

# A Handbook for Elders



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## Introduction

Eldership is one of those concepts that have a rich pedigree in the Presbyterian Church, but as time passes and the Church changes so the old certainties are fading and people are asking all sorts of questions: What sort of leadership does the church require these days, and how does eldership fit into this? How does eldership relate to other forms of leadership? Why are elders (and ministers) ordained, and what is ordination anyway? Is the distinction between ruling and teaching elders relevant anymore? What are elders actually expected to do?

This Handbook will help you explore these and other questions. It is intended as a resource for parishes and presbyteries. It is a supplement to chapters 6 and 9 of the Presbyterian Church's *Book of Order* (2008), the relevant sections of which have been put together to form **Appendix One**. Probably the easiest way to use this Handbook as a training tool is to hold discussions around those sections which you deem to be most relevant to your situation. Questions are provided to prompt reflection and discussion.

**Background Influences:** This Handbook draws on a range of source material. In 1985, Lester Reid wrote *A Resource for Elders, Sessions and Parish Councils*. An excellent resource in its day, that book has since been overtaken by time. Parts of it have been rendered obsolete by changing practises and subsequent changes to the *Book of Order*. Significantly, in 2007, John Roxborough and Mary-Jane Konings began work on an Elders' Handbook. Still a work-in-progress when John concluded his teaching role at the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership, it can be accessed online from John's personal web site:

[www.roxborough.com/elders](http://www.roxborough.com/elders). This Handbook builds on the good work undertaken by John and Mary-Jane and takes into account topics raised by elders in interviews conducted since 2007 by Dr Lynne Baab for the Synod of Otago and Southland. It should be read in conjunction with the *Parish Handbook*, which can be downloaded from the PCANZ web site: [www.pcanz.org.nz](http://www.pcanz.org.nz).

**A useful online resource:** We draw the attention of the users of this Handbook to the Presbyterian Church of Canada's Elders Institute, which has a web site:

[www.eldersinstitute.ca](http://www.eldersinstitute.ca). The web site includes a useful Elders' Toolbox, consisting of numerous downloadable one-page papers on a variety of topics, including pastoral care visiting, reaching consensus in committee meetings, and helping committees work as effective teams.

**Clarification:** The term "church council" is used in this document it refers to sessions and parish councils in their various forms. The term "minister" is used to refer to ordained pastors.

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**Feedback:** The ongoing revision of this document is essential if it is to be of continued use and relevance. To help with this task we would appreciate greatly your feedback. Does it cover the right subject areas? Is it accurate? Is it pitched at the right level? Are the discussion questions helpful? Please email your comments to: [principal@knoxcentre.ac.nz](mailto:principal@knoxcentre.ac.nz)

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## The History and Theology of Eldership

The word “presbyter”, from which the name “Presbyterian” is derived, is a New Testament word, often translated as “elder”. The Presbyterian Church is a church ruled or governed by elders. Our sixteenth-century Reformation forebears, who included among their number John Calvin and John Knox, believed this to be consistent with the early church, as testified to in the New Testament. Some key biblical passages in this regard are:

1. James 5:14, which describes the pastoral role of elders in terms of anointing and praying for the sick;
2. Acts 20:18ff., which describes elders as overseers and pastors maintaining the apostles’ legacy, following their example, and protecting the people against doctrinal error;
3. 1 Peter 5:1ff., which describes the office of eldership in terms of pastoral oversight and authority, and implies a stewardship function;
4. 1 Timothy 5:17, which alludes to a preaching and teaching role.

These and other such biblical references suggest that the notion of elder in the early church had a certain fluidity to it. We do not find in the Bible a universally applicable job description!

Just as eldership is described in a variety of ways in the New Testament, so too it was later conceived and developed along different lines in different Reformed Churches around the world. The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, reflecting its Scottish heritage, took its lead from the Scottish Church. For example, the notion that elders are not simply representatives of the congregation, but are holders of a permanent, spiritual office, comes from the Scottish Kirk’s *Second Book of Discipline*, produced in 1578. That same source provided an enduring rationale for the office of eldership. It said, “As the Pastors and Doctors should be diligent in teaching and sowing the Seed of the Word, so the Elders should be careful in seeking the Fruit of the same in the people.”

This suggests two things. Firstly, it suggests a distinct ministry of the eldership which is complementary to, but also closely related to, the ministry of the Word. In this regard, the oft-used distinction between “ruling elders” (elders on session) and “teaching elders” (ministers of Word and Sacrament) is both helpful and unhelpful. It is helpful in that it makes clear that while these are different roles within the leadership of the church both are needed for the governance of the church; it is unhelpful insofar as it reduces the multifaceted nature of both these ministries to just two functions: ruling and teaching.

Secondly, it suggests that just as ministers are responsible to nurture their own faith in God through Bible study, prayer and other spiritual practices in order to teach and sow the

Word, so also elders must nurture their own faith if they are to be able to encourage others to grow in their faith.

Historically, the eldership's task of seeking the fruit of the Word in the people of God has tended to consist of three main elements: (1) pastoral care; (2) discipline; and (3) spiritual oversight. Let's deal briefly with each of these in turn and then continue on to consider other issues relevant to being an elder.

### **Pastoral Care**

In the Presbyterian tradition the elders have often been at the frontline of pastoral care, with each elder being assigned a "pastoral district" consisting of a certain number of parishioners and their families. In many churches the number of elders on the session was determined by the number of pastoral districts. Elders would be expected to visit the folk in their district at least four times a year, the visits usually coinciding with the quarterly celebration of Holy Communion. It was the elders' job to get to know the folk in their district, pray for and with them, and encourage them in the daily disciplines of Christian faith and conduct, including regular attendance of worship and Holy Communion. In those churches where elders' visits are still the norm, it can be helpful before leaving for the elder to offer a short prayer for the person and/or family and the issues that may have been discussed. There needs to be confidence such prayer is welcome and the elder must feel comfortable offering such a ministry.

Nowadays, due to changed circumstances, few churches maintain such a formal system of visitation by the elders. Many churches prefer a small team of elders to the large sessions of old. While the church council still takes responsibility for ensuring pastoral care is carried out in the parish, individual elders may or may not be involved personally in the conduct of that care. Some churches appoint parish visitors and pastoral care workers (voluntary and/or paid) to visit people on a regular basis, especially the sick and the elderly. Increasingly, pastoral care has come to be regarded as a specialised ministry requiring a code of ethics, training and professional supervision. We are more conscious these days of the need to ensure that people entrusted to our care (as well as the caregivers) are kept "safe".

Unfortunately, the professionalization of pastoral care does come with attendant risks. As elders are relieved of the duty of pastoral care so, in many cases, there is a risk of them losing touch with the joys and struggles of ordinary Christians. The task of seeking the fruit of the Word in people's lives is rendered more difficult if you don't truly know people individually. Moreover, there is a danger of pastoral care being reduced to a form of social work with a consequent erosion of the spiritual dimension to the role (including the place of prayer). We should not forget that the office of eldership is a form of *spiritual* leadership, of which prayer should play a significant part. Prayer and pastoral care go hand in hand.

The Presbyterian Church's *Code of Pastoral Ethics* is included in this document as **Appendix Two**. All those involved in pastoral visiting (including elders) should adhere to it.

*Questions for Reflection and Discussion:*

1. *How is pastoral care structured and coordinated in your church?*
2. *How is the spiritual dimension to pastoral care exercised?*
3. *Is there anything that could be done better?*
4. *What role do you see the elders having in the provision of pastoral care?*

## **Discipline**

In John Calvin's day in Geneva, a group of elders called a Consistory (in effect a session) met weekly and ruled on matters of personal morality, business practice and public ethics. This proved to be the most controversial aspect of Calvin's reforms, but it did lead John Knox to observe that Geneva was the "most godly city ever established on earth." Discipline "rightly administered" came to be regarded as a mark of the Scottish Church, alongside preaching and celebration of the Lord's Supper. While the notion of elders exercising such discipline is unpalatable nowadays, it should be remembered that *discipline*, in a church context, is concerned with the formation of *disciples*, of people whose lives are ordered by the gospel. Nurture, encouragement, pastoral care and even correction, sensitively and prayerfully exercised, and determined always by love, might be deemed an appropriate means of strengthening faith and forming disciples within the Christian community. The eldership conceived in this way is potentially an instrument of God's transformative work, nurturing and encouraging the Church's participation in God's new creation.

