarification?

Prepare an agenda with clear time allocation. As part of the agenda, make three columns: item discussed, with a brief description of what is at issue; who is presenting; and the estimated time it should take. This gives the vestry a preview of the meeting and how long the meeting should last. It communicates that the agenda has been thoughtfully prepared and that they can expect a productive meeting.



'Why not, if it is for Christ?'

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Discernment involves a commitment to keep going so that the good of all people is represented by the decision — where little or no self-centered motivation is observed in the decision making process. Discernment brings about a sense of peace and “rightness” for the whole vestry and parish once the decision is made.

So how does this apply to such mundane things as spending money, repairing

more willing to try the new and are more willing to step out in faith and take the risks that God will guide them in that boldness of faith.

Ultimately that is the bottom line of discernment — not the bottom line as pertains to finances or even numerical bodies of people sitting in pews — but the bottom line of discernment as the call to faithfulness in discipleship and the Gospel



buildings, mutual ministry reviews? The spiritual discipline of discernment impels vestries to first look at its ministry/mission and then evaluate all aspects of stewardship in light of that mission.

Discernment values the gifts of time, talent and treasure are valued more from the dynamic process of “can do” than one of limitations. Discernment leads vestries and congregations into the process of valuing people more than buildings and programs.

Discernment leads vestries into being mutual ministers of the spiritual life of the parish with their priest. Discernment does not allow for sacred cows/bulls (buildings, groups, programs). Rather, the faithful are led in their call to be disciples of the Savior. Vestries actively involved in the discernment process of decision making are

of Jesus Christ. Practical? Not to the world and the way it accounts for things! Fiscally responsible? Absolutely — in that we show the ultimate stewardship for the whole life of a parish! *After all, it is for Christ and his kingdom. Why not?*

The Rev. Canon Dr. Denis C. Brunelle is the Director of the George Mercer, Jr. Memorial School of Theology in the Diocese of Long Island. Denis began his ministry as a retreat director in the Cleveland, Ohio area. Ordained in 1978, Canon Brunelle worked for four years out of the MSC Center in Shelby, Ohio and the Jesuit Retreat House in Parma, Ohio and is a certified spiritual director. He has served parishes in Ohio, Illinois, California, West Virginia and Long Island.



“The Bible is active, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me, it has hands, it lays ahold of me.”

Martin Luther

With the help of the Consortium of Endowed Episcopal Parishes and the Office of Congregational Development at the Episcopal Church Center, we asked the following questions of vestries and bishop's committees, large and small: What makes for a good meeting? What are your hopes and expectations? How can such a meeting both accomplish church business and be faith-centered? Here are some of the responses, edited for space...

In YOUR eyes, what works?

My greatest concern, as manifested at our vestry meetings, is that each member of the vestry show up prepared to discuss the issues, and having made the previous minutes part of their preparation. Vestry is not a "walk in the park" and too many folks are not prepared to make the time and energy commitment. And we all sometimes lose sight of what we want to do as a church and the decisions we are making, in relation to our mission statement.

*John Gasser, Junior Warden
Trinity Church, Portsmouth, Virginia*



Starting on time is critical. People have busy lives so "the train leaves the station" at 7 PM and begins with Compline led on a rotating basis by a member of the vestry. We then discuss a chapter of a book we have agreed to read for twenty minutes. The last book was Heifitz' book, *Leadership with no Easy Answers*.

Then we follow the normative Robert's Rules with welcoming guests, additions/corrections to agenda, approval of minutes and hearing reports. All staff members' reports, including mine, are sent in by e-mail to the clerk of the vestry by Sunday ahead of our Tuesday meetings to cut down on extraneous speechmaking. Committee reports follow and then old and new business, followed by our holding hands, saying the Lord's Prayer and adjournment.

At Christ Church, vestry members work together to develop trust in a myriad of ways

such as an annual retreat, small committee meetings, etc. So when the big decisions come before them, they all reflect together and all have voice which they exercise without restraint!! And, it works for us.

*The Rev. Robert G. "Skip" Windsor
Rector, Christ Church
Needham, Massachusetts*



We have divided all reports into: mission, ministry and money and talk about them in that order. If committees do their jobs, most things run smoothly.

