

Healthy Church Councils



**Church Council
Resource Book**

Port Phillip East Presbytery

2020

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Leadership & Ethical Governance

Contributing to the work of the Uniting Church by serving on a committee or council, enables the Church to fulfil its polity as a series of inter-conciliar councils – each entrusted with its own unique set of responsibilities, yet open to, and in communication with, the other parts of the Church.

In serving the Church we are participating in God’s wider mission – working towards the reconciliation and renewal of all creation. The Church Council, as a community of followers of Jesus, exercises leadership for a congregation in discerning and following the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The Church as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit confesses Jesus as Lord over its own life; it also confesses that Jesus is Head over all things, the beginning of a new creation, of a new humanity. God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church's call is to serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself ¹.

Governance

The strategic task of setting and overseeing the organisation’s vision, goals, direction, limitations and accountability frameworks.

Ethics

Ethics is the cornerstone of sound and responsible governance. It ensures the sustainability, compliance, and good reputation of the Uniting Church.

Ethical governance

Acting in ways consistent with what society and individuals typically hold as shared values. These include honesty, integrity, fairness, equality, responsibility, responsiveness, and transparency.

These principles of following, leadership, and ethical governance, apply to our participation in each of the councils of the Uniting Church, including the Church Council, Presbytery, Synod and Assembly.

Small Group Discussion: What might leadership and ethical governance look like in your congregation, church council, in Port Phillip East Presbytery, in the Synod, and Assembly, and why might it be so important?

¹ Paragraph 3 Basis of Union

Good Governance

Good governance is accountable and transparent

Accountability is a fundamental requirement of good governance. No council or committee can exist in isolation from the rest of the Church. Being accountable means reading the papers in preparation and being able (and willing) to produce sound reason and rationale for any decision made.

Being transparent means being willing to share information honestly and freely (of course respecting confidentiality). All Uniting Church councils and committees have an obligation to report, explain and be answerable for the consequences of decisions they have made.

Good governance follows the rule of law

This means that decisions and actions must be consistent with meeting requirements of Government. This also means members need to understand what the relevant government laws are. Not knowing or saying we were not told is not an adequate excuse.

Good governance is responsive

Members should always try to serve the needs of the whole Church/community while balancing competing interests in a timely, appropriate and responsive manner.

Good governance is equitable and inclusive

The Church's wellbeing results from all of its members feeling their interests have been considered by Council in the decision-making process. This means the various members, stakeholders and participants need to be well-informed of decisions that will impact them.

Good governance is effective and efficient

Councils and committees should implement decisions and follow processes that make the best use of the available people, resources and time to ensure the best possible results for their community. Balancing a range of gifts and skills will mean a far more effective and efficient process than people who simply happen to be free on the day or fill a category of representation.

Good governance knows when to seek advice, when to discuss, and when to act. A church council that only discusses but never makes a decision does not serve the Church well – but neither does rash decision-making without first gathering the facts and discerning the wise way forward. Good governance requires people who know when to act decisively and efficiently

Good governance is participatory

Anyone who has been elected to a committee or council needs to read the papers prior to the meeting, then contribute through listening, questioning, debating and speaking in a pro-active and respectful fashion. Sitting silently and contributing little is avoiding your governance responsibility. If this is then followed up by criticism or undermining of decisions, this is unethical.

Governance and Mission Leadership

While ethical governance is desirable for all business organisations, the Church exists for a unique purpose. The goal of the Uniting Church is not to be successful in business or to generate profit. The Church exists to serve God through living out the call of being a community of reconciliation and renewal, looking beyond itself to God's active presence in the wider community and, indeed, the whole of creation.

The Church as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit confesses Jesus as Lord over its life; it also confesses that Jesus is Head over all things, the beginning of a new creation, of a new humanity....

The Church's call is to serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself.

Paragraph 3 Basis of Union 1992.

This means balancing good governance with missional and ministry focus. The church council functions as a community of leaders who embody a "fellowship of reconciliation", and enable and develop the congregation's commitment to joining together in God's mission in the world.

The decisions that are made ensure the congregation meets with government legislation, compliance and safety. In turn this provides a strong platform from which the local congregation can follow God's call in the local community.

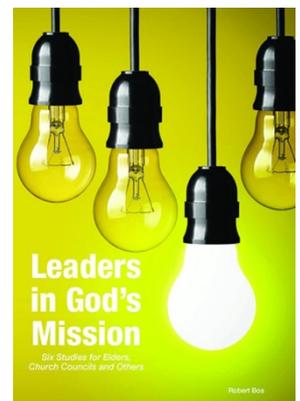
Robert Bos has written **Leaders in God's Mission**, six studies for elders, church councils and others, designed to help focus on what is really important – to exercise leadership in the mission of God in the world.

The studies could be used on a retreat, where people will have quiet time to read, pray, ponder and then discuss it with others. Alternatively, one study could be used at each regular meeting over a period of time. The book is available as a PDF or printed book from Mediacom Education in Adelaide.

mediacomeducation.org.au

Duncan Macleod has produced **Mission Stories**, a set of six videos and discussion/planning guides, designed for church councils as they focus on their local context, mission priorities, partnership, faith formation/discipleship, partnership in the local community, and holding together the full sense of mission.

Once again, the series can be used in a retreat or as regular points of reflection in church council meetings. The videos are available on DVD from the Port Phillip East Presbytery office as well as online. Ask Duncan Macleod for a copy of the study guide.



Church Council Responsibilities

Main Task of Church Council

According to the Uniting Church regulations, Church Council's main priority is to ***build the Congregation up in faith and love***². This means encouraging each member to be active disciples in all of their life, not just while in the Church building.

The point of active discipleship is to participate in Christ's mission in the world. The Church believes that mission (loving and serving the world in God's name) belongs to God. God is already doing it in millions of different ways within all our communities. Church Council helps the congregation identify

what God is doing and then join in as best it can. This is the main purpose of each meeting and should be reflected in whatever agenda is set.

Other responsibilities are:

Share in the pastoral care and spiritual oversight of the Congregation³

This doesn't mean to pastorally visit each member of the congregation, but to ensure pastoral care is adequate. How this happens is up to Church Council to decide.

Spiritual oversight means Church Council is responsible for what the congregation is experiencing and learning in worship, faith formation through the week, paying attention to the relationships between people that shape spiritual growth. Church Council doesn't have to control everything, but are responsible for appointing people of trust to key positions, and dealing with any questions or concerns that might arise. This also involves having oversight over the various groups and committees that may exist within the congregation.

Nurturing the Congregation in their growth in grace⁴

Members of Church Council are to be good role-models and to live out grace in every part of our life, including the way they relate to one another. Church Council's task is to call the congregation to be the best they can be and challenge them when behaviour is less than gracious. Meetings are to be conducted in a spirit of grace and generosity and are never to be a place to impose our will on others.

Making decisions in keeping with regulations⁵

Ensuring Council members have access to a copy of the Uniting Church Regulations and policies set by the Synod will help keep things on track. Church Council must also ensure rolls of the congregation are maintained and reviewed as appropriate.



² Regulation 3.1.2

³ Regulation 3.1.2 (b)(i)

⁴ Regulation 3.1.2(b)(ii)

⁵ Regulation 3.1.2(b)(iii)

Collaborating and sharing with the Minister in conduct of worship and in the sacraments⁶

If there is no Minister or ministry agent in placement, Church Council carries the full weight of this responsibility. It is vital that worship be healthy and nourishing. Allowing it to become repetitious or dull does not reflect the rich variety our God has given us.

Church Council decides things like the time frame for worship, who is baptised and when, how often Holy Communion is offered and by what method. Church Council decides who is able to preach. For example, is accreditation as lay preachers necessary, or can anyone preach? Who might be trained to conduct funerals? Church Council also seeks authorisation from Presbytery should a possible lay presider for baptism and/or communion be identified and trained.