People might find it more helpful these days to talk about mutual accountability rather than discipline. In the absence of any form of accountability there is a very real danger of "spiritual narcissism", whereby people simply do whatever is right in their own eyes. Some people have experienced great value in committing themselves to time-honoured Monastic Rules, adapted to fit today's context and consisting of daily habits of faith, including regulated prayer and Bible study.<sup>1</sup>

*Questions for Reflection and Discussion:*

5. *What are the means in your church by which people hold each other to account for the faith they profess?*
6. *What role, if any, do you see for the elders in this regard?*

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<sup>1</sup> See Selwyn Yeoman's article "Living in the Rules" in the February 2011 issue of *Candour*, available from the PCANZ web site: [http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/sites/default/files/candour/Candour\\_February\\_2010.pdf](http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/sites/default/files/candour/Candour_February_2010.pdf)

## Spiritual Oversight

Historically, spiritual oversight was evident in the responsibility laid upon a session for:

1. pastoral care and discipline, as noted above;
2. determining the times of public worship, including the frequency of the public administration of Holy Communion;
3. assisting the minister in the conduct of worship (upon the request of the minister);
4. selecting and reviewing material used for the purposes of Christian Education, especially in relation to children, youth and home groups;
5. overseeing all teachers and leaders in the congregation (except the minister);
6. working closely with the Board of Managers (or equivalent body) in relation to the stewardship of resources;
7. developing and maintaining programmes of mission and outreach;
8. supervising the life of the congregation, including the election of elders, maintaining the congregational roll, overseeing all groups meeting under the auspices of the congregation, and being involved as needed in processes of Christian formation and baptismal instruction;
9. approving baptisms and ensuring ongoing pastoral care and spiritual nurture of the baptized.

In modern language, many of these responsibilities could be said to fall under the categories of leadership and governance. The phrase “ruling elder” describes very well this key role. However, we need to be clear that “ruling” does not and should not imply an authoritarian approach. Rather, it involves seeking the mind of Christ through consultation and prayerful deliberation. It involves listening for the voice of Christ through a multiplicity of channels and dealing with all people in a Christ-like manner. To rule is to rule wisely and to be, in all things, “an example to the believers in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity” (1 Timothy 4:12). A few years ago, the Presbyterian Church coined the phrase “servant mission leader” to describe the kind of leadership required for today. It produced a brief paper on the subject. That is included here as **Appendix Three**.

In recent years, church councils have been more intentional about assuming a strategic planning role, determining the direction, vision and goals of the congregation. While this has been a natural development and is an important task, we should always remember that it fits within rather than supplants the task of providing spiritual oversight. The church council is not a Board of Governors. It is a body of spiritual leaders concerned for building up the body of Christ and advancing the mission of the Church. Strategic planning must serve this purpose.



Some people are understandably wary about churches engaging in strategic planning exercises. They point out that setting goals and measuring performances against desired outcomes – accepted practices in the corporate world – do not translate well into the church context where one is dealing with volunteers and matters of a spiritual nature.

However, strategic plans can help churches articulate key directions and priorities, which can in turn inform discussions about the deployment of resources for mission. If the articulation of key directions and priorities is about “mission”, decisions about the deployment of resources are about “stewardship”. Mission and stewardship are two sides of the one coin.

There are many different ways of undertaking a strategic planning exercise. Whatever approach you take, make sure you keep it simple, seek to involve as many people as possible, do it prayerfully and carefully, and don’t become so preoccupied with the “what” and “how” questions that you fail to grapple with deeper biblical and theological issues. Remember, the real purpose of a strategic plan is not to advance the organisational goals of your church; it is to help you articulate what sort of community you believe God is calling you to be in Jesus Christ, and discern what kinds of things you can undertake to better enable you to become that sort of community.

See **Appendix Four** for an example of a strategic planning exercise.

*Questions for Reflection and Discussion:*

7. *Which of the nine tasks listed above does your church council take responsibility for? Who covers the rest?*
8. *Is there anything in that list which you would add, change or delete in relation to how your church council exercises spiritual oversight?*
9. *What strategic planning processes has your church council undertaken in recent years? Do you have a plan that serves you well? If not, what would be most helpful at this point in time?*

## **Ruling and Serving**

The language of “servant mission leader” suggests that our understanding of “ruling” should be informed by a strong ethic of service and a humble disposition. Scottish theologian T.F. Torrance once observed that “the nature of the office elders hold and the kind of functions they perform bear a close resemblance to the office and functions of the *deacon* described in the Pastoral Epistles and Early Church documents.” Torrance argued for a renewal of the eldership based on the recognition that its fundamental character is diaconal. A diaconal ministry is a serving ministry. Torrance advocated for elders having “a more central ministry in the responses of God’s worshipping people, in leading their praise and thanksgiving, in guiding their intercession and witness, and in the translation of their love to God into a

living liturgy of service in the depths of human need.” Interestingly, many Pacific Island churches refer to an elder as a "diakono" (Cook Islands).

Remember too, servant mission leadership is modelled after Jesus as a servant leader. That includes an emphasis on the nature of the interactions he had with people and an emphasis on his own prayer times to give direction for his ministry and to make sure he was serving God in what he did.

*Questions for Reflection and Discussion:*

*10. How do you respond to Torrance's vision of eldership?*

*11. Is there anything in it that might inform your understanding of the role of elders?*

### **Elders and Ministers**

The relationship between the minister and elders is a dynamic one which will be affected by personalities, gifting, tradition and experience. As in any shared leadership, there needs to be some negotiation about roles and what is appropriate, based on respect and trust.

Ruling elders generally carry the vision for the parish in the long term. They are a part of the history and tradition of the parish and have a deep knowledge of and relationship with their congregation. The minister or ministerial team is called by the eldership to teach and preach, usually after specialist training for ministry. In some important ways, elders and ministers are similar – both are called, both are ordained. In other ways, there is a distinction – elders often have less training, and while experts in their congregation or parts of their congregation, do not always have an awareness of issues in the wider church.

As in all relationships, clear communication is essential between the ministerial team and the eldership. Relationships need to be built up over time, and probably require more than involvement in a session meeting once a month. Disagreements need to be faced clearly and resolved quickly, using external mediation if required. Elders and ministerial staff have experience and expertise in different areas, both of which are valued and these insights need to be listened to carefully.

Elders have a clear role in mediating disputes and will often be in the situation of hearing complaints, sometimes about the minister, sometimes about other elders, sometimes about other parishioners. Care must be taken not to inflame situations. Elders also need to be aware of their own responses – it can be difficult to remain even-handed when you agree with the complainant!

In talking about the partnership between eldership and the ministry of Word and Sacrament, it is important to delineate areas of responsibility and to stress the significance of a good working relationship between the minister and the church council. It is also important to clear up some misconceptions.

The first thing to note is that both the minister and the church council come under the authority and pastoral care of the presbytery or United District Council (UDC). Neither minister nor church council can lord it over the other. It is sometimes (wrongly) assumed that the minister is an employee of the parish. Not so. Even though the parish pays the minister's stipend, the minister is called, ordained and inducted by the presbytery (or UDC), and it is to the presbytery (or UDC) that the minister is accountable.

This means there are certain things a church council cannot do. It cannot take it upon itself to "correct" the minister's sermons, instruct the minister to perform certain duties, or withhold payment of the minister's stipend and allowances. It cannot call a meeting to which the minister is excluded. And it cannot unilaterally decide to terminate the call of the minister. Conversely, the minister cannot dissolve the church council, or ignore or override decisions that are the prerogative of the church council to make. It is incumbent upon both minister and church council to respect one another's role and areas of authority (as spelt out in the *Book of Order*) and to make every effort to resolve disagreements amicably. In the case of a deteriorating relationship it is prudent to seek the assistance of the presbytery sooner rather than later. The presbytery has a number of pastoral and judicial options available to it. Ultimately, if it 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" (Section 7.25 of the *Book of Order*).

Hopefully, things will never get to that stage! There are certain things that can be done to maintain a relationship of trust and goodwill. Here are some suggestions:

1. Upholding one another in prayer is a good start.
2. Find ways to affirm and explore the implications of the complementarity of roles. How might the church council assist the minister in the task of teaching and sowing the Word? How might the minister assist the elders in the task of seeking the fruit of the same in the people of God? How might they encourage and assist one another in the shared task of servant mission leadership?
3. Even though the minister is accountable to the presbytery, not the church council, it is recommended that the minister present a regular report, preferably in writing, to the church council. The minister can use such a report to alert the church council to key issues, identify matters for prayer, and give some account of the use of his or her time, since otherwise the elders may have little idea of the demands on their minister. Church councils are more likely to be supportive of their ministers if they have a good understanding of their role, the unique and varied demands that are placed upon them, and the issues they are grappling with.
4. Even though the presbytery, not the church council, is ultimately responsible for exercising pastoral care in relation to ministers (and their spouses and families), it is

recommended that church councils play a proactive role in this regard. A parish's obligations (financial and otherwise) towards its minister, as specified in the *Book of Order*, should be regarded as a *minimum* standard of care and responsibility.

*Question for Reflection and Discussion:*

12. *Is there anything that could be done to enhance the relationship between minister and church council in your church?*

### **Elders at worship**

It is imperative elders attend worship regularly and set a good example in this. It is also important for them to be at worship so they receive spiritual food in order to be shaped into the image of Christ, indicate their submission to the mission of God, demonstrate and act on their desire to be connected with and provide support for the members of their congregation.

