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**Tips for  
Christian leadership meetings**



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## Warnings

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In the text, several formulations can refer to a woman as well as a man.

## 1. Instructions : choose one tip, put it into practice, then choose another

Be curious. Browse through these tips and choose one. Use it at your next meeting. Evaluate what effect this tip has had. To do this, use tip no. 13 on p. 7 entitled "Evaluating our meetings". Then choose a new tip for the next time, and so on.

This document is designed to help teams in charge of Christian groups: parishes, pastoral units, associations, various movements, etc. Usually, a team in charge is no more than 6 or 7 people. In a group this small, everyone can easily make their voice heard, listen attentively to others and experience what Jesus said: *"When two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them"* (Mt 18:20). Jesus is the "leader" at whose service a responsible Christian team places itself. He is interested not only in the content of what we share, but also in the care we take to make progress in the way we make ourselves receptive to what he wishes to tell us. He joins in our conversations as he did with the disciples on their way to Emmaus: *"Now while they were talking and asking questions, Jesus himself came and walked with them"* (Lk 24:15-16).

## 2. Preparing for the meeting...

A week before the meeting, the meeting leader - who is not necessarily the person in charge of the team - invites the team to meet. This letter should contain: the date, place and duration of the meeting, the list of participants, the agenda, possibly the minutes of the previous meeting and other documents which it is useful to read before the meeting. The invitation to the meeting should be clear and neat: it already sets the tone for the meeting.

For the meeting, choose a pleasant, comfortable venue, with toilets and the possibility of serving coffee, suitable for the number of participants and with easy parking. It can sometimes be useful to go outside our walls and choose an unusual venue. Choose a layout that gives everyone a clear view of all the participants. A round or oval table gives equal importance to everyone, which can encourage everyone to take part.

Finally, if it is essential to prepare all these material things for a meeting, it is also important to prepare oneself for a meeting, because it means preparing the heart for a conversation in which the Lord wishes to take part.

## 3. Welcoming participants

Before the start of the meeting itself, plan a welcome time with a drink, a biscuit and the opportunity to go to the toilet. To ensure that people are comfortable and attentive throughout the meeting, it is important to ensure that their basic physiological needs are met before the meeting. The leader of the meeting should be the first to arrive, so that he or she can take the time to greet each participant: so that everyone feels welcome and expected. *Jesus said: "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the One who sent me"* (Mt 10:40).

## 4. Choosing a secretary

To relieve the meeting leader of the task of writing a report, a "secretary" is chosen. This person will take note of the key points discussed at the meeting, as well as the decisions made and the things to be done to follow up the meeting. This report will be sent to all participants fairly soon after the meeting. It can be approved at the next meeting. This approval enables decisions taken orally to be confirmed in writing. During the meeting, not all participants hear or record the same information. By approving the report, everyone agrees on the same written, unifying document.

## 5. Keeping to the time limit

The moderator of the meeting will ensure that the agreed timetable is adhered to. He or she will ensure that the time allotted for each item on the agenda is not exceeded. He will distribute the floor to everyone and will make a discreet gesture to indicate to the speaker that the time allotted to him is almost up; this will prevent anyone monopolising the floor, sometimes without even realising it.

## 6. Ensuring a climate of goodwill

A climate of benevolence banishes reproaches made to others or to oneself, excludes accusations and condemnations: "*Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned*" (Lk 6:37). It is a climate which seeks to save the words of others without putting anyone on a pedestal.



Every meeting room at the Heiligenfeld psychiatric clinics in Germany has a pair of cymbals. And every meeting begins with the ritual question: "Who's going to play the cymbals today? The role of the "climate keeper" is to sound the cymbals as soon as he/she senses that one or more people are starting to speak from their ego, to want to be right, to give arguments to win. Cymbals sound for a very long time. And as long as their sound is audible, everyone is asked to remain silent and ask themselves: " Who am I serving? My ego or the common good?" Often it's not even necessary to sound the cymbals: when their "guardian" pretends to use them, everyone has understood and the climate of the meeting changes. [This is extracted from Youtube, Conference "Reinventing Organizations" in French (Flagey Bruxelles)].

The role of climate keeper can be exercised by the meeting leader or someone else chosen for this purpose. If you choose to institute this role and you don't want to invest in cymbals, a small bell might do the trick. Or why not buy a crystal glass at a flea market and clink it with a knife?

