



**THE BOOK OF ORDER**

**OF**

**THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF  
AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND**

**ADOPTED AND PRESCRIBED BY THE GENERAL  
ASSEMBLY ON THE DAY OF 29 SEPTEMBER  
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### **6.1 Background**

- (1) Within the ministry of the whole Church, Jesus Christ calls men and women to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed through the ordained ministry of word and sacrament and through ordination to the office of elder.
- (2) Ordained ministers of word and sacrament have, following the Presbyterian tradition, been known as “ministers”, and as “ministers of word and sacrament” and as “teaching elders”. References to ordained ministers in this Book of Order are made only to the single term “minister”.
- (3) In the Presbyterian tradition the minister is responsible for preaching and teaching the Word and administering the sacraments. In this tradition, the minister is understood as the guardian of the Gospel and along with the elders is concerned with the spiritual rule and pastoral oversight of congregations, leadership in mission and the government of the Church through its courts.
- (4) Baptism invites us to share in God's mission through our own vocation and commitment to God's new and coming world. This vocation and commitment take shape in a range of occupations and activities in society. Within this framework the Church sets

people apart to undertake specific ministries. These include the ministry of word and sacrament and that of eldership. Ordination to these offices is for life. However, election or induction to a church council or charge may be for a fixed period.

- (5) The Church recognises both men and women for ordination to the ministries of word and sacrament and eldership.

*Defined terms: charge, Church, church council, congregation, court, elder, induction, minister, ministry of word and sacrament, ordination.*

#### *Office of minister*

### **6.2 Nature of office of minister**

A minister

- (a) exercises an independent office in the service of Jesus Christ for the safeguarding of Christ's sovereignty over the Church, and
- (b) exercises this office in a collegial relationship with all the ministers of the Church.

*Defined terms: Church, minister.*

### **6.3 Functions of a minister**

- (1) The calling of a minister includes

- (a) leadership in worship,
- (b) leadership in mission,
- (c) pastoral care, and
- (d) spiritual nurture.

- (2) A minister exercises his or her calling after

- (a) completing his or her training and preparation for ministry, as provided for in chapter 9, and
- (b) being called or appointed to a ministry position, and
- (c) being ordained as a minister by a presbytery.

*Defined terms: call, minister, ministry position, ordination, presbytery.*

### **6.4 Leadership in worship**

A minister exercises leadership in worship when he or she

- (a) preaches the Word,
- (b) ensures that the Scriptures are read,
- (c) presides at the sacraments,
- (d) conducts public worship,
- (e) oversees hymns and music for services of worship,
- (f) informs the church council if someone other than the incumbent minister is to preach on any particular Sunday,
- (g) ensures that associated administrative tasks are undertaken.

*Defined terms: church council, minister.*

## **6.5 Leadership in mission**

A minister exercises leadership in mission when he or she

- (a) encourages the congregation to exercise its role in God's mission, including teaching, guiding and assisting members in playing their part,
- (b) discerns and promotes contemporary ways of communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ,
- (c) serves God in collegial relationship with the ministers of the Church,
- (d) under the authority of the church council, proclaims salvation and new life in Christ, baptising and bringing applicants into membership,
- (e) under the authority of the church council, ordains elders and deacons,
- (f) under the authority of the presbytery, participates in the ordination of ministers,
- (g) observes the discipline and government of the Church,
- (h) participates in the courts of the Church,
- (i) ensures that associated administrative tasks are undertaken.

*Defined terms: Church, church council, congregation, court, deacon, elder, member, minister, ordination, presbytery.*

## **6.6 Pastoral care**

A minister exercises pastoral care when he or she provides and assists in making provision for care and support for the congregation and wider community.

*Defined terms: congregation, minister.*

## **6.7 Spiritual nurture**

A Minister exercises spiritual nurture when he or she

- (a) exercises spiritual leadership,
- (b) teaches and provides spiritual guidance,
- (c) nurtures applicants for baptism and membership,
- (d) ensures that associated administrative tasks are undertaken.

