



With a tender hand additional materials

Chapter 3: Grounding our practice

Minutes

The question of what to do about making and keeping minutes exercises eldership and oversight groups for good reasons, which are not always easy to resolve. We have to ask why it is important to keep a record. Who will it help if we do, and what will be lost if we don't?

Not all our business is of a confidential nature, so we shouldn't decide against making minutes on grounds of the sensitivity of matters before us. Minutes provide a useful record of decisions and action taken and help ensure that unresolved business is followed up. And we have to see our work as continuing beyond the service of any individual or of the group as a whole. Keeping sufficient records enables future groups to build on what we have learnt – and to avoid repeating our mistakes. Friends will also be glad of records in the event of an issue recurring or of it being relevant background in a new matter.

While the clerk or convener is usually the person who drafts a minute, all Friends present make the minute by agreeing its final form. Our group therefore needs to discuss what is appropriate to record within a shared understanding of confidentiality. Our guideline will be to minute the essential facts of a matter without revealing unnecessary personal details. For example, a decision to make a grant of money to or for someone should be recorded in a minute that gives the treasurer a clear instruction to make the payment, but it doesn't need to state why the person needs the money. Minutes of an especially sensitive nature can be kept confidential by storing them separately and noting the fact in the general minutes.

Under data protection legislation a person has right of access to records about them held in any form, and this includes 'confidential' minutes. If we make our minutes with this in mind it doesn't stop us from being clear about a matter, but should help us

Do we make our minutes at the time in the usual way or by some other means? Guidance on this will always confirm that the usual way is how it must be done. But in practice many pastoral groups find they don't always achieve this. The matters we discuss are often very different from those brought for decision to a local meeting for business (LM), and we are

trying to fit decision-making in with so many other necessary elements of our meetings. Friends report that they often run out of time and resort to taking notes rather than minutes. Others agree the substance of a minute but the actual minute is written up later and circulated – to those present at the time – for agreement on the sense of the meeting before minutes are signed and filed.

While both practices fall short of the ideal, the important thing is to keep a sufficient record and to be clear such records express the spirit of our discernment. But we may need to ask why lack of time is leading us to do things another way. Are meetings too infrequent? Are we overloading our agendas? Do we use the time we have in the best way?

A final point is to be aware of the usual arrangements for archiving minutes, which is likely to be an area meeting responsibility through an appointed custodian of records. Our group will need to decide when to deposit older records and to know the procedure for retrieving something we wish to refer to in relation to current business.