Historically, the elders have assisted in the serving of Holy Communion and been available to assist with other aspects of worship, including leading the congregation in prayer and delivering the Bible Readings. Nowadays ministers tend to draw on a wider range of people to assist them in the conduct of worship. Some churches maintain the practice of having a "Duty Elder" lead in prayer in the vestry prior to the service and carry the Bible in and out of the church. Worship should begin in a prayerful spirit. Those who conduct a service of worship, including and perhaps especially the minister, need the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of the prayer prior to the service is to seek these things, to commit the service to God, and to pray that those who are assembling for worship will be open to what the Spirit is saying and doing.

There is a well established "lay preaching" tradition in the Presbyterian Church.<sup>2</sup> Many of our lay preachers are elders. All lay preaching occurs under the oversight and authority of the minister or, in the case of a vacancy, the Interim Moderator. It is the minister (or Interim Moderator) who decides who may preach, not the church council. It is the minister's responsibility to deal with any complaints that may arise in relation to a particular sermon delivered by a lay preacher.

Presbyterian and Reformed churches have since the Reformation continued the practise of the early church in ministers only presiding at the sacraments, but for almost twenty years now the Presbyterian Church has allowed what it calls "lay administration of the sacraments". This is where certain elders may be authorised and trained by the presbytery (upon the request of the church council) to preside over the sacraments of Baptism and

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<sup>2</sup> The title of "lay preacher" is unfortunate insofar as it perpetuates a distinction between "clergy" and "laity" that is both unbiblical and unhelpful. Properly understood, the New Testament word "laos" refers to the whole people of God, *including*, not apart from the clergy. Unfortunately, we haven't yet come up with a better designation for those whom the church authorises to share in the task of preaching and administering the sacraments.

Holy Communion. Such authorisation is usually for a set period of time and is subject to review. The provision is intended to cover those situations where a minister is unavailable, as is sometimes the case during a long vacancy and in small and isolated parishes that cannot afford a stipendiary ministry. These ministerial needs in difficult situations can now also be met by the subsequent Assembly provision for Locally Ordained Ministers (LOM) and Local Ministry Teams (LMT). These options offer provision for long term ministry and for the LOMs and LMTs to grow into the role and the trust of the parishes they serve.

Resources for the training of elders in the conduct of worship and the administration of the sacraments may be obtained from the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership.

*Questions for Reflection and Discussion:*

13. *In what ways are elders in your church involved in the conduct of worship?*
14. *Does your church council have a clear understanding of what is its responsibility in relation to worship, and what is the minister's (or Interim Moderator's) responsibility?*

### **Gatekeepers or Permission-givers?**

It is not uncommon for church councils to be perceived negatively as gatekeepers rather than permission-givers. While this perception can be unfair, for the task of discernment does not mean saying “yes” to everything, there are some things that church councils can do to make life easier for themselves:

1. No matter how outlandish a new proposal may seem, treat it (and the person making it) with respect. Do not reject it out of hand or make dismissive comments that prejudice an issue and discourage people from bringing forward ideas.
2. Decide first of all on the best process for dealing with the proposal. Can the proposal be dealt with there and then, or should there be a process of consultation and discussion? If so, with whom – just the church council, or the congregation too? Over what period of time? Fairness and transparency of process are key here.
3. In discussion, discourage people from using unsubstantiated generalisations to make a point. Examples: “Everybody knows that ...” “Young people today ...” “Such-and-such always ...” “History tells us ...” Such generalisations tend to discourage alternative points of view being voiced.
4. Communicate, communicate, communicate! Communicate fully and communicate on a timely basis with all relevant parties, including the congregation. Don't finish a discussion or a church council meeting without deciding what needs to be communicated to whom, by whom, and when. Nothing undermines the integrity and transparency of a process more than a lack of communication. Special care should be taken when communicating why a particular proposal has been turned down. Most people can handle disappointment if they feel they have been heard and they are

confident in the integrity of the process. It's when they feel that the process was a sham and the decision a *fait accompli* that disillusionment sets in.

5. Arrange the Agenda in such a way that adequate time is given to the discussion of the proposal and that it isn't squeezed out by all the routine business. Many church councils have a small executive that meets a week before the meeting to plan the Agenda. It also provides an option when difficult issues arise in discussion to request the executive to bring a report and proposals to the next meeting.
6. From time to time, take time out to talk about the "culture" of your church council. Is it an encouraging environment? Are new ideas welcomed or are they received as a threat? Is the first reaction usually one of why something *can't* be done rather than why this is worth considering? To what extent is the culture determined by the composition of session – is it time for some new blood, some fresh perspectives, some younger voices, to be represented around the table? What underlying dynamics and tensions are there which may need resolving in order to restore the trust and goodwill necessary for effective decision-making?

*Questions for Reflection and Discussion:*

15. *How do you think your church council is perceived? How would you describe its "culture"?*
16. *Where might there be areas for improvement?*

### **Church Councils, Presbyteries and the General Assembly**

Two key words can be used to describe the Presbyterian form of government: "conciliar" and "connectional".

The word "conciliar" refers to an ordered structure of church councils. The highest of these is the national council known as the General Assembly; then there is the regional council or presbytery; and finally there is the local council, which is the church council. The church council is directly accountable to the presbytery and contributes towards its work. The most visible form of this participation in the work of presbytery is the appointment of a "presbytery elder" who not only represents the church council on presbytery but also reports back to the church council. Both presbytery and the General Assembly consist of an even number (approximately) of elders and ministers.

The word "connectional" refers to the reality of congregations being in connection with each other through presbyteries and the General Assembly. Although each congregation is given a lot of latitude to organise its own life and mission, no congregation stands alone, and no congregation has complete autonomy. Although the Presbyterian Church says that the local congregation is the primary locus of mission, it is not a Congregationalist church<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> A Congregational church is one in which the local church has a high degree of autonomy. Even though such churches might belong to a federation or network of other churches that bear the same name, it tends to be more of a voluntary association. The links with that federation or network are not as binding as in the

like the Baptist Church and Assemblies of God; nor is it an Episcopal church<sup>4</sup> like the Anglicans and Roman Catholics.

The lines of connection are evident in many ways, including the following:

1. When a minister is being sought, the presbytery appoints the Settlement Board after consultation with the church council, and appoints its chair;
2. It is the presbytery which calls, ordains and inducts ministers, not the local congregation;
3. Both minister and church council are accountable to presbytery and come under the authority and pastoral care of the presbytery;
4. Elders and ministers attend Presbytery Resource Groups (along with other interested church members) for mutual encouragement and support, sharing resources for mission and exploring new models and opportunities for mission and growth in their location.
5. The forms and procedures in the Presbyterian *Book of Order* are binding on each and every congregation;
6. Each congregation is obliged to pay Assembly and presbytery levies to help fund the mission and work of the Presbyterian Church at national and regional levels.
7. Congregational representation at presbytery and General Assembly.

Because of its conciliar structure the Presbyterian Church is often said to be a democratic Church. But this is true only in part. Yes, it involves many people in its decision-making processes (a real strength of Presbyterianism), and congregational meetings are held for some things (e.g., to consider calling a minister), but for most operational matters the congregation trusts its elders to “rule” wisely and prayerfully. The mind of the elders may reflect the mind of the congregation, but not necessarily so, for their task is to seek the mind of Christ. That is why attendees at the General Assembly are called commissioners, not delegates. The role of the commissioner is to discern what the Spirit is saying, not merely represent a particular constituency or view point. For the same reason, proxy and absentee votes are not allowed in any of the church councils, including congregational meetings. Discernment involves listening to what the Spirit is saying through discussion and debate. How can you do that if you've already decided what your vote will be?

*Questions for Reflection and Discussion:*

17. *How strong is your church council's sense of connection to the wider church? How is this evident?*
18. *How might it be strengthened?*
19. *What do you perceive to be the strengths and challenges of the connective nature of the Presbyterian Church?*

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Presbyterian and other “connectional” churches. The local congregation has the authority of our Presbyteries and Assembly. Their regional and national gatherings are consultative rather than regulatory.

<sup>4</sup> An Episcopal Church is one ruled or governed by Bishops and synods, and often has a clerical hierarchy.

## **How big should a church council be?**

There is no optimum size. Those churches that maintain a traditional structure of elders' pastoral districts tend to have reasonably large church councils; churches that have shed that expectation and organised their pastoral care differently tend to have small church councils. Each has advantages and disadvantages. A large church council tends to have a good cross-section of the congregation represented around the table, but can be rather unwieldy to manage; a small church council can be more flexible and dynamic, but can also suffer from a narrow range of perspectives and also suffer from fewer people to share the work load.

