

## **Leading Effective, Christ-Centered Meetings at Soapstone UMC**

At the heart of Christianity is relationship – the relationship between the three persons of the Trinity, our relationship with God, and our relationships with each other. The spiritual health of our church rises and falls on the strength of these relationships. Unlike meetings in your workplace or volunteer organizations, the *primary* goal of every meeting at Soapstone UMC is to strengthen our connections to God and each other.

With each other: Before the meeting starts, check in with the participants and ask how their day or week is going. Send a clear message that your group is a place where they are cared about. Consider allotting time to hear the joys and concerns on their hearts. When new people or guests are present, take time to get to know them and for them to know you. Processes to build community in your group should always be prioritized.

With God: Meetings at Soapstone can and should be places where people leave feeling a renewed sense of mission to grow more and more like Jesus. Ideally, your opening and closing prayers will help connect the participants with God in light of the predominant theme of the meeting or the ministry the meeting serves. (Extemporaneous prayers are great or you can search “prayers for meetings” online or write a prayer in the form of a “collect”).

Another way to connect the participants with God is to incorporate a brief devotional and/or educational component into your meetings. Some committees alternate between these.

- Devotions are meditations on passages of scripture. Consider reflecting on scripture related to your committee’s purpose or the spiritual gifts needed to perform the ministry. Ask members to sign up to lead a devotion at a given meeting.
- Educational or formational books (blogs or videos) are scripture-based, but are written for a different purpose -- to equip committee members to gain a certain level of expertise in a given ministry area. When the educational component is done well, members of your committee will be better able to carry out the UMC mission “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” Additionally, they will be inspired and excited to do so!

If you would like suggestions for devotional or educational/formational books, blogs, or videos that would be appropriate for your group, please contact your committee’s staff liaison.

### **Meeting Preparation/After Meeting:**

- Aim to set all meeting dates (and devotional/educational leaders) for the year upfront. Balance live and Zoom meetings so no one is alienated.
- Schedule your meeting room. Our preference is that you use church Zoom account.
- Schedule childcare if needed.
- Plan the agenda, handouts, and other materials and send prior to each meeting as a reminder of the meeting.

- Send minutes as soon after the meeting as possible (and cc the office if not using Realm). Keep action items listed at the beginning so they are easy for all to see their assignments
- Communicate what you expect when someone will need to miss. (Reading the minutes? Send input in advance?)

### Agenda:

- Open and close each meeting with a prayer
- Once we have established Soapstone's priorities for this year, include any related to your committee on your agenda along with your committee's mission/vision
- List open action items and those responsible so they can report (copied from previous month's minutes)

### Meeting:

- First Meeting – discuss your leadership style and your plans for the year. Share information about yourself. Together define the goals for the year and determine how you will measure success.
- Assign secretary (could be one person or could share this responsibility with committee – should **not** be committee leader)
- Start on time, even if all haven't arrived.
- Meetings should be no more than 1.5 hours.
- Spread the assignments (Think of others outside the meeting who can help accomplish tasks. Build our leadership).
- Do something to build the relationships in your committee/team. (Bring food, share an interest, etc.)
- End of meeting – review open items, decisions made and next steps/action items (be sure all items are specifically assigned).
- Thank and recognize committee members.

### Leadership tips:

- Encourage all to participate.
- Keep discussions to a time limit – to respect everyone's time
- Delegate assignments.
- Ask questions like "What's the result?" What is the "... so that ..."?
- Empower instead of control. Listen for fresh ideas. Usually an idea needs at least three "champions" to be feasible.
- Lead the journey as opposed to forcing the destination
- Motivate the team and encourage to take the idea and run.
- Always think about how to involve new members from the congregation

## Devotional Resources

We can all use a little help in our spiritual walk. These resources can help inspire new thought, comfort us, challenge us or simply give us a chance during the day to refocus on God. Most are free, though some charge a fee for an email subscription. Each one has its own style and you are encouraged to keep trying different ones until finding the one that fits you best.

[Upper Room](#) – United Methodist Daily Devotional.

[Alive Now on the Web](#) - United Methodist Daily Devotional. Focuses on making space for the sacred and for God in the midst of the chaos.

[Ministry Matters](#) – Ministry Matters offers practical and immediate inspiration for preachers, teachers, and worship leaders. This is not really a devotional site, but many of its articles cite scripture and are relevant to church leadership matters. The [training and development](#) section is a particularly good resource.

[Sojourners: Daily Digest or Verse and Voice](#) - Formed in 1971, Sojourners' mission is to articulate the biblical call to social justice, inspiring hope and building a movement to transform individuals, communities, the church, and the world.

