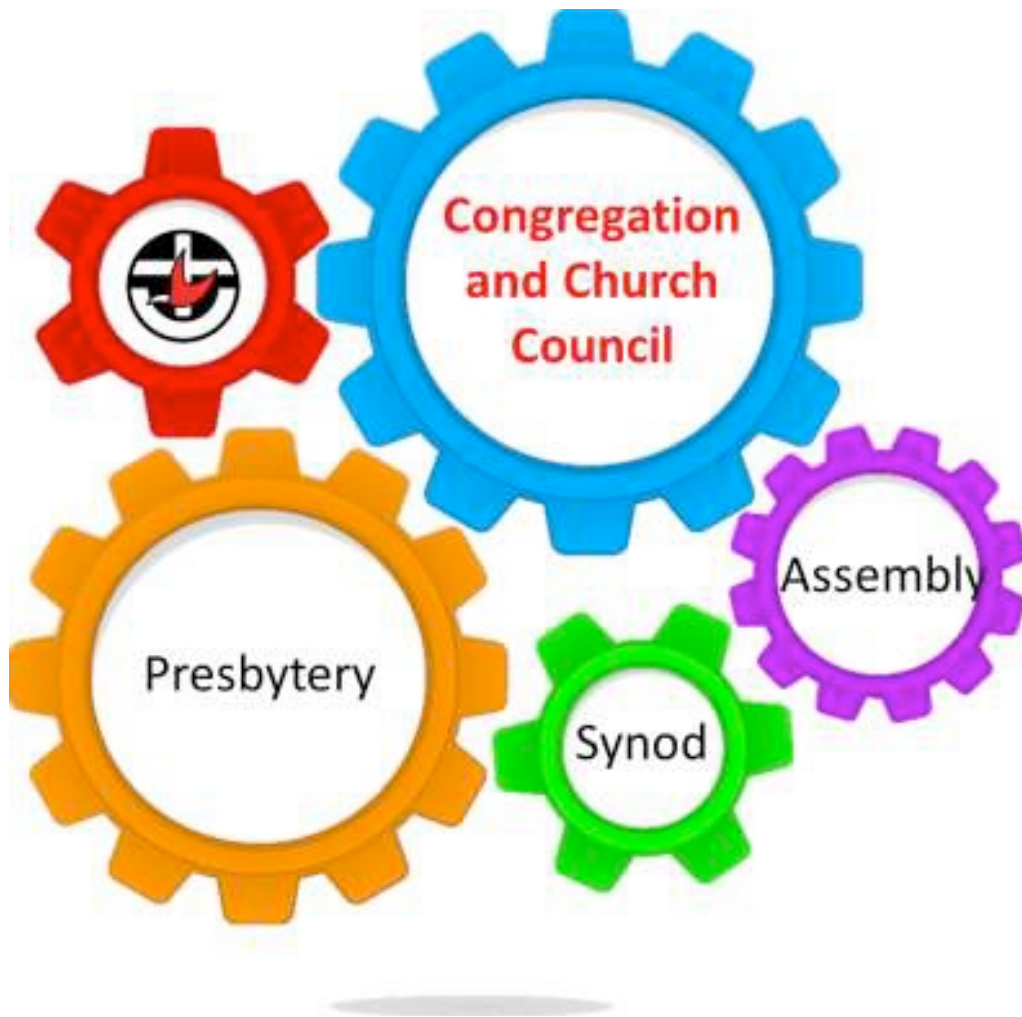


Church Council Ministry Role & Regulations



Church Council Ministry Role & Regulations

In the Uniting Church regulations (3.1.2), the 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 lives, not just while attending worship on Sunday.

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 about this work in millions of different ways across all of our communities. Church Council helps the congregation identify what God is doing and then to join in as best they can.