Interestingly, congregations in the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America are obliged to have a session of twelve elders no matter how big the church. Ordained for life, but serving for only three years at a time, they must stand down a year before being eligible to be on session again. During that "sabbatical" year, elders generally do other tasks, and often come back reinvigorated from their experience at the coal face of congregational life. Elders are elected annually in three "classes" of four so that session does not lose continuity of experience. The visiting work is done by deacons, who also attend to the needs of the poor, including vagrants, and relieve the minister of any such demands.

Some church councils here have adopted a similar model.

*Question for Reflection and Discussion:*

*20. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the size of your church council?*



## **Sessions, Parish Councils and Church Councils**

Sessions are a peculiarly Presbyterian phenomenon; union and cooperating parishes tend to have parish councils. Presbyterian churches can opt for a parish council if they wish. Many have taken up this option over the years.

Whereas in the traditional Presbyterian structure there is a session and a board of managers (or deacons court), with the former focusing on spiritual leadership and the latter focusing on the management of resources (property and finance), the parish council combines these functions. In modern language, it combines governance and management. 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.

The members of a church council must be elders. Other people (e.g., committee convenors) can be associated with the council meeting as needed, but they do not have voting rights.

The fact that elders are ordained for life does not mean that they are obliged to serve on the church council for life. Some church councils set a retirement age, but the setting of that age can be a rather arbitrary exercise, and it cannot be applied retrospectively. Other church councils fix a period of service for their elders (usually 3 to 5 years), but unless such a timeframe is stipulated when elders are inducted then the church council cannot subsequently stop them serving on the council on the grounds that they have exceeded their time. Still other councils opt for an open-ended period of service, but keep the need for “regeneration” of the eldership before the church council and offer an “emeritus” status to elders who choose to retire. Such elders can still be called upon to assist in the conduct of worship and other forms of service in the church and, although they no longer serve on the church council, they can still attend council meetings and contribute towards discussions (but they cannot vote).

If an elder moves to another parish he/she has no automatic right to serve on the church council. The elder must be invited by the church council to do so.

Each structure (session or parish council) has advantages and disadvantages. Some parishes prefer a session because of the priority it is able to give to pastoral care and spiritual oversight without being burdened by a myriad of operational matters; others prefer a parish council because of the efficiencies that come with all the committees of the church being represented around the one table. As churches decline, more and more are finding it difficult to sustain both a session and board of managers and are inclining towards the parish council model.

Each structure requires work and goodwill. Under the session model it is imperative that there be a good working relationship with the board of managers (or deacons court), and that each court understands its role in relation to the other. It is very easy for tensions to arise here, for the board of managers to view the session as being out of touch with the operational realities of running the parish, and for the session to view the board of managers as being unnecessarily obstructive and pedantic. Good communication and trust are essential.

Under the parish council model it is imperative that the sheer pragmatics of running the church and receiving reports from all the committees do not crowd out the vital task of exercising spiritual leadership.

*Questions for Reflection and Discussion:*

21. *What do you think are the strengths of your own church council?*

22. *What are the weaknesses or dangers, and how might these be addressed?*

### **Discernment and Consensus**

Integral to the task of spiritual leadership is the aim of discerning what the Spirit is saying in the midst of all the business that has to be discussed. There are some good resources on this subject. Here are two such books, recommended by Lynne Baab, who has herself written and spoken on this subject:

1. Morris, D.E. & Olsen, C.M., *Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church*, Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1997.

This is a practical book with many concrete steps that make congregational discernment seem possible.

2. Fendall, L., Wood, J. & Bishop, B., *Practicing Discernment Together: Finding God's Way Forward in Decision Making*, Newberg, Oregon: Barclay Press, 2007.

Three Quaker authors describe the process of listening carefully to group members and also to the Holy Spirit working through them.

The incorporation of communal spiritual practices (e.g., worship, singing, silence, prayer and Bible study) into church meetings can go a long way towards facilitating discernment and building consensus. So can the cultivation of listening skills and the sensitive and skilled use of meeting procedures. What we are really talking about here is church councils seeing themselves first and foremost as communities of spiritual leaders, not as business committees.

Another book worth reading in this regard is: Olsen, C.M., *Transforming Church Boards into Communities of Spiritual Leaders*, Alban Institute, 1995. Both this and the books referred to above are available for loan from the Hewitson Library at Knox College.

When discernment and consensus have been achieved, people are far more likely to leave meetings feeling energised and inspired, rather than discouraged and exhausted, and they will have a renewed sense of who and what the church is called to be.

*Question for Reflection and Discussion:*

23. *How might your church council better serve the goals of discernment and consensus?*

### **The importance of a well-run meeting**

Few things kill enthusiasm more effectively than turning up for meetings that are badly organised, poorly moderated (convened), and routinely go on for far too long. At the same time, as we noted above, we do well to remember that the primary purpose of a church meeting is to discern what the Spirit is saying, not simply attend to certain items of business. If we view the task of Christian leadership as a process of discerning God's will for our congregation's ministry, how can we hear the voice of God if we are not spending time in Scripture and prayer together? This should be a priority, not an optional extra.

As a general rule of thumb, few committee meetings or church council meetings should require more than two hours. Here are some tips about how to keep within that timeframe:

1. **Agenda:** Plan the Agenda carefully – decide what needs to be included and the order in which things should be dealt with. Give a time allocation to each item on the Agenda, allocating the most time to the most important items of business. Always allow some time for personal sharing and prayer support.
2. **Distribution of papers:** Ensure all relevant papers and reports have been distributed in advance of the meeting, and create an expectation that elders will read their papers before they come. Undistributed papers can be tabled at the meeting, but may not be discussed, and any recommendations which they contain may not be voted upon.
3. **Speaking protocols:** To avoid more vocal people dominating discussion, each person can speak once to each item of business. They can only speak twice if the Moderator is satisfied that everyone else has had an opportunity to speak.
4. **Keeping a tight rein on General Business:** All items of General Business should be brought to the attention of the Moderator prior to the start of the meeting, and preferably in time to be included on the Agenda. The Moderator should discuss with the person raising the item of General Business the best way of dealing with it – is this the right forum for the item to be dealt with; how urgent is it; does it need a paper to be written and circulated in time for the next meeting? etc.

For more advice on how to run a good meeting, and information about meeting procedures, see **Appendix Five**. See also page 6 of the *Parish Handbook* on the PCANZ web site.

Remember, good meeting procedures are not an end in themselves; they are a means to an end. They should serve, not detract from, the higher goals of discernment and consensus.

*Question for Reflection and Discussion:*

*24. Where might there be room for improving the way your church council meetings are run?*

### **Eldership, Ordination and Leadership**

In recent years congregations have been financing the appointment of youth leaders, children and family workers, pastoral care workers and other specialist ministry positions, many of which have a leadership component to their role. Since these are significant positions filled by very committed people it is often asked, why not ordain them to their ministry? While there is much to be said for commissioning such folk in the setting of public worship, ordination to eldership has two distinctive features that mark it out from those appointed from time to time to serve the church in other capacities.

On the one hand, elders are elected by the people to represent them in the governance of the church. On the other hand, elders are set apart for life to their role of sharing with the ministers in the task of providing guidance, focus and unity to the multiplicity of gifts, ministries that build up the body of the church.

By accepting this role elders are not granted more status than other people in the congregation. They are church members who have accepted election by their fellow church members to represent them in the oversight of the church. It is because they remain church members that they can fulfil the role of representatives of the people in the governance of the church, while accepting the role of being encouragers of the people – and their minister – in their roles.

When this opportunity to serve one another is understood we can see what distinguishes elders and ministers is the function they have in the church, not prestige or rank. Those appointed to the ministry of Word and Sacrament, through their calling, remind the Church of its identity as Christ's servant and call the Church to be true to its nature. Those appointed to the office of eldership, through their calling, lead and guide the community's response of faith, build communion, encourage and exemplify a spirit of service. The offices of minister and elder, therefore, though different, lead the church's life and service in complementary ways.

Tensions can emerge between church councils and ministry staff, employed or appointed to exercise particular ministries, many of which have a significant leadership component. Many church councils are ill-equipped to administer the myriad of requirements that are enshrined in employment legislation; some expect the minister to handle this on their behalf, but the minister may or may not be trained or skilled in this area. The Presbyterian Church's Assembly Office is available to offer advice here. It is very important that church councils act as good employers.

