

## **PCCs without Pain (or Church Meetings without Tears)**

The most common sources of hurt and dysfunctionality within churches are the meetings that determine the policies of the local church. It has to do with how these are conducted. Within the Anglican tradition this is usually the PCC Meeting. In congregationally ordered churches this is known as The Church Meeting. Conciliar traditions will have other names. While undertaking a university management course I was introduced by one of our lecturers (who happened to be a Christian) to a method of dealing with particularly contentious issues. His method certainly lets in more light and reduces the heat in a discussion.

Unfortunately my note of his name has since been lost so I cannot give appropriate credit here. But I suspect he would consider it should be (and indeed might already be) in the public domain.

For the purposes of this paper I will use as an example a debate on no longer using the historic pipe organ but using a small music group with guitars and drums instead. (An alternative scenario would be a debate on whether to do away with hymn books and use digital projection in their place.)

It can be assumed that this is a potentially and therefor divisive issue. This is how he suggests the discussion proceeds.

1. Establish an agreement that all agree that a thorough discussion and consideration takes place.
2. Confirm that everyone will have the opportunity to speak at some stage.
3. Confirm that since each person wishes to be respected we will all listen carefully and avoid rubbishing any other person's contribution (unless anyone wants that to happen to their contribution!)
4. Confirm that everyone will get an opportunity to express their opinion BUT ask that this will only take place when it comes to the vote.
5. In order to ensure a quality conversation and a good outcome everyone is asked not to speak using the words, "In my opinion...." or similar. The reason for this is that human nature is such that having once stated our opinion we would rather defend it to the last rather than allowing our ultimate opinion on the subject to be formulated through the ensuing discussions.
6. Remind everyone of the suggestion and then state that we are going to explore as thoroughly as possible what might be bad and what might be good about the suggestion. This will be done in two stages starting with what might be bad about it. (I have found it helps to address the negative aspects first)
7. If possible use a flipchart. You need to have all comments (pro and con) so that everyone can read them if at all possible.
8. Explain that we are going to work as a team on both parts so everyone is asked to make a contribution (possibly more than one if they wish).
9. On one sheet write "AGAINST" and start by going around the room asking each person in turn to think of any reason why it might be a bad idea. If someone states that they cannot come up with one, remind them we all need to make a contribution to both pro and con and

promise to come back to them. Similarly, if someone says “Joe has just said what I was going to say”, promise to give them time and come back to them.

**Comments against might include:**

“The organist will leave the church”

“We have always used the organ”

“Most people prefer the organ”

“People expect it at a wedding”

“Five years ago we spent £10,000 restoring the organ”

“The organ is more appropriate for traditional hymns”

“It is easier to follow the melody played on an organ rather than using percussive instruments”

10. Go round the room as many times as necessary until you are sure you have all the negative points. If possible put this (or these) on display where everyone can see them before starting the next stage.
11. On a clean flipchart sheet do the same process having written “FOR” on the top of the sheet.

**This time comments might include:**

“The singing will be livelier”

“It is more likely to attract younger people”

“It is more appropriate for newer hymns and songs”

“It would mean more people would be taking part to lead the services”

“We would be less dependent upon one musician which causes a problems at times of illness or holiday”

“If we use acoustic instruments we will be able to hear more of the voices”

“We are more likely to stay in time with the drum”

12. Go round the room as many times as possible until the process has exhausted all suggestions.
13. Display the sheet(s) alongside the negative comments and invite everyone to read them through silently and prayerfully. Perhaps you could use it for silent prayer.
14. Finally thank everyone for their contributions and invite them to vote what they feel is in the best interests of the church as a whole. You might want to do this by ballot rather than a show of hands.
15. Count the ballot forms (if used) into two piles in front of everyone. These should always be destroyed afterwards.

When using the process for the first time it sometimes helps if you can have a trial run with a benign suggestion.

*Barry Osborne - 31 August 2013*