

Help!

...I'm on Parish Council

The Uniting Congregations of Aotearoa New Zealand is a continuing journey of God's people seeking to reflect the essential unity of Christ's Church. This community of Partner Churches and Cooperative Ventures is discovering and living out what it means to be a missional church of Jesus Christ in today's world.

The five partners of UCANZ are: Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Christian Churches and Congregational. Co-operative Ventures (CV's) include uniting, union, and cooperating parishes, joint use schemes, shared ministries, local ecumenical projects and special covenants - essentially wherever the partner denominations work together at parish level. In some Cooperative Ventures there are also other denominations that participate. Every Parish Councillor should make themselves familiar with the web-sites of the partner churches and possibly sign up for regular email newsletters (especially Presbyterian and Methodist).

WHAT IS A PARISH COUNCIL?

Parish Council is the governing authority of the parish and is composed of members elected by a parish meeting and the minister(s). When there is a local shared ministry team at least one of the team will be on Parish Council.

For constitutional reasons the Parish Council may be called to act as a Session, Vestry or Parish Meeting if so required by participating partners.

The format of Parish Councils are varied throughout the country - some work primarily through sub-committees, while others function in a unified meeting. The way your Parish Council works should be clearly explained in some form of constitution or guideline paper. Such a document should identify matters such as nominating councillors, election processes, term limitations, meeting requirements, quorum numbers and voting rights.

A PARISH COUNCILLOR

A Parish Councillor shares in the leadership of the parish. They need to be members of the parish, 'possess gifts and qualities that make them clearly suitable for the work, be faithful in their attendance at public worship, and be known in the congregation for their Christian faith and love, their reliability and competence, their discernment and good judgement' (Common Provisions, 216.3).

Once elected as a Parish Councillor you will be commissioned as a councillor and on re-election you are received or inducted. The commissioning service should follow the format recommended (*Appendix 1*). Through this commissioning a Parish Councillor is considered to be ordained as an elder (in the Presbyterian tradition) and accepted onto vestry (in the Anglican tradition).

A Parish Councillor should uphold the doctrine expressed in *The Faith We Affirm Together* (*Appendix 2*), and should abide by the *Code of Ethics* (*Appendix 3*) if they are undertaking any pastoral care.

FINANCE

Parish Council is charged with the responsibility of overseeing the finances of the parish. This task is usually delegated to a treasurer (and finance committee). There are some key aspects of this work that must be done.

The counting and banking of offerings should be done in an appropriate way, and the confidentiality of personal giving needs to be maintained.

The parish should be informed (usually at an Annual Meeting) of the financial status of the parish and be presented with clear financial accounts. These accounts should be either reviewed or audited by suitably qualified people. The regional courts of the denominations and UCANZ should also have an annual financial report given to them.

The minister's stipend should be the first call on funds. All assessments from church courts should be met. Questions about future viability and responsible investments should frequently be asked. Such work is not just about the numbers, but about the way we use our God given resources to further the work of the Kingdom.

The Partner Support Fund (formerly the Joint Mission Fund) is collected for all the partners except the Anglicans (who have diocesan systems). This money is collected through the UCANZ office and forwarded to the partners. The Partner Support Fund has, in the past, been allocated according to a parish's ability to pay and not on a levy basis - such as per member, attendee, or bank balance. The money collected goes to the denominations and is used in ministry training, mission resourcing, administration and governance. It is important for UCANZ parishes to play their part in resourcing the wider church.

PROPERTY

Property is a large investment for parishes and this is an important task for the Parish Council to oversee. The parish should maintain a Property Schedule that outlines the holdings of the parish and where the properties are vested. Any changes to the property schedule should be reported to the partner churches and the UCANZ office.

A regular builder's report (every five years) is recommended, along with a maintenance plan that is realistic and manageable. Matters to do with Health and Safety, Hazards, and Fire protection should be completed as part of the compliance procedures.

There is usually also a need to have certificates from local Councils with regard to the building, hygiene, and fire regulations. Any certificates should be displayed as required.

Most church property is vested in the name of the denominational trustees - this is a traditional safe-guard instituted by previous experience. But while the property title is held by trustees, it is the local congregation that are the managers of that property. It should also be noted that although the property may all be vested in one denomination, the capital value actually belongs to all the participating denominations in a ratio determined by the property schedule.

