



Five steps for Lacuna in meetings

1. Getting ready

Gently encourage people to prayerfully prepare for a meeting. Take a few moments of quiet prayer to gather one's thoughts, seek grace and clean hearts, to be aware of lack of openness or blocks in relation to the business of the meeting, to pray for the others involved. If a significant decision is to be made, open the space for prayer 30 minutes before the meeting begins.

2. Coming together

Recognise that many people are pressured and busy. A meeting which nurtures them is more likely to enlist their wisdom and service. People often need help to make the shift from the busyness of the day into the discernment space. Create a peaceful and beautiful environment in which to meet. Set up a prayer focus at the centre with a symbol of the task at hand, play peaceful music as people arrive, and, if possible, meet in a circle. Remind people that we meet to do God's work in the presence of Jesus. Place the Lacuna bowl in the centre of the meeting space and invite people to become still and make space for listening for God.

Foster a sense of community among the group. Create space for getting to know each other and sharing stories, for example, have a meal together or invite people to share with others something that happened between meetings. Encourage people to share by asking: "Where have you been aware of God at work in your home, work, neighbourhood, or church recently?"

Begin the meeting with worship. Reflect together on a Scripture passage and consider how it addresses the story of the congregation, or ask what light it throws on the business of the meeting.

3. Working together

Prayer and business can be woven together so that devotions do not just become a bookend at the beginning and end of meetings. For instance, it may be appropriate to pause and invite people to take time to listen deeply for God's guidance. After at least two minutes silence, it is helpful to invite people to share anything that emerged for them in that time.

Suspend discussion until people have shared. The meeting could stop to give thanks, offer confession, or to reflect on a passage of Scripture that sheds light on the situation.

4. Discerning together

Discernment is the "real work" of the meeting, which requires trust, time and listening. Discussing, listening and deciding go hand in hand. Before a decision or plan is made ask the following questions:

- Is this proposal consistent with the biblical witness about the way in which God and God's people act?
- Will it be "good news" for others, not just ourselves?
- Does it seem to be the way Jesus would act/respond/speak?
- Does it give us a sense of life/energy?
- Does it stretch us a bit; call us into "risking the way of Jesus"?
- Is this something that does not seem to go away, but which keeps on coming to us/inviting us?

5. Giving to God

As you conclude, invite someone to offer a prayer that gathers up what has been discussed and decided and sends people out with a blessing. Bless individuals who have tasks arising from the meeting. They could be marked with the sign of the cross, or prayed for individually. Encourage people to commit to prayer about the issues and responsibilities between meetings.

Source: this material is adapted by Joan Wright Howie with permission from Ann Siddall's "Discernment in meetings and decision-making", © Uniting Church in Australia Synod of South Australia.

