# Observing and Interpreting a Meeting

***Observation:***

**How is the room set up? Who is sitting where? (Draw a rough diagram of the set up, noting where the chair/moderator, members, participants, visitors, etc. are sitting and the location of any kinds of presentation materials (white board, projector, newsprint).)**

\*\*The Presbytery meeting was held in a sanctuary. There was a table in the front of the sanctuary on the right hand side where the stated clerk and the assistant stated clerk were seated. The moderator sat up by the pulpit. Everyone else sat in the pews. A projector was used for a few different power points. Krislund Camp and Conference Center did a power point presentation and there was a power point presentation on mission.

**What is going on before the meeting? (Who is talking to whom? What is the mood? What kinds of interactions occur? Is there a written agenda? Did members have materials beforehand or did they receive them as they arrived? Are there refreshments? What are they? Who takes them?)**

\*\* Pastors and Elders started to arrive about an hour before the meeting. Everyone was greeting each other. The mood appeared to be light hearted and joyful. Everyone was shaking hands smiling at one another; ladies were greeting each other with hugs. A meal was served and prepared by the parishioners of the church where the meeting was held. Fellowship throughout the meal provided a warm and friendly atmosphere almost like old friends getting together. The meeting opened with worship. There was a written agenda that had been given out about a week before the meeting by electronic means through the Pastors and the Clerks of Session. At the meeting updates to the budget and flyers for upcoming events at various churches were handed out. Parishioners of the church made coffee and refreshments available at all times throughout the meeting.

**How does the meeting begin? (Who calls the meeting to order? How does it get started? What are the initial comments or items of business? Note both the official start to the meeting and any other comments and how this shapes the course of the meeting and the mood of the room.)**

**\*\*** The moderator called the meeting to order and then Worship Service began. The Senior Pastor of the Church where we met led worship. After Worship the business meeting began and the first item on the agenda was announcements and introducing and giving voice to all visitors. Next there was a consent agenda where items of routine business are passed by consent. There is a sense of a very orderly flow to the meeting. Anytime anyone would like to speak they must address the moderator and ask permission to speak. The moderator can grant permission or deny the floor. Everyone gets a voice in any decisions because all decisions are introduced and then voted on.

**What happens during the meeting? (Note two or three significant events or decisions that were made. Describe the process by which those decisions occurred.)**

\*\*The committee on Ministry discussed calls that were to be dissolved and freed pastors to move on to a new call and set in place the structure to help the church that would be without a pastor to seek and call a new Pastor. This process was presented by the committee and affirmed by vote of the presbytery.

The committee of ministry presented policies for commissioned ruling elders to serve small churches who cannot afford full time ordained leadership. There was a fair amount of discussion that surrounded this topic the moderator facilitated the discussion and finally the decision was made by vote of the presbytery.

The committee of ministry presented inquirers to come under the care of the Presbytery. This required no vote but the members of the presbytery welcomed the new inquirer with prayer and greetings.

Analysis:

**What are your impressions of the meeting (Was it orderly? Was it worthwhile? Was there energy in the room? Where the people engaged in the meeting?)**

\*\* My impressions were that the meeting was done in a very orderly manner. It appears that everyone gets a voice and that everyone’s voice is important. The pastors and elders seemed very engaged in the meeting as they followed along with the agenda and voiced their approval, disapproval and concerns when appropriate. The room was full of energy and the energy seemed to be positive and joyful. It appeared that doing the work of the lord is a real joy. I enjoyed observing the meeting and actually probably learned more and understand the process more because I could just sit and observe. I was not an active participant.

**What process was used to make decisions? What there more than one?**

\*\* Decisions were presented, discussed and voted upon.

**What are the outcomes?**

* Pastor calls were dissolved, given permission to move on and their service to the presbytery was celebrated and honored and they were dismissed with prayer.
* The congregations were provided a moderator and support system in the time of transition to start the call process.
* A policy was approved after a few amendments to give support to Commissioned Ruling Elders to provide pastoral care and leadership to small congregations.

**How did people treat one another?**

People treated each other with respect, dignity and affection even if there was not agreement.

The moderator treated people with respect but was cognizant of time and relevance. She had a sense of humor and used it to put people at ease.

**Was there conflict? How was it handled?**

There were disagreements and discussion, but not conflict.

**What was the role of moderator/chair? (How did she/he function in the meeting?)**

* She called the meeting to order.
* She facilitated the meeting and kept to the schedule.
* When all sides of a discussion were heard, she called for a vote and moved the discussion forward.
* All comments were direct to the moderator not to the assembled presbyters.
* She was guided by the Stated Clerk who is the parliamentarian for the meeting.
* The moderator ended the meeting in prayer and a benediction to dismiss the presbyters.

**Synopsis:**

**Write a one-page synopsis of the key dynamics of this meeting – both the overt decisions/processes and the underlying organizational issues that you observe. How well did the person leading do? What suggestions would you make? If you were the overall leader of this organization, what steps would you take after this meeting?’**

\*\* Within the Presbyterian system, the presbytery is a middle governing body. That connects the presbyters to the larger church. It also supports and gives a general oversight to the local congregations. The calling and dismissing of teaching elders was an important part of the meeting which gave a feeling of caring and support for both the pastor and the congregation. I could feel the conflicting emotions of regret and pain as well as celebration in the call process.

The dynamics of the presbytery meeting was a worship service that led into the work and business of the Lord. Beginning with worship and ending in prayer and a benediction set the mood of the meeting squarely in the context of serving God. Most of the decisions that were made were presented in the packet that was given out in advance so the presbyters came with a sense of how they would vote and prepared to discuss the items on the agenda. Interspersed with the business were informational pieces. The camp, the synod and various mission projects were shared and presented. These presentations provided a time to support the various missions of our presbytery and larger church.

The meal before the service provided a place of fellowship and renewed friendships and genuine caring. At that meal a number of people approached me about my decision to become an inquirer with words of support and encouragement. When I am ordained I will be member of the presbytery and I felt welcomed and encouraged.

Decisions are made in a variety of ways. Some are made by consensus; some by vote, and some have been given to committees who are empowered to make the decision. I am impressed by the amount of respect that is given to each individual presbyter. Even if an individual is in disagreement with the majority, they get to speak and be heard with dignity. If you were a first time visitor or presbyter you might be a little confused about the overall order and facilitation of the meeting**.** While the meeting is done “decently and in order”, regular attendees know what is expected, but it took me a couple of meeting to feel comfortable with the system.