Determining the time and place of services of public worship⁷

New styles and times of worship, as well as small groups also come under Church Councils oversight and encouragement. This means Church Council will have to consider whether each activity supports and serves the mission of the congregation. It might be the congregation wishes to hold a service in the local park – Church Council is accountable for the decision.

Carry out its functions concerning applicants for specified ministry⁸

Should any member of the congregation wish to explore a call to formal ministry, Church Council is the body which assists them. Help and guidance are always available from Presbytery.

Managing financial affairs and general administration⁹

Church Council is responsible for the wise use of all resources. While a treasurer may do the work of financial management, it is Church Council which takes responsibility for the congregation's financial position. Ensuring the congregation has clear and ready access to budgets and reports is vital to the credibility of any Church Council. Church Council must explore the possible work, health & safety risks associated with events or properties, and then note its decision in the minutes to ensure adequate insurance coverage and general duty of care.

Arranging for audit, presentation and examination of the accounts¹⁰

Church Council is responsible for transparency and accountability of the bookkeeping and ensuring the correct submission and forms are completed correctly and in a timely manner.

Managing and controlling property¹¹

Church property has served past congregations and will serve future ones, so no building belongs to any congregation. They are held in trust by The Uniting Church in Australia Property Trust (VIC) – a recognised legal entity. However, congregations have the beneficial use of the property in accordance with the Regulations. Church Councils are to maintain property to ensure it meets the changing needs of the congregation and wider community, including provision for repairs and maintenance and setting aside funds for capital works. However, property should not become the primary focus of Church Council's life.

⁶ Regulation 3.1.2(b)(iv)

⁷ Regulation 3.1.2(b)(v)

⁸ Regulation 3.1.2(b)(vi)

⁹ Regulation 3.1.2(b)(vii)

¹⁰ Regulation 3.1.2 (b)(viii)

¹¹ Regulation 3.1.2(b)(ix)

Preparing and presenting annual reports to the Congregation¹²

Church Council serves a vital role as a channel of good communication. Ensuring the congregation knows what each group is doing builds healthy relationships of love and trust.

Exercise oversight of the appointment of officers and leaders of Congregation organisations¹³

Congregations have a range of groups and Committees called to assist in the local worship, witness and service. These all need to be led and supported by people gifted with the appropriate skills and graces. It is Church Council's responsibility to oversee and support such leaders and officers, as well as deal with any tensions and conflicts that may arise.

Refer matters to Presbytery as required¹⁴

Church Council is tasked with communicating with Presbytery. Whether it is a property alteration or a new candidate for Lay Preacher – it is Church Council's responsibility to be in dialogue with Presbytery.

Exercise discipline on behalf of the congregation as appropriate¹⁵

This involves being aware of what procedures are to be followed should there be a need for any disciplinary action to be taken either against the minister or a member. A useful place to begin is becoming familiar with the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice for ministers and pastoral staff, and the Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders, and the Code of Ethics for Lay Preachers. The Church Council has the responsibility of addressing concerns about behaviour. However, it is usually helpful to have outside help with mediation or responding to formal complaints. Contact Presbytery if you have any concerns about unethical behaviour.

DISCUSSION

How does this job description resonate or conflict with your Church Council experience?

What things might you like to see your Church Council begin doing or including?



¹² Regulation 3.1.2(b)(x)

¹³ Regulation 3.1.2(b)(xi)

¹⁴ Regulation 3.1.2(b)(xii)

¹⁵ Regulation 3.1.2(b)(xiii)

Mandatory Reporting and Safe Place

Child Protection Reporting

Creating safe spaces for ministry and mission includes understanding our obligations under child protection legislation and also the Uniting Church's understanding of being safe and welcoming. It also includes being particularly aware of vulnerable people.

With regard to protecting children, under both Victoria legislation there are obligations for individuals to report to the appropriate Government department if they have information that a child (under 18 years) is at risk of significant harm, or is being harmed/abused. There are some people who are designated as Mandatory Reporters, with regard to this risk.

In Victoria all Ministers, Pastors and employees working specifically with children are classified as mandatory reporters.

If you believe you may need to make a child protection report, seek advice from the following: -

Phone the Department of Human Services Child Protection Crisis Line 13 12 78 at any time or use the online Mandatory Reporting Guide located at

<https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/mandatory-reporting>

Safe Place for all people

'The Uniting Church in Australia (The Church) believes that all people, including children, are made in the image of God. As a Christian community we believe that God reaches out to us in love and acceptance, and that our relationships with each other should express love, care and respect (Safe Place Position Statement developed by the UCA Commission on Women and Men in 1997). Central to living out the gospel is to love God and to love others. As a community of faith, we are committed to providing safe environments for all people, including children, so that they may live life in all its fullness. We also acknowledge the rights of children as detailed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1990, article 49) that States shall protect children from physical or mental harm and neglect, including sexual abuse and exploitation.'

The previous statement is taken from the **National Child Safety Policy Framework** published by Assembly and summarises the Uniting Church's commitment to providing safe places for all people, but particularly children.

Part of our existing practices and policies is to provide training to enable people to understand their legal responsibility for Reporting Child Abuse & Neglect. Training courses ensuring safe place awareness are currently being conducted around the state.

Strategy and Operations

Governance and Management

The larger or more complex a congregation’s operations become the more important it is to be able to distinguish between the governance role of the Church Council and the management role played by ministry staff, whether paid or volunteer. The delineation between what the Church Council does and what the staff does needs to be clearly articulated through policies, guidelines and procedures. It is essential for everyone to know what they are expected to do and what they will be held accountable for.

This delineation between governance and management can sometimes be tricky to navigate. When enacting their governance role, the Church Council must provide oversight of staff. And yet Church Council members, when acting in support of the congregation’s activities, become more like crew members, sitting alongside the staff, championing and assisting them in their work, not attempting to take over the work to which the staff or volunteers were appointed.

Some governance models suggest a clear split between a Board’s (or Church Council’s) strategic role and the staff operational role. In general, this is a good idea. A board is there to govern, not to manage – to steer, not to row; to conduct, not to play. Church Councillors should therefore seek to talk through their understandings of the differences between governance and management, and document the varying responsibilities as understood to be the best wisdom in each congregational context.

For assistance with putting together best-practice policies, procedures and charters of delegated authorities that clearly outline the various responsibilities that make sense in your context you can adapt template policies from a place like the Institute of Community Directors Australia¹⁶ or contact Presbytery staff.

Governance Hat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worn when in a properly called Church Council meeting with a quorum Decisions made only when part of the group wearing this hat
Volunteer Hat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goes on when leaving a Church Council meeting Worn when advising the minister Worn when helping ministry team and often under supervision of ministry team
Implementer Hat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worn when a council resolution gives a church council member authority to implement a council decision Hat is removed when task is done

¹⁶ <https://www.communitydirectors.com.au/icda/policybank/>

Who can be on Church Council?

In accordance with the Regulations:

- Confirmed members & members in association, elected by the congregation
- Elders or Leaders¹⁷, elected by the congregation
- Any ministry agents in placement, e.g., ministers, pastors, etc. and;
- Retired ministers or ministers-in-association, by agreement
- 1 or 2 co-opted members or members in association

If your congregation has 30 or fewer members, you may seek authorisation from Presbytery for the members of the congregation to become the Church Council¹⁸.

Elders, Leaders or Church Councillors

When the Uniting Church moved to having one Church Council in 1999, it determined that over 50% of Church Council members must be elders. While this does not mean you must use this title, it affirms the need for people with gifts of spiritual oversight. Another way to understand this is having *watchful care* over the members of your congregation – people who can encourage, affirm, build one another up, live out their faith with grace and generosity and call others to do the same, are vital to the life of both Church Council and congregation.

