

A Practical Follow-Through Guide for a Council Responsible for Discernment

AFTER THE MEETING

A consequential decision may conclude a meeting without completing the council's responsibility. This guide offers recommended practices, not official PC(USA) policy. Follow the applicable Book of Order, authorized procedures, and confidentiality requirements.

1. Confirm, document, and communicate the outcome

Confirm the action. Determine precisely what was approved, denied, postponed, recommended, or referred. Distinguish a final decision from a recommendation requiring another body's approval; identify conditions and unresolved questions.

Preserve the record. Ensure the formal action and required supporting information are accurately recorded. Retain submitted written statements and other relevant materials as permitted; correct errors through authorized procedures and protect confidential information.

Notify affected parties promptly. Assign responsibility for communicating the decision in understandable language, including what it means, who must act, and any relevant dates. Do not leave people to infer an outcome from informal comments.

Identify urgent obligations. Check required notice, implementation, response, reconsideration, review, or appeal deadlines. Confirm which procedures actually apply; do not assume that every decision is appealable or that an informal request extends a deadline.

2. Explain the Faithful Why

Explain the reasons. To the extent responsibly permitted, identify the principal facts, applicable constitutional provisions and standards, and reasoning supporting the decision. Explain how the affected person's or body's written statements and significant responses were considered, even when the council disagreed.

Avoid post-hoc justification. State the reasons actually relied upon, not a more convenient explanation invented afterward. Distinguish established facts from interpretations and acknowledge material uncertainty or confidentiality limits.

Provide a path for questions. Identify how affected parties may seek appropriate clarification. If explaining the decision reveals a material factual or procedural error, obtain knowledgeable guidance and consider any correction or further review permitted by the governing process.

3. Carry out the decision—or complete the unfinished discernment

Assign ownership. List required actions, promised documents, consultations, pastoral contacts, and other commitments. Name the responsible person or body, the applicable deadline, and the next communication date.

If the response is Not Yet, make a plan. Specify what remains unresolved, what additional information or participation is needed, who will arrange further deliberation, and a reasonable timetable consistent with mandatory deadlines. Notify affected parties why discernment continues, what is expected of them, and when they will hear more.

Monitor implementation. Track completion, explain delays, and consider authorized adjustments when new information or unintended consequences emerge. Do not let obligations disappear when an item leaves the agenda.

4. Examine the integrity and sufficiency of the process

Review Whole-Truth Seeking. Did members fairly consider relevant evidence, contrary accounts, and the written statements of those under consideration? Did the council distinguish allegations, facts, assumptions, and unresolved questions?

Review meaningful participation. Were people given enough time to be heard, considering the gravity and complexity of the matter? Could council members explain their perspectives fairly, even while disagreeing? Were requests for authorized assistance handled appropriately?

Review power and bias. Did unequal authority, procedural knowledge, resources, access, or consequences affect participation? Did institutional interests, relationships, prior impressions, or pressure for closure shape the process?

Address shortcomings. If the review reveals a significant omission or procedural concern, determine what corrective action is possible within the council's authority. Seek qualified polity advice where necessary; a post-meeting review does not itself undo an action or suspend deadlines.

5. Provide appropriate care without compromising accountability

Consider everyone affected. Recognize possible effects on the person or body involved, those harmed, families, congregations, and colleagues. Ask what support is needed rather than assuming that one response fits all.

Offer care with boundaries. Where appropriate, assign someone to coordinate pastoral care or independent support. Do not use care to pressure acceptance, silence questions, gather information improperly, or bypass accountability and confidentiality.

Attend to dissent. Consider whether conscientious objections within the council identify unresolved concerns or implementation safeguards. A majority decision need not erase useful minority insights.

6. Learn from consequences and continue toward shalom

Evaluate outcomes over time. Ask whether the decision achieved its purpose and what intended or unintended effects followed. Look for truthfulness, justice, love, accountability, healing, and opportunities for restoration where appropriate and safe.

Improve future practice. Identify lessons about notice, meeting time, evidence, listening, guidance, consistency, recordkeeping, and follow-through. Change practices within the council's authority; refer proposed constitutional or higher-level changes through appropriate channels.

Remember the horizon. A decision may conclude deliberation but does not necessarily complete discernment. Christ provides the norm; the Spirit produces fruit; fruit provides evidence; shalom provides the horizon.

After-the-Meeting Council Checklist

- ☐ We confirmed the action, its authority, and whether it is final or a recommendation.
- ☐ We preserved an accurate, confidential record and communicated the outcome.
- ☐ We explained the Faithful Why and applicable review procedures and deadlines.
- ☐ If the decision was "Not Yet," have we established and communicated a plan for completing discernment?
- ☐ We assigned responsibility for implementation or a Not Yet deliberation plan.
- ☐ We examined the fairness, completeness, and sufficiency of our discernment.
- ☐ We considered appropriate care, dissenting concerns, and consequences for those affected.
- ☐ We established follow-up and a way to learn from the outcome.

Educational guidance only. It does not establish procedural rights, replace polity or legal advice, or supersede the Book of Order and governing rules.