*Defined terms: member, minister.*

## **6.8 Responsibility of minister**

- (1) A minister who has been appointed to a congregation has ultimate responsibility for the conduct of worship and sacraments.

- (2) A minister is responsible for nurturing and practising his or her own spiritual life and for undertaking ministry development in accordance with supplementary provisions.
- (3) Although a minister is appointed to work within a specific ministry, the minister is responsible to the presbytery.
- (4) Ordination to the office of minister does not automatically grant the minister full membership in the courts of presbytery or the General Assembly.
- (5) A minister may solemnize marriage only between a man and a woman.

*Defined terms: congregation, General Assembly, minister, ordination, presbytery, supervision.*

#### *Office of elder*

### **6.9 Nature of office of elder**

- (1) An elder
  - (a) exercises a spiritual office in the Church,
  - (b) exercises leadership in mission,
  - (c) participates in the spiritual rule and pastoral oversight of a congregation, and
  - (d) participates in the government of the Church through its courts.
- (2) The congregation of a co-operative venture may elect to its church council a person who is not an elder.
- (3) For the purposes of representation at presbytery and the General Assembly, a person who is not an elder but is a member of the church council of a co-operative venture is treated as an elder.
- (4) Nothing in subsections (2) and (3) prevents the congregation of a co-operative venture from electing an elder to its church council.

*Defined terms: Church, church council, congregation, co-operative venture, court, elder, General Assembly, presbytery.*

### **6.10 Functions of an elder**

- (1) The calling of an elder includes
  - (a) leadership in worship,
  - (b) leadership in mission,
  - (c) pastoral care and oversight of the congregation, and
  - (d) spiritual nurture.
- (2) An elder exercises his or her calling only after

- (a) being ordained and inducted in accordance with section 42 of chapter 9, and
- (b) being elected to office by the congregation.

*Defined terms: congregation, elder, induction, ordination.*

#### **6.11 Leadership in worship**

An elder exercises leadership in worship when he or she

- (a) preaches the Word according to his or her gifts under the authority of the minister,
- (b) assists in the celebration of the sacraments under the authority of the minister,
- (c) presides at the celebration of communion if he or she is authorised to administer the sacraments,
- (d) baptises if he or she is authorised to administer the sacraments.

*Defined terms: congregation, elder, minister.*

#### **6.12 Leadership in mission**

An elder exercises leadership in mission when he or she

- (a) exercises leadership within the congregation,
- (b) observes the discipline and government of the Church, and
- (c) participates in the courts of the Church as required.

*Defined terms: Church, congregation, court, elder.*

#### **6.13 Pastoral care and oversight of the congregation**

An elder provides spiritual nurture, pastoral care and oversight of the congregation when he or she

- (a) provides pastoral care,
- (b) makes arrangements for baptism and membership.

*Defined terms: associate member, congregation, elder, member.*

#### **6.14 Spiritual nurture**

If suitably qualified, and under the direction of the minister, an elder may provide spiritual guidance including the nurture of applicants for baptism and membership.

*Defined terms: elder, member, minister.*

#### **6.15 Responsibilities of elders**

- (1) An elder is responsible to the church council for the performance of his or her duties.
- (2) An elder is responsible for nurturing and practising his or her own spiritual life and for undertaking such eldership formation as may be encouraged by the minister or church council.

*Defined terms: church council, elder, eldership formation, minister.*

## **6.16 Alteration of this chapter**

This chapter cannot be altered, amended or deleted in any way except in accordance with the special legislative procedure.

*Defined term: special legislative procedure*

## Chapter 7: Church council

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### **7.1 Background**

- (1) A congregation requires spiritual oversight, leadership in mission, pastoral care, and governance.

