



Mennonite Brethren
**HISTORICAL
COMMISSION**

Why and how to take meeting minutes

The writing of meeting minutes is an important responsibility. The minutes of a congregational business meeting, church council, conference or church committee, provide an official record of discussions and decisions made. These records show how the church as the Body of Christ carries out its mission. The keeper of minutes or meeting secretary carries the important responsibility of recording part of God's story as revealed through the work of the church.



To write a good set of minutes, the meeting secretary must concentrate on his/her task. The minutes must be complete, accurate, and unbiased. Quoted statements must be exact, as must be transcriptions of all motions and resolutions.

One of the most persistent problems a meeting secretary faces is how to record accurately a half-hour discussion of a problem within the minutes. Obviously, the entire discussion cannot, and often need not, be transcribed. Careful listening and careful note-taking (as noted below) will be helpful to the secretary as he/she later writes a succinct record, eliminating unnecessary details.

A general tendency is to record too little of what has transpired. For example, a minute such as: "It was decided to adopt the educational program as presented," is inadequate. It tells future readers very little, except that some action was initiated. It does not provide the rationale for adopting the program. Minutes must reflect the main points of the discussion leading up to the decision. They should record alternatives that have been under consideration and clarify why this program was adopted in preference to other existing alternatives. The minutes need to reflect what actually went on, with sufficient detail in order that the record can serve as historical information for those who will refer to the decisions years later.

No secretary is perfect. Often details will be missed and later pointed out in a review of the minutes. However, when the secretary properly understands the importance of his/her

task and carefully follows the discussion of the meeting, incorporating the suggestions listed below, accurate and useful minutes will be the result.

Below are a few guidelines for recording secretaries:

RECORDING MINUTES

1. Examine the minutes of previous meetings to familiarize yourself with the various topics and kinds of information you will need to record.
2. Keep a copy of the agenda in front of you, so that you will be prepared for the items to be discussed.
3. Make an accurate list of all people who are present or give an estimate of the number of people present, in the case of a large congregational meeting.
4. Take abundant notes during the meeting. You can always eliminate unimportant items later.
5. Whenever someone introduces a topic, record the speaker's name, make an outline of the main points, and note general comments of the discussion.
6. Make a verbatim record of the important statements, motions, resolutions, amendments, and decisions.

PREPARING MINUTES

1. Number of meeting

If there is more than one board meeting for a given year, minutes should be numbered, with the numbering sequence continued from one year to the next. Numbering indicates how many meetings took place within the year; whereas dates only indicate chronology. Numbering is useful for committee or board members to check whether they have copies of all the minutes. (Note: executive or sub-committees should number their minutes separately from the larger body.)

2. Name of board, congregation, or committee

Be sure to indicate the exact name of the board, congregation, or committee. If it is an executive committee, say so. If it is a worship committee meeting, make the title obvious. For congregations, indicate in which city the congregation is located, since some congregations may have similar names.

3. Date and time of the meeting

This is a vital part of every set of minutes. It is an obvious reference point and establishes when important decisions were made. For historical purposes (e.g., writing the history of a congregation), minutes without dates tend to blur the sequence of a congregation's growth.

4. Place of meeting

This information can be useful later in establishing the number of times a committee or group has met in one locale (see also 2, above).

5. List of members present

An accurate listing of people attending the meeting is useful in two ways: One, it establishes that the necessary quorum of members has been present to make decisions binding. Two, it establishes the record of individual involvement.

6. Outline of minutes

Minutes need to be outlined to assure easy reference. Minutes without an outline tend to become confusing. It is much clearer and more precise if one can directly refer to an action by saying, "In point 5.6 of the October 10, 2011 minutes, we read: . . ." Outlining via a number system is probably the easiest and least confusing. A good letter outline can be effective as well. Choose one form, learn to use it, and stick with it (note the example of a number system outline below).

7. Circulation of minutes

Send board and committee minutes to all members, either by computer as a pdf attachment or on printed paper. The church office should keep at least one hard-copy version of the minutes stored in a specified folder or file. This collection would normally be available for members of the congregation to review. At the subsequent meeting, the minutes would then be read and adopted. After some years (e.g., five or ten years), a set of the hard-copy minutes should be sent to the Conference Archives of that region.

Southern and Central District churches send copies to:

Center of M.B. Studies, Tabor College
400 South Jefferson Street
Hillsboro, Kansas 67063

Pacific District churches send copies to:

Center for M.B. Studies, Fresno Pacific University
1717 S. Chestnut Ave.
Fresno, California 93702-4709

Canadian churches (except B.C.) send copies to:

Centre for M.B. Studies
1310 Taylor Ave.
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3M 3Z6

British Columbia churches send copies to:

Mennonite Historical Society of B.C.
211-2825 Clearbrook Road
Abbotsford, BC V2T 6S3

Congregations usually do not circulate their minutes to the general public, unless such procedures have been initiated by the church council.

EXAMPLE OUTLINE OF MINUTES

No.32

Minutes of the Church Council

Central M.B. Church* (Toronto, Ontario)

January 6, 2013

Pastor's Study

Present: (List first and last names of all present).

1. The meeting was begun at 7:00 pm with an opening prayer by Pastor Schmidt.*
2. The chairperson of the Education Committee, Jill Johnson,* asked the Council to help the Committee choose appropriate Sunday School material for the next several years. The possible choices are:
 - 2.1. Life Press*: These materials have been used for the past 10 years.
 - 2.2. Faith Press*: This series is used by other congregations in the community.
 - 2.3. Word Press*: These materials identify more with our church's heritage and develop our current concern for mission, peace, community, and discipleship.
 - 2.3.1. It should be noted that Word Press* is produced by one of the groups in our network of denominational affiliations.
 - 2.3.2. Word Press* has been highly recommended by congregations in Kansas and British Columbia.
 - 2.4. After a brief discussion in which the advantages and disadvantages of the three options were debated, Willy Becker* moved that the Council recommends the Education Committee consider using the Word Press* series. The motion was seconded by Georgia Smith* and it was carried unanimously.
3. Meeting adjourned at 8:00 pm.

Michelle Loewen*

Recording Secretary

*indicates fictitious name

This is an updated 2013 version of the *Why Write Minutes?* pamphlet, published by the Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission of the U.S. and Canadian Conferences of Mennonite Brethren Churches. It is intended for use in congregations, boards, committees, and agencies.