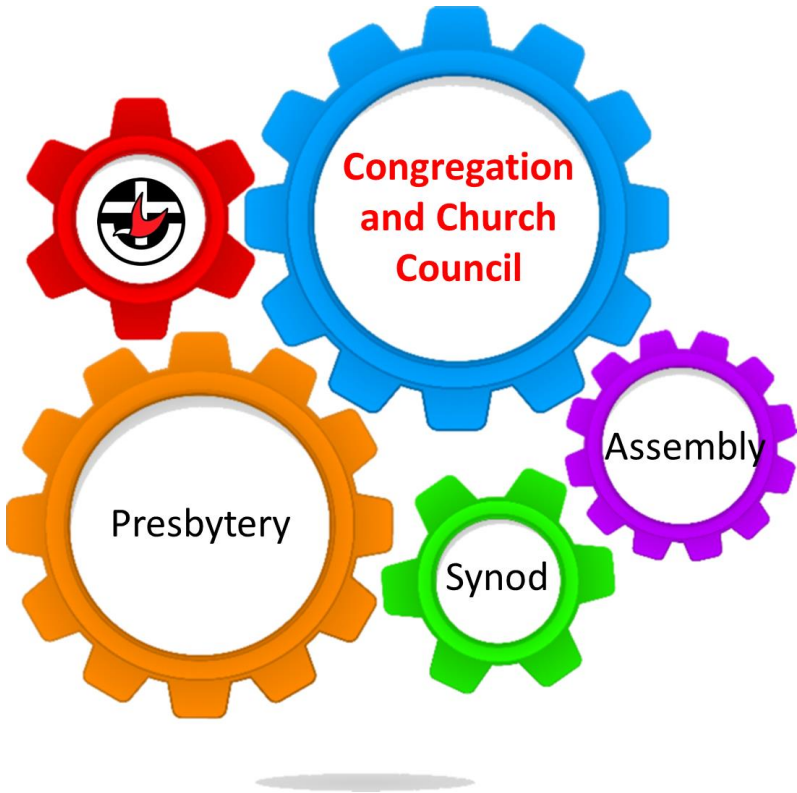


Church Council Ministry Role & Regulations



Uniting Mission and Education is aware that many people are asked to serve on Church Council, yet have access to very little practical information about what is involved.

This brochure is offered as a simple overview of the main responsibilities of Church Council members. It is not designed to be exhaustive.

We hope it is helpful.

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Main Task

According to the Uniting Church regulations (3.1.2), Church Council's main priority is to ***build the congregation up in faith and love***. 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 they 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 congregation.

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 hearing in worship; what is taught in Sunday school, scripture, Bible Studies and other small groups. Again it doesn't mean they have to control everything, but they are responsible to appoint people of trust to these key positions and to deal with any questions or concerns that might arise. Church Council decides who is able to preach, e.g., is accreditation as lay preachers necessary, or can anyone preach? Who might be trained to conduct funerals etc. This also involves having oversight over the various groups and committees that may exist within the congregation.

Nurturing the congregation in their growth in grace.

Members of Church council are to be good role-models and to live out grace in every part of our life. Church Councils' 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 regulations.

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

Collaborating and sharing with the Minister in conduct of worship and in the sacraments.

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 also seeks authorisation from Presbytery should a possible Lay Presider be identified and trained.

Determining the time and place of services of public worship.

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.

Members of CC must explore the possible Occupation, Health & Safety risks and then note its decision in the minutes to ensure adequate insurance coverage and general duty of care.

Carry out its functions concerning applicants for specified ministry

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

Managing financial affairs and general administration, including necessary budgets, statements and reports.

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 who takes responsibility for the Congregations financial position. Ensuring the congregation has clear and ready access to budgets and reports is vital to the credibility of any Church Council.

Managing and controlling property

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 Synod. However Church Council is asked to maintain property, ensuring it meets the changing needs of the congregation and wider community. However, maintaining good repair should never mean the building becomes the focus of Church Council's life. Remember, the primary focus of Church Council is to *'build the congregation up in faith and love.'*(3.1.2)

Preparing and presenting annual reports to the congregation

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 discipline on behalf of the Congregation as appropriate

This involves being aware of what procedures are to be followed should there be a need for discipline action to be taken either against the minister or a member. The regulations or contacting Presbytery or Synod would be a good place to start.

Extra Considerations

Devotions or Opening Worship:

To help remind us we are not a business organisation, our meetings usually open with worship. The length and content of opening worship/ devotions is up to each CC to decide. UME offer a series of discussion starters which explore the various responsibilities of CC in more depth. These are available by email or through the post by contacting Rev Bronwyn Murphy (BronwynM@nswact.uca.org.au) Ph.: 02 8838 8920

Who can be on Church Council?

- Confirmed members & members in association in keeping with Regulations
- Elders, if you have them, should make up at least 50% of the entire council (Reg 3.3.2(a)) if you don't, aim for having at least 50% of people known for their spiritual wisdom, and spend 50% of the meeting time addressing 'elder' type issues.
- Any ministry agents in placement, e.g., ministers, pastors, etc.
- Retired ministers or ministers-in-association.