In thinking about the relationship between a church council and ministry staff (excluding the minister of Word and Sacrament), here are some things to be aware of:

1. Thought needs to be given not just to the ability of ministry staff to do specified jobs, but also to how well they “fit” and respect the “culture” of the congregation. This is especially so when a person is appointed from outside the congregation (and indeed the Presbyterian Church) and may not identify with its life and mission in any way other than a formal employment relationship. In some situations it might be helpful to offer to new staff some form of orientation.
2. When an employment position is filled from within the congregation, the potential for blurring the lines between employment obligations and pastoral care increases substantially. This risk is especially evident if the employment relationship begins to deteriorate.
3. Care needs to be taken by elders not to meddle in employment related matters. Ensure that proper lines of employee management are defined clearly and followed strictly.
4. The church council should respect the expertise that ministry staff bring to their positions. At the same time, ministry staff should respect the oversight role that the church council exercises and the continuity that it provides. After all, ministry staff come and go, whereas it is the church council that articulates the missional vision of the congregation and holds the institutional memory.
5. With the advent of ministry staff teams consisting mainly, if not exclusively, of paid personnel, there is a risk of a new professionalism in ministry undermining the biblical concept of the priesthood of all believers. The move towards the specialisation and professionalisation of ministry can give rise to a perception that real ministry is done by the paid professionals, and that everyone else is there merely to support the professionals in their work. It can also give rise to a perception that ministry is what happens inside the church, while the Reformed emphasis on the priesthood of all believers being worked out in the community and in secular vocations is eroded.

Remember, there are many forms of ministry and leadership in the church, but only elders and ministers of Word and Sacrament are ordained. Following the example of the Apostles, as recorded in the New Testament, ordination is by prayer and the laying on of hands. At the same time, ministers and elders are asked to confess their faith in God, to express their belief in “the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith contained in the standards of this Church”, and to promise to seek the unity and peace of the Presbyterian Church, to uphold the doctrine, worship, government, and discipline thereof, and to take their due part in the administration of its affairs. They then sign a “Formula” to that effect.

These ordination vows need to be taken seriously. When elders and ministers in our church are ordained, they promise to seek the unity and peace of the church and to submit to the

governance structures of the church. At times each of us will disagree with certain decisions. Seeking the peace and unity of the church does not mean suppressing disagreement, but it does mean respecting the processes that the church has for making decisions and hearing appeals as we collectively seek the mind of Christ. It means listening with respect to those with whom we disagree. Making rash allegations, threatening legal action and using the media to scandalise the church does not serve the unity and peace of the church. It simply creates a climate of distrust and anxiety, and fragments our Christian witness. All of us would do well to remember our ordination vows the next time we are tempted to lash out in anger at our colleagues or at the church at large.

The ordination ceremony is indicative of the seriousness with which the Presbyterian Church takes ordination. It should be noted that what we believe about ordination is generally consistent with other major churches and denominations around the world. We don't just make things up as we go along!

See **Appendix Six** for an Order of Service for the ordination and induction of elders.

A word of clarification about ordination and induction: You are ordained into an office; you are inducted into, or appointed to a position of service. An elder is therefore ordained into the office of elder and inducted into, or appointed to serve on a church council. The former is for life; the latter is for the period of one's service on a church council.

*Questions for Reflection and Discussion:*

25. *What misunderstandings about ordination do you think exist, and how might they be addressed?*
26. *Does your church have paid ministry staff? If so, how would you describe the relationships between those staff and the church council? Are there any issues that need to be addressed?*

### **The Calling, Training and Formation of Elders**

There are various ways of calling and appointing elders, but remember that it is the congregation which elects elders, not the church council. One way is to invite nominations from the congregation and to hold a congregational meeting to vote on them. Another way is for the church council to assume a more hands-on role and put names before the congregation. This process might consist of the following steps:

1. Have a discussion in the church council about: (a) the personal qualities and skills desired in an elder; and (b) the desired mix of elders in the church council (e.g., gender, age, culture).
2. Invite the church council to prayerfully consider possible names, bearing in mind the criteria determined in step (1) above. Give a date by which those names can be submitted to the Moderator or Clerk of the church council.

3. Circulate in time for the next meeting of the church council a list of nominations, together with brief bio details on each nominee.
4. Pray, discuss, vote. Voting can be by secret ballot. If, for example, the church council has said it needs three elders and there are six nominations, ask each council member to write on their piece of paper their top three preferences. Appoint a couple of scrutineers to count the votes and determine the top three candidates.
5. Do the preferred nominees reflect the desired mix, talked about in step (1) of this process? Do more names need to be added?
6. Approach those who have made the final list to ask if they will allow their names to go forward to the congregation to be voted upon.
7. Set up a congregational meeting to vote on the final nominations. The bio details of each candidate should be circulated in advance of the meeting. Encourage anyone who has any reservations or concerns about the suitability of any of the nominees to talk in confidence to the minister by a certain date.
8. Hold a training session for the new elders. The church council needs to be satisfied that the elder-elect is suitably trained and able before proceeding to ordination.
9. Set a date for the service of ordination and induction of the new elders.

It is not uncommon for those who are approached to become elders to express feelings of inadequacy in relation to the task. They often have in their mind an image of an elder being a “super-spiritual” and “ultra-wise” person. “Why me?” they ask.

There are some useful texts about leadership and eldership in the Bible, but some people can feel the list of attributes described therein to be rather daunting, adding to their feelings of inadequacy. One session I know of tried to simplify the list. They said that a prospective elder should:

- a) be a member of the church and a regular worshipper;
- b) possess good pastoral skills, including the ability to listen, and to lead in prayer where appropriate;
- c) be of sound Christian character, have a maturity of Christian faith, and be a respected person within the congregation;
- d) be able to relate well to a wide range of people;
- e) be a “team player” who in his or her contribution to discussions will always seek the peace and unity of the church and will listen to other points of view; and,
- f) be called because he or she has the right gifts, not as a reward for length of membership or service in the church.

Church councils need to be intentional about the training and formation of elders and council members. The requisite skills can be taught in occasional workshops and/or in regular short training slots in church council meetings. Equally important, however, is the task of personal and spiritual formation. Eldership is not just about what you do; it’s about who you are. Personal mentoring, theological education and spiritual supervision can play

an important role in this regard. So can the attendance of elders' retreats, spiritual retreats and the supervised cultivation of daily habits of faith, including prayer and Bible study.

These sorts of practices are necessary in order for elders to play an active part in the task of discernment. They need to engage in spiritual practices in order to assure they are growing more into Christ's likeness and are striving to listen to God's voice through the Bible and by the Holy Spirit. This is significant both for them as individuals in leadership, but also significant for them as they work together with other members of the church council to strive to discern God's leading for the congregation.

*Questions for Reflection and Discussion:*

- 27. The criteria for eldership noted above suited one particular context. What criteria for eldership do you think should apply in your situation?*
- 28. What training and formation do you think you and other elders in your church would find helpful?*



## **Appendix One: What the Book of Order says about Eldership**

The following excerpts from the 2008 Book of Order have been downloaded from the PCANZ web site: [www.presbyterian.org.nz](http://www.presbyterian.org.nz)

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

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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.

The congregation of a co-operative venture may elect to its church council a person who is not an elder.

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.

Nothing in subsections (2) and (3) prevents the congregation of a co-operative venture from electing an elder to its church council.

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

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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.

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.

### **6.11 Leadership in worship**

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An elder exercises leadership in worship when he or she

1. preaches the Word according to his or her gifts under the authority of the minister,
2. assists in the celebration of the sacraments under the authority of the minister,
3. presides at the celebration of communion if he or she is authorised to administer the sacraments,
4. baptizes if he or she is authorised to administer the sacraments.

### **6.12 Leadership in mission**

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An elder exercises leadership in mission when he or she

1. exercises leadership within the congregation,
2. observes the discipline and government of the Church, and
3. participates in the courts of the Church as required.

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

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

1. provides pastoral care,
2. makes arrangements for baptism and membership.

### **6.14 Spiritual nurture**

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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.

### **6.15 Responsibilities of elders**

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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.

## **9.3 Ordination of elders and deacons**

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1. A person is eligible for ordination as an elder who
  - a. is a member of a congregation, and
  - b. offers him or herself for that service, and
  - c. displays the appropriate character, qualities and gifts, and
  - d. holds to the fundamentals of faith as defined by the Assembly, and
  - e. has completed the training for the office prescribed by the church council, and
  - f. is elected by the congregation.

### **9.41 Preparation for ordination of elders**

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1. If a church council recognises one or more members of the congregation as having the appropriate qualities for the ministry of an elder, it may
  - a. subject to their consent, nominate those members for election as elders at a meeting of the congregation, and
  - b. provide training for elders prior to their ordination.

A congregation may, subject to their consent, nominate members for election as elders.

#### **9.42 Ordination and Induction of elders**

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1. When a church council is satisfied that
  - a. a member of a congregation has the ability, the appropriate qualities, and the required training for the ministry of an elder, and
  - b. the congregation has elected the member as an elder,

A person elected as an elder who has been ordained in another congregation is inducted in accordance with the supplementary provisions.

#### **9.43 Authorisation of elders to administer the sacraments**

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1. Where a congregation considers it desirable and appropriate that an elder who is a member of the congregation or a member of a co-operative venture should be authorised to celebrate the sacraments in that congregation and the church council is satisfied that the elder has
  - a. the appropriate qualities, skills and gifts, and
  - b. agreed to being so authorised,

the church council may request presbytery to authorise the elder accordingly.