*The Rev. Ernie Matijasic
Rector, Grace Church
Sandusky, Ohio*



With the ease of electronic communications, vestries should handle all preparatory material via e-mail. This can include sending out ahead of the vestry meeting the budget report, any ministry reports, the warden's report and other news. The vestry should commit to the practice of reading all materials so that meeting time can be spent discussing issues and making motions for vote.

Another healthy practice is to divide discussion between speculation (open conversation about a topic) and clarification for vote. The warden should time the speculation period, close it, and ask for a

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Even though your vestry meeting may contain many agenda items, consider structuring it in such a way that everyone has a chance to participate, whether it be a response to prayer or through committee reports.



Kanuga Conference Center



Triangulation: vestries be mindful

In human interactive terms, a triangle occurs when each of two opposing parties seeks to join with a third party against the other, with the third party finding it necessary to cooperate now with one and now with another of these opposing parties.

Triangulation works like this:

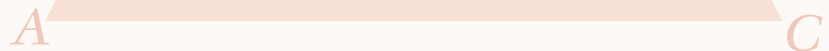
- A has a grievance against C (whether valid or invalid), but instead of going directly to C, A instead talks to B about it.
- A wants B to confront C but without telling C that it is A who has the grievance.

*In this scenario, A wields power over C (unidentified discontent) and B (manipulation). B wields power over C because for C to get to a resolution with A, C must go through B. **How to handle triangulation:***

- B should encourage A to talk to C and state her concerns personally.
- Alternatively, B should lovingly tell A that he will go with her to C, or that B will be happy to convey A's concerns to C but that B will need to reveal A's identity to C because he is sure that C will want to discuss these concerns with A. In any event, B should not carry A's message anonymously.
- Lay the ground rules, starting that we don't communicate anonymous messages. Period. If A wishes to remain anonymous, the complaint goes unreported.

Healthy leaders never play the triangulation game.

Reprinted from *Beyond Business as Usual* by Neal O. Michell, with permission from *Church Publishing*



From the minutes of a vestry meeting at Calvary Episcopal Church in Memphis: "The St. Clare candle remained lit and the brass figure of Christ was passed throughout the meeting to encourage continuous prayer." Nice.

In YOUR eyes, what works?

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vote. The only discussion after the motion is for clarification.

Most important, vestries should be clear about their role in the church and structure vestry meetings to support that role. For larger churches with professional staff, the vestry should be focusing on vision and direct conversations to that end.

*Cary Gray Kelly
Former Senior Warden
Christ Church, Alexandria, Virginia*



We end with the evangelism question, "How is God working in your life?" Each member has the opportunity to talk about their spiritual experiences (or not). We often offer prayers for individual members or members of their families/friends, ending on a prayerful, caring note.

*Mary B. Hagner
Senior Warden
Christ Church Cathedral
Cincinnati, Ohio*



My only suggestion for how to run a better vestry meeting comes from a Vestry 101

Training Session put on by the Diocese. The tip was to not begin every meeting with the treasurer's report. While this is key information, when it starts the meeting it tends to set limits on what the vestry may feel like it can do. This, of course, is balanced by trying to convenience the treasurer who already puts in long hours of service. We are trying to vary the times for his report, but it's tough.

*Charles Hendrix, Senior Warden
St. David's, Minnetonka, Minnesota*



We have a consent agenda which includes the rector's report, senior warden's report, junior warden's report, deacon's report and the minutes of the last meeting. All of these reports are distributed for review at least a week prior to the vestry meeting.

We open with prayer and close with Compline. The rector facilitates the meeting so it moves efficiently. We have the chair of one ministry or committee report at each meeting.

*Frank Connizzo, Senior Warden
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
Manhattan, Kansas*

Per your request

by Toni Daniels



I recently received a phone call from a rector seeking information about what to pay her staff. She was interested in comparisons with other congregations which were similar in size and budget

across the country. She said that she had contacted The Church Pension Group and other offices at the Church Center but was unable to find the numbers she had in mind.

I told her that the Episcopal Church Foundation had not done any research in this particular area. However, I decided to put on my MBA hat and approach this question as a business woman in any small company. I suggested she explore the wages of secular support staff as determined by the job market in her area. I also suggested she inquire at other Episcopal churches in her area, similarly sized congregations of other denominations and her diocese. In addition, she should investigate small businesses that were not church related but required some of the same skill sets. For instance, doctors offices, day care centers, florists, funeral homes, etc.

