

The Parish council Handbook for old and new members

Second Edition



**ANGLICAN
DIOCESE OF
MELBOURNE**

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Foreword to the Second Edition

This second edition of the 'Parish Council Handbook' is updated to include reference to changes introduced by amendments made to the *Parish Governance Act 2013* enacted at sessions of the Melbourne diocesan Synod subsequent to the passage of the Act in 2013, up to the 2019 session of Synod.

Whereas the first edition of the 'Parish Council Handbook' included the full text of the *Parish Governance Act 2013*, this second edition does not, in the event that further amendments are made at future sessions of Synod. It is, therefore, advisable then that the reader have access to the current form of the *Parish Governance Act 2013* for ease of reference.

The text of the *Parish Governance Act 2013*, together with that of other acts of the Synod in force, is at the link below:

- <https://www.melbourneanglican.org.au/governance-synod/synod-legislation/>

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Foreword to the first edition

The Anglican Church has a long history of shared governance, both in the context of the parish and, of course, in the synod, in which the ordained leadership of the church acts in consultation and cooperation with the laity, for the corporate good, and the advancement of, God's kingdom.

This useful handbook has been prepared for those who presently take part in the significant responsibility of parish governance by serving as a member of a parish council; and, equally and importantly, for those who may be considering doing so, either now or at a future time. It will also be a useful for those who may have, or who have been invited to, put their name forward for parish council and would like to know what they might be in for!

The handbook is intended to be a practical resource, and for this reason covers, not only the details of parish governance as set out by the *Parish Governance Act 2013*, but also contains a glossary of common terms, and a treasury of prayers for a range of occasions, for use by both individuals and parish council.

The handbook has been written and prepared by Bishop Bradly Billings, who was chair of the parish legislation review committee which drafted the *Parish Governance Act 2013* and presented it to the synod in 2013. Bishop Billings (then an Archdeacon), moved the motion to adopt the new Act, which I was pleased to second. The motion was accepted on the final day of that year's session of synod, with considerable acclaim.

Bishop Billings has been vicar of two parishes (Gisborne and Toorak), an Archdeacon, and is presently the Director of Theological Education and Clergy Wellbeing for the diocese. He has extensive experience in corporate governance, having served previously on two school boards, for several years as a director of Benetas (Anglican Aged Care), and more recently as the Chair and Executive Officer of the Melbourne Anglican Foundation.

The Advocate, Dr Ian Gibson, who substantially drafted the *Parish Governance Act 2013*, applied his considerable expertise and attention to detail in editing the work, suggesting several improvements to the text and clarifying many matters of importance.

Both Bishop Billings and Dr Gibson are extremely well placed, and well qualified, for the task of producing this helpful and concise guide to parish governance for Anglicans in the Diocese of Melbourne.

I commend this useful and accessible handbook to the wider diocese, confident that it will be a blessing and benefit to parish councils everywhere.

Ken A. Spackman, Registrar, 2017

1. The Parish

The Anglican Diocese of Melbourne has in the recent past, as part of its strategic vision and directions, invited its people to ‘see the parish with fresh eyes.’ This entailed doing things like gathering data on who lives in the community, the various activities that take place, and the different groups and organisations present. One suggestion that accompanied the invitation to ‘see the parish with fresh eyes’ was that parishioners take a walk around the surrounding streets and into the shopping centres and other places where people gather, and prayerfully observe the nature of the community. This points to the Anglican understanding of the parish. It refers to a locality, a geographical area, in which people live, work, study, fellowship and form community. Not all ministry is conducted in a parish setting – there are ministries to school communities, to workplaces, prisons, hospitals, aged care facilities, to the defence forces and emergency services, and many others. But all ministry, including parish ministry, does take place in the context of a community, however those communities are constituted, and whatever their size and composition.

This handbook is about parish ministry and, more particularly, about the parish council. So we begin with two fundamental questions. In this first chapter the question, ‘What is a parish?’ And in the second chapter, ‘What is a council?’ This points to the overarching question we are attempting to answer in this handbook, which concerns what happens when those two words, parish and council, come together.

Happily, in relation to our first question, the *Parish Governance Act 2013* section 5 provides a helpful definition. Under the subtitle ‘The Anglican understanding of a parish,’ it reads:

The parish is the geographical unit for organizing the mission of God throughout the Anglican Church within the Diocese of Melbourne. The boundaries of each parish are those approved by the Archbishop in Council. The Anglican Church within the Diocese is constituted of clergy and lay people committed to building up the Body of Christ under the leadership of the Archbishop.

This definition tells us some things of particular importance:

- That the parish is a geographical area (or unit). This means that each parish is especially responsible, in terms of its mission and ministry, for the community or communities within those boundaries (but, importantly, not necessarily for more than this).
- The purpose of organising the diocese into parishes is to facilitate the mission of God. This is, fundamentally, why the parish exists, and why there are one or more places of worship within it – to live out the call to mission that Jesus gave to his Church (Matthew 28.19-20). This is also primarily why the parish has a council, but more on that later.

- The boundaries of each parish are not randomly constituted, nor determined at our own whim or desire, but are those approved by the Archbishop in Council. This alerts us to the fact that all parishes, and all parish councils, work within the confines of the broader structures of the church, such as the Archbishop in Council, and the synod.
- The Anglican Church, we learn, is made up of clergy and laypeople who are committed to building up the Body of Christ. That is, to further enhancing, growing and building this Anglican part of the wider Christian family. The parish, and the parish council, have an important role to play in this. In fact, it is not too much to say that this is a large and important reason why the parish council exists!
- Finally, all of this is done under the leadership of the Archbishop. Because the Anglican Church is an episcopal church (led by bishops), both the diocese as a whole, and the parishes within it, can be thought as being ‘gathered’ around their chief pastor and leader – in the case of Melbourne, this is the Archbishop.

This tells us quite a bit about the meaning and purpose of the parish, and how it relates to the diocese in which it is located. It is worth noting, at this point, that the parish is the smallest unit of organisation within the Anglican Church. It is, therefore, inherently ‘local.’ For this reason, the name of each parish will normally include the place in which it is physically located. The parish is, however, not the only unit making up the whole of the church, but is one part within a much larger whole.

There is, for example, a parish of Malvern (St George’s), which has particular responsibility for Anglican ministry in the inner south eastern suburb of Malvern. The parish of Malvern is one small part of a much larger whole, which can be described in the following way:

- i. The parish of Malvern is included in the deanery of Stonnington, which includes several other parishes in the same part of Melbourne. The clergy and authorised lay ministers who are licensed to the parishes of the deanery meet together regularly for mutual prayer, support and encouragement.
- ii. The deanery of Stonnington is within the archdeaconry of Stonnington, whose Archdeacon also has administrative and missional responsibilities and duties for both the Stonnington deanery and the neighbouring deanery of GlenEira.
- iii. The parish of Malvern, the deanery of Stonnington, and the archdeaconry of Stonnington and Glen Eira, are each within one of the three areas of episcopal care (Marmingatha) in the diocese, each overseen by an assistant bishop.
- iv. The Diocese of Melbourne is, in turn, one diocese in the ecclesiastical province of Victoria, which also includes, in addition to Melbourne, the dioceses of Ballarat, Bendigo, Gippsland and Wangaratta.
- v. The Diocese of Melbourne is one diocese among the 23 individual dioceses that make up the Anglican Church of Australia.

- vi. The Anglican Church of Australia is, in turn, one part of the worldwide Anglican Communion, made up of those national churches having their historic origins in the Church of England.
- vii. The worldwide Anglican Communion is itself a part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church that stretches back in time all the way to Jesus and the first apostles, and which continues to exist today in a variety of forms and expressions across the globe.

Hence, we can understand the parish to be one part of the universal Christian church, and a small, but important part, in the context of that larger whole. Furthermore, the nature of the parishes we are concerned with in this book are units within the Anglican Church, and a part of the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne. As such, the parish, through its clergy and its laypeople, are shaped and informed by the history and traditions, and the faith and practice, of the Anglican Church. This inevitably invites the question of what form that history and that tradition takes, and of what the content and particularities of that faith and practice might be. Here, the constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia is especially helpful, for it sets out, in its fundamental declarations, a helpful summary of how the Anglican Church understands itself within the broader context of the worldwide Christian church, and in the light of its own history and traditions, together with the sources of its faith and practice.

The 'fundamental declarations' (sections 1,2 and 3) of the constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia, are:

(1) The Anglican Church of Australia, being a part of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ, holds the Christian Faith as professed by the Church of Christ from primitive times and in particular as set forth in the creeds known as the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed.

(2) This Church receives all the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as being the ultimate rule and standard of faith given by inspiration of God and containing all things necessary for salvation.

(3) This Church will ever obey the commands of Christ, teach His doctrine, administer His sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, follow and uphold His discipline and preserve the three orders of bishops, priests and deacons in the sacred ministry.

The ruling principles (section 4) further state; 'this Church, being derived from the Church of England, retains and approves the doctrine and principles of the Church of England embodied in the Book of Common Prayer together with the Form and Manner of Making Ordaining and Consecrating of Bishops, Priests and Deacons and in the Articles of Religion sometimes called the Thirty-nine Articles.'

This gives us a helpful overview of the Anglican understanding of the parish in the context of the larger whole of the Christian church, and of its purpose in terms of what it is called to do and proclaim. It reminds us that the parish is a missional unit. Those who make up the people of God in that particular place are a sign, and hopefully a visible and active sign, of the presence of God in the midst of that community. As Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) so beautifully put it:

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

2. The Council

The parish council has its origins in the way the Church of England organised itself from the sixteenth century onwards. At that time the body responsible for governing the affairs of the geographical area of the parish was called a vestry, as it often met in the church vestry (the room in a church where the clergy robe or 'vest' before a service of worship). For centuries in England the vestry had charge of both church related (or ecclesiastical) and civic affairs for everyone who lived in the parish area, whether they attended the church or not. In England, this terminology was changed in 1919 when the Parochial Church Council, or PCC, replaced the vestry as the governing body within the Church of England.¹ In the Diocese of Melbourne the old term vestry continued to be used of what is now the parish council, right up until the adoption of the *Parish Governance Act 2013* at the 2013 session of synod.

The Diocese of Melbourne has historically understood itself to be 'episcopally led,' that is led by bishops, and 'synodically governed,' in that a representative body of clergy and laypeople gather in the context of synod to consult together and to vote on matters of importance to the life of the church. In a parish setting, this same principle finds expression in the form of the parish council, wherein the vicar of the parish shares leadership, decision making, and matters requiring general consultation and consensus, with the laypeople who make up the parish council.

Parish rules for meetings and officers: The parish council is established by the parish rules for meetings and officers, which set out the procedure for calling and holding the annual meeting, and for the election and appointment of members of the parish council. Those responsible for governance in each parish need to be familiar with the parish rules for meetings and officers. Model rules are contained in a schedule to the Parish Governance Act. These are the default rules. Each parish may decide to modify the model or default rules in certain ways permitted by the Act. If modified, the new set of rules must be lodged with the registrar and agreed to afresh at least every 10 years.

- See the parish rules for meetings and officers (Schedule 1 of the *Parish Governance Act 2013*).

It is further important to understand that, whilst it may look like a board or council with various powers and functions, the parish council has as its primary focus the worship of Almighty God, and the advancement of the good news about his son Jesus Christ. The parish council is, corporately, a disciple and follower of Christ, as all Christians are individually. Whilst elections, motions, voting, and the very title 'council' suggest the parish council has

¹ Martin Davie, *A guide to the Church of England* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), p. 47.

some of the powers and functions of like secular bodies, and whilst this is sometimes true in certain situations, its model is in fact that of the servant leadership of Christ himself, and its aim is the furtherance of the good news about him.

It is further important, then, to understand that the parish council is a council, it is not a board or an executive, and its members are not, and do not function as directors, nor do they have executive powers. The council is first and foremost a consultative body, called together to consult, with God, and with each other, so as to discern, insofar as it is humanly possible to do so, God's will for the church in that place.

Being a member of such a body is an extraordinary honour: In the long history of our local churches... parish council members and church leaders are entrusted with the care of the church as co-workers with God, consulting together, building on the past history of the people of God in that place, but also seeking God's will in building the future growth and development of the life of the church.²

The members of the parish council come together, then, to consult on matters of importance to the community they serve, seeking discernment regarding the will of God in the context of the decisions they must make, and in the discharging of those responsibilities. Its members should not be seeking to impose their will, to advance an agenda, or represent 'interest groups' within the parish, but should be constantly engaged in a process of discerning where God is leading the parish and the community they serve. Essentially, the parish council is about service, not power; its goal is missional, and it strives to be a blessing to those it serves.