If presbytery agrees to authorise the elder to celebrate the sacraments, presbytery may hold a service of worship or other appropriate recognition at which it presents the person with a certificate of authorisation.

The authorisation of an elder to celebrate the sacraments remains effective to the extent provided in the supplementary provisions.

## **Appendix Two: Code of Pastoral Ethics**

The 1996 General Assembly commended to the Church the following Code of Ethics as an agreed minimum standard of practice. It can be found on the PCANZ web site:

[www.presbyterian.org.nz](http://www.presbyterian.org.nz)

### **Introduction**

This Code is to be read in the context of the Preamble to the *Book of Order*, the Statement on the *Book of Order*, and the Standards set out in Chapter 1, Section A. These set out the basis of the faith, order and discipline of this church. The discipline of our church applies to ministers and other office-bearers, communicants and adherent members who have arrived at the years of discretion.

This Code is a statement of how the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand understands the standards of conduct of those members who undertake the work of pastoral care in its name. In this context the term minister will include all, clergy and lay, who undertake the work of pastoral care.

Pastoral care involves the formation of special relationships characterised by openness and trust. These relationships are developed in a variety of settings and a variety of ways, from informal pastoral care to structured counselling situations.

This Code indicates acceptable ethical behaviour for those offering pastoral care. While its focus is pastoral care, it is also applicable wherever there is a ministry relation between people. By the grace of God we are called to serve, and through the power of the Holy Spirit we are sustained and encouraged to keep within this code.

### **Responsibilities to Those to Whom We Offer Pastoral Care**

- 1) Ministers will deal truthfully with people, encouraging free and open discussion, upholding their best interests, rights and well-being.
- 2) Ministers will respect the right of people to privacy and confidentiality of information except when there is a clear and imminent danger to those people or others, at which time they will be informed of those limits.
- 3) Ministers will recognise the dignity and worth of every person and will offer pastoral care without unfair discrimination.
- 4) Ministers will not abuse their position by taking advantage of people for personal, financial or institutional gain.

5) Ministers will recognise that sexual intimacy in the pastoral situation is unacceptable and will not subject people to sexual exploitation, sexual harassment or sexual abuse.

6) Ministers will recognise that there are limits to their competence and will refer people to others when this proves necessary or desirable. They will not attempt counselling without training.

7) Ministers will recognise that there is a cultural context for pastoral care and will act with awareness and sensitivity.

### **Responsibilities to the Church**

1) Ministers will uphold high standards of practice in ministry and work for the advancement of those standards.

2) Ministers will exercise stewardship in the time given to ministry, guarding against both over commitment and avoidance of responsibility.

### **Responsibilities to Colleagues and Other Pastoral Workers**

1) Ministers will promote co-operation with colleagues, pastoral workers and members of other helping professions, treating them with consideration and respecting professional confidences.

2) Ministers will seek mediation through the courts of the church when conflicts with colleagues or others within the church community arise.

3) Ministers will take action through the proper channels concerning unethical conduct by colleagues or other pastoral workers.

### **Responsibilities to the Wider Community**

1) Ministers will act to prevent and eliminate unfair discrimination in the wider community.

2) Ministers will encourage as part of their pastoral task, participation in the shaping of social policies, advocating the promotion of social justices, improved social conditions and a fair sharing of the community's resources.

### **Personal Responsibilities**

1) Ministers will use regular approved supervision to maintain accountability and a high standard of pastoral care.

2) Ministers will use regular opportunities for spiritual growth, personal recreation and refreshment.

3) Ministers will seek to extend and enhance their knowledge.

## Appendix Three: Servant Mission Leadership

The following paper on Leadership for Mission has been downloaded from the PCANZ web site: [www.presbyterian.org.nz](http://www.presbyterian.org.nz)

### Introduction

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God invites the church to join with God's mission in the world. The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand has made the development of healthy congregations a priority so it may work more effectively with God in this mission.

To achieve this our Church has identified the need for good leadership. Servant mission leadership is one way of describing the kind of leadership our Church believes it needs. Understanding more clearly what this phrase means will help us identify potential leaders and equip them to exercise leadership more effectively.

Servant mission leadership may mean different things to different people. How you think about it will relate to the community you belong to. But it has some core features we can agree on. Broadly speaking, it refers to the style of leadership and to the direction that leadership takes. More specifically, leadership is about vision, accountability, character and variety.

### It's about Vision

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The job of the leader is not to serve exclusively the people of the congregation or the organisation called the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. It is to work with others in serving the *mission* of God.

This mission is the 'vision' that informs the plans for the future of a congregation. It is a vision of life in all its fullness for both humankind and creation, grounded in the good news and mission of Jesus Christ, and it involves, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, interpreting and extending the Presbyterian Church's place in that mission.

This vision includes:

- the ability to tell the difference between what is of God and what is the latest fashion
- the ability to communicate in ways that make sense in today's world
- respect for tradition coupled with an eagerness to usher in the Church of the future
- creativity that is neither gimmicky nor trite
- perseverance especially when the going gets tough

### It's about Accountability

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Leaders know they are answerable for their actions, and that there is value in giving an account of their actions. They also know that mutual accountability strengthens the Church and enhances the vigour of its mission.

As a result they will:

- exercise their leadership in a professional manner
- adhere to the Church's code of ethics
- be committed to ongoing learning
- seek an appropriate level of supervision

### **It's about Character**

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Leadership is not only a matter of having the right skills, important as these are. It is also about having the right character and spirit. It's about trustworthiness. This implies a life of personal faith and prayer that enables leaders to grow in the likeness of Christ and to draw upon Christ's wisdom and strength for the task of leadership. Paul encouraged the Church at Philippi to "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ" (Philippians 2:5). He then identified humility, integrity, servant hood, and obedience to the mission and will of God as part of the character of Christ.

Trustworthy leadership will show among other things:

- an appropriate use of power that avoids its misuse and abuse
- authority without becoming authoritarian
- a reconciling ministry, willing to be decisive without being divisive, determined to advocate for those whose voice is not being heard
- faithful stewardship of the resources available for mission

### **It's About Variety**

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Parish ministry has often assumed that ministers of Word and Sacrament have the responsibility of leadership in the Church. This belief is reinforced by a distinction often drawn between clergy and lay people. This distinction is not grounded either in Scripture or the Reformed Tradition of which our Church is part.

In the Presbyterian Church, leadership doesn't stop with the people who are ordained, ministers or elders. Leadership is a gift and a responsibility given to many within the Church community including youth leaders, APW leaders, and those leading home-groups.

Much Christian leadership is also exercised in the wider community. The New Testament doesn't distinguish between ministries in the Church and the wider world. Everyone has their own calling, depending on their gifts. Ministry of Word and Sacrament, which serves as a guardian of the gospel, is one among these many ministries. All the Church's leaders are invited to exercise leadership.

### **Summary**

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Although it will take different forms in different contexts, some characteristics lie at the heart of our leadership vision:

- it reflects a contemporary **vision** of the mission of Jesus Christ
- it is appropriate and **accountable** to the gospel
- it reflects a **character** built on personal faith
- it can be practiced by anyone within the **variety** of church leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand.

## Appendix Four: A Sample Strategic Planning Exercise

There are many different ways of undertaking a strategic planning process. Here is one such approach, broken down into five easy steps.

Start by generating a brief summary statement about who you are as a church and what sort of community you believe God is calling you to be in Jesus Christ. This is your mission statement.

The mission statement should be consistent with the PCANZ's mission statement, which is stated in terms of making Jesus Christ known through: (1) nurturing and teaching; (2) loving service; (3) proclaiming the Gospel; (4) transforming society; and (5) caring for creation.

Here is an example:

We are a community being shaped and guided by Holy Spirit to be:

- A *gathered* community. We are drawn together in all our variety to joyfully worship one God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- A *learning* community. We seek to follow the way of Jesus, grow in our understanding of the Bible and extend the outworking of our faith.
- A *caring* community. We are committed to the well-being of those who suffer in body, mind or spirit.
- A *sent* community. We yearn for the liberating message of God's kingdom to heal and transform lives and, indeed, all creation; and that yearning influences our choices, commitments and priorities as we share in God's reconciling work.

Note how the above mission statement consists of four main (interrelated) areas of activity: worship; education and faith formation; pastoral care; and mission and outreach. Of course, these divisions are rather arbitrary, for it can be rightly pointed out that mission is not just one activity among many; rather, it describes and underpins everything we do.

Nevertheless, the categories serve the task at hand.

The second step is to describe your church's commitments and priorities under each of those headings. Each statement should be both descriptive (of what is important to you) and aspirational (what you aspire to be and do).