Here are some suggested questions for comparison with secular businesses:

- Size of plant for cleaning purposes (compare square footage);
- Size of landscaped grounds that are maintained with greenery and need a gardener;
- Skills needed by a secretary (computers, accounting, volunteer coordination, etc.);
- Specialized knowledge (i.e., Episcopal Church familiarity) and how that equates to specialized knowledge in other fields.

There are times in the life of the church when we must approach the concerns from a business point of view. I hope this inquiry and approach to the issue provides some grist-for-the-mill for you and your vestry when considering the business of the vestry.

This new column will appear occasionally in Vestry Papers and is designed to answer questions faced by vestry members. Send your questions to Toni@episcopalfoundation.org Antoinette (Toni) Daniels is the Director of Learning and Leadership for the Episcopal Church Foundation.



When to use Robert's Rules of Order? After appropriate dialogue has occurred and an official vote is required for the record, especially in decisions regarding finances, real estate, hiring practices, etc. To learn more about Robert's Rules, go to www.robertsrules.org





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To strengthen the leadership and financial capabilities of Episcopal congregations, dioceses and related organizations to pursue their mission and ministry.



President

Donald V. Romanik

Director, Learning & Leadership

Antoinette (Toni) Daniels



Editor

The Rev. Lindsay Hardin Freeman
VestryPapers@EpiscopalFoundation.org

Editorial Associate

Kelly Mistick

Director of Marketing

Rebecca McDonald

Design/Production

Monarch Communications

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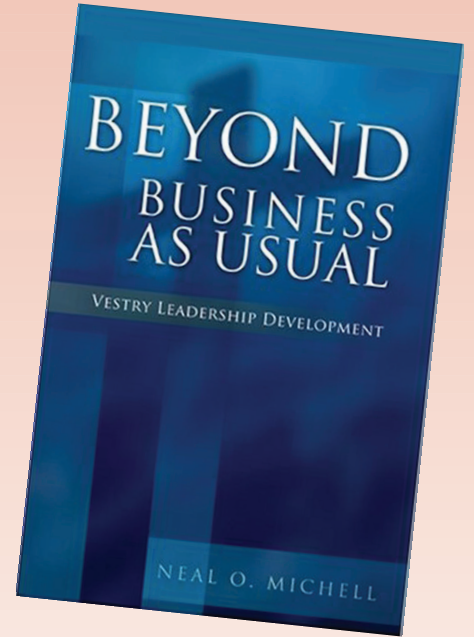
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Reader's Corner

- Ministry flows from community.
- The way to grow a church is not by bringing in more people but by developing stronger leaders.
- Leaders will attract only at their leadership level and below.
- If your past is more exciting than your future, your church is in trouble.
- Healthy leaders never play the triangulation game.

Such axioms are at the heart of the Rev. Neal O. Michell's newest book, *Beyond Business as Usual*. In the 132-page book, Michell, the canon missionary for the Diocese of Dallas, encourages vestries on a variety of fronts, from how to conduct more effective vestry meetings to the importance of projecting a non-anxious presence in the middle of conflict.

Engaging and easy to read, the book offers a wealth of suggestions, hands-on advice and



practical exercises for vestries as they seek to grow in Christ. Clergy as well as laity will find new learnings and best practices outlined in this book a compelling read. (www.churchpublishing.org)

Other good picks

"As you become a vestry member it is important for you to realize that your role is a sacred ministry...This is not a board of directors...a vestry is different because the Church is different."

And that is the theme that the newly updated 80-page *Vestry Resource Guide* strikes: while skills learned in business and other realms are key, a different foundation underlies and embraces the work of the vestry.

Explored are a range of topics useful to and continuing vestry members: responsibilities of the vestry, legal and otherwise; spiritual life and development; stewardship, congregations in transition and sample job descriptions of vestry leaders. Also included are concise snapshots of relevant canon law for congregations and vestries and prayers for use during the church year.

The Vestry Resource Guide is available from Forward Movement and published by the Episcopal Church Foundation. To learn more, visit www.episcopalchurchfoundation.org or call Forward Movement at 800-543-1813.

