

# Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ

Tips for committee secretaries  
Prepared by staff, 11-03

Secretaries have a vital role in any organization. They help an organization to know for sure what it has actually done and what it hasn't done. They help the organization remember who is supposed to implement the decision, and what policies have come into being. They also help the organization remember what hasn't been done. One of the most important roles of a secretary is to ask during a meeting, "Just what have we done, or what are we about to do?" If you, as the secretary, are not crystal clear about what is being decided, chances are good that the committee itself is also not clear. Please ask, and ask again.

What should you record?

1. **Attendance:** We suggest asking people to sign an attendance record and to print their names so you get the correct spelling. Don't trust your memory!
2. **Items introduced:** You do not have to record all the discussion about a topic. In fact, it is better not to do that. But do note items introduced even when there is no action taken. ("Joe Smith raised the question of painting the church roof pink. Much discussion followed but no decision was made. The topic will be on next month's agenda.") Recording topics introduced like this helps committees a month later when they say, "Gosh, didn't we decide last month to paint the roof pink?" The minutes answer that question.
3. **Motions offered and the outcome of the motion:** Record the mover, the seconder, and the text of the motion. If in doubt about any part of the motion, get the motion IN WRITING. Here is some shorthand that makes your job easier.
  - a. MSC (Smith-Jones) to paint the roof pink. (This means, Smith moved, Jones seconded, to paint the roof pink, and it carried unanimously)
  - b. MSC (Smith-Jones) (5-4) to pain the roof pink. (Same as above, except it was a split vote, 5-4)
  - c. MS F (Smith-Jones) (2-10) to paint the roof pink. (Means that the motion failed)
  - d. M (Smith- ) to pain the roof pink. (Means that Smith made this motion but it failed for lack of a second.)
4. **Consensus agreements:** Such as, "After thorough discussion, it was agreed by consensus to paint the roof pink."
5. **Assignments:** Such as, "Smith and Jones agreed to find a contractor to paint the roof as previously decided."
6. **Topics for later agenda:** Such as, "No agreement was reached about painting the roof pink. This question will be studied by Smith and Jones, who will report to the next meeting about environmentally sound roof colors."

## 7. Date(s) for future meetings:

Please write up the minutes as soon as humanly possible! This avoids your memory lapses and helps the whole committee to function better when this reminder of our common work is sent to the committee members (especially to those who missed the meeting!)

Make sure ALL minutes of Minnesota Conference UCC Committees to Karen Gasche at the Conference Office ([kareng@uccmn.org](mailto:kareng@uccmn.org)) with a note about whether you are going to send it to committee members or whether you are requesting her to do so. (Association committee minutes go to the appropriate Association Office)

Organizations/committees that make a lot of decisions that may be referenced in the future will often adopt a system for dating and coding decisions, which may coincide with coding of agenda items. It is best for a coding system to be developed and adopted over time, so that when the job of secretary passes from one person to the next, the system remains the same.

Setting up minutes in a column so that topics or names are referenced in the left margin make it easy in the future to seek and find past actions. Such as:

<b>Paint Contract (04-1)</b>	MSC (Jones-Johnson) to award the roof painting contract to the Fred Smith firm which specializes in painting church roofs in outrageous colors
<b>Youth Fund raiser (04-9-2)</b>	MSC (Williams-Mantle) to sell baseball bats as a fund raiser for the Youth Group
<b>Softshoe (04-9-3)</b>	MSC (Wells-LaMont) to hire Muriel Softshoe as choir director (terms attached)