Mark Tanner, in his guide for parish council members in the Church of England, sums this up well in asserting:

A good PCC (Parochial Church Council) is a place of grace, forgiveness, prayer, wisdom and hope: it is part of Christ's body, his bride, his Church. It strives to be constructive, co-operative and cheerful. It looks up to God, looks out to the world, looks forward faithfully, and looks after others. It thinks, prays, wrestles, argues, laughs and cries, and it does it all with integrity and humility. It makes mistakes, falls short, struggles with pain, and it does all this with the same grace with which it celebrates success and the joyful moments of church life.³

Grace is a good theological word to describe the ideal operation of a parish council. All conversations, all discussions, all personal interactions, and all decisions, should be thoroughly grounded in, and informed by, the grace of God that is demonstrated most

² Paul Bayes & Tim Sledge, *Mission-Shaped parish: traditional church in a changing context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2009), p. 108.

³ *The PCC Member's Essential Guide: A beginners guide to hold on to!* (London: Church House Publishing, 2015), p. 8.

vividly in the life, death and resurrection of his son Jesus Christ, and ought to be reflective of the distinctly Christian character to which we are called as both individuals, and together.

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive. Above all, clothe yourself with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts (Colossians 3.12-15a).

3. Composition of the Parish council

The parish council includes the vicar of the parish and the churchwardens, together with a number of other laypersons who are either elected at the annual meeting, or appointed by the vicar.

Qualification for membership

In order to be elected or appointed to the parish council a person must be on the electoral roll of the parish, and must be a communicant member of the Anglican Church of Australia (Rule 13.1). The provisions for being included on the parish electoral roll are set out in the *Parish Governance Act 2013* section 9. The term communicant member is, notoriously, fluidly defined to mean a person eligible to receive the sacrament of Holy Communion in an Anglican Church. This has been determined, in the Diocese of Melbourne, to mean a person who is either confirmed or has been received into communicant membership of the Anglican Church of Australia.

Even if on the parish electoral roll, and a communicant member, a person will be disqualified from holding office, including serving on parish council, if they are made ineligible by section 19 of the *Parish Governance Act 2013*, which disqualifies (i) an undischarged bankrupt, (ii) the spouse or partner of a current member of the council or a churchwarden, (iii) persons who have been convicted of a criminal offence punishable by more than five years imprisonment, and (iv) a person subject to a prohibition or order under the *Professional Standards Act*.

Composition

The composition of the parish council is set out in to the parish rules for meetings and officers, which state (Rule 10.1) that the parish council consists of:

- (a) the vicar;
- (b) three churchwardens (two elected, one appointed); and
- (c) nine others, one third (3) nominated by the vicar and two-thirds (6) elected by the parishioners.

Whilst this is the 'default,' Rule 10.1 provides for alternatives that allow the parish to have as many as 12 and as few as 3 members in category (c).

However many parishioners are appointed and elected, the parish council, in every place, will always, by virtue of Rule 10.1, include:

- the vicar, and;
- three churchwardens.

Upon entering the room for the first time, the new parish council member can expect then to find present the vicar of the parish (or the person who is acting as vicar if there is a vacancy), and three churchwardens, together with the number of members elected by the annual meeting and appointed by the vicar.

Term of Office

Apart from the vicar, and regardless of whether elected or appointed by the vicar, the term of office for each member of the parish council, including the churchwardens, is normally one year, concluding at the end of the next annual meeting (Rule 12.1). The composition of the parish council may, therefore, change at each annual meeting.

A parish may, however, adopt one of two permitted alternatives to Rule 12.2 or Rule 12.3 that provide for all, or some, of the churchwardens and / or parish council members to have overlapping two year terms.

In all cases, Rule 13.2 requires that any layperson who has been a member of the parish council for six continuous years is ineligible for election or appointment as a churchwarden, or as a member of parish council, for the next twelve months (i.e. after serving for six continuous years, a person must have a 'sabbatical' year off, before being elected or appointed again).

The Vicar

The vicar is the ordained clergy person licensed to the parish by the Archbishop, or in the event of a vacancy in the leadership of the parish, the clergy person licensed by the Archbishop to act as the vicar (called a locum). In circumstances of doubt, or if the person concerned is absent from the parish, the Archdeacon acts as the vicar. The vicar has a distinct role in the governance and management of the parish, which is set out in the *Parish Governance Act 2013* section 24 (c) and (d), which prescribe that the vicar:

(c) works in cooperation with the churchwardens and parish council in ensuring that the governance and management of the parish serves the identity and whole mission of the church;

(d) exercises a "presidential" role by chairing the parish council, the vestry and statutory parish meetings, or by appointing other fit persons to chair such meetings as provided for by this Act and the parish rules for meetings and officers, and is entitled to exercise a vote at a meeting of the parish council or a vestry (whether chairing the meeting or not), but is not entitled to exercise a vote at statutory parish meetings.

The vicar is always a member of the parish council by virtue of Rule 10.1a. The reality is, of course, that every community needs a leader, and, in the context of an Anglican parish, the vicar is that leader. Further, like all organisations, someone needs to ensure the mechanics of communal life are in place. As John Pritchard explains, 'certain things have to be done in the life of the local church if it is to bear witness to Christ... services have to be

held; people have to be cared for; Parochial Church Councils have to meet.’⁵ The vicar is the person charged by the Archbishop to lead, manage and organise a parish, and to arrange the affairs of the parish, so that its mission and ministry not only happens, but is enhanced. Importantly, the vicar, as the leader of the parish, sets the culture, and bears ultimate responsibility for the good order and operation of all aspects of the parish.

The Churchwardens

The churchwardens are the senior laypersons in a parish. Of the three churchwardens, two will be elected at the annual meeting (sometimes called ‘peoples’ wardens’) and one will be appointed by the vicar (sometimes referred to as the ‘vicar’s warden’). There is no distinction or hierarchy amongst the churchwardens. Together the churchwardens have some particular responsibilities that are set out in the *Parish Governance Act 2013* section 23.

- (1) Subject to this Act, the churchwardens of a parish are responsible for—
- (a) the care and maintenance of the church, the vicarage and other accommodation provided by the parish for the staff of the parish, the church grounds, and all other buildings and property of the parish;
 - (b) the care of the furniture of the worship centres and of all things necessary for the conduct of public worship, and for providing everything necessary for the conduct of public worship, including the bread and wine for the Holy Communion;
 - (c) keeping in order the worship centres and their grounds and seeing that everything in and about the worship centres is fit and in proper order for the due performance of public worship;
 - (d) keeping order in the worship centres during public worship and providing for the due seating of the congregation and the collection of their offerings;
 - (e) reporting to the parish council all repairs or alterations required in the fabric, fittings or furniture of the worship centres and the fabric and fittings of the vicarage;
 - (f) complying with any laws of the Commonwealth of Australia, the State of Victoria or any municipality in which the parish has property that impose mandatory requirements applicable to the land, buildings and operations of the parish; and
 - (g) the other functions and responsibilities imposed on them by this Act.

These are distinctive and important responsibilities that overlap with, and will require support from, the parish council, if they are to be properly discharged.

⁵ John Pritchard, *The life and work of a priest* (London: SPCK, 2008), p. 140.

Office Bearers

In addition to the vicar and churchwardens, some members of the parish council will also have particular roles and functions. Most of the provisions for such roles and functions are to be found in the parish rules for meetings and officers.

- The **Chairperson** is normally the vicar who, in the words of the *Parish Governance Act 2013* section 24 (d), 'exercises a "presidential" role by chairing the parish council.' As envisaged by that same section, however, the vicar may also appoint 'other fit persons to chair' the parish council in his or her place. Hence Rule 16, *Chairing meetings of the parish council*, states that the chair of the parish council is the vicar, but further provides for the possibility that the vicar may nominate a member of the parish council to be chair (Rule 16.1b). The chairperson occupies the most important role on the parish council, and the vicar should carefully consider whether he or she is the person best qualified to perform that role, or whether another member of the parish council is better suited to be its chairperson. Research in the business sector has shown that a very high degree of a board's effectiveness depends on the chair, who sets the agenda and determines how business is conducted.⁶ In circumstances where both the vicar and a person nominated by the vicar to chair the parish council are not present at a meeting, the parish council may choose another member to be chair (Rule 16.1b). The vicar, whether chairing the meeting or not, is entitled to exercise a vote at a meeting of the parish council.
- The **Parish Treasurer** is appointed by the churchwardens (Rule 18.1), unless the parish concerned has adopted one of the permitted variations at Rule 10.1 which provide for the annual meeting to elect the treasurer, or if the parish concerned has adopted the permitted variation at Rule 18.1 which provides for the parish council to elect the treasurer. Regardless of whether appointed or elected, the treasurer must be a parishioner, and cannot also be a churchwarden without the approval of the Archbishop in Council (Rule 18.2). The treasurer is always a member of the parish council, and if not an appointed or elected member of the parish council at the time of being appointed or elected treasurer, automatically becomes one (Rule 18.3).

Rule 18.4 sets out the responsibilities of the parish treasurer as:

- (a) ensuring the proper banking of all moneys of the parish and the proper payment of all amounts payable by the parish;
- (b) maintaining proper financial records of the parish;
- (c) reporting to each meeting of the parish council on the financial affairs of the parish, including projected outcomes in accordance with the annual budget of the

⁶ Kevin Giles, *Making good churches better: A workbook for Church councils and Church leaders* (Melbourne: Acorn Press, 2001), p. 153.

council;

(d) preparing forward estimates of income and expenditure in accordance with strategies and plans adopted by the council;

(e) ensuring that the accounts of the parish are audited or assessed as required by the Act; and

(f) preparing the annual financial report to the annual meeting.

- The **Parish Secretary** is always a lay member of the parish council (i.e. the parish secretary cannot be the vicar or another cleric). The parish secretary is appointed by the parish council (Rule 19.1), unless the parish concerned has adopted one of the permitted variations at Rule 10.1 which provide for the annual meeting to elect the parish secretary, or if the parish concerned has adopted the permitted variation at Rule 19.1 which provides for the churchwardens to appoint a lay member of the parish council as the parish secretary.

Rule 19.2 states that the duties of the parish secretary are determined by the parish council, however the permitted variations provide an indication of what those duties are likely to entail. They include:

(a) Ensuring the minutes of parish meetings are taken and maintained;

(b) Sending and receiving correspondence on behalf of the parish;

(c) Maintaining an up to date compilation of the legal requirements applying to the parish;

(d) Assisting the churchwardens and members of the parish council comply with the legal requirements placed upon them.

Rule 19.2 allows for further duties to be inserted at the discretion of the parish concerned.

Others may attend

Two further categories of persons may also attend meetings of the parish council under the provisions of Rule 10.3. These are other persons in Holy Orders (i.e. ordained clergy) who are licensed to the parish, or authorised to conduct services in the parish, and lay persons appointed to stipendiary (paid) roles in the parish who are not otherwise members of the parish council. Typically these will be assistant curates or assistant priests, and authorised lay ministers leading the parish's children's ministry, youth ministry, or another form of pastoral ministry. As a matter of convention and courtesy they would normally attend at the invitation of the vicar. Parishes may further adopt alternatives to Rule 10.3 that would enable others, such as a director of music for example, to also attend meetings of the parish council. Anyone attending meetings of the parish council under this category (Rule 10.3) may speak at the meeting, but is not entitled to move or second motions, or vote.

It is further possible, under Rule 10.2, that the parish council may co-opt a parishioner, except for a parishioner ineligible under Rule 13, to assist the parish council in its business for a period of time; or for a person who is not a parishioner to be co-opted in the same way, as long as they are not a person ineligible under Rule 13. If the parish council does co-opt people in this way to assist it, the person attending under these provisions, as set out in Rules 10.2 and 10.4, may speak at the meeting, but is not entitled to vote.

In addition to this, and from time to time depending on the circumstances of the parish and the business at hand, it may be desirable or necessary for members of the wider church to attend a meeting of the parish council. These may include, but are not necessarily limited to, the Area Dean, the Archdeacon, and the Bishop.

- The **Area Dean** is normally a vicar in the same geographical area (the 'deanery') who has been appointed by the Archbishop to organise meetings of the clergy in that deanery and to exercise a ministry of pastoral care to them.
- The **Archdeacon** is appointed by the Archbishop and has a particular role in the administrative, governance and missional needs of the clergy and parishes in an area, often comprising one or two deaneries. The Archdeacon is the external person most likely to appear at meetings of the parish council, especially if there is an interregnum (the time between the departure of one vicar and the appointment of the next vicar), a matter of particular strategic importance, or a difficulty of some nature.
- The **Bishop** is the senior ordained cleric with overall responsibility for the mission and ministry of a Diocese. In Melbourne, the Archbishop is the most senior cleric, and due to the size of the diocese, is assisted by one or more Assistant Bishops.

