



Good practice in ministers' meetings

“Let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, ... but encouraging one another.”

Hebrews 10:24-25a NIVUK

1. The purpose of ministers' meetings

The Baptists Together framework for Continuing Ministerial Development (CMD) expects ministers to practise the habits of (among others) accountability and connection. Both can be served by well-run, functional and nurturing ministers' meetings.

Accountability is defined as seeking the support of those outside our immediate setting who can help us reflect upon our ministry – its highs and lows – and how it is affecting us. While CMD encourages us to practice accountability through accompaniment such as mentoring or pastoral supervision, ministers' meetings can be part of our portfolio of support and learning.

Connection is defined as a commitment to the wider Baptist movement by engaging with regional and national structures, and by the fostering of mutual and supportive relationships between Baptist ministers. Both are a reflection of the covenantal nature of Baptist relationships. Clearly, ministers' meetings can be an important expression of connection.

So, ministers' meetings can offer companionship, mutual encouragement, shared learning, accountability, and a place of prayer. At their best they provide a safe space for ministers to connect, share experiences, and support one another in their spiritual and professional journeys.

We note that this, sadly, is not the experience of every minister. Reported pitfalls include:

- The domination of meetings by a few voices;
- Ministers feeling excluded or overlooked because of who they are, the nature of their ministry, or the timing or location of meetings;
- A competitive environment that celebrates success but makes no room for struggles and setbacks;
- Failure to call out and/or resolve any of the above poor behaviour;

- Superficiality amongst members that undermines genuine support and learning.

This guidance is written to help meeting convenors and members reflect on the culture of their meeting and its practical aspects, so that the pitfalls are avoided and mutually enriching relationships are formed.

2. Key principles for effective ministers' meetings

- **Companionship:** Emphasize journeying together, supporting one another, and creating a sense of belonging.
- **Confidentiality:** Agree that what is shared in the meeting remains private, to build trust and openness.
- **Inclusivity:** Be intentional about actively welcoming and including all types of minister, regardless of their age, ethnicity, gender, and ministry context.
- **Flexibility:** Adapt to the needs of the group, including meeting times, formats, and topics of discussion.

3. Steps to start a ministers' meeting

1. **Identify potential members:** Reach out to local church ministers, chaplains, pioneers, children's, youth and families' ministers, and those in other ministry roles. Your Association will help you identify who is nearby. An early decision will need to be made, probably in conjunction with the Regional Minister, whether or not to include retired ministers, or non-ministerial church staff. Be aware that it is hard for groups larger than 8–10 members to include everyone to the extent that trust is built. If you form a larger group, consider breaking into smaller sub-groups for sharing, praying or deeper discussions.
2. **Define the Purpose:** Decide the purpose(s) of the meeting, whether for mutual support, friendship and prayer; learning of ministry skills; theological reflection; practical discussions; and so on, and agree activities accordingly. (But please see below on variety as a best practice.) Note that groups that share in a ministry or missional activity, such as community outreach or joint services, often find deeper meaning in their gatherings.
3. **Set Ground Rules:** Collaboratively establish guidelines for honesty, vulnerability, confidentiality, mutual care, and accountability. Record these so they may be later given to new members. Ground rules might include:
 - Be willing to be honest and vulnerable.
 - Listening actively without interrupting.

- Respecting confidentiality.
 - Exercising mutual care and friendship.
 - Praying for one another between meetings.
 - Holding each other accountable when necessary.
4. **Choose a Format:** Decide on meeting frequency (e.g., weekly, monthly), timing, location (in-person or online), and structure (e.g. prayer, discussion, guest speakers).
 5. **Communicate with Regional Ministers:** Inform your Regional Minister about the group and invite their participation if appropriate.

4. Best practices for running meetings

1. Create a safe space by agreeing together to:

- Uphold criteria for confidentiality;
- Avoid judgmental and argumentative attitudes;
- Use inclusive language;
- Listen attentively to better understand those who hold different views;
- Act as allies for one another, not as competitors to one another.
- Ensure in-person meeting venues are accessible to all.

2. Incorporate Variety

- Allocate time for a mixture of discussion, personal sharing and prayer for one another, whether all in one meeting or across a number of meetings.
- Consider activities like shared meals, walks, retreats, visits to places of interest, visits to each group member's ministry setting.
- Consider a programme of different activities across each year's meetings, such as social events, discussion of a theme, group study, sharing and praying, sharing of ideas and resources, planning joint services or events.
- Consider inviting external speakers, facilitators or expert practitioners for fresh perspectives.

3. Encourage Participation

- Rotate leadership roles to ensure shared ownership;
- Be deliberate about including all voices and ensure that those who are slower to contribute have an opportunity to do so if they wish;
- Meet on a variety of days and times to include participants serving in different environments and make sure that there is no-one who is always unable to attend.

4. Adapt to Online Formats

- On digital meeting platforms, agree a protocol for meetings. For example, muting when not speaking, using chat for questions, 'raising hands' to make contributions rather than just jumping in, and so on.
- When leading digital meetings, pay attention to who is wanting to speak and give an equal chance to all to contribute.
- Consider hybrid models for those unable to attend in person.

5. **Review the pattern**

- Periodically review whether the group is keeping to or needs to refine its ground rules and how it may better serve the group members.

5. A prayer for ministers' meetings

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of each other as sisters and brothers in Christ and colleagues in ministry. Give us compassion, wisdom and grace as we seek to walk with and watch over one another. Bless our gatherings with your presence; guide our discussions; and help us to support one another in love and truth. May our meetings glorify you and strengthen our ministries. Amen.

6. Some helpful scriptures (NIVUK):

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong – that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. (Romans 1:11-12)

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another. (Proverbs 27:17)

Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. (Ecclesiastes 4:12)

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. (Ephesians 4:15)

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (Philippians 4:2)



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