The Uniting Church regulations allow for variations on size and makeup of Church Council to be approved by the Presbytery. The Port Phillip East Presbytery Pastoral Relations Committee is able to consider and approve any changes.

Looking at who might possess such gifts and then asking them to consider being on Church Council are the responsibility of all members of the congregation.

Is Church Council for you?

While being on Church Council may seem an overwhelming responsibility, it is a chance to serve and respond to God's call to use the gifts that he has endowed you with. As a key member of the Council you will be living the mission of your congregation as it seeks to be God's people within your community

It is a position of privilege and it needs people who are willing to see beyond their own personal wants and needs to what might best serve the needs of the people. It is a servant ministry – and we wish you God's blessing as you prayerfully consider this call.

¹⁷ Regulation 3.3.1(b) – and if this quota is not yet established effort to do so is encouraged.

¹⁸ Regulation 3.9.3(a)

Election of Elders and Church Councillors

Regulation 3.3.2

- (a) In electing Elders and Church Councillors, the Congregation shall recognise and appoint confirmed members or members-in-association who are endowed with gifts fitting them for the responsibilities of the office.
- (b) Election shall be by written ballot in a meeting of the Congregation. Prior notice of intention to hold such a ballot must be given and the names of nominees shall be publicly announced at least two weeks prior to the ballot being held.
- (c) The meeting shall declare to be elected only such persons as receive the support of a majority of those participating in the ballot, or such higher percentage of those participating in the ballot as the Congregation may have determined prior to the call for nominations.
- (d) The maximum number of Elders and other Church Councillors to be elected, in addition to any Elders holding life tenure, shall be determined by the Congregation from time to time after advice from the Church Council.
- (e) Elders and other Church Councillors shall be set apart by prayer in a service of worship conducted by the Minister of the Congregation, or if unavailable, by another person appointed by the Presbytery to perform this duty.
- (f) The term of office of an Elder and an elected Church Councillor is for such period from one to five years as is stipulated by the nominee and for which period the person is then elected by the Congregation. At the expiry of the term the Elder or Church Councillor shall be eligible for re-election.

Setting Agenda

Here's an excerpt from Charles M. Olsen's book, *Transforming Church Boards into communities of spiritual Leaders*.¹⁹

Many new board members expect board participation will be an opportunity for personal faith development only to find a long, parliamentary-ordered, business as usual meeting. While asking for bread, they felt they had been given a stone.

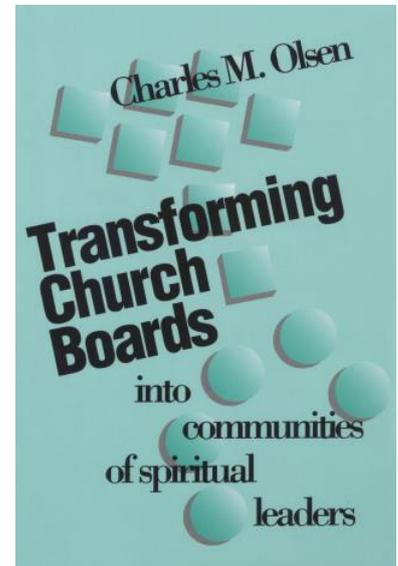
“Stonelike” boards are those that do not attend to personal needs and aspirations. Stonelike boards try to make too many decisions. Dr Tom Savage, president of Rockhurst College, observes that most boards can make only one or two good decisions in a given meeting (perhaps in a year!). Considering this, adequate time and attention should be given to the really big issues over a span of meetings.

Stonelike board meetings are repetitious. Stonelike boards are seduced into acting as a committee of the whole in response to incomplete committee reports or half-baked recommendations. Stonelike boards rely upon and are partial to assertive, verbal, and left brain-oriented people. Stonelike boards rush to judgment, making decisions with inadequate information, and without prayerful discernment. Stonelike board meetings may be cut and dried, with the real decisions having already been made by the pastor or staff. Board members are left with little power to act or lead.

“Breadlike” boards allow for bonding and trust to build as a community of faith is formed. Breadlike meetings are centered and focused by scripture on images of God and the people of God in community. Breadlike meetings take the time to prayerfully discern God's leading and call. Breadlike boards have farmed out many operational decisions, entrusting them to other people and groups that have been empowered and commissioned to act. Breadlike boards look at the “whole forest” and into its future. Breadlike meetings integrate inspiration with governance and feel more like “worship” than “meeting”.

Careful consideration in planning the agenda for a meeting is every bit as important as planning for worship. Like the communion table, the board table should be viewed as “holy ground.” If a meeting is to be worshipful work, with great potential for energy and excitement, much care needs to be given to its planning. A casual editing of last month's agenda makes for more stale bread.

The following two pages outline some of Olsen's suggestions for reshaping agendas.



¹⁹ Charles M. Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards into Communities of Spiritual Leaders*, Rowman & Littlefield, Alban Books, 1995

Replace Committee Reports

Replace the litany of committee reports with spiritually rooted practices. The Set Apart Lay Leaders project is constructed around a four-practice model.

Story telling or history giving. Allow a portion of the meeting to surface these in general or in relation to a specific occasion or issue.

Biblical and theological reflection. The master stories from scripture, when woven with our stories and reflected upon theologically, will produce a centre, a basic purpose, and a focused mission for the church.

Prayerful discernment. Decisions are to be “discerned” with a spiritual eye rather than through a rational or deductive process.

“Visioning” the future. Take the long, unhurried look. Anticipate the fulfillment of trends as well as the intervention of God through the unexpected.

These four practices create the potential for an integration of spirituality and administration. They do not need to follow the same order in each meeting. Nor do they require an equal proportion of time. Sometimes one practice is more appropriate to extended gatherings or retreats. A committee may feel threatened as these practices are instituted. But that need not be the case if they can see that an agenda can easily be grouped into stories, reflections, decisions, and future planning. This framework can actually save an enormous amount of meeting time. The board is able to focus on what is most pressing, pertinent, and important.

Create an Annual Agenda

If a board or council can make only a few good decisions in a year, ask, “What is the most important decision that we have to make this year?” Pick the two to four major decisions and develop a process for consideration that ensures good communication, lead time, and prayer. The rhythm of the church and program year lends itself to a planning cycle in which committees may need to report only once or twice a year, certainly not at every meeting. Their reports can include basic policy recommendations or future plans.

Prepare a Consent Agenda

Prepare a consent agenda in which all recommendations are in writing and listed together on a single page (or more). This should be in the hands of board members several days before the meeting. At the meeting separate out any items for which people request discussion or debate. Remaining items can be approved with common consent. Some churches are more comfortable with an informal agenda that may not be in print. In this case, the presider can use a whiteboard; at the beginning of a meeting, ask members to identify stories, recommendations, or future explorations. List on the whiteboard any action items. Rank them in order of importance for consideration. This ensures that the board will give its best energies to the most significant decisions.

Create an Agenda Tracing Worship Themes

Create an agenda that traces the themes of the Sunday morning worship service. This method ensures that elements of worship, including prayers, hymns, affirmations of faith, centering in God's Word, offering, commitment, and blessing, are present.

Incorporate Prayers

Incorporate provisions for a variety of prayers that thread their way throughout the gathering.

Reflect on the Meeting

Make provision for one of the participants to offer concluding reflections on the meeting. Reflections are not a recap of the meeting like oral minutes but a commentary on the process and significance of what has happened. What really happened here, and what is the significance of it for our life together and for the church? The reflections may be pastoral. Often people stick their necks out in a meeting and risk more than they had planned to. They may feel uneasy and apologize, "Maybe I shouldn't have said that." The meeting's reflections might bless and affirm such a person's participation by identifying how helpful it was to the process. Naming the tensions, conflicts, or frustrations while affirming the board's resolve to hang together and be there for each other (as well as trusting God's sustaining grace). This reflecting role, which can be rotated through the group, raises awareness of the dynamics of board process and reduces the need for subgroups to conduct their own post-mortem in the parking lot afterwards.