- (2) This chapter describes flexible forms of organisation intended to meet the requirements of the congregation.
- (3) In the Presbyterian tradition, a congregation calls a minister and elects elders to undertake spiritual oversight, leadership in mission, and pastoral care. A congregation may elect either a deacons' court or a board of managers to manage the property and finances of the congregation.
- (4) A session may assume the functions of a board of managers, and may retain the name "session" or be called a parish council. The term "church council" is the generic term for a session or parish council in its various forms.
- (5) When commissioners are elected by a church council to serve in the higher courts of the Church, they are elected as commissioners rather than representatives and in attending, participating and voting at presbytery or the General Assembly, such commissioners, whether ministers or elders, vote in accordance with their own consciences and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

*Defined terms: board of managers, church council, commissioner, congregation, deacons' court, elder, General Assembly, minister, parish council, session.*

## **7.2 Functions of a church council**

- (1) The church council provides for governance, spiritual oversight and pastoral care of its members and leadership in mission, plays a role in the wider community and, subject to chapter 16, has responsibility for the management of its finances and property.
- (2) To enable the congregation to identify and play its part in God's mission to the world, a church council must
  - (a) put in place systems and processes which allow for and comply with the policies of the General Assembly,
  - (b) organise activities, including meetings, to enable the congregation to discern and develop its part in God's mission,
  - (c) nominate office bearers for election by the congregation,
  - (d) elect elders to become members of presbytery in accordance with sections 22 to 24,
  - (e) nominate elders to presbytery to attend the General Assembly in accordance with section 17 of chapter 8,
  - (f) accept persons as members of the congregation and recognise persons as associate members,
  - (g) remove members and associate members from the appropriate congregational roll,
  - (h) appoint or remove any person exercising functions and responsibilities within the congregation, and

- (i) employ any person to undertake such duties as the church council considers necessary and appropriate.
- (3) To enable the congregation to fulfil its function to worship God, a church council must
- (a) fix the times and places of public worship,
  - (b) along with the minister or interim moderator ensure that there is leadership in worship,
  - (c) provide for the celebration of the sacraments of baptism and holy communion,
  - (d) ensure that the minister or local ministry team has final authority as to who preaches and conducts worship, and
  - (e) apply to presbytery to train and commission elders to celebrate the sacraments of baptism and communion.
- (4) To enable the congregation to provide pastoral care for one another and the wider community, a church council must
- (a) provide pastoral care for the congregation,
  - (b) support the minister or local ministry team,
  - (c) compile and maintain congregational rolls,
  - (d) respond to complaints, and
  - (e) deal with disciplinary matters in accordance with the requirements of the Book of Order.
- (5) In providing spiritual oversight of the congregation, a church council must provide teaching and training programmes for members of the congregation, children and youth.
- (6) In enabling the congregation to manage its finances and property, a church council may
- (a) form either
    - (i) a committee under section 19, or
    - (ii) a board of managers under section 8, or
    - (iii) a deacons' court under section 9
 to administer the property and finances belonging to or held in trust for the congregation,
  - (b) receive reports from the committee, board of managers or deacons' court, as the case may be, at each meeting of the church council, and
  - (c) determine the use of the buildings owned on behalf of the congregation.

*Defined terms: associate member, board of managers, Book of Order, church council, complaint, congregation, deacons' court, elder, General Assembly, local ministry team, member, minister, office bearer, presbytery,*

### **7.3 Legislative proposals**

- (1) If a church council wishes to put forward a proposal for legislative action, the church council must present the proposal to the presbytery with which it is associated for consideration and transmission to the General Assembly.

- (2) A church council must fix a day for the consideration of any legislative proposal that, in accordance with the special legislative procedure, has been sent down from the Council of Assembly under section 9 of Chapter 14.
- (3) A church council must expressly approve or disapprove, or abstain from approving or disapproving, the proposal.
- (4) A qualified approval, a proposal to amend, an equality of votes, or an abstention will be taken as disapproval of the proposal.
- (5) A church council that wishes to amend a proposal must send a fresh proposal to the General Assembly.

*Defined terms: church council, General Assembly, presbytery*

#### *Forms of Congregational Organisation*

#### **7.4 Options for structure of a church council**

- (1) A congregation must organise a church council to be its governing body.
- (2) A church council may be constituted by
  - (a) a session and a board of managers, or
  - (b) a session and a deacons' court, or
  - (c) a session or parish council that combines the functions of a session and either a board of managers or deacons' court.
- (3) Despite subsection (2) a congregation may, with the approval of its presbytery, organise its church council in any other way that the members and associate members consider appropriate for their circumstances.