COMPLIANCE

Every Cooperative Venture was given a Compliance Manual in 2002 and this outlines procedures for most aspects of parish life. A **Compliance Officer** needs to be designated by Parish Council and that person should work through the manual and provide a completed Compliance Statement to the UCANZ office each year. Any liability issues should be advised to the church courts as soon as practicable.

A notice about Sexual Harassment and complaints processes should be on every church noticeboard. All Parish Councillors should be aware of the processes to be followed by each partner denomination - check the web-sites for details.

The minutes and records of the Parish and Parish Council should be maintained appropriately, and historic documents should be forwarded to the approved archive depository. The keeping of such records is normally given into the hands of the **Parish Council Secretary**.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

We often think that Christian Education is just about Sunday School - but the Parish Council has a far wider responsibility than that. There certainly is a task to ensure that children and young people are well catered for - and this includes ensuring that those who work with children abide by the Code of Ethics and have a police check before they begin. This may seem a little heavy handed, but the danger of not doing it is far heavier.

Parish Council should also be concerned about the ongoing education of adults. A programme of learning activities may involve Bible studies, personal growth, leisure activities or interest groups. The church (and Parish Council) should at all times try to encourage commitment and devotion.

WORSHIP

The conduct of worship is primarily the responsibility of the minister or ministry team. It is the Parish Council's task to set the time and place of worship (including the times for communion to be celebrated) but not to define the content of the services. Parish Council should, however, be aware of the resources needed for vibrant worship, including people, objects and money.

Initiatives for new worship opportunities may come either from the minister(s) or from Parish Council. The key thing to remember is that leading worship should be a team event and Parish Council needs to work with the minister(s) to make things happen.

People must also be aware that there is always a balance between tradition and innovation - and often the worship leader needs to hear positive feedback that encourages improvement - and being a Parish Councillor means that you should be encouraging of the ministry of all people.

PASTORAL CARE

It is the Parish Council's task to care for the people of the parish, a task that is often shared with ministers but should never be delegated completely to them. Parish Council should ensure that there is a system of adequate care for all in the parish, especially the sick and elderly. It is as important for a church to look after their front door (those who newly arrive in a parish) as it is to watch the back door (those who drop-out). A good system of pastoral care will pick up the issues that move people out of fellowship.

ROLLS

Cooperative Ventures are required to have two rolls, a Parish Roll and a Pastoral Roll. The Parish Roll lists the members of the parish, generally accepted as those who take an active role in the life and work of the parish. The Pastoral Roll is somewhat wider and may include all those who get a newsletter or who have had contact in some way with the parish. While it may, at times, seem heavy handed to demand a clear Parish Roll, it is an essential tool when legal decisions need to be made by the parish, including property transactions, ministry settlements, and disciplinary matters.

MINISTER

Minister(s) are fairly unique in their employment status and are technically not employees of the church. Presbyterian ministers are directly accountable to the local Presbytery, Methodist ministers are part of the Methodist Connexion, Anglican ministers are responsible to their Bishop. If Parish Council does believe that a ministry is not working then appropriate channels must be followed to deal with the issues.

Parish Council should be a primary support place for the minister(s). The appointment of a person or small group of people to directly support the minister(s) has been found helpful by many. Part of that support would be to ensure that ministers take their time off, holidays, and study leave. They may also check that there is appropriate supervision (paid for by the parish) and ongoing learning opportunities. Today there is also a need for good computing and technical equipment. Some parishes allow a budget amount for the minister to enhance their work (which also gives a sense of autonomy to them).

The parish minister is a resource that should be used wisely. Identify their gifts and strengths of character and make good use of them. Most importantly, Parish Councillors should maintain a relationship that enables them to share small niggles with the minister(s) before they become major issues.

BEING EMPLOYERS

While not employing the minister (technically) many Parish Council are responsible for other employees, such as Church Secretaries, Youth or Family Workers, caretakers and cleaners. In New Zealand today there must be an employment contract and every effort must be taken to provide a fair and safe place of work. It is important to consult church authorities before undertaking employment - the PCANZ website has some helpful information about employing people, including sample contracts.