Work with a Design Team

Invite a design team of several board members to work with the pastor in framing the agenda. Board members can rotate through the team. This move would further empower the laity and ensure ongoing feedback on whether they are ingesting stones or savouring bread!

What do you think is useful in Olsen's advice for church boards?

What advice would you give for setting agendas?

More from Charles Olsen

Olsen's other books are also worth checking out:

Selecting Church Leaders: A Practice in Spiritual Discernment, Charles M. Olsen & Ellen Morseth, Rowman & Littlefield, 2002

Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church, Danny E. Morris and Charles M. Olsen, revised and updated, Rowman & Littlefield, 2012.

The Wisdom of the Seasons: How the Church Year Helps Us Understand Our Congregational Stories, Charles M. Olsen, Rowman & Littlefield, 2009

Writing Reports

Ministry team members, committees, task groups and office bearers such as Chairperson and Treasurer may find it helpful to submit a report to Church Council. Provide written reports with enough time for people to read before the meeting, freeing up the agenda for significant discernment and decision making.

What would you include in a written report?

Current Significant Issues

This is a section that alerts the church council to matters that are critical to the life of the congregation. This could include recommendations for action that need to be taken by the church council, particularly for work or budgeting that hasn't already been approved.

Update on implementation of priority work

This is a section that reports on responsibility already delegated to a person, team or committee. This could be provided in relation to worship, pastoral care, property, finance, Christian education, community connections, recruitment and oversight of staff.

Major Key Performance Areas (staff)

Staff may find it useful to report on key areas of their work, relating to their position descriptions. It is not expected that every report has to cover every part of the position description!

Risk and Compliance Update

It is helpful to table a list of events and activities being run under the auspices of the congregation, for which the church council carries any risk.

Any potential or existing risk can be named, with a plan for addressing that risk. For example, the enrolment of volunteers, along with applications for Working With Children Checks, could be noted in advance of events or activities involving children.

Personal and Pastoral

This provides for an update on ministry team leave, reporting on supervision, continuing education and attendance at Code of Ethics updates, the wellbeing of members, significant life moments for members.

Healthy Participation in Church Councils

How often would Church Council meet?

The UCA Regulations say that church councils shall meet at least quarterly. Most church councils meet monthly. This will be determined by your congregation's needs and are set out in the UCA Regulations²⁰.

Regardless of size, it is vital that Church Council regularly meet, pray, discuss and record minutes of what is decided and what action is to be taken.

Quorum

Half the membership of Church Council is needed for a quorum. If no quorum is present, then the meetings shall be reconvened on another occasion. Should no quorum be present at the reconvened meeting, business may be conducted by those present.

Importance of Relationships

People should matter more than regulations. The way Church Council members (and congregation members) treat one another is even more important than the decisions they make.

A Church Council meeting should be a place of hospitality and generosity where all people are valued and affirmed. Confidence must be maintained – who said what at Church Council stays at Church Council.

Each person is expected to contribute – not dominate the conversation, nor shrink away from speaking at all. The consensus cards are especially helpful in indicating to the Chair that you would like to speak. The tone and manner in which you speak matter enormously.

Sadly, there may be occasions when people behave in difficult and wilful ways. Should the group keep silent for the sake of immediate peace, the situation will not improve. Consider whether risking 20 seconds of courage to name poor and ungracious behaviour in a caring way might help the meeting, the people and the congregation.

We are part of God's realm – thus we build each other up, encourage and affirm one another as well as hold each other accountable.

²⁰ Regulation 3.5.2

Meeting Procedure

Meetings are generally conducted in accordance with the consensus model outlined in “A Manual for Meetings in the Uniting Church”. This can be downloaded from the Assembly website.

While your meeting may feel too small to worry about using consensus cards, your members may be at a disadvantage should they be elected to Presbytery, Synod, or Assembly.

Being familiar with using the cards and the consensus model is also helpful should a controversial issue arise. Needing to learn consensus and manage controversy at the same time could be very difficult. We encourage you to consider using the cards so that all your members are familiar with the procedure and aware of how the Uniting Church Consensus method works.

Orientation Pack

The Presbytery suggests every member of Church Council be given an orientation pack. In it you might include the following key documents of the Church.

- Constitution & Regulations 2018
- Basis of Union 1992 Edition
- UCA Statement to the Nation 1977
- Covenanting Statement and Response 1994
- Revised Preamble to the Constitution 1994
- Explanation of the UCA and UAICC Logo
- Multicultural Church Statement 1985
- Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice 2012
- Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders 2016
- Code of Ethics for Lay Preachers 2013
- Manual for Meetings 2015
- Guide for Church Councils for Implementing Keeping Children Safe Policy VIC/TAS 2017

These documents are all downloadable from the Assembly and Presbytery websites.

You may want to develop your own resources suited to your context

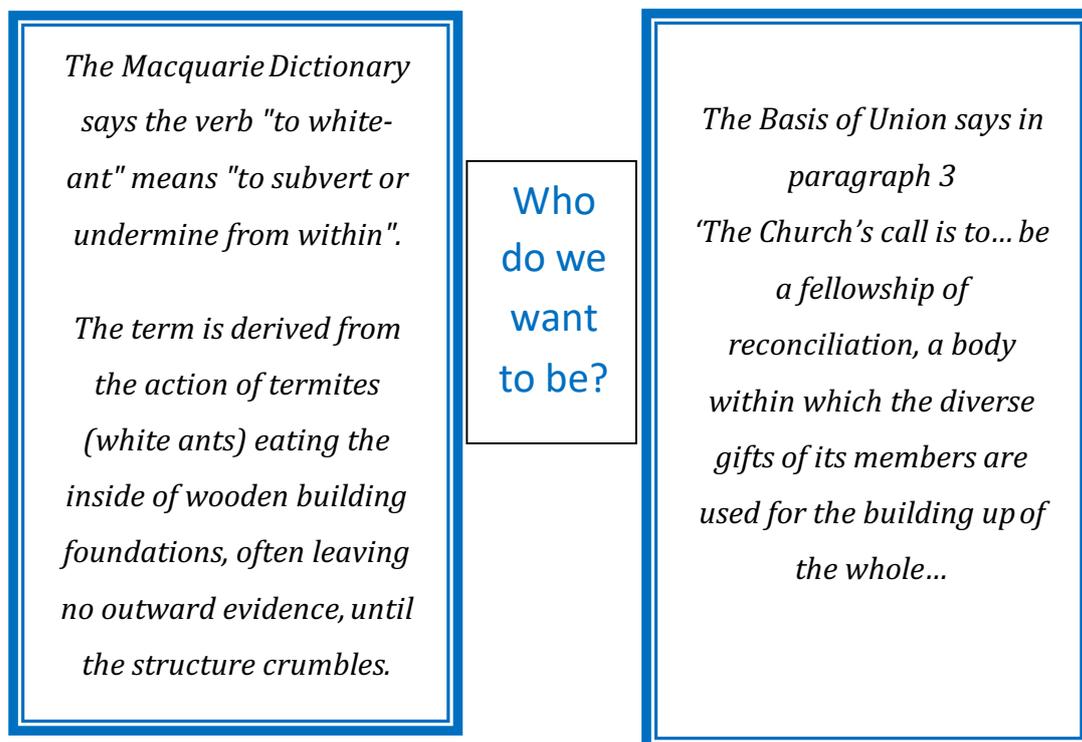
- Vision, Values, Mission Statement, Strategic Plan
- Job Description for Church Council members
- Acknowledgement of Country Template

Council Solidarity

A good Church Council will have robust debate and discussion, but once a decision has been made, must stand in solidarity, knowing the decision was made together.

