

A Practical Follow-Through Guide for a Person or Body Subject to Discernment

After the Meeting

A council's decision may conclude deliberation, but it does not necessarily complete the work of discernment. Use this guide to understand the outcome, attend to urgent responsibilities, and decide what faithful action requires next.

1. Check urgent deadlines and responsibilities first

- **Identify time-sensitive requirements.** As soon as possible, determine whether the council set deadlines for responding, submitting documents, fulfilling commitments, or requesting review. Record the dates and who is responsible.
- **Find out which procedures apply.** A committee recommendation, a council decision, and a formal judicial determination may have different rules. Ask the stated clerk or designated contact which Book of Order provisions and council procedures govern your situation.
- **Protect available options.** Not every decision can be appealed or reconsidered. If a remedy may exist, seek knowledgeable, appropriately independent polity or legal guidance promptly. Asking for clarification or having pastoral conversations does not necessarily stop a filing deadline.

2. Establish what happened and why

- **Record the outcome accurately.** Was a request approved, denied, deferred, or referred elsewhere? Distinguish the official action from comments by individual participants. Confirm who has final decision-making authority.
- **Seek the “Faithful Why.”** Ask for the principal reasons, relevant facts, standards, and constitutional provisions supporting the action. A statement of what was decided is not always an explanation of why. Respect applicable confidentiality limits.
- **Clarify “Yes,” “No,” or “Not Yet.”** For Yes, confirm conditions and implementation. For No, clarify the reasons and any available next steps. For Not Yet, ask what is missing, who will act, and when the matter will return.
- **Separate evidence from inference.** Write down what the council actually said and what you infer. Understanding the reasons does not require agreeing with them. An incomplete explanation does not automatically prove bad faith.

3. Preserve a trustworthy record

- **Write a dated summary promptly.** Record the participants, key questions, documents considered, the action taken, reasons given, unanswered questions, and commitments. Clearly distinguish notes taken during the meeting from recollections added later.
- **Keep relevant materials together.** Preserve notices, agendas, your submissions, correspondence, the council's written action, and subsequent communications. Note important telephone conversations: date, participants, substance, commitments, and follow-up. Confirm significant oral understandings by email when appropriate.
- **Protect accuracy and privacy.** Retain originals and make secure backups. Do not edit source records, pass off recollections as verbatim quotations, or disclose confidential information without authorization. Recording conversations may require consent or permission.

4. Evaluate concerns and available responses

- **Identify specific gaps.** Were important facts overlooked, your position misunderstood, applicable procedures unclear, or commitments left unfulfilled? Explain the concern and why it matters rather than relying on a general sense of unfairness.
- **Ask for an appropriate response.** Depending on the applicable rules, seek clarification, correction of factual errors, completion of promised follow-up, or reconsideration. Where available, investigate formal review or other authorized remedies without missing deadlines.
- **Prepare for a possible appeal or other formal remedy.** If you believe the council's decision may warrant a formal challenge, promptly determine which procedures apply, whether you have standing, and what deadlines must be met. Consult someone knowledgeable about Presbyterian polity. Organize the decision, supporting documents, relevant correspondence, and a dated account of what occurred. Identify the specific actions, procedural irregularities, or constitutional concerns you believe warrant review. Do not assume that every unfavorable decision is appealable or that informal requests extend filing deadlines.
- **If the council proceeds despite unresolved concerns,** put the specific concerns and requested action in writing, retain a copy, and ask whether the response can become part of the appropriate record. A concern about insufficient discernment is not automatically a procedural violation or a basis for appeal.
- **Choose a constructive path.** Accepting a decision, seeking clarification, pursuing an available remedy, or exploring another opportunity can each be faithful choices. Consider consequences for yourself and others, including family, congregation, and colleagues.

5. Seek support and make a practical plan

- **Use a trusted sounding board.** Talk with someone who can listen carefully, challenge assumptions, and help you distinguish what you know from what you fear or infer. Observe confidentiality responsibilities.
- **Seek the right kind of help.** Pastoral care can offer prayer and accompaniment; polity advice can clarify church procedures; legal advice may be necessary where legal interests are affected; professional counseling or practical support may help with distress, transitions, finances, or relationships. These roles are different.
- **Make a next-step plan.** Decide what you will do, whom to contact, which documents you need, and by when. Include any obligations you accepted. Do not make major decisions in exhaustion if they can safely wait—but do not let reflection cause you to miss deadlines.

6. Continue discernment and look for fruit

- **Revisit the experience over time.** Were you able to participate meaningfully? Did the council seek a sufficiently full understanding? Were promises honored? What was done well, what could improve, and who may still need care? Offer constructive feedback when appropriate.
- **Attend to relationships and boundaries.** Forgiveness, reconciliation, and restored trust are not identical. Reconciliation may require truth, accountability, changed conduct, and time. Seeking peace does not require silence about injustice or remaining in a harmful situation.
- **Consider who you are becoming.** Prayer, Scripture, Christian fellowship, and wise counsel can help you respond with love, courage, truthfulness, humility, and responsibility. The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23) is evidence to consider; shalom—truthful, just, reconciling wholeness—is the horizon.

After-the-Meeting Quick Checklist

- ☐ I have identified any urgent deadlines and the rules that apply.
- ☐ I know what was decided, by whom, and what reasons were given—or have requested clarification.
- ☐ I have saved the decision, correspondence, notes, and commitments in a secure place.
- ☐ I have identified unresolved concerns and any appropriate requests or remedies.
- ☐ I know whom to consult for trusted perspective, pastoral care, or specialized advice.

- ☐ I have a practical follow-up plan, including responsibilities and dates.
- ☐ I will revisit the longer-term effects on people, relationships, and faithful living.

These educational suggestions do not replace pastoral care, professional counseling, legal or polity advice, or the constitutional responsibilities of Presbyterian councils. Procedures and available remedies depend on the nature of the matter.