*Defined terms: associate member, board of managers, church council, congregation, deacons' court, member, parish council, presbytery, session.*

#### **7.5 Approval of special structure of a church council**

Before approving the organisation of a church council constituted in accordance with subsection (3) of section 4, a presbytery must be satisfied that the proposed form of organisation will provide adequately for the functions of the church council.

*Defined terms: church council, presbytery*

#### **7.6 Officers of a church council**

- (1) The minister or his or her nominee shall be Moderator of the church council.

- (2) If the congregation has more than one minister or a local ministry team and the ministers or local ministry team cannot agree who should be Moderator of the church council, the matter must be decided by the presbytery.
- (3) A church council also appoints such other officers as it considers necessary and appropriate to fulfil its functions.
- (4) The Moderator of a church council may appoint one of the members of the church council to moderate a particular meeting of the church council.
- (5) A church council may only nominate for election and ordination as an elder a person who is a member.

*Defined terms: church council, elder, member, Moderator, ordination.*

### *Composition of Church Councils*

#### **7.7 Session**

- (1) The session of a congregation consists of
  - (a) any minister or ministers inducted, or local ministry team commissioned, by presbytery or any interim moderator appointed by presbytery, and
  - (b) the elders who have been ordained in accordance with chapter 9 and either elected to session by the congregation at a meeting of the congregation or appointed by presbytery.
- (2) The minister or a member of the session nominated by the minister shall be Moderator of the session.
- (3) If the congregation has more than one minister or a local ministry team and the ministers or local ministry team cannot agree who should be Moderator of the session, the matter must be decided by the presbytery.

*Defined terms: congregation, elder, Interim Moderator, local ministry team, minister, Moderator, ordination, presbytery, session.*

#### **7.8 Board of managers**

- (1) The board of managers of a congregation consists of
  - (a) members of the session chosen by the session to be members of the board, and
  - (b) members and associate members of the congregation elected by the congregation to be managers, and
  - (c) any minister or ministers of the congregation who choose to be a member of the board.
- (2) The congregation must determine the term for which it elects a member to the board of managers.

- (3) The board of managers must each year appoint one of its members to be chairperson for a fixed period of not more than one year.

*Defined terms: board of managers, congregation, minister, session.*

### **7.9 Deacons' court**

- (1) The deacons' court of a congregation consists of
  - (a) members of the session chosen by the session to be members of the deacons' court,
  - (b) members of the congregation elected by the congregation and ordained to the office of deacon, and
  - (c) any minister or ministers of the congregation who choose to be a member of the court.
- (2) If a congregation has more than one minister appointed to that congregation, the minister who is senior in appointment may choose to be a member of the deacons' court or may nominate the other or one of the other ministers to be a member of the court.
- (3) The provisions of this chapter and chapter 9 apply to the choice, ordination and induction of a deacon.
- (4) A deacons' court cannot admit to or depose any person from the office of deacon.
- (5) A deacons' court must each year appoint one of its members to be chairperson for a fixed period of not more than one year.

*Defined terms: congregation, deacon, deacons' court, induction, member, minister, ordination, session.*

### **7.10 Term of elder or deacon**

The congregation may determine the term for which it elects an elder to the church council or a deacon to the deacons' court.

*Defined terms: congregation, deacon, deacons' court, elder.*

### **7.11 Parish Council**

- (1) Sections 7 and 10 apply to the membership of a parish council that combines the functions of the session and either the board of managers or deacons' court, save that up to 40% of the members of a parish council need not be elders who have been ordained in accordance with Chapter 9.

- (2) If a church council is organised as a session under section 4 (2) (c), the session also has the functions of either the board of managers or the deacons' court.
- (3) The parish council of a co-operative venture has the functions of a session or parish council.
- (4) Members of the parish council of a co-operative venture are treated as elders for the purposes only of representation at the General Assembly and the presbytery and for no other purpose, unless those members are ordained in accordance with section 9.

