

**Enews**  
**May 10, 2023**

Last week I met in Canfield with some Clerks of Session to review their 2022 minutes. We had a good gathering and I look forward to meeting more clerks at the next gathering. Occasionally I get contacted by a clerk or a pastor asking about just what should be included in the minutes. Sometimes the problem is that they are trying to remember the details of a decision, but the minutes are too vague with only something like, “The session voted to replace the air conditioner” but not specifying anything further like the price or the contractor and that lack of detail became an issue later. In another case I was reviewing session minutes a few years ago but having a hard time figuring out what had been decided. In those minutes, the Clerk had recorded everything that had been said to the point that the minutes actually became difficult to use because the vote was buried in pages of discussion! In both congregations, the minutes could have been improved by making sure the relevant information (and only the relevant information) was recorded. So the question remains, what should go in the minutes of a meeting? There are a few standards that should be in all minutes:

**WHO** – The minutes of every meeting should state who is present and who is not. This record helps establish that a quorum was present and that the actions were legally decided in case that becomes an issue later. In rare cases, this can also be used to determine who has the right to object to an action later.

**WHERE & WHEN** – The minutes should indicate where the meeting took place, the date, and the time that the meeting began and ended. This helps in keeping minutes organized and knowing when a certain action went into effect.

**WHAT** – The minutes should reflect the actions that were taken at a meeting. Note that is not the same thing as the motions that were made. You do not need to record a motion that failed to get a second or one that was voted down. However, sometimes you may wish to do so to keep a more complete record. Also, you do not need to record everything that was said and who said it. Generally, that information distracts from the primary purpose of the minutes (to be a record of actions taken) and it can also increase division since once a decision is made it becomes the action of the whole body not just those who voted for it. How much to include in the minutes is as much of an art as it is a science. Generally I recommend that Clerks try to include enough information so that when someone looks back years later they will understand what happened. Here are two examples:

*“John Smith moved that Sally Knox be hired as the new Director of Christian Education. The motion was seconded and approved”*

That is good, but it would be better to record the following:

*“John Smith moved that Sally Knox be hired as the new Director of Christian Education with a one year contract stipulating that she will work 20 hours/week and an annual salary of \$22,000 starting on July 1, 2022. The motion was seconded and approved.”*

It would be even better for the minutes to be accompanied by a contract and job description that will be attached to the minutes. Those attachments become part of the official record and can provide even greater clarity for those looking into the matter later without having to record every single detail in the minutes themselves. I will also point out that, for what it is worth, neither of those motions noted who seconded the motion. The minutes do not actually need to state that. There is no harm in doing so but there is also no need to stress about it if you miss who it was. They also do not need to state the actual tally of votes. Saying that the motion was approved or not approved is sufficient unless the session votes to include the tally in the minutes or a member asks for his or her vote to be recorded as a protest of the final decision.

So long as you are recording WHAT you did you're on the right track but I will note that the *Book of Order* has some specific things that sessions are required to do like opening and closing with prayer, approving a budget, and examining officers. The proof that you fulfilled those expectations is that they are recorded in the minutes. These things are on the checklist for the annual minutes review and I encourage Clerks and Moderators of Sessions to use that form as a guide for preparing session agendas and minutes to make sure everything gets done and recorded properly.

Finally, for a humorous example of on how not to take minutes, I encourage you to [click here and listen to the excerpt of \*The Search\* by Michelle Huneven that she reads in this interview](#). The book lovingly pokes fun at the Church by telling the story of a woman serving on a Pastor Nominating Committee. It even includes some recipes in the back for your congregation's next covered dish luncheon!

Do you have polity question for the Stated Clerk? Email him! Your question may help educate other clerks in a future Clerk's Corner!