Sometimes not everyone agrees with a decision. Sometimes not everyone even participates in the decision-making process.

How Church Council members respond in such a situation can make or break the unity of the group. Something known as ‘white-anting’ can distract the focus of the Council, Board or Committee, undermining relationships and eroding energy. This can be a complex issue and a lack of solidarity is one of the struggles many Churches, Councils, and meetings face.



It is the task of the Chairperson to invite contribution from every member so that there is a sense of ownership in any resulting decision. Should a member not support a decision, the appropriate place to speak their mind is before the decision has been made. Speaking about it resentfully or bitterly afterwards only depletes our unity and undermines not only the relationship within the Church, but the missional activity of the Church.

Good governance involves robust debate AND strong solidarity

Congregation or Church Council?

Congregation and Church Councils generally have different areas of responsibility. However, sometimes issues can overlap. Anything important that affects the life of the congregation should be referred to a congregational meeting by Church Council with strategic and pastoral thought guiding the process.

For example, imagine Church Council is considering changing the time of worship or painting the interior of the Church a new colour, or possibly even selling the building. In regulation 3.1.1(c) the Congregation is charged with:

- advising the Church Council on property matters affecting the congregation;
- maintaining all necessary and appropriate relationships with the Presbytery and other Councils and bodies;
- such other things as are consistent with the purposes of the Church and not the specific responsibility of any other Council or body within the Church.

Regardless of regulations, Church Council would be very wise to consult with the congregation on any issue which concerns or affects the congregation as a whole. Asking for opinions and responses demonstrates clear transparency and grows trust – not to mention assisting Church Council to make the wisest decision considering the interests and perspectives of all stakeholders.

DISCUSSION

How well do Church Council and the congregation communicate?

What channels of communication ensure information is effectively shared?

Taking this further, how helpful is the communication between your congregation and Presbytery?



Confidentiality

In most legal relationships or transactions, we deal with one another with what the law generally calls an “arm’s length” status. This means we have no special duty or requirement to protect the other person or warn them if we believe they are about to engage in conduct that is unwise or not in their best interests.

In certain situations, however, the law does require a higher standard of conduct. We refer to such situations as having a *fiduciary* duty. Officers and directors of a corporation, including a non-profit corporation such as a Church or ministry, also owe a fiduciary duty.

So, what is fiduciary duty?

It is the duty to act in the best interests of the Church even if doing so may not be in your best personal interests.

Fiduciary duties also include the duty of loyalty. Within this duty of loyalty is the responsibility to maintain confidentiality. This means to hold all information learnt by virtue of a position on a Council in confidence. You should not disclose information regarding Church affairs unless the Church has already made a public disclosure, or the public already commonly knows this information. This is especially important in the case of examples such as financial information, staff issues, pastoral matters and future plans of the Church.

One specific example of why it is important for members to always maintain their fiduciary duties, particularly the duty of loyalty, is because from time to time they may receive information that is protectable under the attorney-client privilege. The courts will waive the protections available to preserve these confidential communications if a member discloses them outside a proper venue.

Breaches of duty can result in personal legal liability, and that is why many organisations hold Directors and Officers Liability Insurance to indemnify individuals from personal legal liability in certain situations. Church Council members and office bearers of the Uniting Church are required to immediately contact the VIC/TAS Synod Risk and Insurance Team to report any known fact or circumstance that may result in a potential legal liability claim arising from a breach of duty as a Director, employee or office bearer of the Uniting Church.

Most courts view whether or not a Minister, Pastor or council member violated fiduciary duty based on the individual facts and circumstances of each case. They will judge a Church officer’s conduct on what an ordinary and prudent officer would have done (or not done) under similar circumstances.

Conflicts of Interest

Church Councils should strive to be providing a fair, ethical and accountable environment for the operations of their local mission to thrive. The role of the Council to make decisions in this regard is paramount.

Two key concepts of this duty are not placing oneself into an actual or potential perceived position of conflict between either a personal interest or a duty owed elsewhere.

Council members are required to act in the best interests of their Council, which can be difficult with all the different “hats” we wear in our Church life, other work or volunteer organisations.

This not only includes our own personal, professional or business interest but also the personal, professional or business interests of the individuals or groups we associate with. This might include relatives, friends or even rivals. A conflict of interest can arise from avoiding personal losses as well as gaining personal advantage – whether financial or otherwise.

This is a difficult boundary to discern and the wisdom of the whole Council can be called upon. An overarching guideline to consider can be:

Will a Council member be able to make an independent judgement, or whether a conflicting interest or duty could reasonably be expected to divide their loyalties?

Three (3) other guiding rules can be of use here:

- (a) The 'conflict rule' – is there a personal interest that is inconsistent with the best interests of the Church.

For example, should a member of Church Council member vote to approve to the operation a low-cost childcare centre on site, when their children are in need of that service?

- (b) The 'profit rule' – is there a possible advantage for themselves or a third party for the outcome of a decision.

For example, should a member of Church Council vote to accept a tender to renovate the Church Hall using their brother’s company?

- (c) The 'misappropriation rule' - there must not be any misuse of property (real or intellectual) for their benefit, or that of a third party.

For example, should a member of Church Council provide additional information and knowledge of the internal workings of the congregation to a job applicant when this information is not freely available or provided as part to the application process when recruiting staff?

The Church and their community expect that where such a conflict exists, matters must be resolved by putting the Church interest first. The recommended way to deal with conflicts of interest and minimise and potential for concern is to:

- Disclose the situation early and establish within the Council a culture of disclosure;
- Have conflicts as the first item on the agenda of meetings to set that expectation;
- Weigh up, on a case-by-case basis, the potential for conflicts of duty and
- Reconsider the three (3) 'rules' above then move forward based upon that discernment.

DISCUSSION

Discuss other examples of Conflict of Interest
within the Church environment and
examples of best practice as to how to deal with them.

Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders

The Uniting Church in Australia Assembly Standing Committee at its meeting in November 2015 adopted the following Code of Conduct and accompanying Guidelines for Councils of the Church when implementing the Code. The Code of Conduct came into formal effect from 1 April 2016. It is recommended that each member of Church Council sign a covenant or commitment which includes the Code of Conduct.

1. Introduction

The Uniting Church in Australia is committed to providing safe places where people are cared for, nurtured and sustained. In order to fulfil this commitment, the church needs to have accountability and consistency, across Presbyteries and Synods, in all our services and activities.

A Code of Conduct is an important document for communicating the kinds of behaviours expected from people in the life of the Church. The existence of a Code of Conduct, when it is known and applied, gives confidence to the wider community and assists the witness of the Christian community. It is an instrument to raise awareness within the Church of what is expected and what kinds of behaviour it does not condone.

This Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders (Code of Conduct) outlines the behaviours expected of persons who participate in the life of the Uniting Church in Australia as leaders. It applies to all the Church's lay leaders, including but not exclusively Church Councillors, elders, worship leaders, chairs of committees, team / activity leaders. That is, any lay person who accepts a leadership role within a Congregation, Presbytery, Synod or Assembly. It does not apply to those holding paid positions as it is expected that employment contracts will bind employees to the organisation's code of conduct.

Lay leaders within a Congregation, Presbytery, Synod or Assembly should be recognised in that role through a short commissioning service, to be held within the normal worshipping life of that Council of the Church. This is so that everyone, including the leader, understands that they have formally taken on a leadership role and are subject to the discipline of this Code of Conduct.

Ministers of the Word, Deacons and lay people serving in an approved Ministry of Pastor role are bound by the national Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice for Ministers of the Uniting Church in Australia.

