

How to Hold Threshing Session

1. Give full notice of the threshing session well in advance. Make an effort to ensure that, as much as possible, group members of all shades of opinion will be present. To the extent that participants of a given view are absent, the usefulness of the threshing session is diminished. If factual material needs to be presented, arrange for persons knowledgeable about the issue to present such material and be available to answer questions.
2. Choose a facilitator who is not identified with any particular opinion on the matter. The facilitator's job is to manage the process, to draw out the reticent and limit the time taken by those who tend to speak at length, and to guide the discussion away from the direct back-and-forth of a debate.
3. The facilitator or someone designated by them gathers the group with a prayer or other ritual that focuses the group on God's presence.
4. The facilitator presents the issue before the group for this session. If appropriate, someone knowledgeable can add a brief history of what has been done to address the issue thus far.
5. The facilitator makes it clear that expressions of the widest differences are welcome, urging participants not to hold back whatever troubles them about the issue at hand, and reminding them that they should be inspired by but not respond directly to what others say.
6. The facilitator reads this description of a threshing session:
"When a congregation faces a difficult or controversial issue, it can be helpful to hold a threshing session to allow full opportunity for differences to be aired and faced. In such a meeting, no decision is made, but the 'chaff' of personal opinions is separated from the 'grains' of truth. It can clear the way for later action at a future meeting."
7. Someone (not the facilitator) is chosen to take notes of the session for later reference.
8. Each person who wants to speak raises their hand and waits to be recognized by the facilitator. No one should speak until recognized. Each person should speak only once unless they have a new thought to add or their mind and heart has been changed by listening to others. The facilitator should leave a few moments of silence after each speaker, so listeners can absorb what they have heard before hearing more.
9. The facilitator ends the session when everyone who wants to speak has done so. Do not make any decisions, even if it seems that people are beginning to agree. It is vital that you hold to your commitment NOT to make any decisions until a later time, no matter what.
10. End the session with a prayer or other ritual that reminds participants that God has been part of the process.