Other responsibilities are:

Share in the pastoral care and oversight of the congregation. This does not mean to pastorally visit each member of the congregation, but to ensure that pastoral care is adequate. How this happens is up to the church council to decide. Spiritual oversight means church council is responsible for what the congregation is hearing in worship, what is taught Sunday School, scripture, Bible studies and other groups. It doesn't mean that 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 may arise. Church Council decides who is able to preach: is accreditation as a lay preacher necessary, or is anyone allowed to preach? Who might be trained to conduct funerals services?

Nurturing the congregation in their growth and grace. Members of church council are to be good role models and to live out grace in every part of their lives. Church Council's task is to call the congregation to be the best they can be, and challenge them when behaviour is perhaps thoughtless and less than gracious. Meeting of council 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 the regulations. Ensuring each Council members has access to a copy of the regulations will help to keep things on track. Church Council is also responsible for the maintenance of the congregation's roles.

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 be repetitious or dull does not reflect the richness of God's presence among us. Church Council is responsible for the time and time frame of worship, who is baptised and when, how often Holy Communion is offered and how. Church Council also seeks the 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 that Church Council has to consider whether each activity supports and serves the mission of the congregation. It might be that the congregation wished to hold a service in a local park – Church Council is responsible for this decision.

Members of Church Council must explore the possible Occupation, Health and 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 specified ministry, the Church Council is the body who assists them.

Management of financial affairs and general administration. 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 take responsibility for the congregation 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 life. Remember, the primary focus of Church Council is to, *'build the congregation in faith and love.'* (reg 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 disciplinary action to be taken against a minister or member. The regulations or contact with the Presbytery or Synod would be a good starting point.

Extra Thoughts

Devotions or Opening Worship:

To remind us that we are not a business organisation, our meetings should always open with a time of worship. The length and content of our worship / devotions is up to each Council to decide. However, this time should be the key part of the meeting creating an atmosphere that is open to not only hear from God, but also to be attentive to each other.

Who can be on Church Council?

- **Confirmed members & members in association**
- **Elders, should you have them, should make up 50% of the entire Council. If you do not have elders, aim for 50% of your number being people known for their spiritual wisdom and make sure that you spend at least 50% of your time on elder / pastoral matters**
- **Any ministry agent in placement**
- **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 that 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 the 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 the congregation.

How often should Church Council meet?

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

If you 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 meet together regularly for prayer, discussion and recording minutes of what has taken place and any actions required.

Importance of relationships

People 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. Confidentiality must be maintained – what happens at Church Council stays at Church Council. Each person is expected to contribute – not dominate the conversation, nor shrink from speaking at all. Consensus cards are very 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 you may feel that your meetings are too small to worry about using consensus cards, if you choose not to use the cards, your members may be disadvantaged should they attend meetings of the wider church, such as 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 meeting 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 (2018). The downloadable version can be found at the UCA Assembly website:

<https://assembly.uca.org.au/resources/regulations>

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 may not 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.

Useful Resources

Membership of Church Council is a vital role in the life of the local church and as such it is important to have a good understanding of the work of the whole church to inform your journey. Some tools would be useful for a church councillor to have in their kitbag would be:

- Copy of the Basis of Union
- Preamble to the Constitution
- Covenanting Statement
- Explanation of the UAICC (Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress) Logo
- Multicultural Statement
- Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice
- Regulations for Congregations 3.1.1
- Consensus: How we make decisions in the Uniting Church and why we use the consensus model

Contact your presbytery or UME (Uniting Mission and Education) if you need help locating these documents.

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)

Church Council Ministry Role & Regulations

- (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. Our Assembly only use the blue and orange cards.

Phases of Consensus

Information session

- The topic for discussion is presented
- Questions of clarification are invited via the use of the yellow or blue cards

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 shown indicating support or opposition to what has been said. They are not a vote and can be changed according to your choice.

Decision making session

- 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 judgement.

There is more detailed information on the Assembly Website - and in the Manual for Meetings - <https://assembly.uca.org.au/resources/regulations>.