REPRESENTATION

Being a Cooperative Venture means that the parish is a full member of each of the partner churches courts. This means that locally there may be attendance at Presbytery, Synod, Diocesan meetings, and the Joint Regional Committee. In Northland parishes share in Churches Together in Northland, and in the Wairarapa and West Coast there are also shared courts. Generally the minister and one other will attend these meetings when they are able.

Parishes may also be called on to send people to the various Assemblies or Conferences that are held - along with the Biennial Forum of UCANZ. Here parishes are able to have input into the decision making processes of the partner churches and can speak out for the ecumenical journey.

A CHECK LIST OF ANNUAL TASKS

Annual Reports to Regional Courts, JRC	
Statistics to UCANZ office in July/August	
Audit or Review of Parish Accounts	
Financial Certificate to UCANZ office	
Compliance Certificate to UCANZ office	
Local Council Permits	
Local Fire Permit (this may include fire drills)	

ABBREVIATIONS

UCANZ	Uniting Congregations of Aotearoa NZ
CV	Co-operative Venture
LEP	Local Ecumenical Project
PCANZ	Presbyterian Church
MCNZ	Methodist Church
ACNZ	Anglican Church
CCNZ	Christian Churches NZ (Churches of Christ)
CUNZ	Congregational Union
JRC	Joint Regional Committee
UDC	Union District Council

APPENDIX: Code of Ethics

219.1 Preamble

This code is intended to be used by Ordained and Lay Leaders, Educators and Pastoral Carers, both paid and voluntary. This code is a statement of how the Partners in the Cooperative Ventures in Aotearoa New Zealand understand the standards of conduct by those members (both ordained and lay) who undertake the work of pastoral care, in the name of the church and as part of the Body of Christ.

219.2 Background

The church is a community bound together by faith, hope and love. We all share responsibility for its mission, to be a sign and instrument of the communion of human kind with God and with one another? Our rule of life is the inseparable twofold commandment of Jesus? *Love God and love your neighbour as you love yourself*. We are committed to living by this law of love as professional ministers and lay leaders, accountable for our ministry whatever its setting, This accountability is expressed in a minimal way through the acceptance of the responsibilities of this code of ethics.

The responsibility for adhering to the code rests with us. It has no official standing in the church, and no official body exists to enforce it and there are no sanctions against those who do not follow it. The code is offered to enhance the dignity of pastoral care and to give the public greater confidence that we are committed to standards of excellence and to a high quality of service.

The code is not to be taken as legal advice. When in doubt about the appropriateness of one's actions, ethically or legally, consultation with experts in related fields is always wise. This code is not instead of the codes or standards of practice of the Partners, but is intended to stand alongside them.

219.3 Statement

With God's help,

- 1) I will keep spiritually and emotionally healthy by following a regular discipline of spiritual growth and adequate personal recreation and selfcare.
- 2) I will act with integrity, dealing openly and honestly with those under pastoral care, maintaining a safe environment and upholding their best interests, rights and well-being, rather than my own.
- 3) I will respect the privacy of individuals and confidentiality of information. The only exception is where there is clear and imminent danger to the person or others, at which time he/she will be informed of those limits.
- 4) I will affirm the dignity and worth of each person and will ensure pastoral care is available for them without discrimination on grounds of their age, gender, race, sexual orientation, religious belief, economic status or physical or mental abilities.
- 5) I will acknowledge that people in pastoral care come from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and will act therefore with awareness, sensitivity and responsibility,
- 6) I will recognise that it is my responsibility, whose role and status gives me greater power, to maintain personal and professional boundaries in pastoral relationships.
- 7) I will not abuse the relative power of my position by taking advantage of people for personal, financial or institutional or spiritual gain.
- 8) I will not subject anyone to sexual exploitation, harassment or abuse, and recognise that any sexual intimacy in the pastoral situation is totally unacceptable.
- 9) I will recognise that there are limits to my competence and will refer people to others better qualified when this proves necessary or desirable. I will not attempt clinical counselling without appropriate training.
- 10) I will use regular professional supervision, where appropriate, or some similar process to ensure accountability, good time management, appropriate theological reflection, and a high standard of pastoral care.