1. Administration

Meetings
An important activity is the meetings of the Church Council (elders) and the Church Council and deacons. The content, meaning and legacy of regular meetings emerges from the agenda and minutes.

A Church Council meeting differs in several respects from all other meetings. These differences have implications for the procedures in Church Council meetings. For example no constitution or domestic rules apply to a Church Council meeting. Here the Church Order applies. The Church Order contains broad guidelines with certain biblical principles that also have meaning for the procedure in Church Council meetings.

1.1 Chairman

Church Order, art 37 determines that the reverend should be chairman because he is minister of God's Word; because Christ rules his church through his Word and Spirit.

The chairman must at all times be fully informed of every matter on the agenda. He must also have a thorough knowledge of the Church Order and the general polity and church governance.

In cases where the local minister cannot be present or when a congregation is vacant, the consulent must chair the meeting. A Church Council may not simply ask any minister to act as chairperson, except with the express consent of the consulent.

In highly exceptional cases an elder may lead a Church Council Meeting as chairman. However, decisions made in this case must be ratified as soon as possible in a meeting chaired by a minister.

1.2 Quorum

Synod 1920 decided that Church Councils determine their own quorums; however, the Synod considers it desirable that it is not less than half plus one. A quorum is calculated according to the number of elders who are present. If a Church Council sets its quorum at less than half plus one (e.g. one third) it can easily happen that decisions of a meeting where a quorum was only just present are reversed at a subsequent meeting where more office bearers are present.

1.3 Turn to speak

As guideline, discussion should be allowed until the meeting is ready to reach a decision; in other words, until the matter is clear to everyone. Church Council meetings should not degenerate into a debate.

If the chairman is satisfied that the matter is clear to everyone and the meeting is ready to make a decision, he halts all further discussion, except when a proposal or amendment requires further clarification.

The Chairman thus definitely has the right to conclude the discussion at a certain point. He may not, however, autocratically abuse this right to promote a particular point of view.

1.4 Point of order

1.4.1 Point of order

Point of order can only be posed/put to the chairman by way of a question and never by way of an allegation.

The purpose of a point of order is not to promote one's own opinion, but only to draw attention to the fact that the speaker is deviating from specific rules and/or principles. Examples are: obscene language, exceeding time allowed, unnecessary repetition, misrepresentation of other opinions.

If a point of order is raised, the chairman must assess it and give his ruling without letting it be discussed.

1.4.2 Motion of procedure

Motion of procedure, also called "formal motion" or "motion of order", is a proposal that only affects the order of consideration of a matter and never the content. For example, a proposal that all further discussion is now discontinued and voting must take place.

A motion of procedure must be seconded and immediately, without discussion, brought to a vote before continuing with the matter under discussion.

In exceptional cases a chairperson may refuse to table a motion of procedure, especially if he is of the opinion that a particular motion of procedure has been submitted to "steamroller" a decision on a matter in favour of a certain school of thought.

1.5 Decision making

After an issue has been properly discussed and it is clear to everyone, a decision is made by way of a proposal that is duly seconded.

Before it is put to the vote a proposal can also altered by an amendment. An amendment is a proposal that a certain part of the original proposal is altered or deleted or that something is added to the initial proposal.

Only one amendment at a time is tabled. Good order should be maintained and there must be complete clarity on the various amendments before it is put to vote.

All votes on persons and matters take place with absolute majority. For an even number, e.g. 10, the majority is half plus one, viz. 6. For an odd number, e.g. 11, one is added to the total making the total 12; the majority then is half of 12, viz. 6.

The chairman has no deciding vote in any church meeting (Synod 1910, section 176).

When votes are tied the following usually applies (see Synod 1873:46, art 173):

- when votes about persons are tied there should be praise through the solemn invocation of the Name of the Lord;
- when votes on matters are tied the matter is then normally off the table.

A Consulent has no voting rights in a Church Council Meeting.