Vacancies

A vacancy may occur if a member of the parish council resigns, ceases to be a parishioner, becomes a disqualified person under section 19 of the *Parish Governance Act 2013*, or is absent for three consecutive meetings without being granted a leave of absence, in which case their place on the parish council may be declared vacant (Rule 14.1).

A vacancy may also be created through a lack of nominees at the annual meeting.

When there is a vacancy, the position may be filled in these two ways.

- i. If the vacancy is for a churchwarden or a member of the parish council appointed by the vicar, the vicar may appoint another person to fill the vacancy (Rule 15.1);
- ii. If the vacancy is for a churchwarden or a member of the parish council elected by an annual meeting, the parish council may appoint another person to fill the vacancy.

A special election meeting is convened in the event that a vacancy causes the number of lay members of the parish council to fall to less than half its total complement of elected and appointed members (Rule 5.1).

If necessary, if a person vacating a position held office as a churchwarden, the parish treasurer, or parish secretary, another member of the parish council qualified under the Act to do so may fill the vacancy and take up the role vacated (Rule 15.2).

All members are full members

Whilst some of the parish council members occupy particular roles, and whilst some, such as the churchwardens, have particular responsibilities and duties under the Act that exceed those of other members of the parish council, there ought to be no hierarchy of membership when the parish council meets and as it conducts its business. Each member of the parish council is a full member, with the same rights to speak, be heard, and to contribute to decisions, as any other member.

Brother, sister let me serve you.
Let me be as Christ to you.
Pray that I might have the grace
to let you be my servant, too.
(Richard Gillard, 1976).

4. Functions of the Parish council

An unfortunate, but much heard, statement in the life of the church is that no one wants to be on parish council, or that being appointed or elected to a parish council is somehow a task to be endured. The stereotype is of long, boring meetings, dominated by one or two people, in which battles rage into the night over the colour of the carpet or some other inane matter. As Kevin Giles notes, in his *Making Good Churches Better*, too many members have approached the monthly council meeting with dread, anticipating a conflict-ridden talkfest that achieves little.⁷ On the other hand, some vicars under-utilise the parish council at best, and at worst, see and treat it as a thing one must 'get through' rather than an opportunity for sharing mission and ministry.⁸

Even if such attitudes have their basis in an element of past truth, such a picture of the work and purpose of the parish council is a long way from the ideal, and, in most places, a long way from the reality. The parish council is one of the primary ways in which those who make up the worshipping community in a particular place (the parishioners), participate with the clergy in leading and shaping the mission and ministry of God's church in that place. This is, surely, an important and weighty responsibility, to be taken seriously, and only accepted after considerable prayerful reflection and thought. Whilst matters of administration and governance, finance, property, and compliance, are a necessary part of the parish council's responsibility and must be attended to as a matter of good governance and stewardship, it is also the case that the parish council shares in the conduct of a parish's mission, and is called to focus on evangelism and outreach so that the community may grow and prosper in its proclamation of the good news about the person of Jesus Christ.

Further, it is not the case that a parish council meeting need be dull, or overly long and tedious. Much will rest on the capability of the chair, but in essence, there is no reason why a parish council need not be a place of warm engagement in mission, and its business ably executed in a timely manner, leaving room for prayer and fellowship among its members.

Functions and purpose

The *Parish Governance Act 2013* section 25 sets out and describes the particular functions of the parish council.

- i. The parish council is 'to promote the whole mission of the church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical.' This is very broad, and includes and embraces the ministry of pastoral care and concern for others in the parish; the evangelistic ministry of the church which may encompass its outreach activities and strategies for

⁷ *Making good churches better: A workbook for Church councils and Church leaders* (Melbourne: Acorn Press, 2001), p. 147.

⁸ So David Ison (Ed), *The vicar's guide: Life and ministry in the parish* (London: Church House Publishing, 2008), p. 115.

- growth; the social life of the parish; and ecumenical affairs, in particular the opportunities for working collaboratively with other Christian churches in the parish area.
- ii. The parish council assists the churchwardens in the discharge of their responsibilities. This is, again, a broad statement that recognises the considerable weight of responsibility the churchwardens bear. A good parish council will be constantly seeking to assist the churchwardens in their several areas of responsibility, and looking for opportunities to share the burden with them.
 - iii. From time to time a parish council may consider matters of particular public interest and importance concerning the Anglican Church, and might determine how to respond to them. This might arise as a result of a current matter of debate or concern in the community, especially one affecting the area in which the parish is located in some way. It should be noted that a parish council cannot make any determination or declaration regarding the doctrine, or beliefs and practices, of the Anglican Church, as any such matters, insofar as they can be changed at all, need to be considered in the context of another body such as the synod of the diocese or the general synod of the national church.
 - iv. There may be occasions whereby the parish council may wish to raise a matter of concern or importance to it by referring that matter in some way to the synod. The synod may also pass legislation or motions that have an impact on the operation of the parish council, and which may require action by the parish council in order to be put into effect.
 - v. The parish council must, in the words of the *Parish Governance Act 2013*, 'consult together on matters of general concern and importance to the parish.' Again, this is an intentionally broad statement, that leaves open the possibility the parish council will have a significant, and wide ranging role in the affairs of the parish, especially those matters that may be of particular concern and importance to the parishioners. It is very instructive that the two key words in this clause are 'consult' and 'parish.' Consultation together, in the form of its regular meetings, and taking into consideration the views of all of its members, is the essence of the life and function of the parish council. Further, those matters of importance about which the council consult are for the whole of the parish, which in Anglican polity, implies both those who are parishioners and worshipping members of the parish church, but goes beyond this to encompass also those living in the geographical area of the parish whether they actively attend the parish church or not.

Risk Management and Professional Standards

The parish council must have in place, and must review annually, a plan setting out the material risks and the mitigation strategies affecting the parish. This is an important matter of good governance and stewardship, noting the accountability of the parish to its community, and the imperative that the church be a place of welcome and safety for all -

Parish Governance Act 2013 section 25(3). This includes, and embraces, matters of occupational health and safety (OH&S), together with safeguarding requirements, such as police checks of all parish staff and volunteers, and ensuring those who are required to by the nature of their roles do have a current working with children card (WWCC).

A table showing which category of church worker should have one or more of the working with children card and / or a police check, and who should have undertaken Professional Standards training, as determined by the Archbishop in Council, is available from Registry.

To fulfil its obligations in this area, the parish council should:

- i. Maintain a register of the risks and hazards identified by an annual OH&S review, together with the mitigation strategies in place and corresponding action items;
- ii. Keep and maintain in an accessible place a list of all current policies, in particular those applying to all church workers, both paid and voluntary;
- iii. Keep a register of who in the parish must have a working with children card and / or a police check, and ensure these are current for each person.

The parish council should be proactive in setting within the parish a culture of safety and compliance, and in ensuring the necessary actions are taken. It is good practice, then, that child safety, professional standards compliance, and occupational health and safety, be a standing item on the agenda.

Finances

The *Parish Governance Act 2013* sections 33, 34 and 35 set out the particular financial responsibilities and functions of the parish council, which include and embrace the following:

- i. The parish council has general oversight, or direction, for the administration of all parish finances - *Parish Governance Act 2013* s33(1);
- ii. The parish council approves the budget for the year in which the annual meeting takes place, which it then presents to the annual meeting - *Parish Governance Act 2013* s 33(2);
- iii. The parish council has power to alter the budget to respond to unforeseen, and some other, circumstances - *Parish Governance Act 2013* s33(4);
- iv. The parish council must put in place a system for monitoring how parish funds may be spent, and by whom, and how liabilities or expenses may be incurred by the parish, and by whom - *Parish Governance Act 2013* s 34(6);

- v. The parish council must ensure that certain things are paid from its funds and, in the context of its budget must specify the amount applicable to meet these expenses. These include the supply of all things necessary for the conduct of public worship, the remuneration of parish staff, the payment of insurance premiums, the repayment of monies borrowed for building projects, and payment of the annual diocesan assessment - *Parish Governance Act 2013* s 33(3) and s 35.

The signatories to the parish's bank account(s) are automatically the churchwardens and parish treasurer, however the parish council may appoint other signatories. The vicar must have no role in relation to the management of parish finances.

The churchwardens have additional and specific responsibilities in relation to parish finances, including ensuring receiving the annual accounts from the parish treasurer and ensuring that they are audited or independently examined.

Buildings and property

The parish council have some particular responsibilities in relation to the parish property and buildings, which are set out in the *Parish Governance Act 2013* section 37.

- i. The parish council must ensure that the uses of all of the parish property are consistent with the fundamental beliefs and practices of the Christian church in general, and with the good name and public reputation of the Anglican Church in particular. This may entail regulating the hire and use of the parish hall, for instance, as well as other buildings and facilities - *Parish Governance Act 2013* s37(1);
- ii. The parish council have a role, alongside the vicar, churchwardens and the Archbishop, in approving the altering of any existing fittings, furniture or fabric in the church, the addition of any new fittings, furniture, or fabric, and the removal of any existing ones - *Parish Governance Act 2013* s 37(3). Note: a monument or memorial cannot be fixed inside a church without a faculty being obtained from the Archbishop, and no monument or memorial for which a faculty has been previously obtained can be removed without written permission from the Archbishop - *Parish Governance Act 2013* s 37(4-5).

Other matters

A number of other requirements are placed upon the parish council by section 25 of the *Parish Governance Act 2013*. These include, but are not limited to:

- i. The parish council must take into consideration any expression of opinion by a statutory meeting of the parishioners. Typically this will be the annual meeting of parishioners, which may, for instance, resolve to ask the parish council to investigate something, or take a certain course of action - *Parish Governance Act 2013* s22(1);

- ii. The parish council must determine the amount of funds that are to be made available for the purpose of paying the parish clergy, lay ministers and other parish staff - *Parish Governance Act 2013 s 27(1)*;
- iii. If the vicar wishes to reside beyond the geographical area of the parish boundaries, the parish council is to be consulted - *Parish Governance Act 2013 s 38(5)*;
- iv. The time and mode of conducting the principal service of worship in a worship centre of the parish cannot be changed without the consent of both the vicar and the parish council - *Parish Governance Act 2013 s 40(5)*;
- v. The parish council must give written consent for a periodic review of the parish, as set out in section 55 of the *Parish Governance Act 2013*, to be conducted - *Parish Governance Act 2013 s 55(1)*;
- vi. The parish council is required to give written consent to any agreement for the parish to share resources, ministry, or another activity, with another parish - *Parish Governance Act 2013 s 60(2)*;
- vii. Particular processes will apply to the parish council of a parish that is in special circumstances by virtue of it being designated a 'supported parish' under the provisions of the *Parish Governance Act 2013* section 61, or in accordance with section 62 as a parish under 'review,' or in accordance with section 72 if a parish comes 'under consideration for discontinuance.'

Evaluation

Although it is not required by the *Parish Governance Act 2013*, it may be helpful, in some instances and in some contexts, for the parish council to evaluate itself in some way. This is standard practice in many secular boards and councils, which undertake an annual stocktake of the proceedings of the council, its composition, and the extent to which it is fulfilling its purposes and achieving its objectives. Various instruments may be used for this, from an open plenary session, to a simple survey, or a facilitated session with a consultant.

Shaping mission and values

The legal language in which the *Parish Governance Act 2013* is necessarily expressed gives all of this a somewhat bureaucratic, if not forensic, feel. In the midst of necessary matters of governance, finance, the maintenance of property and the like, it can be easy for a parish council to become bogged down in what might seem like issues of red tape and compliance, and to develop a culture that takes it away from the core business of the mission and ministry of the church. The reality is, however, that buildings, property, finance and the like are all, in themselves, missional matters too, even if they may not feel like it – for if the administrative and financial wheels of the parish are not turning as they should be, its mission and ministry will soon be impeded, if not stalled. Even so, a parish council should be doing more than ensuring its particular responsibilities in corporate governance, as set out above, are being met.

The parish council has an overall responsibility for what might be summed up as the ‘whole mission of the parish,’ as well as for shaping and influencing the values, culture and character of the parish and the people who form community in it. This is indeed a high calling, and may extend from devising, for example, in consultation with the vicar and others, a parish mission action plan (or MAP), developing a parish policy for a range of matters that might include things like respectful behaviour and language, to who has access to the parish website and Facebook pages, and much more. In many places a parish will have goals or objectives, often expressed as a parish vision or mission statement, and it will be incumbent upon the parish council to monitor progress toward achieving these and in aligning its activities with them.