[On a Journey](#) - On a Journey is a lectionary-based devotion written by Rev. Tom Ehrich, an Episcopalian priest. The focus is how to be God's church in today's world. There is a subscription fee for this message.

[Richard Rohr's Daily Devotional](#) - Stay connected with Richard Rohr and the Center for Action and Contemplation by receiving our free emails. This year Fr. Richard's Daily Meditations and Weekly Summaries explore the theme of Love through many of his classic teachings

[Our Daily Bread](#): Our mission is to make the life-changing wisdom of the Bible understandable and accessible to all. Searchable by Topic.

[Guideposts](#) - Encouraging you in your walk with God by providing spiritual refreshment and guidance through all-new first person daily devotions. Writers share the wonders in ordinary moments that will help you invite God into your life.

[WalkDeep.com](#).—devotional resources for helping people walk with God. Check out Conversations and Prayers, or sign-up for e-mail links.

[My Utmost For His Highest](#)— Oswald Chambers classic daily devotional compiled from his sermons

[Back to The Bible](#)— links to numerous devotionals, including: [Faithwalk](#), a devotional that takes you through the Bible in a year

[Prayer, Praise and Promises](#): Comfort, courage and strength. Journey through the Psalms each day of the year with selected devotions from Warren Wiersbe's book Prayer, Praise and Promises

[Crosswalk](#)—words for the intersection of faith and life. Daily and weekly devotionals, bible reading plans, devotions for Senior living, women, dieters, families. Includes classic devotionals and newer Pastors like Ed Young and Max Lucado.

[Bible.com](#) or [Biblegateway.com](#)— on-line passage look-up, multiple versions/translations, concordance search

[Christian Classics Ethreal Library](#)— download free classic Christian literature such as Confessions of St. Augustine, Pilgrim's Progress and works by the early church Fathers. Also access to the World Wide Study Bible, early commentaries, on-line book clubs and bible study links.

### **Writing Your Own Devotion for a Meeting**

While resources are often helpful and inspiring, don't be afraid to spend time with a bible and write your own devotion without notes or commentary. Read and listen to what God is saying to you. Try this:

- Pick a verse or passage and read it through. What words does God bring to your attention? Quietly wait for an impression.
- Read the passage again. Ask God what you are to realize about Christ from the words he's drawn to your attention
- Read the passage a third time. Ask God how those words are to affect your life or the life of your group.

## Composing a Collect ("You Who" prayers)

Do you ever get nervous when asked to pray off the cuff? Knowing how to quickly compose a collect (pronounced CALL-ekt) is a good trick to have up one's sleeve. It's also a fantastic way to relate to the living God. A collect is a type of intercessory prayer that's been around for more than a millennium and has been especially practiced in the Anglican/Episcopal tradition.

### Formula

1. **Name God.** (Loving God, Trustworthy God, Lord Jesus, Healing Lord ...)
2. **Remember something God has done.** (You who ...). Identify the reason why you have reason to trust that God will listen and respond to your petition.
3. **Ask.** What is it specifically you want God to do?
4. **State desired hope.** Describe the outcome you imagine. What is the change to yourself or community?
5. **End.** Almost always cites Jesus' role of interceding to God. Traditional ending: Through Jesus Christ, your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.

### Example: Prayer for Purification

1. **Name:** Almighty God
2. **Remember:** to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hidden
3. **Ask:** Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit
4. **Desired Hope:** that we may repent of our sins and lead lives worthy of your calling.
5. **End:** through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### Example: UMC Ash Wednesday Collect

1. **Name God:** O God
2. **Remember:** Maker of everything and judge of all that you have made, from the dust of the earth you have formed us and from the dust of the earth you would raise us up
3. **Ask:** By the redemptive power of the cross, create in us clean hearts and put within us a new spirit
4. **Desired hope:** So that as we gather in your name sure of your unfailing love, we will hear your will more clearly.
5. **End:** Through Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Example – One petition in a longer prayer

1. **Name God:** Good and loving God, Father and Mother of us all,
2. **Remember:** You gave Lydia oversight over her household such that when she heard your word and it became real in her heart, she led her entire household to be baptized. And on that momentous day, you gave her the gift of hospitality and she asked Paul and his companions to receive shelter in her home.
3. **Ask/Desired Hope:** On this Mother's Day, teach us to be like Lydia and those women in our lives who have shown us love, comforted our sadness, quelled our fears, and taught us about the world and our place in it. For as we grow more like them, we grow more like you.
4. **Ask/Desired Hope:** Guide all of us to reach out in Christian love to young mothers who are learning to care for their children and their needs, and to reach out to mothers who cannot or will not care for their children, and to give comfort to women who would be mothers if they could -- for in doing so, we show them what it means to be loved as you love.