2. Leadership within the Church

Lay leaders are called to minister out of a relationship with God by:

- joining regularly in the life and ministry of the Church.
- studying the Scriptures in private and in groups.

- praying regularly in private and in fellowship with and for the people and ministry of the Church.

3. Conduct

Leaders will:

- treat all people of the Church, including those engaged in Church activities and programs, with respect, courtesy, honesty and fairness, and have proper regard for their interests, rights, safety and welfare.
- act according to the legislative requirements, policies and ethical codes that apply to their areas of leadership.
- make decisions fairly, impartially and promptly, considering all available information, legislation, policies and procedures.
- be aware of and careful not to abuse any social or professional power that comes with any personal attribute, or role or position held in the Church or professionally or in the community.
- show others what healthy relationships look like by modelling them.
- avoid behaviours that could be experienced as bullying, emotional abuse, harassment, physical abuse, spiritual abuse, sexual abuse or any kind of sexual misconduct.
- be sensitive to the particular needs and vulnerability of children and young people.

4. Confidentiality

Leaders will:

- treat as confidential any personal or sensitive information acquired through their work or other involvement in the Church, other than as required by law or where proper authorisation is given.
- adhere to legal requirements, policies and all other lawful directives regarding the use of personal or sensitive information.
- use personal information only for the purpose stated or understood when the information is gathered.

5. Relationship with the Law

Leaders will:

- obey Australian laws while recognising that the long standing Christian tradition of political resistance and civil disobedience may lead to exceptions.
- not act violently or intentionally provoke violence when engaging in civil disobedience.

- not take property belonging to others, including intellectual property (copyright).
- not knowingly make false, misleading, deceptive or defamatory statements.
- disclose to the Church leadership if they are or have been investigated for any criminal offences or have any knowledge of serious criminal activity.
- act with financial integrity, including having accountable and transparent systems in place in financial matters.
- be responsible in their use of addictive substances and services (for example, medications / alcohol).

6. Conflict of interest

Leaders will:

- ensure personal or financial interests do not conflict with Church related roles and responsibilities to be undertaken or in which a leader is involved.
- manage and declare any conflict between personal interests and Church duty.
- where conflicts of interest do arise, seek the support of the relevant Council (Congregation, Presbytery, Synod or Assembly) to ensure they are managed in the public interest, according to community standards of the highest order.

7. When the code is breached

This code will only be effective if it is widely known and available throughout the Church, practised consistently and implemented justly. All lay leaders have a responsibility to ensure that personal behaviour and practices that are not consistent with this code are neither tolerated nor covered up.

If there is knowledge or reason to believe that another lay leader of the Church has not followed this code, then that person should be approached and the concern identified.

If the lay leader can be considered as persisting in disregarding the code without good reason and a person has suffered or is at risk of suffering harm, then the behaviour should be reported to the council of the Church with responsibility for the member.

If in doubt, seek advice from a colleague or Minister.

Dealing with Breaches of the Code of Conduct

Guidelines for Councils of the Church, when implementing the Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders

Types of breaches

i) Minor

Everyone is capable of sin but can repent and be forgiven (1 John 1:8-9). It stands to reason then, that the code can be breached. When this happens in an area that is not a breach of civil or criminal law, leaders should be approached by a member of the Council responsible for their oversight. This behaviour should be explained to the leader, who will be expected to simply cease the conduct. In some cases, it may be necessary to stand a person aside from their duties whilst this takes place. It is crucial to deal with such matters confidentially and sensitively.

ii) Unknowing violations:

Not all leaders will understand 'unacceptable' behaviours. Even after explaining the code some may be unaware they are exhibiting unacceptable behaviours. Leaders need to be open to correction and humble enough to modify behaviours so as to not discredit the gospel. As above, standing a person aside from their duties may be necessary.

iii) Constant or consistent violations:

There are breaches that are not a breach of civil or criminal law, but still unacceptable behaviour. Where a leader has been made aware of their behaviour and yet refuses to change:

- a) the Chair of the council responsible for the leader's oversight meets with the person for behaviour review meetings and communicates required behaviour change, up to a maximum of 3 meetings.
- b) If behaviour continues, a small group of Church leaders are to arrange a meeting to address the behaviour. Standing aside is appropriate at this point.
- c) If the behaviour(s) continues beyond this meeting, then respectfully, and upholding confidentiality, the person will be stood down for a set period. They will be offered help in changing their behaviour via counselling if they are willing. (ref Regulation 5.2.1 and 5.3.1 for implementing)

NOTE: Written notes of all meetings to be carefully taken and a copy given to all parties.

iv) Breaches of the law or allegations of abuse

Breaches of the law or allegations of abuse are to be referred to the appropriate government authorities, in line with Uniting Church processes. The General Secretary of the Synod must be contacted at this point.

Consensus Model for Decision Making

Consensus decision-making was adopted by the 1994 National Assembly as the norm for meeting procedure in all Councils of the Uniting Church (Congregation, Church Council, Presbytery, Synod, and Assembly).

In the introduction to the Manual for Meetings, the (then) General Secretary wrote:

Consensus:
*seeking a
common mind
about the wisest
way forward for
the Church.*

The Manual for Meetings provides the official standing orders and rules of debate for the Uniting Church in Australia...

The Manual is a very important development in the life of the Uniting Church. The Uniting Church believes that we hear the voice of God in the Councils of the Church. Church meetings that encourage community and listening to one another in a spirit of openness and humility, are more likely to discern the will of God.

It is the hope and expectation of the Assembly that the process present in the Manual will enable us to give expression to Christian community as we work together...

I particularly commend the Manual for Meeting to those who have responsibility for chairing meeting of Councils of the Uniting Church.

Terence Corkin, Assembly General Secretary April 2009

Why Consensus?

In Paragraph 3 of the Basis of Union declares, we rely on ‘the gift of the Spirit in order that we may not lose the way.’ Good governance is needed in order to discern the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Aware that the majority-vote decision-making process resulted in conflict and adversarial relationships far more than it led to reconciliation or renewal, the Uniting Church adopted a different decision-making technique called consensus. “Wherever possible in Councils of the Uniting Church in Australia, we seek to make our decisions using consensus procedures.”²¹

The Basis of Union makes it clear that unity is expected not only in ecumenical endeavours but also in governance. Recognise these phrases from Paragraph 15? Responsibility for government in the Church belongs to the people of God by virtue of the gifts and tasks which God has laid upon them... Christ may speak to the Church through any of its Councils...

It is the task of every Council to wait upon God’s Word, and to obey God’s will in the matters allocated to its oversight... Each Council is to heed the other Councils, so that the whole body of believers may be united by mutual submission in the service of the Gospel.

Meeting procedures themselves can build Christian unity as we discover a way forward for the Church - together.

Reaching a decision by consensus allows for the insights of each member. The process ensures issues are fully aired and all members feel they have been adequately heard. Decisions are taken not simply because one more than 50% of members are in favour of a proposal, but because all agree to a way forward. Some may feel it is not necessarily their first option, but all can support it and commit themselves not to undermine the decision.

It is important to realise the consensus decision may be agreement on further processes for dealing with the situation – consensus does not imply every issue has a single resolution.

True consensus is not the same as unanimity – we must be careful to recognise that real consensus arises out of real community, and often only through real tension as people express their insights with passion and integrity, and yet with respect for really hearing others’ points of view.

It is a prayerful process, seeking to discern God’s will; hence meetings incorporate intentional community building including worshipping together. Decisions are made without voting through genuine listening dialogue, being respectful and empowering of all entitled to participate. We’re not defending a particular point of view in order to triumph over others losing their argument; rather we’re seeking together to discern God’s way forward for the Church – waiting for that moment of grace in discovery together.

A proposal may progressively change during debate, as the meeting indicates warmth or coolness towards suggested variations. An outcome may be very different from what was previously anticipated, when openness to fresh insights and the Holy Spirit’s guidance permeates a meeting.