It can be further useful, and at times important, to develop and make known some key, agreed statements about purpose and mission, especially where these might give rise to conflict. As Bob Jackson advises, in his highly informative and useful *Hope for the Church*, a well worded policy on a matter of contention in a parish, agreed to by the parish council, greatly assists in setting the agenda for what is, and what is not important, serves to protect the vicar and others by enabling them to focus on the matters identified as mission critical, and enables all to know what the consensus view is on that issue.⁹

Because it is easy to become bogged down in small details and to be delayed by matters of minor importance, and because time and resources are limited, each parish council will need to find ways of keeping mission and ministry at the forefront of their business. These might include facilitated sessions working through a resource, developing a mission action plan, or producing a parish profile and vision statement.

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age’ (Matthew 28.16-20).

⁹ Bob Jackson, *Hope for the Church: Contemporary strategies for growth* (London: Church House Publishing, 2002), p. 154.

5. Communication and Representation

Although sometimes heard in the context of a discussion concerning parish council, members of a parish council should not see themselves as in some way 'representing' groups or organisations within the parish.

Despite how a person came to be a member of the parish council, and whether elected or appointed, all of the members of the parish council bear a primary responsibility under the *Parish Governance Act 2013* for the whole mission and ministry of the parish, and not for one sector, group or 'faction' within it. Deliberations and discussion, and decisions, should be taken with the best outcome for the whole of the parish in mind, with the effects and implications for individuals and groups within the parish being, of course, a valid part of the decision making. Once a decision has been taken legitimately, and with the consent of the majority present, all members of the parish council bear responsibility for it in a corporate way, and should be able to clearly and effectively communicate to the parishioners what the decision is, what it means, and the reasons for which it was taken.

Members of a parish will often, rightly and naturally, approach those who are on the parish council with a particular issue of concern or interest. Parish council members should be always open to communication to, and with, parishioners, and should, therefore, be willing to listen respectfully to parishioners approaching them with such matters. If the matter is a difficult or divisive one, it will often be wise and necessary to refer to the vicar and / or churchwardens, or to ask the parishioner concerned to consider writing a letter setting out their question or issue of concern, addressed to the parish secretary, so that the matter can be considered as correspondence in the context of a meeting of the parish council. Individual parish council members should not normally take up, or advocate for, a particular cause or matter in the context of the meeting without giving the chair the courtesy of knowing that the matter is to be raised, especially where it may be difficult or divisive, or delay the meeting.

Because matters of faith and belief are inherently personal, and will be deeply held and valued by those who sit on a parish council, as will be the commitment of the parish council members to their parish, it is understandable that some things may evoke a passionate or emotional response. Further, some matters may result in opposing positions being taken, and contrary views being expressed. This will be common to every board or council, and ought not be surprising or distressing on a purely human level. The primary, and very significant, difference between a parish council and another board, committee or council, is that a parish council is a corporate disciple of our Lord, whose members are all people expressing Christian faith. The manner in which the business of a parish council is conducted, the way members relate to and interact with each other, and the language used, should always be reflective, then, of this.

These words of St Paul, writing to the Romans, are as fine a summary of the marks and characteristics of Christian behaviour as ever written. Each parish council member would do well to have them firmly in mind as they come together around the table,

remembering always in whose name they meet.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all (Romans 12.9-18).

6. Other Committees, Groups or Teams

The *Parish Governance Act 2013* is silent on the possibility of the parish council setting up its own committees, although this is a common and often useful practice. Given their distinctive and collective responsibilities, it is to be assumed that the churchwardens will meet regularly, usually with the vicar. They do not meet as a committee of the parish council, but in order to discharge their independent statutory obligations. What committees are formed will be largely dependent on local factors, such as the size of the overall operation, past practice, and the particular needs occupying a parish council at a point in time.

The *Parish Governance Act 2013*, in section 34, provides that a person must not incur a liability on behalf of the parish except as authorised by the parish council, and that the parish council must establish a proper system for monitoring the incurring of liabilities on behalf of the parish to ensure that liabilities are incurred within the scope and terms of the authorisation given. As a result, no sub-committee, working group, or team set up by a parish council has the right to enter into any agreements with other parties on behalf of the parish without the explicit authority of the parish council. In no circumstances, for example, should that include setting up a separate bank account, or some other financial arrangement affecting the parish.

Some of the sub-committees that might be part of parish life could include, but are not limited to:

- A finance committee, although in some places the churchwardens meeting with the vicar fulfil this role;
- A worship or liturgy sub-committee, team, or working party, who share with the vicar in planning services of worship in the parish. It should be noted, however, that the vicar has ultimate responsibility for all matters of worship and liturgy – *Parish Governance Act 2013 s 24(a)*;
- Youth and / or children's and young peoples committee or planning team, to maintain the parish focus on this important aspect of its mission and ministry;
- Mission action planning (MAP) team. All parishes in the diocese are asked to have an up to date MAP in place, and many have formed a working team or planning committee to achieve this;
- Maintenance team, especially in contexts where there is a significant plant, or an ongoing need to maintain the buildings and grounds. This team is usually made up of volunteers and often led by one or more of the churchwardens;
- There may be committees for particular ministries or causes, such as supporting overseas missions and / or missionaries, outreach and evangelism, social justice issues, or for a particular matter of concern, etc.

- There may be an ecumenical affairs team or committee made up of clergy and laypeople from neighbouring churches of different denominations, which may include representatives of the parish council;
- In parishes where there is an opportunity shop, a school, or kindergarten, or other such enterprise, the committee of management will often comprise one or more members of the parish council, and may be constituted as a sub-committee of the parish council.

There are no requirements for a parish council to have any such sub-committees, working parties, teams, or groups, nor are there any restrictions on how many a parish council may form. As a matter of good governance it is important, however, that any committees, teams or groups formed by the parish council be given clear terms of reference, however brief, that set out the lines of accountability, and make it clear that the parish council has sole statutory responsibility for any decisions, outcomes and expenditure, etc. which must be proposed in the form of recommendations to the parish council for resolution. It is a further matter of good governance for any committees, groups or teams formed by the parish council to be time limited, usually annually, with a view to regular review of their continued existence, terms of reference, and composition.

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labour of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building (1 Corinthians 3.5-9).

7. Prayer

To pray is to speak to God. Throughout the scriptures we find examples of men and women spending time in prayer by speaking to God, whom we are assured, listens to and receives our prayers. It will be natural then, for a parish council to begin in prayer, and indeed, every meeting of every parish council should. In some parish's the parish council meeting may be preceded by a service of Holy Communion, Evening Prayer, or a prayer meeting, or may begin with a reading and devotion from the Bible that leads into the opening prayers. In other places, the vicar may lead prayers, or members of the parish council may take it in turns to lead the prayers.

A Prayer Book for Australia 1995 includes a prayer for use 'Before a Meeting' (p. 213).

God our Creator,
 When you speak there is light and life.
 Fill us with your Holy Spirit
 So that we may listen to one another,
 Speak the truth in love,
 and bear much fruit in the service of your kingdom,
 through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

A Prayer Book for Australia contains further prayers for 'Various Occasions' and several 'Thanksgivings' (pp. 183-222) that may be suitable for use in a range of circumstances. These include longer litanies, prayers for choosing a new incumbent, prayers for use in times of international conflict or disaster, as well as prayers of intercession for the church, discipleship and mission. Of course, the Lord's Prayer may also be used, said by all, as a way of gathering up the prayers, both spoken and silent, of all present.

Many parish councils will conclude with the members standing to say together 'The Grace,' a benediction (a closing prayer or blessing) taken from the end of St Paul's second letter to the Corinthians.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
 And the love of God,
 And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
 Be with us all evermore. Amen.

Mark Tanner, in his *The PCC Member's Essential Guide*, makes three further, excellent suggestions, regarding prayer.¹⁰

¹⁰ *The PCC Member's Essential Guide: A beginners guide to hold on to!* (London: Church House Publishing, 2015), pp. 34-35.

- i. **Prayer Walks.** Print out a map of the parish area and plot several routes through it, walking through each over time, praying for the things you observe along the way. This can be done alone, or in groups, over an extended period of time.
- ii. **Praying the papers.** Obtain the local paper each week and take time to carefully and prayerfully read it, noting the major issues affecting the local area and praying for them, and for those involved in, and impacted by, them.
- iii. **The prayer box.** Sometimes people can be reticent to pray aloud, or may find it difficult to respond immediately when asked to provide prayer requests. A prayer box, placed in the back of the church or where people fellowship together after the service, can be used to collect prayer requests on scraps of paper, that the parish council can then use to guide their prayers.

There are many other ways a parish council may engage in prayer, and ensure it spends time seeking God, and talking to God.

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you (1 Thessalonians 5.16-18).

Note: See Appendix Two for a 'A Treasury of Prayers' for use by parish councils.

8. Consulting Together

As we have seen, a primary purpose and function of the parish council is to ‘consult together on matters of general concern and importance to the parish.’ This entails meetings, and for many, probably most, members of the parish council, attending meetings of the parish council will be their primary point of involvement.

The parish council is required to ‘hold such meetings as are necessary for the performance of its functions’ (Rule 22.1). Some parish’s may wish to set a minimum number of meetings, or set a regular occurrence (e.g. monthly), by adopting one of the two permitted variations to Rule 22.1. Most parish councils will have an established pattern of meeting, often monthly (e.g. the first Tuesday evening in each month, except January), but some will set the meeting pattern and frequency at the first meeting of the new parish council following the annual meeting, so that the pattern is agreed to by the majority of the members. The most common pattern is monthly meetings (usually except January), with most parish councils meeting in the evening, although some meet on the weekend. Many parish councils also have an annual, or bi-annual, planning day, often at the start of the year, and some have a weekend away or retreat.

In addition to the regular meetings, as established by the parish council, there are provisions for further extraordinary meetings, should such meetings be required or become necessary.

- i. The vicar, or the chair if a person other than the vicar, can convene a meeting at any time, subject to any direction made by the parish council concerned (Rule 22.2);
- ii. A meeting of the parish council can be convened upon the request of four members (Rule 22.3).

The quorum, apologies and leave of absence

For a meeting to proceed, whether a regular scheduled meeting or an extraordinary one called according to the provisions above, there must be a quorum of members present. The quorum set by the *Parish Governance Act 2013* (Rule 11.1), is a simple majority (i.e. more than half of the total number of members), although this can be altered to a greater proportion if the permitted variation is adopted.

If a member of the parish council is unable to be present at a meeting, they should advise the chair or the parish secretary of their inability to attend, and should ask to be noted as an apology in the minutes of the meeting. There is no provision for voting by proxy (i.e. having another person who is present vote on another member’s behalf).

If a member of parish council is aware they will not be able to be present for more than two consecutive meetings, they should request a leave of absence for the number of meetings they expect to miss, and ask that this be recorded in the minutes. A leave of absence might be necessary in instances of extended travel, or during a period of illness or hospitalisation,

for example. Where leave of absence is granted, or when it is known that a member of parish council is unable to fulfil their duties for a period of time, an 'acting appointment' may be made by following the provisions of Rule 21.1.

Voting

There will be occasions at most meetings of the parish council when a vote is called for. Often this will be routine – e.g. the minutes of each meeting are normally ratified at the next meeting, after a call for alterations, corrections, or additions, and are then formally approved as a true and accurate record by a vote of the members present. Similarly, the correspondence to be tabled and dealt with, and the reports, including the financial statements, will be ratified by a vote of all present.

The procedure for this is that a member 'moves' a motion, such as that the minutes be approved, or that the correspondence, or a particular report etc., be received. The mover is often the person presenting the report. Another member of the parish council must second this for it to then become a 'motion.' A motion may be amended, and, following any discussion, is then put to the vote, usually by show of hands but sometimes by voices ('aye' or 'no'). In some especially contentious or difficult circumstances the vote may be by secret ballot. If the vote on a motion is even (i.e. six for and six against), the motion is resolved in the negative (it is lost – Rule 22.4). Whilst the chair of the parish council has a vote, as does every member of the parish council, neither the vicar nor the person chairing the meeting (if the vicar is not the chair) has a 'casting vote' in the event there is an even number of votes on a matter under consideration (Rule 22.5).

Matters for which there is a motion, and, consequently, which are to be resolved by a vote of the members of the parish council, will normally be clearly indicated on the agenda that is distributed in advance of the meeting. This is good governance, and the chair of the parish council should make the usual procedures for decision making and voting known to the members at the first meeting of a new parish council, or in some other way. It is possible, however, for any member of the parish council to move a motion during the course of a meeting, whether it has been advised in advance of the meeting or not. If seconded, the motion must then be dealt with in the way outlined above.

