

Seven Ways to Begin a Meeting

by Marlene Bogard, WDC Library Director

Meetings have the potential to be a mighty big blessing, a primo opportunity for Christian Formation as well as community-building. I invite all your committees to create space in all your meetings to reflect, pray and listen to God.

1. **Silence and Prayer.** The leader invites the group to be comfortable, take a few slow, deep breaths and then enter into a time of silence together. I suggest a full five minutes of silence. Busy people will welcome a few moments of restful quiet to settle their minds and souls, listen to God and prepare them for engaging in meaningful conversation and committee work. The leader will then end the silence with prayer. Taking the time at the beginning of a meeting to have silence and prayer together is a way of entering into "worship-ful work," that pattern of recognizing that our church committee work is God's work, and this "work" is also one way to worship and love God.

2. **Praying the Scriptures.** Do you have particular scriptures on which your church is focusing? Perhaps something connected to your Mission Statement? Perhaps you could pray the scriptures you have chosen for the [Twelve Scriptures Project!](#) Basically, Praying the Scriptures means that you read the selected text slowly and repeatedly, with time for silence in between each reading. Spontaneous sharing about what word or phrase "sparkled" is invited. Some of you may know this as Lectio Divina, and I encourage you to adapt the steps to fit your group. This practice is especially appropriate during a Year of the Bible! Explore www.yearofthebiblenetwork.org weekly.

3. **Group Reflection and Sharing.** The leader, after posing a question, will ask the rest of the group to respond. Examples: How has God been present to you this week? Have you experienced a "God-sighting" today? What has been the brightest part of your day and the hardest part of your day? These questions are intended to gently open us up to the Holy Spirit's movement in our lives, and help us take time for reflection, which in turn enables us to speak more clearly about our own experience with God. This simple rhythm of reflection, sharing and then prayer is a wonderful practice of spiritual formation.

4. **Group Experience.** The Cornerstones book (see below) provides comfortable community-building exercises that connect with a scripture focus. Try these: *Let this Mind Be in You*, (complete a drawing, then share how you each "see" different things) or *Coming Soon to My Life* (you create your own billboard announcement).

5. **Group Resourcing.** Read a book together, and discuss a chapter; Each participant comment on a blog that they follow; Invite one person to report on an learning event they attended. Use a bit of time to learn together!

6. **Use a "pre-fab" devotional.** It's ok to use something that is already created! I suggest a story from *Purpose* magazine or a devotional from *Rejoice* (available in print and download). These offerings are written by Mennonites across the US and Canada, specifically to encourage and inspire us. Call MennoMedia at 1-800-245-7894 or visit [their web site](#) to order these materials for your congregation. Or...search "devotions" on [our online catalog](#) and get 180 hits!

7. **Pray in a new way.** Life Reflections. Discernment Process. Biblical Reflections. Intercessory Prayer. All of these can be done prayerfully, using a variety of the senses and learning styles. Perhaps you will simply grab some hymnals and sing your prayers! Search "Creative Prayer" on our catalog and you will get 33 fantastic books! I am happy to send you any of them.

Resources available at the WDC Resource Library:

Attentive to God: spirituality in the church committee by Karen Marie Yust. Chalice Press, 2001.

Cornerstones for Christian Communities: openings and closings that empower church meetings by Kurt Bickel. Cornerstone, 1996.

Growing Together: Spiritual Exercises for Church Committees by Rochelle Mellander and Harold Epply. Augsburg, 1998.

Meeting God in the Bible: 60 Devotions for Groups by Donald Griggs. Kerygma, 2003

50 Ways to Pray: from many traditions and times by Teresa Blythe, Abingdon, 2006.

Resource Library is open M – F (8 – 5) AND the first Saturday of every month 10 – noon.

2517 N. Main Street, North Newton, KS 67117 316-283-6300 / crlib@mennowdc.org

Marlene Harder Bogard, Minister of Christian Formation

Western District Conference, Mennonite Church USA

Web catalog: mennowdc.org