



The Uniting Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD

Church Council Governance Briefing

Topics to be covered

- Governance and church council oversight
- General good governance principles
- ACNC compliance obligations
- Minute taking requirements / tips



What is governance



Demystifying governance

- Ultimately:
 - doing the right thing
 - accountability, transparency
 - informed decision making
- Good governance is at all levels
- Enabler of good stewardship
 - enable church to be the best it can be
 - support mission and better achieve our purpose



Governance in practice

- Financial accountability
- Property maintenance
- Wise use of resources
- Work, health and safety
- Safe ministry for children



Oversight areas

- Vision
- Strategic and long term direction
- Risk
- Performance
- Legal oversight for operational aspects of the church (compliance, policy e.g. WHS, child safety, property)



General good governance



Doing the right thing

Duty	Detail
Comply with the governing documents (e.g. Regs)	Know them and comply with them, fulfil Reg. responsibilities
Act in good faith in the best interests of the church	Act honestly, in interests of your part of the church
Act for proper purposes	Exercise powers for purposes they were given
Act with care and diligence	Reasonable care and skill, be informed, constructive questions
Don't misuse information or your position	Act honestly, don't use information for personal advantage
Avoid or manage conflicts of interest	Disclose actual/potential/perceived conflicts
Don't act fraudulently	Don't misappropriate property
Manage financial affairs	Monitor finances, don't trade insolvent



Practical governance

- Attend meetings
- Read and reflect on reports prior to the meeting
- Actively participate and have a questioning mind
- Exercise informed and independent judgement
- Keep informed about the life of the church
- Monitor financial state of the church
- Don't use information to advance your own interests



Church council member duties

- Legal oversight
- Responsible for decision making
- Compliance responsibilities (e.g. ACNC, child safety)
- Manage and control property (e.g. use, WHS)
- Oversee finances
- Support available from Presbytery and Synod



Role of chair in supporting governance

- Leadership of the council
- Manage conduct of meetings
- Manage communication at meetings and create a safe and respectful space
- Summarise discussions and direct towards resolution
- Responsible integrity of governance processes
- Set an appropriate agenda
- Facilitate online meetings if required (e.g. COVID-19)



Compliance



General compliance

- Safe Ministry with Children
- Workplace health and safety
- Finances
- Property
- Risk Assessment
- Lay leaders' Code of Conduct



ABN and ACNC

- ABN
 - Congregations should have an ABN
 - Synod office can assist with:
 - registrations/cancellations (governance@ucaql.com.au)
 - GST assistance (Finance)
- ACNC: Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission
 - Congregations are registered charities
 - Generally all congregations are basic religious charities which means you have reduced obligations with the ACNC



ACNC – responsible persons

- All church council members are responsible persons
- Provide timely updates of church council membership to the Synod office (directory@ucaqld.com.au)
- Synod office updates our internal records (which feeds UConnect) and the ACNC records
- Use templates to ensure all information is provided
[Change of key person form](#)
[Change of key person bulk form \(excel\)](#)



ACNC – annual information statement

- Annual lodgement to ACNC, due 6 months following year end
- Lodged by Synod office for most congregations, based on information already provided to us (e.g. annual returns, insurance questionnaire)
- Lodgements must be up-to-date to retain charity status and charity tax concessions



Structural changes

- Update Synod office with any anticipated structural changes (amalgamation, dissolution, change to faith community)
- Synod office can provide advice and assist with ABN/ACNC related actions
- Refer to guideline for help

[Guidelines for congregation changes](#)



Proactive future work

- Keen to move from reactive to proactive
- Undertaking data audit annually
- Engaging with Presbytery annually to review congregations and their structures (e.g. CQ)



Minute taking



Minutes – before the meeting

- Use minute template
- Draft minutes based on agenda and proposed resolutions
- Don't repeat the content of board papers



Minutes – during the meeting

- Capture resolutions and material reasons for those decisions concisely and accurately
- Don't minute a transcript of the discussion- capture sentiment of room
- Include key points of discussion and a sufficient level of detail to support decisions
- Note papers and other materials presented to the meeting



Minutes – after the meeting

- Finalise within a week
- Use non-emotive and impartial language
- Ensure resolutions stand alone – sufficient context/ information to make them understandable in isolation
- Number resolutions for ease of reference
- Resolution register – populate from minutes
- Actions register – populate from minutes



Minutes – tips

- Unless specifically requested to do so, don't attribute discussion to specific individuals (the council acts as a collective)
- Words such as the council 'discussed', 'debated', 'questioned', 'enquired', 'requested information on', 'tested their understanding' can be useful ways to accurately record discussions



Thanks



The Uniting Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD