

Minutes

The past speaks to the present. And that message requires good record keeping. Here is your guide to everything you need to know about taking and keeping the official minutes of your church's meetings.

What Are Minutes?

The official notes recording what occurred at a meeting of members or trustees of an organization are the minutes of the meeting. The book in which the minutes of an organization are kept is the official memory, recollection, and record of decisions of the organization. In this form, the minutes become the legal record of actions taken and plans called for in the ongoing work of the organization.

Any organization legally chartered, organized by a constitution and bylaws or acting in behalf of a larger group of members, must keep minutes of all meetings. Subject to any limitations prescribed in the articles of incorporation and not prohibited by law, the minutes are open to all members of the organization.

The minutes are the organization's history and its plan of action for the future. They record past decisions and official actions so in the future they may be referred to for information and guidance. They express the will of the members present about plans, policies, and specific actions.

Who Keeps The Minutes?

With but few exceptions, the secretary of the organization has responsibility for recording and maintaining the minutes. The exception would be where the body of the organization has appointed some other person to have this responsibility. A good example would be a church board that has an elected secretary but has given the official responsibility for taking and keeping the minutes to the employed secretary of the church.

The secretary, in close cooperation with the presiding officer, takes notes at business meetings, prepares the minutes from the notes, presents them to the group either in printed form or by reading them, and makes any corrections or additions as called for by the group. The secretary may wish to tape-record the discussion at meetings to refresh his or her memory when typing the minutes. The secretary signs the original presented copy of the minutes before changes are made.

Bylaws usually designate the secretary as the keeper of the organization's books and records. He or she should keep these books and records in a safe place with a copy kept at some other site for safety. Many groups have these books and records bound annually. Two copies should be bound so one copy can be kept at hand for reference and guidance while the other copy is placed in another location for protection.

The Minutes Book

All minutes for a church or church board should be kept in one book. In this way all meetings of members and of board members are recorded in sequence, by date. The reason for the use of a single, chronological minute's book is that congregational meetings are generally held only annually or semiannually. These are intertwined among the minutes of the board that meets more often. The congregational minutes usually follow the actions taken by the board. Keeping all minutes as a record of a single stream of activities is what is needed to follow the official action of the board and the congregation.

The minute's book shall contain at least the following items:

1. Title page
2. Copy of the Constitution and/or Article of Incorporation
3. Bylaws (and any amendments)
4. Minutes of all regular and called meetings of the board
5. Minutes of all regular and called meetings of the congregation (The board and congregational minutes shall contain copies of all financial reports and other departmental or committee reports that are made in writing.)

Loose-leaf books are preferred by most secretaries. It is desirable to bind the minutes at the end of each year or place them in a legal binder. Good quality, acid-free paper for the original copies is preferable.

The handwritten meeting notes taken by the secretary should be carefully set in order with proper English and neatly typed. Pages should be numbered with the date of the meeting at the top of each page. An index by subject, date, and page number is helpful and desirable. This should follow the minutes for each year. The book should always be treated as an entire unit; pages should not be removed to be taken to a meeting or anywhere else. The entire book should be taken to produce the continuity of the records and to have the information available for ready reference.

Minutes of each meeting should end with the signature of the secretary. After they are presented (and corrected, if necessary, in ink) at the next meeting, the corrections should be initialed in the margin by the secretary and also by the presiding officer at that meeting. Such corrections may be made only with the consent of those present at the meeting, with the exception of typographical errors.

Once the minutes have been approved in corrected form, the countersignature of the presiding officer shall be added below that of the secretary with the current date, in verification of their correctness. Some organizations require that each page of the minutes be initialed by the secretary and presiding officer. No changes or alterations may be properly made in the minutes after verification. Even corrections, typographical or grammatical, may be made only with the approval of the members present at a regular or called meeting. If corrections of actions or changes in decisions or records are to be made after they have been verified, that may be indicated in the minutes of subsequent meetings—not by rewriting history.

Contents of the Minutes

Minutes of each meeting should contain at least the following information. All parts are needed to give complete and accurate reporting for future reference and for legal information.

1. Time (date, hour, and minute)
2. Place, both address or name of site and room number or description (fellowship hall, minister's study, library)
3. Statement that the meeting was duly called:
 1. By whom
 2. By the kind of notice (regularly scheduled, if it is a called special meeting then the procedure set forth in the bylaws should be followed)
 3. Attached copy of the notice for any called or special meetings
4. Presiding officer
5. Secretary of the meeting
6. Names of those present and those absent (in the event provision is made for voting by proxy, the minutes should show the names and number of those voting by proxy)
7. Reading, correction, and adoption of the minutes of the previous meeting
8. Adoption of the agenda if it is prepared in written form.
9. A record of what occurred at the meeting, including:
 1. Resolutions proposed
 2. Resolutions adopted (names of movers and seconds and the outcome of the vote including the number for, against, and abstaining if a count is taken)
 3. Reports of officers, committees, departments, and ministers (especially the treasurer's report)
 4. Primary issues or themes discussed
10. Adjournment time (date, hour, and minute)
11. Signature of secretary
12. Countersignature of presiding officer (obtained at the next meeting, when these minutes are adopted)

Importance of Minutes

The minutes of a meeting are prima facie evidence of what occurred at that meeting. They are effective evidence of what was said and done. Laws in some states specifically require that nonprofit corporations keep and maintain minutes of their proceedings and complete books and records of accounts. Often in legal transactions such as borrowing money, selling real estate or securities, copies of the official action as recommended in minutes are required.

General Comments

Verbatim recording of discussion is not required or even general practice. Issues and subjects should be recorded indicating whether there was major or minor time spent in the discussion. If there are specific statements made for or against issues, these can be summarized. If the statement seems important enough, the substance of the statement and the name of the person making the statement may be recorded.