*Defined terms: board of managers, church council, co-operative venture, deacons' court, elder, General Assembly, ordination, parish council, presbytery, session*

#### *Functions of board of managers or deacons' court*

##### **7.12 Functions**

- (1) A board of managers or deacons' court or a committee formed under section 19 must administer the property and finances of the congregation, including
  - (a) managing all finances and property belonging to the congregation or held in trust on its behalf,
  - (b) collecting all contributions and offerings from and to the congregation,
  - (c) keeping bank accounts and any other financial records as may be necessary,
  - (d) expending monies on behalf of the congregation, including payment of stipends, salaries and honoraria,
  - (e) preparing budgets and statements of accounts, and having the accounts reviewed or audited,
  - (f) providing a financial report when required by the session,
  - (g) raising and securing loans,
  - (h) letting any building or other property,
  - (i) appointing and dismissing administrative staff, and
  - (j) any other function necessary for the proper administration of the property and finances of the congregation.
- (2) A board of managers or a deacons' court has the powers necessary to perform its functions.

*Defined terms: board of managers, congregation, deacons' court, session.*

#### *Respective responsibilities*

##### **7.13 Responsibilities of minister or local ministry team**

- (1) The minister or local ministry team is responsible for the content and form of worship despite the functions of the church council set out in section 2.

- (2) A minister or local ministry team is responsible to the presbytery in relation to the performance of any power or the exercise of any function.

*Defined terms: church council, local ministry team, minister, presbytery.*

#### **7.14 Responsibilities of church council**

- (1) In performing its functions, a church council
  - (a) is responsible to the presbytery, and
  - (b) must give particular weight to the views of the minister or local ministry team.
- (2) A church council does not exercise authority over the minister or local ministry team except where specifically provided to the contrary in this Book of Order.

*Defined terms: Book of Order, church council, local ministry team, minister, presbytery.*

#### **7.15 Responsibilities of a board of managers and deacons' court**

- (1) In the performance of its functions and the exercise of its powers under section 12, a board of managers or deacons' court is subordinate to the session and must
  - (a) give particular weight to the views of the minister or local ministry team,
  - (b) comply with the requirements set out in chapter 16,
  - (c) obtain the approval of the church council and the congregation for the annual budget, including the expenditure of any monies,
  - (d) arrange for the use or letting of any building or property, and
  - (e) consult with, and have regard to the views of, the minister or local ministry team and of the church council before appointing or dismissing administrative staff.
- (2) The session may reverse or alter any decision of the board of managers or deacons' court.

*Defined terms: board of managers, church council, congregation, deacons' court, local ministry team, minister, session.*

#### *Procedural matters*

#### **7.16 Meetings of a church council**

- (1) The Moderator presides over each meeting of the church council and must ensure that each meeting is opened and closed with prayer.
- (2) The Moderator must give the members of the church council not less than 10 working days notice of a meeting.

- (3) The notice must be either in writing or given at the close of the previous meeting.
- (4) The Moderator or the minister (or one of the ministers if there is more than one) may convene a special meeting of the council in case of urgency.
- (5) The Moderator must give reasonable notice to all members of a special meeting.
- (6) The Moderator must call a special meeting if not less than 3 members of the church council so request.
- (7) The Moderator:
  - (a) cannot move or second a motion, and
  - (b) has no deliberative vote, but may, if the council is equally divided, exercise a casting vote.
- (8) A quorum of the church council consists of one third of the members of the church council, but must
  - (a) comprise not fewer than 3 members of the church council, and
  - (b) include the Moderator, and a minister if the Moderator is not a minister.