For example, under the category of worship, there might be a statement along the following lines:

Excellence in worship and music is important to us, as is a strong preaching tradition. We believe that the act of public worship should be informed by sound biblical and theological principles, which include a balance between form and freedom, the integration of word and sacrament, the connection between liturgy and life, and the involvement of the whole people of God. At the same time, we recognise that styles

of music and worship change over time and vary according to context, and that not everyone worships God in the same way. This means that traditional forms of worship must be supplemented by fresh expressions that draw upon a wide range of musical sources and will encourage a breadth of interaction and congregational participation across all ages. To this end, we encourage variety and creativity whilst maintaining the integrity and core principles of Christian worship. We further rejoice that our congregation is more ethnically diverse than ever before, and we are committed to finding ways to allow this diversity to enrich our worship.

The third step is to brainstorm and prayerfully discern what fresh commitments might be entered into and what new opportunities might be explored. These will be quite specific and will arise out of your own particular context. Here is an example of a checklist of ideas, again under the heading of worship:

1. Conduct a series of studies on the nature of Christian worship, noting in particular current trends, and identifying issues that merit further reflection – e.g., the frequency of the celebration of Holy Communion.
2. Review the physical layout of the church. How might our worship space better serve the principles and dynamics of worship that we believe are important?
3. Build up our pool of people involved in the conduct of public worship, especially in the area of music. Hold training workshops as needed – e.g., in the art of leading a congregation in prayer.
4. Build up our pool of music resources and extend our repertoire of hymns and worship songs, giving particular attention to our New Zealand and Pacific context.
5. Building upon our linkages with organisations in our area, look for worshipping opportunities both on- and off-site—e.g., offering regular devotions and/or worship services in a local retirement home.
6. Organise kids-friendly Christmas and Easter worship services for the Mainly Music Group and their families.
7. Talk with other local churches about extending the range of opportunities for shared worship events.
8. Trial a brief mid-week communion service.

The fourth step is to rank the above possibilities in terms of priority, agree on the level of resourcing needed (money, facilities and personnel), and decide who will take responsibility for what and over what sort of timeframe.

The fifth step is to monitor progress, at least annually, but preferably every six months. Progress should be recorded in the annual reports.

The strategic plan should be reviewed every three years or so.

## **Appendix Five: Tips and Techniques for Chairing or Moderating a Meeting**

**Duration:** Few meetings should need to go for longer than two hours. If more time is needed, consider deferring business to the next scheduled meeting or set up an extra meeting.

### **Who should moderate the meeting?**

The minister is expected to “moderate” the church council. The reason for this is theological: There is no aspect of parish life that should not be informed by and come under the oversight of the Ministry of the Word. When the minister is in the chair, he or she should be referred to as “Moderator”. Moderating a meeting carries two responsibilities: facilitating or chairing the meeting; and maintaining pastoral oversight.

The minister may nominate someone else to chair the meeting in his/her absence.

### **How to keep meetings to time:**

1. **Agenda:** Plan the Agenda carefully – decide what needs to be included and the order in which things should be dealt with. Give a time allocation to each item on the Agenda, allocating the most time to the most important items of business.
2. **Distribution of papers:** Ensure all relevant papers and reports have been distributed in advance of the meeting, and create an expectation that council members will read their papers before they come. Undistributed papers can be tabled at the meeting, but may not be discussed, and any recommendations which they contain may not be voted upon.
3. **Speaking protocols:** Each person may speak once to each item of business. They may only speak twice if the Moderator is satisfied that everyone else has had an opportunity to speak.
4. **Keeping a tight rein on General Business:** All items of General Business should be brought to the attention of the Moderator prior to the start of the meeting, and preferably in time to be included on the Agenda. The Moderator should discuss with the person raising the item of General Business the best way of dealing with it – is this the right forum for the item to be dealt with; how urgent is it; does it need a paper to be written and circulated in time for the next meeting? etc.

### **Ground-rules for discussion:**

1. Confidentiality: What is said in committee stays in committee; and papers that pertain to that meeting should remain confidential to committee members unless a decision is made to circulate them more widely.
2. Being bound by decisions: Once a decision is made on a particular matter, even those that spoke and voted against the motion are bound by the decision. They

cannot speak against the decision in another forum, or disclose the fact that they voted against it, unless they have opted to “record their dissent”.

3. Listening with respect to others. This involves allowing others to speak without interruption, avoiding the use of “passive-aggressive” body language (e.g., rolling of eyes), and not using verbal put-downs.

#### **Tips for facilitating discussion:**

1. There are two ways to have an issue discussed. The first is to have a motion or recommendation formally moved and seconded and then opened up for discussion – see (2) – (8) below for protocols around this. The second is for a (preliminary or general) discussion to be held prior to a motion being put. Under this model, consensus is aimed for by discussion, and then the moderator asks if someone would like to formulate a motion which they think reflects the consensus that was reached. The motion might be modified through further discussion or by the amendment process, and then voted on.
2. Make it clear at the beginning of a discussion what is the issue, recommendation or motion under consideration. When the time is right, someone should formally move the recommendation; another person should second it; and it should then be opened up for discussion and debate. If no one seconds the motion then there is no need to proceed with the discussion. Sometimes a person will second a motion not because they personally support it but because they want to allow it to be discussed.
3. Encourage people to keep their comments brief and to the point. Where somebody is rambling, politely interrupt, say that time is limited, and ask them to get to the point.
4. Provide opportunity for those who have not yet spoken to do so.
5. At some point in the discussion you may want to ask those who have already spoken to refrain from speaking again until others have had a chance to speak.
6. If several people in a row (say, three) have spoken either for against a particular motion, ask if anyone who has a contrary view would like to speak. If no one comes forth, there is probably no need for further discussion and the motion can be put.
7. If, at the end of the discussion, people are not ready to put the motion to the vote, the report can be left to “lie on the table”, for it to be picked up for further discussion at a subsequent meeting. Don’t feel obliged to vote straight after the discussion. The thing about discernment is that you don't need to always rush things. Occasionally you will have to make decisions quickly, but much of what comes before church councils could wait one or two meetings to let things sift out through prayerful consideration of the key issues. Elders and council members can be encouraged to stop and pray at any point in the discussion or voting process. The minister can suggest a pause for prayer, and so can an elder. Sometimes a pause to pray for God's guidance in the discussion can slow things down enough that new ideas emerge.

8. Occasionally a person may say, “Moderator, I move that the motion be put.” This is a procedural motion. It usually means someone feels there has been enough discussion, but sometimes it is used to try to circumvent discussion. If the motion is seconded it should be put straight to the vote without debate.

### **Receiving apologies:**

People who cannot attend the meeting are entitled to have their “apology” recorded. Absentee people who do not give their apology cannot subsequently question a decision with which they might personally disagree. Those who give their apologies can.

### **Conflicts of interest:**

Where a conflict of interest is declared or determined, the Moderator shall formally note the conflict, and have it recorded in the minutes, and either invite the elder or council member to leave the meeting during that item of business or require the elder or council member to remain silent and not be a party to any resolution.

### **Two types of motions:**

There are two types of motions: those that deal with the business itself (“substantive motions”) and those that deal with the way the meeting is run (“procedural motions”). Each motion has to be supported (“seconded”) by another person before it is open for discussion. The Moderator then asks the proposer to speak to the motion. Other members can add to this discussion. The proposer of a substantive motion is normally given a “right of reply” at the end of the discussion and just before the vote is put.

During the course of discussion, someone may move an amendment to the original motion. If someone seconds the amendment, then the amendment is debated. If the amendment is passed, then the amended motion becomes the new substantive motion, which is then opened up for further debate. If the amendment is lost, then debate continues on the original substantive motion.

Debate on an amendment may be avoided if the mover of the original substantive motion declares that they regard the proposed amendment as a “friendly amendment”.

Unlike the mover of a substantive motion, the mover of an amendment does not have a right of reply.

### **Forms of voting:**

For most items of business a verbal “yes” or “no” will suffice. If the vote is close, it is advisable to vote again via a show of hands. On particularly important or sensitive issues, it is advisable to vote by way of secret ballot. Ballot papers should be prepared beforehand, and at least two “scrutineers” should be appointed to collect the ballot papers and count the votes.

Proxy or absentee votes are not allowed in any of the church courts, including congregational meetings. Discernment involves listening to what the Spirit is saying through discussion and debate. How can you do that if you've already decided what your vote will be? It is for this reason that Assembly attendees are called "commissioners", not "delegates". The role of the commissioner is to discern what the Spirit is saying, not merely represent a particular constituency or view point.

### **Determining the voting threshold:**

At the General Assembly the voting threshold for a motion to be passed is 60% rather than a "simple majority" of 50%. Many church councils have chosen to adopt the same or even higher threshold. It is advisable to know what the threshold is before a debate on a contentious issue takes place.

### **Types of decisions:**

People can vote on a recommendation or motion in one of four ways: (1) For (in agreement); (2) Against; (3) Abstain; (4) Against, and record their dissent.

Abstaining means you adopt a neutral position. Reasons for this could be that you don't feel you have enough information on the issue being discussed, or that you have a conflict of interest.