## 7. Reconnecting oneself

At the start of the meeting, everyone has one or two minutes, no more, to introduce themselves if there is someone new in the team, or to express their inner weather, or to share an important event in their personal life that has happened since the last meeting. This event can be happy or painful: bereavement, success, failure, surprise... in the family or at work...

These brief exchanges encourage group cohesion, a sense of belonging and concern for one another. They can also generate a feeling of mutual trust and therefore security. They free minds and hearts to turn to the issues on the agenda.

## 8. Initial prayer

Begin the meeting with a prayer that brings us into the presence of the One for whom we are gathered.

### **Read a short passage from the Bible**

The text should be well chosen to direct hearts and minds either towards our reason for being together, or towards the issues on the agenda. An extract from the texts of the day's Mass may sometimes be providentially appropriate. Or we might prefer a simple phrase from the Bible, for example:

- *"May they all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be one in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me"* (Jn 17:21).
- *"When two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them"* (Mt 18:20).
- *"God sent his Son into the world, not to judge the world, but that through him the world might be saved"* (Jn 3:17).
- *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit"* (Jn 15:16).
- *"With those who love God, he himself contributes everything for their good"* (Rom 8:28).
- .....

### **Making a request**

After reading the biblical text and allowing a little time for interiorisation, it's time to make a request, because, as Jesus says, *"without me you can do nothing"* (Jn 15:5) and he promises: *"Ask, and it shall be given you"* (Mt 7:7).

Here are some examples of requests:

- Father, give us your Spirit, that he may inspire us to say and not to say, to do and not to do.
- Come, Holy Spirit, enlighten our minds with your light and give us your strength to act according to the light we have received.
- Come, Holy Spirit, fill our hearts with the fire of your love.
- Lord Jesus, increase our faith...

We can end this time of prayer by praying the Lord's Prayer together, as it is that brings us together for this meeting.

## 9. Agreement on the agenda

Start the meeting proper by rereading the agenda and asking if everyone agrees with what is proposed or if anyone would like to add an item. It is important that the agenda ends with an "Any Other Business" item: this allows everyone to add any other business afterwards. Any miscellaneous items should be listed at the start of the meeting, as they may require an adjustment to the time allocated to each item on the agenda, so as not to extend the meeting time. Any miscellaneous items added should be kept short.

Remind them of the duration of the meeting and its framework (benevolence, mutual trust, confidentiality, mobile phone off, etc.).

## 10. Providing a "talking stick"

In the centre of the circle formed by the participants is a "talking stick" to be used only when necessary: when everyone wants to speak at the same time or when someone has something difficult to say. Whoever takes the "talking stick" keeps it in their hand as long as they have something to share. This ensures that they will not be cut off and that the moments of silence they need to express their thoughts will be respected. The "talking stick" can be a simple pen, a small lighted candle, or any object of significance to the group.

## 11. Making a decision by consent, overcoming objections

Here are a few points to bear in mind when an item on the agenda requires a decision to be taken and you want it to come from everyone, not just one person:

- Start by stating the question on which a decision needs to be made and make sure that everyone understands it. It may be useful to write it on a flip-chart, so that it remains visible and forms the common basis. Hold an initial round to ensure that everyone has understood the question and that no one needs clarification.
- Allow a short moment of silence for everyone to reflect on the question and pray. Then each person in turn is invited to respond to the question or propose a solution to the problem. The facilitator repeats and rephrases each contribution and transcribes a summary on the board, so that everyone has it in front of them. Using a support such as a board helps with concentration and listening. It also provides a common basis for the dialogue and ensures that everyone has understood the same thing.
- Hold another short moment of silence, during which everyone asks themselves: "What has touched me about what has been shared? What has given me life, joy and dynamism? Or, on the contrary: "What saddens me, discourages me, worries me?"
- Hold a second round to allow interactions.

- If it is necessary to choose from all the points listed, everyone can, for example, vote for the point or points that seem most relevant to them. The moderator will place a small vertical bar next to the sentences mentioned. Proceeding in this way clearly highlights the proposals that meet with the approval of as many people as possible.

For example, the proposal that received the most votes can be placed on a new sheet of flipchart paper. A 3<sup>rd</sup> round of questions is asked: do you agree that we should adopt this proposal or do you have an objection? Objections, if they relate to objective facts and not preferences, are listened to and resolved one by one by the team. To overcome objections, it may be necessary to adjust the initial proposal. The aim is to arrive at a proposal that meets with no objections. In other words, the aim is not to arrive at a proposal to which everyone says "yes", but to arrive at a proposal to which no one says "no".

## 12. Granting a mandate by consent

The aim of the process is to increase the number of possible candidates for a position, by asking all participants in the meeting to make proposals. This summary is by Pierre Tavernier, sociocracy consultant.

1. Definition of the mandate: mission, duration, skills required, specific selection criteria (e.g. gender mix), work to be performed, etc.
2. Everyone votes for someone (you vote for only one person; you can vote for yourself).
3. Everyone shares the results of the vote and the arguments in favor of a particular person.
4. You can change your choice after being influenced and having influenced others during the sharing of n° 3.
5. You can bring in other arguments that have not yet been put forward.
6. The facilitator proposes the candidate whose name comes up the most. If two or three have the same number of votes, the facilitator asks the group to choose a candidate.
7. The facilitator asks if there are any objections to this candidate. There are often two types of objection:
  - a. Concerning skills
  - b. Concerning availability
  - A sharing follows. The candidate speaks last. With regard to skills, for example, the candidate could be asked to undergo training. Regarding the candidate's lack of availability, you could possibly allocate responsibilities differently, appoint a deputy, etc. Working together to resolve objections is an opportunity to make a better decision. The decision is taken not when everyone is in agreement, but when there are no longer any reasonable and well-argued objections to the candidate. All then give their consent even if they would have preferred another solution.
8. We proceed in the same way for the second member of ERI and the third one.
9. Celebration. We celebrate the candidates and celebrate having voted well.

### Some recommendations:

- - Sometimes exchanges about the candidates are needed in order to get to know them better.
- - That we dare to speak to each other truthfully and listen to each other sympathetically.

- - No one should be forced to be elected.
- - Possibly ask the candidate to leave the group as long as they are being talked about.
- - Suggest a prayer to prepare for the election.

## 13. Weighing up the *pros* and *cons* of together

Let's assume a question that requires careful consideration, for example, "Should we move or not?"

- In a first step, consider the "Move" solution and list its advantages together, then list its disadvantages together.
- Secondly, consider the diametrically opposed solution: "Not move". List the advantages together, then list the disadvantages together.
- Thirdly, using the *pros* and *cons* of each of the two proposals, underline together what seems to be the most decisive.

This avoids the creation of two clans: one *in favour of* the proposed solution and *the other* against.

## 14. Devoting a meeting to faith sharing

Once or twice a year, let us devote a whole meeting to sharing our deep personal experiences of God, the desires that burn in our hearts, or the struggles we face, in connection with the calls of Jesus in the Gospel. This helps us to get to know each other in depth, sheds light on what motivates us and strengthens our bonds so that together we can better respond to our common mission. This can also be done during a team retreat.

## 15. Evaluating our meetings

A group that does not evaluate its actions is doomed. When we have a group experience, it's not always easy to be aware at the time of what's happening in the group, of the fruits of that experience, of what we're getting out of it. Rereading the experience afterwards helps us to become aware of what happened during the experience and to learn from it. Rereading also helps us to discern the fruits of the Spirit: rereading an experience as if we were praying a page of the Gospel, to discover the Lord present, at work in our lives, in our exchanges, the Lord who speaks to us in our experiences. Reread to grasp his Word.

Here's how it works:

### **Personal time**

Looking back at what happened at the last meeting(s), I ask myself the following questions:

- What gave me life?
- What has slowed down or blocked your life?
- How can we better welcome life from now on?

Then **I thank** the Lord for the life I have received, for the forgiveness he always offers, and for the energy he gives us to move forward.

### **Sharing time :**



- Let's share our rereads. Everyone speaks in turn, and then a conversation begins.
- Finally, let's ask ourselves the question: "What are the unavoidable consequences of what we have just shared?"

## 16. Ending with a "Thank you"

All is grace. It's a good idea, at the end of a meeting, to give thanks to God for the work accomplished.

- Let's try to explain as clearly as possible where and when we have felt the Lord's and his Spirit's beneficial help.
- Those who wish to do so may speak spontaneously.
- You can conclude with a prayer of praise or a song of praise, a magnificat...