Elders, Leaders or Church Councillors

When the Uniting Church moved to having one Church Council, 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. Looking at who might possess such gifts and then asking them to consider being on Church Council is the responsibility of all members of the congregation.

How often would Church Council meet?

The regulations suggest that Church Council should meet at least quarterly. Most Church Councils meet monthly. This will be determined by your congregations needs.

If your congregation is less than 30 members, you may seek authorisation from Presbytery for your congregation to become the Church Council. (Reg 3.9.3)

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.

Importance of Relationships

People should matter more than regulations. The way church councillors (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 - what happens 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 matters enormously. Sadly, there may be occasions when someone behaves 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.

Meeting Procedure:

Meetings are generally conducted in accordance with the Consensus model outlined in “A Manual for Meetings in the Uniting Church”.

While your meeting may feel too small to worry about using consensus cards, if you choose not to use the 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 there arise a controversial issue. 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.

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.

Constitution and Regulations:

Please note that every congregation should have a copy of the most recent regulations (2012). The downloadable version can be found at:
<http://assembly.uca.org.au/images/stories/Regulations/2012%20constitution.pdf>

Is Church Council for you?

While being on church council may seem an overwhelming responsibility, it is a chance to serve your congregation, as well as your community - guiding your church as it seeks to be God's people.

It is a position of power and privilege (even if it doesn't always feel like it) and it needs people who are willing to see beyond their own wants and needs to what might best serve the needs of the people. It is a servant role – and we wish you God's blessing as you prayerfully consider this call.

Orientation Pack

The resourcing Team of Uniting Mission and Education suggest every member of Church Council be given an orientation pack. In it you might include the following key documents of the church.

- Basis of Union.
- Preamble to the Constitution.
- Covenanting Statement and Response
- Explanation of UAICC Logo.
- Multicultural Statement.
- Response of 2012 National Young Adults Leaders Conference.
- Statement to the Nation.
- Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice
- UCA Regulations for Congregations 3.1.1 & 3.1.2
- Consensus: How we make decisions in the Uniting Church and why we use the consensus model.

Please contact Bron Murphy at UME if you need help locating these documents.

The following pages are from the 2012 Revised Regulations and outline the responsibilities of Church Councils.

Constitution & Regulations 2012 Edition

<http://assembly.uca.org.au/images/stories/Regulations/2012%20constitution.pdf>

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CHURCH COUNCIL (See Para 24, Constitution)

- 3.1.2** (a) The Church Council shall give priority in its life to building up the Congregation in faith and love, sustaining members in hope, and leading the Congregation to a fuller participation in Christ's mission in the world. This priority shall be reflected in the agenda of its ordinary meetings.
- (b) The responsibilities of the Church Council include:
- (i) sharing with the Minister(s) in mission and in the pastoral care and spiritual oversight of the Congregation;
 - (ii) nurturing the members and adherents in their growth in grace;
 - (iii) making decisions in accordance with the Regulations concerning baptism, confirmation and membership, and the keeping and reviewing of the rolls of the Congregation; (See Part 1 of these Regulations)
 - (iv) assisting the Minister(s) in the conduct of worship and in the administration of the sacraments;

- (v) determining the time and place of services of public worship;
- (vi) carrying out its functions in accordance with the Regulations concerning applicants for the specified ministries;
- (vii) managing the financial affairs and the general administration of the Congregation including the reception, preparation and presentation of all necessary budgets, statements and reports;
- (viii) arranging for audit, presentation and examination of the accounts of all the funds of the Congregation; (See Reg. 3.8.7)
- (ix) managing and controlling property in accordance with the Regulations; (See Reg. 4.4.1)
- (x) preparing and presenting to a meeting of the Congregation an annual report concerning the life and work of the Congregation including its worship, mission and service, and making recommendations with regard to the program for the ensuing year;
- (xi) exercising oversight of the appointment of officers and leaders of Congregational organisations;
- (xii) referral of matters to Presbytery as prescribed;
- (xiii) discipline of members (See Reg. 5.1.2 – 5.2.5);
- (xiv) carrying out its functions in relation to Ministers-in-Association (See Reg. 2.11.1).

Consensus Cards in brief

Blue: is the cold card. It is the card you hold up when you are unhappy with what is being said, or wish to oppose part, or all, of a proposal.

Orange: is the warm card. It is the card you hold up when you are supportive of what is being said or you are in consensus with the proposal.

Yellow: is the question card. It is the card you hold up when you want to clarify something or ask a question before voting. The yellow cards are used by the NSW/ACT Synod. Assembly use only the blue and orange cards.

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 via the use of the yellow or blue card.

Deliberation Session

- The issue is discussed. The cards will let the chairperson know how members are feeling. At the conclusion of a speech, cards can be held at chest level indicating support or opposition to what was said. They are not a vote and can be changed according to your choice.

Decision Making Session

- The cards are used to vote.
- 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.

For more information see Manual for Meetings on the Assembly Website.

UME Contact Information

This material has been developed by
Uniting Mission and Education (UME).

If you have any questions regarding its use, or are interested in attending a **Living Our Values** course, please contact:

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Other Resources

UME is always willing to partner with Presbyteries in running events tailored for each context.

If you are interested in the other resources UME offers, contact us, or visit our website:

<http://ume.nswact.uca.org.au/>