*Defined terms: church council, minister, Moderator, working day.*

#### **7.17 Reference by a member or associate member of congregation to a church council**

- (1) Any member or associate member of a congregation:
  - (a) may request the church council to consider any matter concerning the Church or the congregation generally,
  - (b) may seek a decision with regard to that matter, and
  - (c) must provide details of the matter concerned.
- (2) A member or associate member of the congregation who wishes the church council to make a decision on a matter he or she has requested the council to consider may request an opportunity to speak on the matter concerned at the meeting at which it is to be considered.
- (3) If a member or associate member of the congregation requests an opportunity to speak on the matter, the church council may:
  - (a) agree to or decline the request,
  - (b) allocate a fixed time for the member or associate member to speak, and
  - (c) set any other conditions as it considers appropriate including a limit on the time available to the member or associate member to speak.

- (4) The member or associate member must:
  - (a) adhere to such conditions, and
  - (b) withdraw from the meeting at the expiration of the time allotted unless the council extends the time.
- (5) The council may:
  - (a) make a decision where that is sought, and
  - (b) if it considers it an inappropriate matter for decision, decline to do so.
- (6) The council secretary must:
  - (a) convey any decision to any person affected by it, and
  - (b) advise such person of his or her rights of appeal and necessary procedures.
- (7) If a member or associate member of the congregation is dissatisfied with the decision of the council or by a refusal to make a decision, the member or associate member may appeal to presbytery.

*Defined terms: associate member, church, church council, congregation, member, presbytery.*

#### **7.18 Minutes**

The Moderator must ensure that there is a secretary of the church council and that the secretary:

- (a) accurately records minutes of the proceedings of the church council,
- (b) sets out in the minutes the names of the members present, and
- (c) on request, makes available extracts of the minutes to persons affected.

*Defined terms: church council, Moderator.*

#### **7.19 Powers to appoint committees and delegate**

A church council may appoint a committee and, subject to the restrictions in section 20(1), may delegate any of its functions to it.

*Defined term: church council.*

#### **7.20 Powers of Committees**

- (1) Except to the extent lawfully authorised either generally or specifically by the church council, a committee appointed by the church council under section 19 cannot make decisions which bind the minister or local ministry team, church council or congregation.

- (2) A committee appointed by the church council may make recommendations to the church council on any matter relevant to its functions.

*Defined terms: church council, congregation, local ministry team, minister.*

### **7.21 Decisions of Session**

If a session makes a decision that affects the functions of the board of managers or deacons' court, it must

- (a) inform the board of managers or deacons' court, as the case may be, of the decision, and
- (b) provide a copy of any part of its minutes that relates to the decision.

*Defined terms: board of managers, deacons' court, session.*

### *Church council commissioners to presbytery*

#### **7.22 Commissioners to presbytery**

Ministers and elders serving as members of presbytery are commissioners and not representatives and must vote in accordance with their own consciences under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

*Defined terms: commissioner, elder, minister, presbytery*

#### **7.23 Electing commissioners to presbytery**

- (1) An elder elected by a church council as that council's commissioner to presbytery must be a member of the church council.
- (2) Despite subsection (1), a church council may elect an elder from another congregation within the area of the presbytery if the church council is unable to elect an elder from within its membership.
- (3) Elders are ordinarily to be elected as commissioners to presbytery for a term of 12 months, but may be elected for a shorter term of not less than 3 months.
- (4) A church council must furnish to presbytery a letter of commission as specified in the supplementary provisions in respect of each elected commissioner.

*Defined terms: church council, commissioner, congregation, elder, presbytery supplementary decisions*

#### **7.24 Election of alternate commissioner**

A church council may elect one of its members to act as an alternate for the elder or elders commissioned to presbytery in the event that a commissioned elder is unable to attend a presbytery meeting.

*Defined terms: church council, commissioner, elder, presbytery.*

*Dissolution of a church council*

**7.25 Dissolution of a church council**

If the presbytery is of the opinion that irreconcilable differences have arisen within a church council or between a church council and a congregation, the presbytery may dissolve the church council and appoint a temporary church council to act until the presbytery has arranged for a new council to be elected.

*Defined terms: church council, congregation, presbytery*

**7.26 Alteration of this Chapter**

This chapter cannot be altered, amended or deleted in any way except in accordance with the special legislative procedure.

*Defined term: special legislative procedure*