1.6 Agenda/Minutes

1.6.1 Agenda

The chairman and secretary are responsible for drawing up the agenda. To simply make use of a standard agenda does not comply with Church Order, art 30, which among other things emphasizes the conclusion of matters. The greatest danger of a so-called "standard agenda" is formalism: the same items over and over without reaching justifiable decisions to the benefit and development of the church.

There are two opinions on whether a Church Council should have a fixed or standard agenda. The principle is that every meeting (Church Council, Classis, Synod and General Synod) determines its own agenda.

For the compilation of an agenda it should first be determined whether there are matters about which the Church Council should decide. For this members of the Church Council can be given opportunity beforehand to introduce matters for the agenda. It is best that all matters for the agenda are submitted in writing.

1.6.2 Minutes

The necessity of correct minute taking can hardly be overemphasized. Not only is it invaluable for research on a church's activities through the years. It is of utmost importance when it comes to the functioning of a Church Council/Broader Church Council with deacons where financial, administrative, and where Church Council meetings' decisions on matters of principle, doctrine and supervision of ministry and disciplinary cases are concerned.

1.6.3 See CO, art 34: “In all assemblies a secretary shall assist the praeses (chairman) and keep faithful record of all the important matters. “

1.6.4 There are different ways to write the minutes

Merely recording decisions according to the agenda as the meeting comes to conclusions.

Example 1

Cashier’s report
The cashier delivers the report (Appendix 1)
Decision: 1 to 3. Noted.
4. Refer to a property commission.
The report in its entirety is approved and attached as an appendix to the minutes.

When someone wants to read the cashier's report of the Church Council it is therefore essential that the appendixes will be available.

Example 2

Cashier’s report
The cashier delivers the report (Appendix 1)

1. The income was Rxxx-xx
2. The expenditure was Rxxx-xx
3. The surplus is paid into the investment account.
   Decision: Church Council approves income and expenses.
4. Painting of the rectory. A quote of R5000 has been obtained and this is referred to the property commission.
   Decision: Approved.

As we can see the two ways of taking minutes differ. No names or discussions are recorded in the minutes. E.g. Elder Jan Viljoen believes that it is not necessary to paint the rectory now. Piet Kruger, however, insists that the rectory should be painted now. Such a discussion is NOT recorded.

With certain decisions of Church Council meetings, Deputies meetings, Classes and Synods it is necessary to record the motivation behind a decision.

The difference between minutes and acta

The Acta of a Synod incorporates all reports, points of description, petitions of protest and appeals in the acta and decisions are included after the conclusion of a matter. There is thus no a file with appendixes that should be read in conjunction with the decisions, while minutes simply record the decisions.

1.6.5 Electronic

With the modern tools at our disposal many minutes are typed on a computer and so approved and stored. However, it is of utmost importance that a hard copy of all minutes are kept, duly signed and filed.

Motivation:

1.6.5.1 computer technology develops so quickly that the minutes may later not be readable because the software changes with development.

1.6.5.2 Second motivation: should a computer break down or become stolen, and the necessary backup was not made, the minutes are lost.

1.6.5.3 Third motivation: The minutes must be sent to the church archives of the GKSA (1.8.2). In the archives of the GKSA there are handwritten documents of a 150 years and older that can still be read.

1.6.6 Storing of minutes and appendices

It is essential that a Church Council will take care to properly store minutes, minute books and appendix files.

It is essential that minute books have numbered pages in order to prevent possible falsification of records. When typed minutes are pasted into minute books, or a number of typed minutes are bound in book form, the pages must be numbered and this must be done with great precision and caution.

1.6.7 Church Councils are reminded to regularly send minute books and other relevant information contained in files, etc., to the GKSA's archives for safekeeping and indexing (more about this later in the section "archive").