Consensus decision-making requires an attitude of mind and heart, not just adherence to another set of standing orders and rules of debate.

²¹ Jill Tabart in <http://crosslight.org.au/2015/03/01/consensus-mean-uca>

Positive outcomes:	Stumbling blocks:
<p>Greater openness to hearing different perspectives, not just defending a pre-determined position against all odds.</p> <p>Greater and wider ownership of decisions</p> <p>Greater confidence in participation, especially by those who previously felt disadvantaged by procedures</p> <p>Indicator cards help to empower those for whom speaking in a meeting is daunting.</p> <p>Strengthening Christian community as trust and respect are nurtured.</p>	<p>Many UCA members have not yet read <i>A Manual for Meetings</i> after all these years. Some Councils persist with formal procedures (perhaps cosmetically modified) while declaring it ‘consensus decision-making’.</p> <p>A crowded agenda is not conducive to careful discernment when considering major issues.</p> <p>Venues may need changing to enable participants to sit in small groups</p> <p>Chairpersons carry a heavy responsibility. Careful training and meeting experience enable the best from consensus procedures.</p> <p>Coloured indicator cards are not voting cards, but when used appropriately provide an avenue for expressing opinion which helps a meeting move towards a consensus outcome.</p>

Did You Know?

Since the UCA took this dramatic step 21 years ago, our Manual for Meetings has been the model guiding changed procedures now adopted in the World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the World Conference of Reformed Churches, and several members Churches of these ecumenical bodies across the world.

The Christian principles behind consensus decision-making are widely affirmed.

DISCUSSION

1. How can we sharpen our meeting practices so they model UCA values and maximise effective and relational
2. How might good governance help us more clearly discern the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

In Summary

- As we meet, we are seeking the will of God in every Council of the Church.
- We seek to discern God's will through the guidance of the Holy Spirit
- We are not just trying to make the most efficient or popular decision
- In doing these things we hold true to our value of unity and growing relationships and acknowledge that the Church is ultimately God's – not ours.
- We have a responsibility and a commitment to using the Consensus Model regardless of our personal feelings. It is something the Uniting Church has chosen and formally committed to using.

How Consensus works

Blue is the cool/cold card – it is the card you hold up when you are concerned about or uncomfortable with what is being said or proposed, or wish to oppose a proposal.

Orange is the warm card – it is the card you hold up when you are supportive of what is being said or proposed.

Yellow is the question or comment card used in some settings. It is the card you hold up when you want to clarify something or ask a question before voting.

Many people have asked why we don't use red and green cards – like traffic lights. The cards are not yes or no cards – they are feeling cards indicating warmth or coolness; support or opposition to an idea or proposal. Orange and blue are also readily identifiable by many people who have colour blindness.

These cards enable us to express our thoughts and feelings as we move through the different phases of our consensus process.

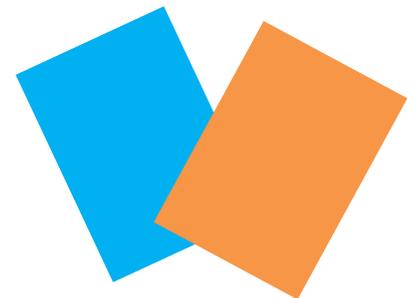
Phases of Consensus

Information Session

- The topic for discussion is presented
- Questions of clarification are invited – it is vital that everyone fully understand the issue at hand.
- The card used here is usually yellow and allows the Chairperson to see how many people wish to ask questions overall, as well as identify specific people.

Deliberation Session

- The issue is freely talked about. The cards are very helpful in letting the Chairperson know how members are feeling. At the conclusion of a speech, cards indicate support or opposition to what was said. They are not a vote and can be changed according to your choice – but they do let the Chairperson know whether more time is needed for discussion or if everyone is already on Board with further discussion being unnecessary.
- Should you have a question, hold your yellow card clearly up until the Chairperson acknowledges you – never ever hold your cards in a bunch – it is confusing for the people behind you and can give the wrong impression.
- Should you feel enough time has been spent and would like the process to move on, hold your orange and blue cards together. Be careful how you do this as it can be disconcerting to the Chairperson.
- Should you hold up your blue card, the Chairperson will invite you to speak to your opposition, giving you the chance to bring your wisdom to the meeting.
- From the discussion, several specific proposals may emerge. It may be that as small groups or as a large group the proposals are discussed and refined until one clear proposal emerges. Wording is important and this takes time – remember that at the same time you are forming good words for a proposal you are also building good relationships – patience is vital.
- In this phase, the cards allow the Chairperson to assess the mood of the room, as well as to judge the right time to move to decisionmaking.



Discussion of Proposals

- The benefits and disadvantages of the proposal are sought. Members are encouraged to show their cards indicating their responses to each speaker. Minor changes to the wording of the proposal may occur. From time to time the Chairperson may ask for an indication of how people are feeling about the proposal.

Decision Session

Checking for Consensus

- When the Chairperson believes enough discussion has occurred, and it is time to seek consensus for the proposal at hand, he or she will restate the proposal, so everyone is clear, and then asks, “Do we have consensus?”
- Cards are held up high clearly until the chair indicates the vote is taken. Waving them or holding them up for a brief second is not helpful.
- If all cards held up are the same colour, consensus is declared and recorded.
- If consensus is not reached the discussion continues. This process continues for as long as the Chairperson deems it helpful.

Sometimes the process stalls. After vigorous sharing of ideas, there may be strong but not unanimous support for the proposal. There may be some who are uneasy about a proposed way forward, yet not able to express their concerns. The prompting of the Spirit may be expressed in disquiet as much as in creative suggestions for wording a proposal.

All people are worthy of respect as they indicate their position, and no-one should feel pressured into agreeing with a position against their better judgment – but neither is it helpful to dig your heels in and be stubborn or rude over an issue.

Seeking Agreement

If, after careful attempts to work towards consensus, there remains a small number who are unable to support or accept the majority position, the Chairperson may ask:

- ‘Do those unable to support the proposal and not prepared to accept it, believe your point of view has been listened to, even though you don’t agree with the proposal and are not able to accept it?’
- ‘Do those who support or who are prepared to accept this proposal believe you have heard what the others of our Council are saying?’

Having a yes to both questions enables the Chairperson to then ask:

- ‘Are those who are in the minority on this proposal prepared to live with the majority view and allow the Council to record an agreement?’
- ‘Does the Council therefore wish to record agreement on this proposal?’

If there is no person indicating against these two questions, then agreement is recorded.

If after these steps have been followed, a small minority still cannot in all good conscience accept agreement; further steps must be followed. The Chairperson will ask:

- Does a decision need to be reached now?

If not, then the chair will defer it until the next meeting when all members have had further time to reflect.

Should the meeting agree that a decision must be made, the Chairperson must ask for permission to move to formal procedure.

Decision by formal majority

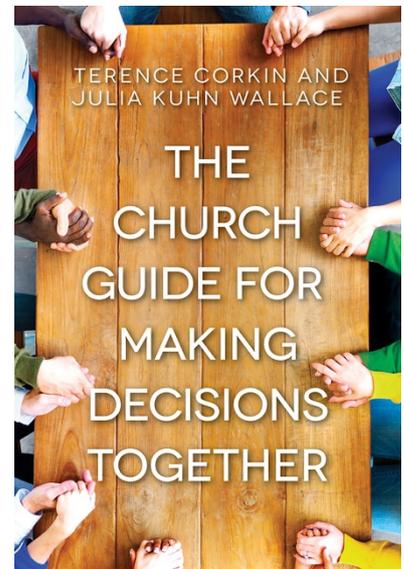
75% of the meeting must agree to move to formal procedures. The majority make the decision with it being recorded as carried by formal procedure. The meeting can decide the portion of votes that will lead to the decision being made or fallen from.