In addition to receiving the minutes, correspondence, and reports, any item of business that requires the expenditure of parish funds should be expressed as a motion, and be moved and seconded, and then put to a vote, in the manner described above. This is because an auditor or independent examiner will look through the minutes of the parish council to ensure that expenditure, and especially any un-budgeted expenses, were agreed to. In addition, if such a motion represents a departure from the parish's budget, there should be a separate motion, duly considered and passed, to amend the budget. From time to time, there may be other motions put before the parish council in a formal way – often these will

be accompanied by a presentation, written report, or speech supporting the motion, and discussed at the parish council meeting ahead of the motion being put to the vote.

Conflicts of Interest

It is important to note that a member of the parish council cannot vote on a matter in which he or she has a conflict of interest, and should normally leave the meeting when that matter is reached on the agenda to avoid being present for both the discussion and any vote resulting. By 'conflict of interest' is meant a matter in which a person has a pecuniary interest (Rule 23.1). This will normally be a matter in which the person concerned, or another person with whom they are associated, has a reasonable likelihood or expectation of gaining or benefitting in some way. An example of this will be a motion to award a contract for roofing repairs on the parish vicarage to a company owned by the spouse or partner of a member of the parish council. Another example would be where the son or daughter of a parish council member is on the committee of a community service organisation that wanted to hire the hall for meetings. At the time this matter comes up for discussion on the agenda at a meeting of the parish council, the person concerned must declare a conflict of interest, and offer to leave the meeting until the matter is resolved and the next item on the agenda is reached (see further Rule 23.1-3).

The Minutes

The *Parish Governance Act 2013* (Rule 22.6) requires that 'true and accurate records of each meeting of the parish council shall be kept and signed by the chair.' Normally, the parish secretary will take and keep the minutes, which are then distributed after the meeting to all members of the parish council, and ratified at the following meeting. The chair will then sign a copy of the minutes as agreed to, after any corrections, alterations or additions requested by the meeting have been made. The *Parish Governance Act 2013* further requires that the minutes of the parish council are 'publicly displayed' (Rule 24.1). A permitted variation to this rule, however, allows a parish council to alter this provision by specifying how the minutes are publicly displayed (for instance, in a secure part of the parish website), whilst a further permitted variation leaves open the possibility of this requirement being omitted altogether.

Relationship and Community

At its heart, the parish council, like the parish itself, is a community, made up of people called out of the broader community of the parish for a season of time to assist with the governance and leadership of that parish, in the context of the parish council. The council is, then, a network of interpersonal relationships. At its best, it should be a reflection of the diversity of the parish, and it should take the lead in modelling and reflecting Christian

community to the parish. As Paul Bayes & Tim Sledge note,¹¹ a good question a parish council might ask itself is, are we truly a body, in the way that St Paul describes a body of believers in his first letter to the Corinthians?

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many (1 Corinthians 12.12-14).

¹¹ *Mission-Shaped parish: traditional church in a changing context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2009), p. 110.

9. Preparing for the Meeting

In order to participate fully in the discussion and decision making that typically takes place at a meeting of the parish council, it is important that council members spend some time in preparation for the meeting. This need not be especially onerous or time consuming, unless perhaps if there is a matter of particular importance, controversy, or difficulty on the agenda.

Some simple things that can be done to prepare for a meeting are:

- Ensure the dates and times of each meeting are safely in your schedule for the whole year ahead. If you cannot attend a meeting, advise the chair or parish secretary that you will be an **apology** in advance of the meeting. Although it is not possible for someone to attend in your place and speak or vote on your behalf (called a proxy), most chair's will allow you to provide some written notes on any item on the agenda for which you may wish your views to be made known to the meeting.
- **Read** the papers distributed in advance of the meeting. The discussion is likely to be conducted on the assumption that members of the parish council have read the content of the reports and other papers provided to them in advance of the meeting, and have come prepared to consider and discuss.
- **Communication** is an essential part of the smooth running of any committee or organisation. Ensure you read and respond to messages from the chair, parish secretary, or other members of the parish council, in a timely manner. It is likely much communication among the members of the council will be by email, and there may well be email updates on matters raised, or to be raised, at parish council meetings.
- **Engage** with the parishioners and other stakeholders as appropriate on the matters being discussed and deliberated by the parish council. It is always good and helpful for parish council members to be aware of the thoughts and views of the parishioners.
- Whilst noting the need for good communication, and for engagement with parishioners and other stakeholders, members of parish council will also recognise and observe **confidentiality** where appropriate and as instructed by the chair.
- Finally, the parish council is, of course, an important part of a Christian community, and as Christians, its members should always be immersed in **prayer**. Pray for the workings of the parish council, for the matters to be discussed and decided upon, for the other members of the council, and for the work and mission of God's Church.

Whilst everyone will prepare in their own way, it can be helpful to make notes as you read through the papers, underlining things of importance and identifying matters about which you may wish to ask questions. If there are long and complex papers, it can sometimes help to read the summary at the beginning and end first, so as to gain an overall understanding

of the matter. Similarly, the financial statements can sometimes appear like a wall of numbers, but often there will be some commentary in writing to accompany them, explaining the figures, and setting out the assumptions that underlie them.

The 'Prayer of Preparation' (*A Prayer Book for Australia* 1995).

Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name,
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

10. What happens at a Parish council Meeting?

Although it is hard to be specific, given the great variety of parishes and the communities they serve across the Diocese of Melbourne, and because much will depend on the chair who sets the direction for the meeting and prepares and sets the agenda; there are some things that will be relatively universal and common to most parish council meetings. Each meeting of the parish council will have been prepared in advance, and in most cases, an agenda, together with the minutes of the previous meeting, reports such as the vicar's report, and the financial statements, will be sent to the members prior to the meeting.

The Agenda

The meeting will follow a format set by the agenda, which sets out what will happen in sequential order. There are some things that will appear on the agenda of every regular meeting. The agenda helps organise and guide the meeting, ensuring that matters of importance are not missed, and will usually advise of any matters for decision. The agenda might identify the person responsible for presenting a particular matter. For example, 'the vicar's report (the vicar),' or 'the financial statements (the treasurer).' A time frame (e.g. 15 mins, or 6.00-6.15pm for example) may also be allocated to each item, to help guide the meeting (and the chair).

A typical agenda may include the following:

- i. **Identification of the date and time of the meeting, and the venue:** in addition to a starting time, the agenda may also indicate a finishing time, so that the meeting is kept within a defined, and agreed to, period of time.
- ii. **Welcome:** the chair welcomes those present to the meeting.
- iii. **Prayers:** most meetings will commence in prayer.
- iv. **Apologies:** any apologies or requests for leave of absence, which should have been communicated to the chair or secretary in advance of the meeting, will be noted.
- v. **Notice of any conflicts of interest:** may be called for as the meeting commences, or alternatively, the practice may be that conflicts of interest be declared as they arise throughout the meeting.
- vi. **Minutes of the previous meeting:** the minutes of the previous meeting will normally have been distributed in advance for members to read and check, ahead of them being ratified, with any alterations or corrections, at the meeting.
- vii. **Matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting:** a matter arising is something that is present in the previous meeting's minutes, which is not otherwise covered by the agenda, but may require further discussion and / or resolution.
- viii. **Child safety, professional standards compliance, and OH&S** (recommended to be a standing item on the agenda).
- ix. **Correspondence:** any items of correspondence that have been received, either by post or email etc., are tabled as 'correspondence in'; whilst any correspondence that

the parish secretary, or another member of the parish council, has sent in the name of the parish council since the last meeting is noted as 'correspondence out.' The correspondence (in and out) may be 'received' by the moving of a motion to do so.

- x. **Reports:** There may be written, or verbal, reports from a variety of people. Normally the vicar will provide a report. Often the churchwardens will also report on any matters for which they have carriage. There may be reports from other ministers and areas of ministry, such as the Sunday School, youth ministry, choir, Mothers Union, and so on. For some parishes it may be helpful to receive these reports quarterly and consider them by rotation at different meetings. It is possible that the content of the reports may lead to a resolution being moved to take a certain course of action, which will need to be ratified by a vote.
- xi. **Finances:** the financial statements will normally be tabled at each meeting of the parish council by the parish treasurer, who will often summarise them and take questions on them. The financial statements are then received by the meeting through the putting of a motion (normally by the treasurer) to adopt them, which is then seconded by another member of the parish council, and a vote then taken.
- xii. **General business:** this is the opportunity to raise any matters for discussion and deliberation that are not covered elsewhere on the agenda, or for which there is not a natural place on the agenda for them to be raised. It is customary, and a matter of good governance, that the chair be advised in advance of the meeting, or sometimes at the beginning of the meeting, of an intention to raise matters of general business.
- xiii. **Close:** the meeting will be declared closed and the time noted. Many parish council's will end with a short prayer said by all, such as 'The Grace.'
- xiv. **The date and time, and venue, of the next meeting:** will normally be noted at the end of the agenda.

Each agenda will look different, depending on local custom, and some may be more formal than others, but most will include at least some of the features identified above.

During the Meeting

Each member of the parish council may ask questions, especially where something is unclear or unknown to them. There is no such thing as 'a stupid question.' In most cases, the person responsible for answering will be pleased and able to do so immediately, or will undertake to provide an answer at the next meeting or at another convenient time. It is possible, if not probable, that other members of the parish council might have wondered about the same thing, but have been reticent to ask. Asking questions is a matter of good governance.

On some occasions, for instance if there are many questions to ask, or a significant amount of detail that will need to be provided, it may be best to seek a meeting with the responsible person outside of the parish council meeting, so that the meeting is not delayed or dominated by a matter that not all members will be interested in pursuing. For instance, a

member of the parish council may have a number of questions about the financial reports that might not be of high importance or interest to other members of the parish council, and in those circumstances might ask to meet with the parish treasurer at another time to look over the accounts and ask questions about them.

Each member of a parish council should feel free to participate in the discussion on any matter under consideration at the meeting, especially if they feel they may have something to contribute to it. Sometimes this will take the form of asking a question, sometimes it will be adding some knowledge or insight to a matter under discussion, and at other times it will be forming a view and participating in the debate. It is not the case, however, that every member of the parish council need, or should, have something to say about every matter on the agenda, at every meeting.

Fellowship

Because the parish council is a community, and because the strength, or otherwise, of a community relies on the quality of the relationships within it, adequate time should always be set aside in the context of a parish council for fellowship. Most typically this will take place after the meeting, over a cup of coffee or tea, or a glass of wine, and often accompanied by supper. Some councils produce a roster for this purpose. Whilst the conclusion of the meeting is a natural place for fellowship, it is not the only possibility, and may not always be the most ideal, especially if members need to return home quickly after a long day at work, or if the meeting has run overtime. Some parish councils may offer a time of fellowship before the meeting begins, and some have a regular or annual meal, at which partners of members are also often invited. Depending on the manner in which the meeting is chaired, and taking care to stick to the agenda, it is also possible for there to be an adjournment in the middle of the meeting for a short break and fellowship.

After the meeting

Kevin Giles writes that, in his experience, one of the most significant faults of a church council is the failure of its members to take responsibility for the council's decisions.

Most people like being on church council, enjoy the talking, love being at the centre of the decision making process but fail to do the follow up work required. This means that motions are passed but action does not follow.¹²

This is a corporate responsibility, and also a function of the chair, who should clearly note who is responsible for ensuring a course of action is carried out to completion, upon the successful passing of a motion or a resolution to do so. Some parish councils will keep an 'action tracker' to help them keep track of who is undertaking a certain task, and all should,

¹² *Making good churches better: A workbook for Church councils and Church leaders* (Melbourne: Acorn Press, 2001), p. 156.

at the very least, record in the minutes how a motion, or another expression of the council's will, is to be expedited, by whom, and within what time frame.

If you have been asked to perform some task or action and have agreed to do so, ensure you make a note of it, and do it. Much of the business of the parish council will be carried out after the meeting, and its effectiveness, or otherwise, will depend on its members being proactive in carrying out things they have agreed to do or participate in. It can also be wise, and helpful, to open a file, either a physical or digital one, or both, in which meeting notes, the agenda, reports and minutes, together with anything you might be directly responsible for or have undertaken to bring through to fruition, can be kept, and referred to after the meeting, as may be necessary.

The Church's councils can act as microcosm of the Church as it should be. They can adopt a lifestyle which is open, honest and rooted in God and committed to seeking the advancement of the kingdom. If they do, then the structures of the Church can and do work well for mission.¹³

¹³ Paul Bayes & Tim Sledge, *Mission-Shaped parish: traditional church in a changing context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2009), p. 121.

11. The Annual meeting

The annual meeting is an opportunity for all of the parishioners to gather together and to hear about the life and work of the parish, reflect on the past year, and consider the future. As we have seen, the members of the parish council are elected at this meeting – if there are to be elections. The parish rules for meetings and officers sets out the process for calling and conducting the annual Meeting, together with how the parish council is elected and appointed.