1.6.8 Guidelines for writing minutes

The following is given as a guideline (example) for writing minutes:

1. Heading - minutes of ..... held on (date) at (location).
2. Opening - who opens, Bible passage, Psalm sung and prayer.
3. Welcome - everyone present, special welcome to .....
4. Attendance - list of names, excuses, no excuses are recorded.
5. Motions - sympathy with; congratulations.
6. Determining of agenda - matters can still be added.
7. Approval of the previous meeting's minutes - amendments are recorded here.
8. Matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting that need attention.
9. Attending to the agenda. Taking minutes point by point; brief summary; decision (approved, noted, refer to, postponed).
10. Other matters tabled.
11. Next meeting - date for next meeting is determined.

12. Acknowledgements.
13. Conclusion - who concludes with prayer.

1.6.9 Confidentiality of Church Council meetings and minute taking

The meeting of the Church Council (elders) is confidential. The name and honour of people who must be protected are concerned here (HC, Sun 43). Someone who violates the confidential nature of a Church Council transgresses the 9th commandment and can even be taken to public court for defamation.

1.7 Registers

1.7.1 Member registers

Statistics of members should be properly recorded in member registers and updated regularly. There are several computer programs available that were created for this purpose. The following Church Order articles applies here: 60, 61 and 82. Careful control system is a great tool for the minister and church councils when the full name and surname, date of birth, date of baptism, date of Confession of Faith, certificate of membership received or admitted/recorded/accepted, married, family, address, telephone, cell phone, Email address, etc., are recorded. It not only eases the administration, but gives ministers and elders valuable information to use.

1.7.2 Baptism register

Church Order, Article 60: The names of baptized members and their parents or guardians as well as the dates of birth and baptism should be recorded.

1.8 Archives

1.8.1 Why an archive?

After a Synod decision in 1961 the GKSA archive was established under the leadership of Deputies Historic Matters, who are responsible for the management of the archive. In the archives we store documents of the church councils in the GKSA under controlled conditions.

1.8.2 What is in the archive?

All written and electronic information of the congregations, for example registers, marriage registers, baptism registers, member registers, minute books, financial documents, church newsletters, photos and many more.

1.8.3 Where is the archive?

The documents are kept in a vault (strong-room) in the Theological School Potchefstroom, in a cellar under the Jan Lion-Cachet Library.

1.8.4 Who visits the archive?

Genealogical researchers and church members visit to search for information in the archive. Enquiries by church councils are answered from their archival documents (remember the documents remain the property of the congregation). The archivist gives guidance and makes documents available for research.

1.8.5 Tips for handling and storage of church material before it is sent to the archive for safekeeping

1. Note that the front of the books are written which book it is, from which congregation and what the content is, for example: GK Strand member register.
2. Find a safe place to store the documents while in the congregation's possession (not somewhere behind an organ, or in a damp cellar).
3. Recommendation to Church Council - That the scribe chosen is administratively orientated and can keep data in order.

4. Date all the documents and letters, number the appendixes and record dates of meetings.
5. As far as possible keep minutes and appendixes of meetings together and indicated what belongs together.
6. Do not stick or staple appendixes into minute books. No glue or adhesive tape has a long shelf life, it only discolours and damages the paper.
7. Keep all the minute books of the Church Council and its committees (Finance, Property, Mission, Catechesis, Sisters, Bible study, etc. All the correspondence presented at a meeting is an appendix to the minutes - dates and number it.
8. Compile a register of Church Council Decisions and indicates where it can be found. Index by topics, e.g.: borders, property, etc. Cancel a decision if no longer applicable or if a new decision on the matter is taken - keep it on record.
9. If member- and/or baptism register is on the computer, print a copy every year, make a complete list of the baptized members who do Confession of Faith every year.
10. Give each pair of parents a baptismal certificate of their child's baptism, carefully complete the register.
11. Keep original documents in connection properties of congregation such as deeds - send copies to the archive for storage without delay.
12. Financial documents must be stored at the congregation for 5 (five) years for the Receiver of Revenue. The archive only stores the audited financial statements.
13. Please inform the archive if a congregation merges with another or dissolves. In such a case, the documents of the 'old' congregation must be transferred to the archive as soon as possible.