

The Role of the Church Council in the Uniting Church

Recently I published a special article on the role of members in the Uniting Church in Australia. For those who take these duties and responsibilities seriously, it may appear a lot to ask of those who regularly attend worship in the Uniting Church. The reality, however, is that the Christian life is a life lived in mutual accountability. This means that we are not only to be engaged in ministry and mission but also both support and exercise discipline within the context of the church family.

In the light of this, you may then have cause to ask about the roles and responsibilities of those who are in leadership of the congregation. If the members and adherents of the congregation are meant to exercise all this pastoral care, ministry and mission, where does the Church Council fit in? I'm glad you asked that question, because this is particularly relevant in view of the recent changes in the Uniting Church Rules and Regulations.

While Elders or Leaders are still relevant under the new regulations, the primary role and responsibility of the Elders have been removed from the new regulations and have now been incorporated into the duties and responsibilities of the Church Council (see 3.1.2 (a) below). Here then are the duties and responsibilities of the Church Council, according to the latest regulations:

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CHURCH COUNCIL

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 duties and responsibilities of the Church Council include the following:
- (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;
 - (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 concerning applicants for the ministries of Minister of the Word, Deacon, Community Minister, Lay Pastor, Lay Preacher and Youth Worker, having regard to the Regulations;
- (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;
- (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 organizations;
- (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

In relation to *Elders* in the Uniting Church, the basis of Union states that: It (the council of elders or leaders) is responsible for building up the congregation in faith and love, sustaining its members in hope, and leading them into a fuller participation in Christ's mission in the world. (*Basis of Union, Government in the Church 15b*)

It seems clear from this that the responsibility for oversight of the congregation etc., and the task of ensuring the pastoral priority of the Church Council meetings, according to the 2012 regulations, is now attributed to the Church Council. (See 3.1.2a above)

What then does this mean for our congregation? At its recent meeting, the Church Council began to investigate this very question. Over the next few months the leadership of the Gladstone congregation will see some changes that will help to streamline the roles and responsibilities of the Church Council. It is anticipated that the distinction between Elders and Church Councilors will disappear with all Church Councilors being regarded as Elders. Stay tuned for further information on this topic. Grace and peace.

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