



Meeting Ritual Research Committee Historical Overview

1867

- I.C. Sorosis was founded April 28, 1867, at a time when Monmouth College was supported by the Presbyterian Church and—like most of their fellow students—our 12 founders were Christian women.
- The first constitution of our organization stated the President shall open each meeting with a devotional exercise, which was normally a reading from Emma Brownlee’s Bible and a prayer.

1880s

- By convention vote, the name of the organization was changed from I.C. Sorosis to Pi Beta Phi. Some chapters had already been using the Greek motto for years before the change was officially made.
- Emma Harper Turner—who served as Grand Secretary from 1888-1890 while a collegiate member of D.C. Alpha—asked her good friend and fellow D.C. Alpha, Anna Hazleton, to write a Meeting Ritual that would replace the devotional.
- The 1890 Convention adopted a new Initiation ceremony and a revised constitution, along with the proposal of a Meeting Ritual that would be used by all chapters. The 1893 Convention adopted the Meeting Ritual written by Anna Hazleton that is still used today.

1960s

- During the 1960s, debate emerged regarding Meeting Ritual, which was interpreted by some collegians as discriminatory toward non-Christian women. The 1969 Convention was the scene of spirited conversation about Meeting Ritual.
- A resolution directing Grand Council to form a committee “with the express responsibility of making changes in our present Ritual to delete or replace sectarian references” failed on a vote by the convention body.

1970s

- At the 1971 San Antonio Convention, a Ritual and Ceremonies Study Committee was appointed by Grand Council to study member perspectives about Ritual and other ceremonies and make recommendations based on member feedback.
- The committee included 10 members, evenly divided between collegians and alumnae and representing faith backgrounds including Judaism and both Protestant and Catholic Christianity. In Fall 1971, the committee sent letters to every chapter, alumnae club and alumnae pocket, with responses submitted from 27% of chapter and 33% of alumnae groups.
- Those in favor of modifying Meeting Ritual shared that having a ritual was necessary to unify a group, but religion itself was not the key to creating that bond; rather, friendship, humanitarianism, philanthropy and social activities should be at the center. Those opposed to changing Meeting Ritual proposed informing Potential New Members about the Christian elements of Ritual prior to pledging as a solution.
- After gathering this feedback, the committee provided reports of their findings at both the 1973 and 1975 Conventions. After the committee issued their final report, convention delegates voted to maintain Meeting Ritual as it was adopted in 1893.

1980s

- In the 1980s, other fraternities and sororities recognized the need to examine their own rituals. Some made changes while others opted to maintain their rituals as written.
- The 1983 Convention included guest speaker Edward King, an author whose work focused on the importance of ritual to organizations. In partnership with past Grand Vice President Collegians **ADRIENNE HISCOX MITCHELL**, Kansas Alpha, King distributed questionnaires on Meeting Ritual and Initiation to chapter delegates and attendees. Adrienne described the purpose of the questionnaires as a means “to direct each member’s thoughts toward the significance and qualities promoted in our Fraternity’s [Meeting] Ritual and Initiation ceremony.” These questionnaires again showed a broad range of perspectives.
- Also at this time, multiple chapters reported modifications to Meeting Ritual being made on an individual chapter level, including Vermont Beta and Illinois Epsilon. Grand Council continued to advise against chapters making these modifications. In a letter explaining their decision to modify Meeting Ritual, Illinois Epsilon shared, “Members of the house believe that Illinois Epsilon can be more productive as a unified chapter and can thus contribute more to the [inter]national organization.”

1990s

- In 1991, Connecticut Beta proposed legislation at convention to change Meeting Ritual with the express intent of making it more inclusive to non-Christian members. Their proposal replaced all references to the Christian trinity with the word God and changed all pronouns to she/her to make Meeting Ritual gender specific. They noted that members who chose not to participate in Meeting Ritual because of their faith are separated from chapter unity, as well as unity with the international Fraternity.
- Following their proposal and other discussions about Meeting Ritual, another committee was established to examine the relevance of beliefs about Meeting Ritual. The 1991-1993 Ritual Research Committee was charged “to investigate further the need for a non-discriminatory, non-sectarian ritual.”
- As part of their work, the committee surveyed the membership and received more than 7,000 responses. Their final report was given at the 1993 Convention. Their recommendations were to replace references to Christ and the Christian trinity with the word God, exchange Roman numerals (I) for Arabic numbers (1) when referencing the Bible in Meeting Ritual and to maintain the creed used during closing Ritual. These recommendations did not pass the convention body.
- During this time, many members cited the importance of Article I Section II of the I.C. Sorosis Constitution as evidence non-Christian members are welcomed and that Meeting Ritual should not include exclusionary statements. “The object of this organization shall be the advancement of its members in the most delicate yet strong friendship, mental assistance in all matters, endeavoring to dispel the gloom from the lives of all around them, to further the cause of religion by exerting an influence of virtue and charity throughout all intercourse, also to enable any member to follow the dictates of her own conscience knowing that she will be upheld and encouraged in independence. Anything within the bounds of morality shall receive the commendation of her sisters.”

2010s

- In 2016, Missouri Beta drafted a proposal for a new Meeting Ritual. The proposed changes replaced opening Ritual with call and response phrases centered around the six core values and replaced closing Ritual with the mission statement of Pi Beta Phi alongside the creed. This proposal was not brought to convention.
- In 2021, Fraternity officers began considering the establishment of another committee to examine Meeting Ritual and New Member Meeting Ritual. This was in part prompted by increased requests from chapters for alternatives to the Meeting Ritual and New Member Meeting Ritual.