The Electoral Roll

Each parish maintains an electoral roll containing the names of those laypersons aged over eighteen who have met the qualification for being on the parish electoral roll, and have filled out and signed an application form. The qualifications and procedure for this is to be found in the *Parish Governance Act 2013* section 9. In short, to be on the electoral roll, a person must:

- Be a layperson (i.e. not ordained);
- Be over eighteen years of age;
- Be baptised;
- Have regularly and habitually attended public worship in that parish;
- Be a member of the Anglican Church of Australia;
- Not be a member of another church or denomination;
- Not be on the electoral roll of another parish or congregation;
- Have completed and signed an application to be on the electoral roll.

The electoral roll is maintained by the parish electoral committee, as set out in the *Parish Governance Act 2013* section 10, which requires;

There to be a parish electoral committee; comprising the vicar and either a churchwarden or a member of the parish council; appointed by the parish council at its first meeting after the annual meeting.

The parish electoral committee has the task of maintaining and revising the parish electoral roll each year, in advance of the annual meeting, in accordance with the provisions of the *Parish Governance Act 2013* sections 11 and 12.

Note: it is up to each parish electoral committee to determine whether a person has regularly and habitually attended public worship in the parish, and it is anticipated that appropriate pastoral sensitivity and common sense will be applied, especially where (for example) a member of a parish may have to travel interstate or overseas for work. Under the provisions of the *Parish Governance Act 2013* a person who has attended public worship at a worship centre 12 times in the preceding 12 months, and three times in the preceding three months, is deemed to have regularly and habitually attended public worship.

Statutory Meetings

A statutory meeting means any meeting called under the provisions of the *Parish Governance Act 2013*. This may be a meeting called for a special purpose, an extraordinary meeting of the parishioners on the electoral roll, or a meeting called for the purposes of conducting an election, deciding on a change to worship times or style, to decide on a co-operation with a neighbouring parish, or whether to place the parish under consideration. There is, however, only one statutory meeting that must take place every year, and that is the annual meeting. For most parishes, in most years, the annual meeting will be, then, the only statutory meeting held in the parish.

The Financial Year

The financial year followed by the church is different to the financial year of the secular world (1 July – 30 June), and distinct to the calendar year as reckoned by secular time. In the church, a new financial and administrative year begins annually on 1 October. This means that the end of the financial year in the church is 30 September (*Parish Governance Act 2013* section 3). The 1 October date has several implications:

- The financial statements will close on 30 September, and will then need to be audited or independently examined, with the audit or examination being concluded in time for the annual accounts to be presented to the annual meeting;
- The budget set by the parish council, and presented to the annual meeting, will commence each year on 1 October (i.e. not from the date of the annual meeting or from 1 January or another date);
- The parish records, such as the average number attending services of worship, and the number of baptisms, weddings and funerals etc., are calculated for the period 30 September - 1 October;
- A new stipend determination, setting out the rates at which the clergy and any authorised stipendiary lay ministers are remunerated (paid), will take effect on 1 October each year, and will need to be signed by the churchwardens and the cleric or lay minister concerned before that date.

Annual meeting 'season'

The annual meeting of the parish must be held in either October or November each year (Rule 3.1). Several things must be done in advance of the annual Meeting, including, but not limited to;

- The fixing of the time and date of the annual meeting, by the parish council;
- The preparation of the agenda;
- The preparation of reports by those responsible, and the collation of the reports;

- The auditing, or independent examination, of the accounts;
- The revision of the parish electoral roll by the parish electoral committee;
- The call for nominations for churchwarden, parish council, and incumbency committee.

This activity gives the month or so leading up to the annual meeting the feel of a 'season' of its own, often referred to as 'annual meeting season.' In addition to this, the annual session of the synod of the diocese will be held during the course of the month of October. Synod is modelled on parliament, and will extend for three sessions over the course of three years, and is attended by the licensed clergy of the diocese and the lay representatives elected every three years by each parish in the diocese.

The Annual meeting

The manner of calling and conducting the annual meeting is set out in schedule one of the *Parish Governance Act 2013* which contains the 'parish rules for meetings and officers.' In addition to fixing the time and date of the meeting, the parish council must issue a notice giving parishioners advice of the arrangements for the annual meeting together with details of the time and date by which nominations are to be received (Rule 3.2). All nominations, for all positions, are to be displayed at the entrance to the main place of worship for at least 48 hours before the commencement of the annual meeting (Rule 3.3).

Rule 3.4 sets out the order of business that must be part of the annual meeting, although there may be additional business.

- Prayers;
- The minutes of the previous annual meeting;
- Reception of the electoral roll;
- An annual report by the vicar;
- An annual report on the proceedings of the parish council;
- An annual report by the churchwardens;
- The audited, or independently examined, accounts;
- The budget approved by the parish council for the year in which the annual meeting takes place;
- Reports by other parish groups;
- The election of churchwardens and members of the parish council;
- The election of representatives to the parish incumbency committee;
- The election of the parish incumbency committee reserve list (if desired);
- The election of an auditor or independent examiner;
- Any other matters of parochial or general church interest.

The vicar chairs the annual meeting but does not have a vote and does not, therefore, have a casting vote (Rules 7.1 and 7.2). The quorum is that set by Rule 7.3 – either one fifth of those on the electoral roll or ten parishioners, whichever is the greater.

Note: if the written report of the auditor or independent examiner has not been distributed to those present at the annual meeting, the meeting must be adjourned (when all other business has been dealt with) to a later date (but before the end of February) so that the report and the audited accounts can be received.

Elections

As noted earlier, the parish council is comprised of those elected by the annual meeting of the parishioners, and those appointed by the vicar, in the proportions determined by Rule 10.1. At the time the annual meeting is called there is also a call for nominations for churchwarden, members of the parish council, members of the incumbency committee, and members of the incumbency committee reserve list (Rule 8.1). There are no nominations for, and there is no election at the annual meeting of, synod representatives. The synod representatives are elected every three years upon receipt of the Archbishop's mandate for the calling of a new synod.

The procedure for elections is set out in Rule 9.

- If at the time the nominations close, the number of nominees is equal to, or less than, the number of vacancies, all nominated will be elected unopposed;
- If there are fewer nominees than positions available, there will be a casual vacancy that may be filled under the provisions of Rule 15;
- If an election is required, it is conducted by secret ballot and overseen by a returning officer appointed by the vicar;
- If there is an equality of votes requiring a casting vote, the returning officer has the casting vote, or may decide by the casting of lots.

The churchwardens and members of the parish council elected at the annual meeting will normally hold office until the conclusion of the next annual meeting, unless the parish concerned has adopted a permitted variation for two year terms.

Appointments

The vicar appoints one of the three churchwardens, the other two being elected by the annual meeting (Rule 17.1). In all of the possible compositions set out by Rule 10.1, the parish council will be composed of a proportion of those elected by the annual meeting and a lesser proportion appointed by the vicar (Rule 12.1).

The vicar is required to announce to the parishioners the name of the person appointed as churchwarden, and the names of those appointed as members of the parish council, within 30 days of the annual meeting (Rule 20.1).

The churchwardens and members of the parish council appointed by the vicar, as with those elected by the annual meeting, will hold office until the conclusion of the next annual meeting (Rule 12.1), unless one of the permitted variations allowing for two years terms has been adopted.

After the annual meeting

It is important that the vicar, churchwardens and parish secretary (especially) do not lose sight of the significant reporting requirements that follow the annual meeting. In fact, it is wise to think of the annual meeting as not truly ending until all the subsequent actions have been completed. These include:

- Having appropriate police checks and/or working with children card's sought and obtained;
- Having new parish council members sign the required declarations;
- Appointing the churchwarden who is to be the wardens' appointee on the incumbency committee;
- Notifying the registrar of the members of the incumbency committee;
- Within seven days of the conclusion of the annual meeting send to the registrar two copies of the accounts and financial documents prepared for the meeting.

Many parishes also include a commissioning of those newly elected during one or more of the Sunday services following the annual meeting, or early in the new year.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.' The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: 'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!' Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: 'Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.' Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I; send me!' (Isaiah 6.1-8).

12. Through the Year

The church year has a rhythm that distinguishes it from the calendar year. Hence theologians talk about the marking of 'liturgical time' or 'sacred time,' separate to that of secular time. Sacred time is marked by the seasons of the church year, but also by the routines and rhythms of the annual meeting and the business of the parish council, which provide a place and an opportunity for parishioners to become involved in the administrative, governance and financial life of their parish, as well as its worshipping life.

Advent

The church year begins at Advent, which will commence either late in November or early in December. The season of Advent occupies the four weeks prior to Christmas, and is a period of preparation for the annual celebration of the birth of our Lord. As Advent is a time of preparation, violet (or purple) is the liturgical colour. The commencement of the church year on Advent Sunday, the Sunday that commences the season of Advent, often has a symmetry with the commencement of a new parish council, following the annual meeting, which must be held in October or November.

Christmas and Epiphany

Whilst it has become commonplace to think of, and to speak about, the season of Christmas as the period of time leading up to 25 December each year, the reckoning of sacred or liturgical time finds otherwise. The season of Christmas begins on Christmas Eve and extends to the Feast of the Epiphany (marking the visit of the Magi to the infant Jesus) on 6 January. As a celebratory festival, the liturgical colour for Christmas is white. After the Epiphany, the church enters a period of 'ordinary time,' during which the Sundays that fall between Epiphany and the beginning of Lent on Ash Wednesday will be called the Sundays after Epiphany (or Epiphany 1, Epiphany 2, and so on). During 'ordinary time' green is the liturgical colour. In Australia, the Epiphany itself, and the first few weeks afterwards, will, of course, coincide with the holiday month of January for many people. Many parish councils will not meet during January, although some may have a planning session, sometimes over a whole day, or even a whole weekend, early in the new year.

Lent

The season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, and marks the forty days (not counting the Sundays) before the celebration of the Lord's resurrection on Easter Day. Lent is a penitential season, in preparation for Easter, during which time Christians are called to prayer, reflection and self-examination. As a season of preparation, the liturgical colour during Lent is the same as that for Advent – purple or violet.

Holy Week and Easter

The most important week in the church's year commences with Palm / Passion Sunday and ends with Easter Day. The week concludes with the 'great three days,' often called the 'Easter Triduum' – Maundy Thursday recalling the Last Supper, Good Friday remembering the crucifixion of Jesus, and Holy Saturday, the day between Good Friday and Easter Day. These are the last few days of the season of Lent, which will conclude with the celebration of the Lord's resurrection on Easter Day.

Easter

Although often compressed into a single day or weekend by the weight of secular time, in the Church, the season of Easter extends for several weeks, commencing with the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Day, and extending to the Day of Pentecost.

Pentecost

The Day of Pentecost falls fifty days after Easter, and celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of the Christian church, as described in the Acts of the Apostles (ch. 2). Red is worn on the Day of Pentecost, for the 'tongues of fire' that descended on those gathered in the upper room. The Sunday after Pentecost is Trinity Sunday. After this, a long period of 'ordinary time' commences, during which the Sundays will be designated 'After Pentecost' or Pentecost 1, Pentecost 2, and so on. As a period of ordinary time, the liturgical colour is green.

All Saints and Remembrance

The church year (or liturgical year) which began on Advent Sunday, draws to its conclusion in the month of November, which begins with the observance of All Saints Day on 1 November. As a festival, or celebration, the liturgical colour for All Saints is white. In many places All Souls Day (2 November) may also be observed, whilst there might also be a service for Remembrance Day (11 November). The church year will come to an end during the month of November on the Sunday prior to Advent Sunday, which is celebrated as Christ the King Sunday.

Other occasions

In addition to the marking of sacred time and the annual rhythm of the seasons of the church year, many, if not most, parishes will mark other important occasions throughout the course of the year. Many will be well established annual events in the life of the parish community, while others may be one off or exceptional occasions. The parish council may well have a significant role to play in the planning and execution of these special days, which may include, but will not be limited to:

- Ordinations: Although ordinations will normally take place at the Cathedral, if the parish has a new assistant curate these occasions will be important ones in the church year. Most deacons are ordained in early February, and priests in late November.
- Episcopal visits: The Archbishop, or a bishop, may visit during the course of the year, for an important festival, an anniversary, or just to preside and preach in the parish.
- If there is a confirmation of service of reception into communicant membership, a bishop will visit to conduct the service.
- The patronal festival may be a significant event in the life of the parish. The patronal festival is named after the 'patron' saint, or the 'holy mystery,' for which the church is named. For instance, if St Mary's, the patronal festival will be on 15 August (or the Sunday nearest) which is the Feast Day of Mary, Mother of our Lord; or if Holy Trinity, then the patronal festival will be on Trinity Sunday, and so on.
- The parish fete, fair or community open day, if a custom, or another comparable event, may be a particular focus at a certain time of year.

Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided:
Lord for the years, we bring our thanks today.
(Timothy Dudley-Smith, 1969).

13. When the Vicar leaves

A range of things occur when a vicar leaves a parish. Because a parish is a community, it is natural that strong relationships of mutual trust and Christian fellowship may develop between the parishioners and the leader of the community. When the leader moves on, there will often be a degree of sadness and a sense of loss, before acceptance of the new situation sets in, and the need to appoint a successor becomes the primary consideration.

At the time the vicar formally leaves, or sometimes before the nominal date if there are periods of annual leave or long service leave pending, the bishop responsible will appoint a locum, to ensure that pastoral and sacramental ministry will continue. Any other members of the parish staff, such as assistant curates, assistant or honorary priests, and authorised lay ministers, will continue in their roles, as will the churchwardens and the parish council. It is important to note that the locum minister who is appointed has all of the rights, privileges and responsibilities of the vicar. So the *Parish Governance Act 2013* section 3 (in the definitions) advises that, where there is a locum appointed to the parish, that person is regarded as the vicar for the purposes of the Act.

The churchwardens and parish council, and of course the incumbency committee representatives, will have some extra tasks and duties to perform during the period of an interregnum (the period of time until the new vicar arrives) and whilst a locum is in place. In most instances, the locum will be a retired priest working part time, and so there will be aspects of the life of the church that others will need to pick up in the absence of a full time vicar. A significant task, that will often become the responsibility of the parish council, needing to be undertaken, will be the preparation of a parish profile, which will be used to give prospective vicars a sense of the parish situation and its ministry. This entails setting out in a document the main ministries of the parish, including of course its Sunday services, and taking stock of the numbers attending, the buildings and property, and the finances, together with the mission action plan and its implementation and progress.

The parish council will play a key role in ensuring the parish continues to function during the period of waiting for a new vicar, and may be well served by ensuring frequent use among the parishioners, and in communal contexts such as Sunday services and meetings of the parish council, of the prayer below, for use at the time of choosing an incumbent, from *A Prayer Book for Australia 1995*.

Bountiful God,
 give to this parish a faithful pastor
 who will faithfully speak your word
 and minister your sacraments;
 an encourager who will equip your people for ministry
 and enable us to fulfil our calling.
 Give to those who will choose, wisdom,

discernment and patience,
and to us give warm and generous hearts,
for Jesus Christ's sake. **Amen.**

Appendix One – Glossary.

A Prayer Book for Australia 1995 (APBA): an authorised liturgy for use in the Anglican Church of Australia, alongside the 1978 *An Australian Prayer Book*, and the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*.

Accounts: the records of monies that the parish possesses, has received, or spent.

Anglican Church: means the Anglican Church of Australia (*Parish Governance Act 2013* section 3).

Agenda: the order of business for a meeting.

Annual Meeting: each parish must be hold an annual meeting in either October or November each year.

Apology: if unable to attend a meeting, you give an apology.

Archdeacon: a senior priest who assists the bishop in a geographical area called an archdeaconry. In the Diocese of Melbourne, most archdeacons are also vicars with their own parishes.

Archbishop: the chief ordained minister in the Diocese of Melbourne.

Archbishop in Council: a body which meets throughout the year, it is the highest decision making body in the diocese outside of the synod, and is made up of members elected by the synod or appointed by the Archbishop directly.

Area Dean: a priest who coordinates and supports other clergy and lay ministers in a geographical area known as a deanery, mainly for the purposes of meeting together for mutual support, prayer and encouragement.

Assessment: the annual amount a parish must pay to the diocese from its funds (see *Parish Governance Act 2013* sections 30-32).

Auditor: the professional accountant or accountants who check ('audit') the parish accounts each year ahead of their presentation at the annual meeting (see *Parish Governance Act 2013* section 44).

Authorised Anglican Congregation (AAC): means a congregation that has been declared an AAC under the terms of the *Parish Governance Act 2013* section 8. An AAC is treated as though it were a parish in most matters.

Authorised Lay Minister: a lay (i.e. non-ordained) person who has been authorised by the Archbishop as a minister in a parish or other setting; Authorised Lay Ministers may be stipendiary, which means paid, in which case they may be referred to as an Authorised

Stipendiary Lay Minister (ASLM), or they may be honorary, or unpaid, and referred to as an Honorary Lay Minister (HLM).

Bishop: in the Diocese of Melbourne, the diocesan or chief bishop is the Archbishop, who is assisted by other bishops called Assistant Bishops, some of whom have responsibility for particular geographical areas known as ‘areas of episcopal care.’

Book of Common Prayer (BCP): the Prayer Book in use in the Church of England from the period of the Reformation, having its origins in the first edition of 1549 under the leadership of Archbishop (of Canterbury) Thomas Cranmer, and reaching its final state in 1662. The BCP is the authoritative source of matters of doctrine and liturgy in the Anglican Church of Australia.

Budget: the annual plan for raising and spending money.

Canon: two meanings; (i) it may refer to the canons of the church, which are a series of rules and laws by which the church is governed (so Canon Law), and (ii) the clergy and laypeople who assist in the ministry of a Cathedral.

Cathedral: the principal place of worship in a diocese, in which the lead bishop, or Archbishop, has his ‘cathedra’ (seat or throne).

Chancellor: the senior legal officer in a diocese.

Church: when applied to a building means a building of which the whole or some part is set apart and consecrated, or intended to be set apart and consecrated, exclusively for the worship of Almighty God according to the doctrine, rites, and usages of the Anglican Church (*Interpretation Act 1878*).

Churchwarden: the senior laypeople in a parish; two are elected each year by the annual meeting, and one is appointed by the vicar.

Clergy / clergyperson / cleric: an ordained minister of the church; the clergy may be ordained as deacon, priest and bishop.

Clerk in Holy Orders: means a person who has been ordained in one or more of the three Orders of the church; deacon, priest, or bishop.

Collect: a set prayer, prescribed for use on a particular day, also used of a prayer said together by all; a collect gathers up (‘collects’) the prayers of all.

Communicant member: a notoriously difficult term to define, it describes a person eligible to receive Holy Communion in an Anglican parish church; this is defined for the purposes of parish governance as a person who has been confirmed or received into communicant membership of the Anglican Church.

Curate: properly ‘Assistant Curate’ - a curate is an ordained person in the first few years of their ordained ministry, usually working under the supervision of another experienced clergyperson.

Cure of souls: an old term, arising out of the *Book of Common Prayer*, to describe the pastoral function and ministry of a parish priest, reflecting its particular focus on the spiritual needs of those in the parish area.

Deacon: one of the three orders of ministry in the Anglican Church; all clergy are ordained deacon, some may subsequently be ordained priest and bishop, whilst some remain deacons (often called 'distinctive deacons').

Dean: the priest in charge of a Cathedral (distinct to Area Dean - above).

Deanery: a geographical area within the diocese.

Diocese: is the geographical area under the oversight of a diocesan bishop or Archbishop.

Ecclesiastical: a matter regarding or pertaining to the church, from *ekklesia*, the Greek word for 'church.'

Electoral Roll: the list of laypeople entitled to vote at the annual meeting.

Episcopal: means regarding the bishop or bishops, from the Greek word *episkopos*, meaning 'overseer.'

Eucharist: an alternative term for the Holy Communion, from the Greek *eucharisteo*, which means 'thanksgiving.'

Ex-officio: a person who is automatically a member of a body or council without having to be appointed or elected, usually by virtue of their position or office. Ex-officio members of a board or council normally do not have the right to vote and cannot move or second motions, but may speak and contribute to the business of the meeting.

Faculty: a document giving permission for something to be placed in a church, such as a memorial to a person, a fixture, decoration, or window etc. A faculty is also required to remove any such fixture for which a faculty has been previously obtained.

Incumbency Committee: a body convened under the provisions of the *Appointments Act 1971*. The incumbency committee may be convened by the registrar, at the request of a bishop, if the parish becomes vacant, and if there is to be a review of the tenure of the vicar.

Incumbent: a vicar whom the Archbishop has licensed to a parish as incumbent; the incumbent has tenure for up to ten years at the time of first being appointed to the parish, with the possibility of five year extensions after the initial period of ten years.

Independent Examiner: where the total receipts are less than \$250,000 in a financial year, the parish may appoint an independent examiner instead of an auditor (see *Parish Governance Act 2013* sections 46-47).

Interregnum: the period of time extending from the departure of one vicar and until the next vicar assumes office.

Lay / layperson / laity: the people of a parish who are not ordained; from the Greek *laos* ('people').

Liturgy: the words said, and actions performed, in a service of worship, and their sequence; usually as prescribed in a Prayer Book such as *A Prayer Book for Australia 1995*.

Members of the Church: means the members of the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Melbourne (*Interpretation Act 1878*).

Metropolitan: the bishop (designated an Archbishop) who is in charge of the largest diocese in a province; the Archbishop of Melbourne is the metropolitan for the province of Victoria, which takes in the dioceses of Melbourne, Ballarat, Bendigo, Gippsland and Wangaratta.

Minutes: the written record of a meeting.

Parish: the geographical unit for organising the mission of God throughout the Anglican Church within the Diocese of Melbourne (*Parish Governance Act 2013* section 5).

Parish Electoral Committee: a committee formed annually to review the parish electoral roll, consisting of the vicar and either a churchwarden or a member of the parish council - *Parish Governance Act 2013* section 10(1).

Parish officer: a person in a parish (other than the vicar) who is a churchwarden, parish secretary, parish treasurer, member of the parish council, member of the incumbency committee, or member of a local vestry in a Section 18 parish (*Parish Governance Act 2013* section 3).

Parish rules for meetings and officers: means the rules referred to in Schedule One of the *Parish Governance Act 2013*.

Parish secretary: means the person appointed or elected as parish secretary under the parish rules for meetings and officers.

Parish treasurer: means the person appointed or elected as parish treasurer under the parish rules for meetings and officers.

Parishioner: means a person who is duly enrolled on a parish electoral roll under the provisions of the *Parish Governance Act 2013*.

Parochial: pertaining to a parish.

Polity: a form or process for governing a group or organisation; the rules, traditions, or body of legislation, often expressed in the context of a constitution or set of rules, by which a community, or an organisation, is governed.

Priest: clergy ordained deacon may subsequently be ordained priest; in the Anglican Church some functions are reserved to priests who alone may pronounce absolution, give the blessing, and celebrate the Holy Communion.

Priest in Charge (PiC): a clergyperson whom the Archbishop has licensed as priest in charge to a parish under the direction of the area bishop; the license is normally reviewed after three years.

Quorum: the number of members that must be present in order for a meeting to proceed.

Stewardship: in theological terms, means to take good and prudent care of the resources - financial, material, and other – entrusted to an individual, organisation or other entity.

Stipend: the monies paid to an ordained clergyperson or authorised lay minister of the church (like wages); the word 'stipend' means a 'a living.'

Synod: the highest decision making body of the diocese, synod encompasses the licensed clergy together with the elected laypeople, and meets over three years, generally once in each year.

Vacancy: a parish which has no vicar is said to be vacant or undergoing a vacancy.

Verger (sometimes Virger): a person appointed to assist with the smooth running of a church service, and / or to take care of the church and its grounds.

Vestry: three meanings: (i) the older term for the parish council, (ii) a room in the church where the clergy robe ('vest') and prepare for the service, (iii) the local governing body in a parish with more than one worship centre that has enacted section 18 of the *Parish Governance Act 2013*.

Vicar: means the priest in charge, the incumbent, or another cleric appointed temporarily by the Archbishop (i.e. a Locum) to act as such.

Warden: see churchwarden.

Appendix Two – A Treasury of Prayers

From A Prayer Book for Australia 1995

(1) Before a meeting

God our Creator,
When you speak there is light and life.
Fill us with your Holy Spirit
So that we may listen to one another,
Speak the truth in love,
and bear much fruit in the service of your kingdom,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(2) In times of conflict

God our refuge and strength,
you have bound us together in a common life:
help us, in the midst of our present conflict
to confront one another without hatred or bitterness
to listen for your voice amid competing claims
and to work together with mutual forbearance and respect;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(3) Call to discipleship

Christ, whose insistent call
disturbs our settled lives:
give us discernment or hear your word,
grace to relinquish our tasks,
and courage to follow empty-handed
wherever you may lead,
so that the voice of your gospel
may reach to the ends of the earth. Amen.