A flowchart of the Consensus process is included on the next page.

Further Reading

For further reflections on decision making, read ***The Church Guide for Making Decisions Together***, by Terence Corkin and Julia Kuhn Wallace, Abingdon Press, 2017.

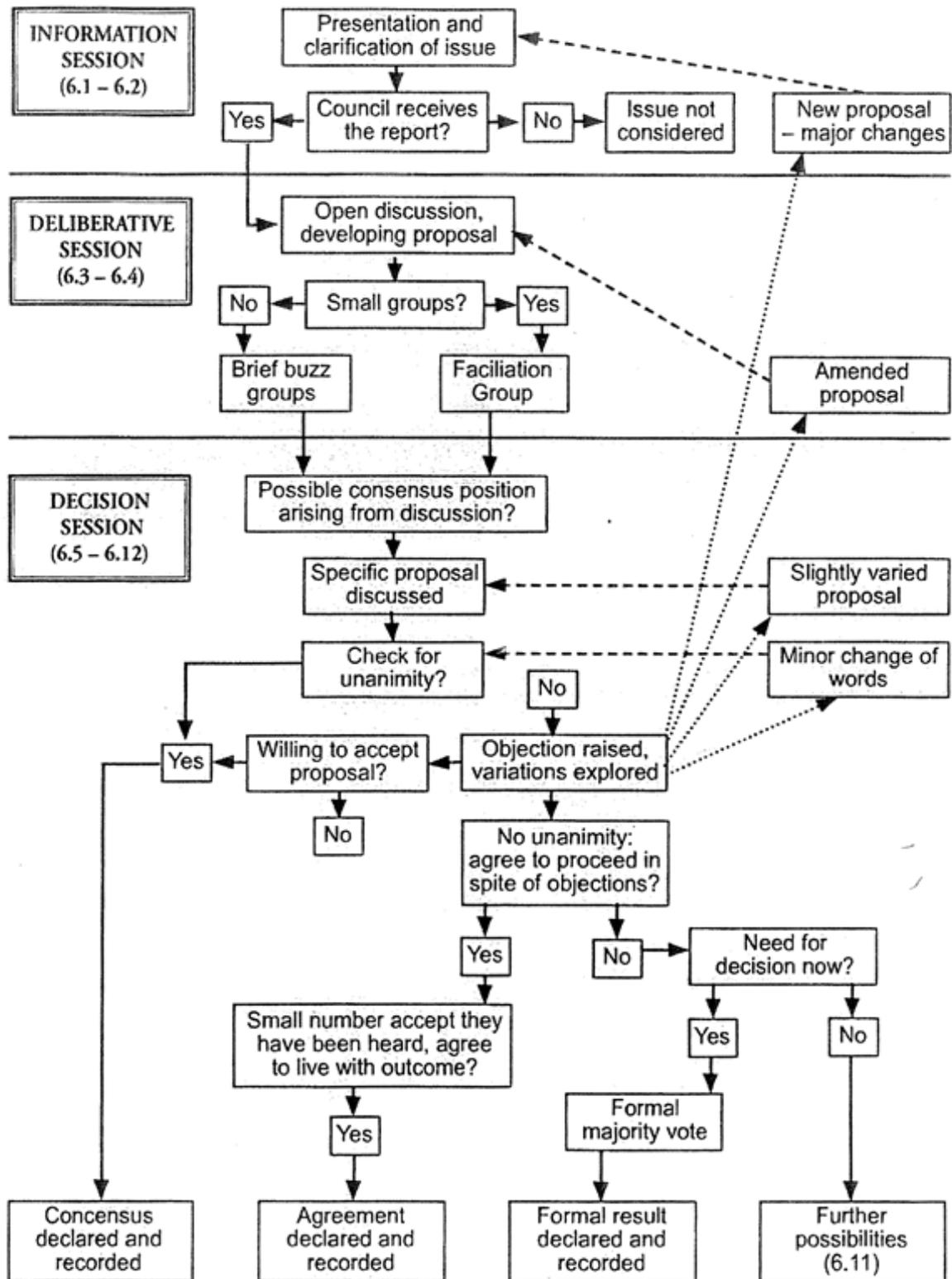
See the website <https://makingchurchdecisions.com> for resources and online courses.



DISCUSSION

- What do you like about consensus process?
- What do you struggle with?
- How effectively have you seen consensus process in action?
- Is it something your church uses well?

CONSENSUS PROCEDURES – FLOW CHART



Basis of Union Extracts

3 BUILT UPON THE ONE LORD JESUS CHRIST

The Church as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit confesses Jesus as Lord over its own life; it also confesses that Jesus is Head over all things, the beginning of a new creation, of a new humanity. God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and

foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation.

The Church's call is to serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself.

The Church lives between the time of Christ's death and resurrection and the final consummation of all things which Christ will bring; the Church is a pilgrim people, always on the way towards a promised goal; here the Church does not have a continuing city but seeks one to come. On the way Christ feeds the Church with Word and Sacraments, and it has the gift of the Spirit in order that it may not lose the way.

15 GOVERNMENT IN THE CHURCH

The Uniting Church recognises that responsibility for government in the Church belongs to the people of God by virtue of the gifts and tasks which God has laid upon them. The Uniting Church therefore so organises its life that locally, regionally and nationally government will be entrusted to representatives, men and women, bearing the gifts and graces with which God has endowed them for the building up of the Church.



The Uniting Church is governed by a series of inter-related Councils, each of which has its tasks and responsibilities in relation both to the Church and the world.

The Uniting Church acknowledges that Christ alone is supreme in his Church, and that he may speak to it through any of its Councils. It is the task of every Council to wait upon God's Word, and to obey God's will in the matters allocated to its oversight.



Each Council will recognise the limits of its own authority and give heed to other Councils of the Church, so that the whole body of believers may be united by mutual submission in the service of the Gospel...

16. PARTICULAR FUNCTIONS

The Uniting Church recognises the responsibility and freedom which belong to Councils to acknowledge gifts among members for the fulfilment of particular functions. The Uniting Church sees in pastoral care exercised personally on behalf of the Church an expression of the fact that God always deals personally with people, would have God's loving care known among people, and would have individual members take upon themselves the form of a servant.

17. LAW IN THE CHURCH

The Uniting Church acknowledges that the demand of the Gospel, the response of the Church to the Gospel, and the discipline which it requires are partly expressed in the formulation by the Church of its law. The aim of such law is to confess God's will for the life of the Church; but since law is received by human beings and framed by them, it is always subject to revision in order that it may better serve the Gospel.

The Uniting Church will keep its law under constant review so that its life may increasingly be directed to the service of God and humanity, and its worship to a true and faithful setting forth of, and response to, the Gospel of Christ. The law of the Church will speak of the free obedience of the children of God, and will look to the final reconciliation of humanity under God's sovereign grace.

18. THE PEOPLE OF GOD ON THE WAY

The Uniting Church affirms that it belongs to the people of God on the way to the promised end. The Uniting Church prays that, through the gift of the Spirit, God will constantly correct that which is erroneous in its life, will bring it into deeper unity with other Churches, and will use its worship, witness and service to God's eternal glory through Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.

DISCUSSION

What do these paragraphs say about how we should conduct ourselves when in meetings on behalf of the Uniting Church?

What insight do they give into our shared-in-common purpose, as well as the specific tasks of our Boards, Councils and Committees?

Contact Details & Credits

The materials in this booklet were produced by representatives of Uniting Mission & Education NSW/ACT, Sydney Presbytery and Parramatta Nepean Presbytery in 2016, and adapted by Port Phillip East Presbytery in 2020. If you have any questions regarding its use, please contact:

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