If someone chooses to record their dissent, they must give their reasons for dissent in writing, and these are appended to the Minutes of the meeting. The mover of the motion should also be given the opportunity to offer a written response to the reasons for dissent, and this statement will also be appended to the Minutes. Note: Even in dissenting an elder should always seek to preserve the unity of the church; dissenting does not mean you can then lobby or canvas opinion or fuel dissent within the parish.

### **Keeping minutes and recording discussions:**

The formal record of a meeting is called the Minutes. Keeping accurate Minutes is important. The Minutes of the previous meeting should be circulated with the papers for the current meeting. Someone should move, and another person second, that the Minutes of the previous meeting are accepted as a true and correct record. Both the mover and the seconder must have been at that meeting.

If everyone votes in favour of the motion, it should be recorded in the Minutes as "Agreed", which means it is unanimous.

If the majority of people vote in favour of the motion, it should be recorded as "Carried".

If the majority of people vote against the motion, it should be recorded as "Lost".

There is no need to record verbatim comments of everyone who contributed to a discussion. Simply record the motion, the fact that it was moved and seconded, and the outcome of the vote – “Agreed”, “Carried” or “Lost”. Occasionally a summary of the key points in the discussion is helpful, but keep the detail to a minimum.

### **Communicating decisions:**

Thought should be given as to what should be communicated about a meeting, to whom, what format, and when. A written report is always preferable to simply making the Minutes available, because a report is in narrative form and allows the context of a decision to be described.

### **Example of a Session Agenda:**

Opening Devotions & constitution of the meeting in prayer (10 mins)

Apologies

Personal sharing and prayer support (10 mins)

Pastoral concerns and time of prayer (10 mins)

Theme discussion<sup>5</sup> (30 mins)

Approval of Minutes from previous meeting

Matters Arising (from the Minutes)

Correspondence: Receipt of inwards & approval of outwards

Reports:

    From the Minister(s)

    From the Board of Managers or Administration Committee

    From the Session Committees

General Business

Date of next meeting

Benediction

### **Keeping it relational:**

1. Depending on the time of the meeting, think about preceding or following it with food and fellowship.
2. Aim to be efficient without being clinical; don't hide behind technical points of procedure. Remember, the primary task of the church council is to discern what the Spirit is saying. Don't become so preoccupied with moving through the items of business that you leave no room for prayer and for waiting on God.
3. Keep one eye focused on the business of the meeting; use your other eye to observe pastoral dynamics (Who is saying little, and why? What will be the likely effect of a

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<sup>5</sup> The “theme discussion” could consist of any number of things: a remit from the General Assembly; a biblical or theological issue; a strategic planning issue; a significant business item from one of the reports; an aspect of training for elders; etc.



particular decision on those who hold a minority view? Should we stop and pray for a few minutes to slow down the discussion, reduce the intensity of the conversation or ask for God's guidance? Would it be a good idea to wait until the next meeting to vote?).

4. If tensions become apparent in the meeting, think about how best to handle them. Techniques might include verbal acknowledgement of the tensions, leading in a time of prayer, or asking people to take a 5 minute break while you get alongside those who seem especially worked up about the matter under discussion.
5. Ask if those who hold a minority view on an issue can live with the decision of the majority. Living with a particular decision is not the same as endorsing the decision. In most cases, people will say they can. If they say they cannot, then you can arrange to meet with them to talk about how they process their disappointment in a constructive way.

## **Appendix Six: An Order of Service for the Ordination and Induction of Elders**

*The following liturgy is based on the Church of Scotland's Book of Common Order (1994) and Appendices H-5 and H-9 of the PCANZ's old Book of Order.*

*The ordination and induction takes place during a public service of worship, at an appropriate point, preferably after the sermon.*

*Congregational responses are in bold type and italics.*

### **Prologue** (based on 1 Corinthians 12:4-11)

There are many gifts,

***but it is the same Spirit who give them.***

There are different ways of serving God,

***but it is the same Lord who is served.***

God works through different people in different ways,

***but it is the same God whose purposes are achieved through them all.***

Each one is given a gift by the Spirit,

***to use it for the common good.***

We have the joy of using our gifts as members of the Church of Christ, which is his body continuing his ministry in the world today.

Those who are chosen for the office of eldership are asked to seek the fruit of God's Word in people's lives, to care for God's people and encourage them in the Faith, and to exercise spiritual oversight and leadership within the congregation.

*A brief narrative of the process followed for the election of new elders shall be given by the minister/Moderator or the session/church council clerk.*

### **Preamble**

In the name of the risen and ascended Lord, who gives gifts for building up the body of Christ and sharing in God's mission, we are gathered ...

*either*

to ordain A,B,C, and D  
to the office of eldership  
and to induct them as elders in this congregation.

*or*

to ordain A,B,C, and D  
to the office of eldership  
and to induct them,  
together with E,F,G, and H  
as elders in this congregation.

*or*

to induct E,F,G, and H  
as elders in this congregation.

In this act,  
the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand,  
as part of the holy catholic or universal Church,  
worshipping one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
affirms anew its belief in the Gospel of Jesus Christ,  
and, through the power of the Holy Spirit,  
commits itself afresh to sharing in his life and mission.

We acknowledge the Word of God,  
which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments,  
to be the supreme rule of faith and life.  
We hold as our subordinate standards the Westminster Confession of Faith,  
the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, and Kupu Whakapono.  
We recognise liberty of opinion on such points of doctrine  
as do not enter into the substance of the Reformed Faith,  
and claim the right,  
in dependence on the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit,  
to formulate, interpret, or modify our subordinate standards;  
always in agreement with the Word of God  
and the fundamental doctrines of the Reformed Faith  
contained in the subordinate standards,  
of which agreement the Church itself shall be sole judge.

### **Affirmation**

*The Moderator/minister says to the elders-elect:*

In view of this Declaration, you are now required to answer these questions:

Do you undertake, with God's help,  
the office and ministry of elder,  
encouraging people in the Faith,  
exercising spiritual oversight, leadership and discernment,  
and remaining diligent in prayer and service.

***I do.***

Do you believe the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith contained in the standards of this Church;  
do you promise to seek the unity and peace of this Church,  
to uphold the doctrine, worship, government, and discipline thereof,  
and to take your due part in the administration of its affairs?

***I do.***

The Lord bless you and enable you to keep your promises.

### **Signing the Formula**

*The elders-elect may sign the Formula here or at the conclusion of the service. The Formula reads as follows:*

I believe in the Word of God in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and the fundamental doctrines of Christian Faith contained in the Kupu Whakapono and Commentary, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and other subordinate standards of this Church. I accept that liberty of conviction is recognised in this Church but only on such points as do not enter into the fundamental doctrines of Christian faith contained in the Scriptures and subordinate standards. I acknowledge the Presbyterian government of this Church to be agreeable to the Word of God and promise to submit to it. I promise to observe the order and administration of public worship as allowed in this Church.

### **Prayer**

*The elders-elect may kneel or stand. Other elders may be invited to gather round. The minister/Moderator prays:*

Loving God,  
we give you thanks that by your grace you have called  
A,B, ... G, and H (or these your servants whom we have named before you)  
to lead and care for your people as elders in your Church.  
We commend them to you now  
as we (ordain and) induct them into the office of eldership.  
Grant them the gift of your Holy Spirit  
that their hearts may be set on fire with love for you  
and for those committed to their care.  
Make them pure in heart  
as those who have the mind of Christ.  
Give them vision to discern your purpose  
for the Church and for the world you love.  
Keep them faithful to the end in all their service,

that when the chief shepherd appears,  
they may receive glory, a crown that never fades.  
These things we ask in Jesus' name.

***Amen.***

### **Declaration and Welcome**

*The minister/Moderator says:*

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
the King and the Head of the Church,  
(I declare you to have been ordained to the office of the eldership, and)  
I induct you as elders in this congregation.  
As a sign of our welcome we give you the right hand of fellowship.  
The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

*The elders follow the minister/Moderator in offering the right hand of fellowship.*

### **Renewal of Commitment**

*The minister/Moderator says:*

Christ calls us all to share in his ministry.  
Let us, then, dedicate ourselves anew to his service.  
Please stand.

*To all:*

Members and elders of this congregation:  
putting your whole trust in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord,  
do you commit yourselves to love and serve his Church and Kingdom?

***We do.***

*To the congregation:*

As members of this congregation,  
will you encourage and support your elders,  
and remember them in your prayers?

***We will.***

*To the elders:*

In your service as elders,  
will you seek to be a worthy example  
“in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity”  
to the people you serve,  
God being your helper?

***We will.***

## **Prayer**

*Together:*

***God of grace,***

***you have called us to be servants of Christ Jesus,  
and to share in his eternal ministry of love and reconciliation.***

***Renew our enthusiasm; give us joy in your service,  
that we may declare your wonderful deeds  
and show your love to the world;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.***

*The service continues in the customary manner.*