(4) For God's guidance

Almighty and everlasting God,
direct, sanctify, and govern
our hearts and bodies in the ways of your law
and the works of your commandments.
By your mighty protection
may we be kept safe in body and soul
and serve you with generous and joyful hearts,

bringing glory to your holy name;
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

(5) Dedication festival

Bountiful God,
to whose glory we celebrate the dedication of this house of prayer:
we praise you for the many blessings
you have given to those who worship here,
and we pray that all who seek you in this place may find you,
and being filled with the Holy Spirit
may become a living temple acceptable to you,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(6) For the Church

Almighty God, we praise you for the blessings
brought to the world through your Church.
We bless you for the grace of the sacraments,
for our fellowship in Christ
with you and with each other,
for the teaching of the Scriptures,
and for the preaching of your word.
We thank you for the example of your saints,
for your faithful servants departed this life,
and for the memory of all that has been true and good in their lives.
Number us with them
in the company of the redeemed of heaven;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(7) The Grace

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
And the love of God,
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
Be with us all evermore. Amen.

(8) Grace

Go before us, O Lord, in all our doings
with your most gracious favour,
and assist us with your continual help;
that in all works, begun, continued and ended in you,
we may glorify your holy name,

and finally by your mercy
obtain everlasting life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(9) The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

From the *Book of Common Prayer*

(10) The Prayer of General Thanksgiving

ALMIGHTY God, Father of all mercies, we thine unworthy servants do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us, and to all men. We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all, for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we shew forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives; by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

(11) The Second Collect at Evening Prayer

O GOD, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed; Give unto thy servants that peace which the world cannot give; that our hearts may be set to obey thy commandments, and also that by thee, we, being defended from the fear of our enemies, may pass our time in rest and quietness; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

(12) A Prayer of St Chrysostom

ALMIGHTY God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications unto thee; and dost promise, that when two or three are gathered together in thy Name thou wilt grant their requests; Fulfil now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants, as may be most expedient for them; granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting. Amen.

(13) For the Holy Spirit's guidance

O GOD, forasmuch as without thee we are not able to please thee: mercifully grant that thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(14) For all our works

DIRECT us, O Lord, in all our doings, with thy most gracious favour, and further us with thy continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy Name, and finally, by thy mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.¹⁴

From *Common Worship*, the Church of England

(15) A Prayer for the Parish council

Almighty God,
 you have given your Holy Spirit to the Church
 to lead us into all truth;
 bless with the Spirit's grace and presence the members of this Parish council;
 keep us steadfast in faith and united in love,
 that we may manifest your glory
 and prepare the way for your kingdom;
 through Jesus Christ, your Son our Lord. Amen.

(16) For guidance

Almighty God,
 we thank you for the gift of your holy word.
 May it be a lantern to our feet,
 a light to our paths,
 and a strength to our lives.
 Take us and use us
 to love and serve

¹⁴ *The Book of Common Prayer* 1928.

in the power of the Holy Spirit
and in the name of your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Prayers from other places

(17) Before a meeting (i)

Living God,
as we meet in Council today may we meet with you.
Grant us wisdom, patience, and courage
as you shape our conversation, our thinking, and our deciding.
Guide our thoughts to embrace the overlooked and forgotten;
lift our hearts to desire earnestly the highest good for all;
and draw our decisions to conform to the purpose of your will.
In Christ our Lord and master we pray,
Amen.¹⁵

(18) Before a meeting (ii)

O Lord, we meet in your name and we ask most humbly that your spirit of wisdom and understanding may direct and rule our hearts, and all that we do and all we say may be to your glory and to the furtherance of your kingdom, and that in all things we may be faithful servants of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.¹⁶

(19) For wisdom

‘If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind’ (James 1.5-6).

Lord,
your word says that when we lack wisdom we should ask,
and in asking believe,
and in believing receive.
We need, and we lack,
so we ask, and we trust...
Give us wisdom we pray,

¹⁵ Mark Tanner, *The PCC Member's Essential Guide: A beginners guide to hold on to!* (London: Church House Publishing, 2015), p. 43.

¹⁶ Pat Robson, *A Celtic Liturgy* (London: HarperCollins 2000), p. 81.

in and through Christ our Lord.
Amen.¹⁷

(20) Prayers of gratitude and concern

For the roots of our community,
and for all communities:
we thank you, Living God.

For what we share together,
and for the life we share with others:
we thank you, Living God.

For the path that lies before us now,
and our future in your hands:
we thank you, Living God.

Further prayers may be offered...

O Christ, you are within each of us.
It is not just the interior of these walls:
it is our own inner being you have renewed.
We are your temple not made with hands.
We are your body.
If every wall should crumble, and every church decay,
we are your habitation.
Nearer are you than breathing,
closer than hands and feet.
Ours are the eyes with which you, in the mystery,
look out with compassion on the world.
Yet we bless you for this place,
for your directing of us, your redeeming of us,
and your indwelling.
Take us outside, O Christ, outside holiness,
out to where soldiers curse and nations clash,
at the crossroads of the world.
So shall this building continue to be justified.
We ask it for your own name's sake. Amen.¹⁸

¹⁷ Mark Tanner, *The PCC Member's Essential Guide: A beginners guide to hold on to!* (London: Church House Publishing, 2015), p. 56.

¹⁸ The Iona Community. *Iona Abbey Worship Book* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2001), p. 28.

(21) A short litany

Let us pray.

Guide us, Lord, by your Holy Spirit, so that this parish council may promote your work among us and build up your holy church.

Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Direct all our discussion and debate, so that we may discern your will for us and make right decisions on the matters before us.

Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Keep our focus on your commands and promises to us, so that we may be bold in our mission to the people of this community.

Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Make us ready to listen, slow to criticise, and willing to cooperate with each other, so that we may promote the unity which you have given us.

Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Encourage and inspire us through this meeting, so that we may be better equipped to serve you as your priestly people; through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**¹⁹

(22) For modesty

Grant unto us, O Lord, the gift of modesty.

When we speak, teach us to give our opinion quietly and sincerely.

When we do well in work or play, give us a sense of proportion, that we be neither unduly elated nor foolishly self-deprecatory.

Help us in success to realise what we owe to thee and to the efforts of others: in failure, to avoid dejection;

and in all ways to be simple and natural, quiet in manner and lowly in thought:

through Christ. Amen.²⁰

(23) When we disagree

Father, this is hard but you understand.

Calm us, we pray, that we might attend to the still, small voice...

... the silent echo of your presence

... the echo of your goodness and grace

¹⁹ Prayer for the opening of a synodical convention (adapted), from *Church Rites* (The Lutheran Church of Australia, 1994), pp. 257-258.

²⁰ George Appleton (Ed), *The Oxford Book of Prayer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 122.

... the breath of life that you breathe over each of us
 ... and the echoing cries of a needy world.
 Blow away our anger, fear, confusion, and all that clouds our vision,
 and renew our love, our hope, our peace, and even, we pray, our joy.
 Rest upon us, Spirit of the Living God,
 and grant us a gentle heart and grace-filled mind...
 ... the very mind of Christ.
 Amen.²¹

(24) To the Holy Spirit

O Holy Spirit,
 giver of light and life,
 impart to us thoughts higher than our own thoughts,
 and prayers better than our own prayers,
 and powers beyond our own powers,
 that we may spend and be spent
 in the ways of love and goodness,
 after the perfect image
 of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.²²

(25) For the enlightenment of the mind

Enlighten us, O good Jesus,
 with the brightness of internal light,
 and cast out all darkness
 from the dwelling of our hearts.
 Grant us, O Lord,
 to know that which is worth knowing,
 to love what is worth loving,
 to praise that which can bear with praise,
 to hate what in your sight is unworthy,
 to prize what to you is precious,
 and above all,
 to search and do your holy will. Amen.²³

²¹ Mark Tanner, *The PCC Member's Essential Guide: A beginners guide to hold on to!* (London: Church House Publishing, 2015), p. 29.

²² A prayer of Eric Milner-White (1884-1964), in George Appleton (Ed), *The Oxford Book of Prayer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 155.

²³ A prayer of Thomas a Kempis (1380-1471), in *Uniting in Worship* (Melbourne: The Uniting Church in Australia, 1988), p. 218.

(26) For illumination

Most gracious God, our heavenly Father,
 in you alone dwells all fullness of light and wisdom:
 illuminate our minds by the Holy Spirit
 in the true understanding of your Word.
 Give us grace that we may receive it
 with sincere reverence and humility.
 May it lead us to put our whole trust in you alone;
 and so to serve and honour you
 that we may glorify your name,
 and encourage others by the good example
 of a holy life.
 And because it has pleased you to number us
 among your people,
 help us to give you the love and homage that we owe,
 as children of the light and as servants to our Lord.
 We ask this for the sake of our Master and Saviour. Amen.²⁴

(27) For the knowledge of God's will

Almighty and everlasting God,
 in whom we live and move and have our being,
 who hast created us for thyself,
 so that we can find rest only in thee;
 grant unto us such purity of heart
 and strength of purpose,
 that no selfish passion may hinder us
 from knowing thy will,
 no weakness from doing it;
 but in thy light we may see light clearly,
 and in thy service find perfect freedom;
 for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.²⁵

(28) Instruments of peace

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.
 Where there is hatred, let us sow love;
 where there is injury, pardon;
 where there is discord, union;

²⁴ A prayer of John Calvin (1509-1564), in *Uniting in Worship* (Melbourne: The Uniting Church in Australia, 1988), p. 220.

²⁵ The Church of Scotland, *Book of Common Order* 1940.

where there is doubt, faith;
 where there is despair, hope;
 where there is darkness, light;
 where there is sadness, joy.
 Grant that we may not so much seek
 to be consoled as to console;
 to be understood as to understand;
 to be loved as to love.
 For it is in giving that we receive;
 it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
 and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
 Amen.²⁶

(29) Closing a meeting

O Lord, we offer you the thoughts and deliberations of this meeting, and we ask that you forgive our shortcomings and our lack of understanding. May we be mindful of your trust and ready always to work in harmony with each other, that through us your kingdom may go forward and your will be done. Amen.²⁷

(30) A Blessing

May the love of the Lord Jesus
 draw us to himself;
 may the power of the Lord Jesus
 strengthen us in his service;
 may the joy of the Lord Jesus
 fill our souls.
 May the blessing of God Almighty,
 the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,
 be amongst us
 and remain with us
 always. Amen.²⁸

Prayers for personal use

(31) For people I find difficult

Lord Jesus,
 I bring *N.* before you:

²⁶ Attributed to St Francis of Assisi (1182-1226).

²⁷ Pat Robson, *A Celtic Liturgy* (London: HarperCollins 2000), p. 81.

²⁸ A prayer of William Temple (1881-1944), in George Appleton (Ed), *The Oxford Book of Prayer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 172.

your hands 'knit them together' and you know all their days and all their ways,
 thank you for your extraordinary love for them,
 and that when I reflect on you loving them,
 I grow in my trust that you can actually love the real me too:
 let that love fill us,
 transform us,
 renew us,
 that I may truly pray for them and be grateful for their prayer for me,
 and that together we may see your goodness at work in us and through us,
 for you are the God of all goodness and transforming love.
 Amen.²⁹

(32) For when we are nervous about something we have to say or do

Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And
 with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit' (John 20.21-22).

Lord Jesus, I receive your peace...

I receive not because I have earned, or practiced, or invested,
 but because you promise and you are faithful.

Lord Jesus, I go because you were sent and now you send me...

I might not get it all right, but please guide me to get it right enough.

Protect me from my weakness, and, release me in your strength,
 and let the glory be yours.

Lord, I receive your Spirit as you breathe upon me...

unite your Spirit with my own,

transforming me, renewing me, commissioning me, and using me, to your glory,
 loving others, and in the service of your coming kingdom.

Amen.³⁰

(33) When I don't understand

O God of wisdom and understanding,
 thank you that you know what all of this means,
 even when I have little or no idea!

Direct my eyes to the important things,
 enlighten my mind with understanding,

help me to know the questions that need to be asked,
 and give me peace to trust where I do not need to know.

²⁹ Mark Tanner, *The PCC Member's Essential Guide: A beginners guide to hold on to!* (London: Church House Publishing, 2015), p. 29.

³⁰ Mark Tanner, *The PCC Member's Essential Guide: A beginners guide to hold on to!* (London: Church House Publishing, 2015), p. 33.

In all of this, let your Kingdom come, your Name be glorified,
and your people be drawn to you, the God of all insight and grace.
Amen.³¹

(34) The serenity prayer

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
And wisdom to know the difference.³²

³¹ *The PCC Member's Essential Guide: A beginners guide to hold on to!* (London: Church House Publishing, 2015), p. 61.

³² Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971).

Resources

Websites

Anglican Diocese of Melbourne

- <https://www.melbourneanglican.org.au/>

Anglican Church of Australia

- <https://www.anglican.org.au/>

Bishop Perry Institute for ministry and mission

- <https://bishopperryinstitute.org.au/>

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