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How to Hold Meetings in a Pandemic

Meetings Matter

In this time of social distancing, there are still decisions that need to be made by communities of faith including congregations and pastoral charges. It is also still important that decisions are made by the appropriate governing bodies, with open discussion, prayerful consideration and in accordance with The United Church of Canada Manual 2019, and your local constitution. The United Church has created a document entitled [Governance in Congregations during Covid 19](#). Please check The United Church of Canada website regularly for updates.

Governing Body Meetings

Because we are a conciliar church, key decisions rest with the governing body (Council/Board) of the community of faith. It is important to gather electronically to allow the discussion and decisions to be made in real time, rather than by email or other correspondence. Options include online video conferencing or telephone conferencing. An agenda and any background information can be circulated by e-mail or in writing in advance of the meeting.

Quorum is still required. This includes the Pastoral Charge Supervisor if one has been appointed for your community of faith.

Minutes also need to be kept, including a list of who was present and how the meeting was conducted, i.e. by zoom, conference call etc. A copy of the minutes can be posted on the church webpage or distributed by email to the wider congregation.

Congregational Decisions

Notice of the Meeting

For some decisions it may be necessary to hold a congregational meeting. Congregations holding virtual worship can deliver the notice electronically in the service following the time requirements set out in the [Manual 2019](#) B.5. You can supplement this with email and telephone notices.

Congregations that are not gathering electronically for worship have an alternate option during this time of disruption. Based on The Manual Section G.3.6.2, congregations are being authorized to give notice by telephone, email or post using the members known contact information. This alternative way of giving notice is only available while communities are not meeting for worship.



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The person calling the meeting (minister/chair of the annual meeting/pastoral charge supervisor) must act in good faith in calling the meeting and choose the option for notifying members that, in their reasonable opinion, is the best way of getting in touch with the largest number of people under the circumstances. There is a minimum period of time between when the notice is given and when the meeting may be held. These minimum time periods still apply even in situations where the business is urgent, and wherever possible, additional time should be given to allow for as many people as possible to receive the notice of the meeting.

Quorum

The requirement for a minimum number of members to be present at the meeting still applies to meetings held by electronic means. See section B.5.5 of The Manual.

Minutes

The minutes of the congregational meeting should record how notice was given along with the rationale for choosing that method—for example: “Notice of the meeting was given via e-mail to all members for whom we have e-mail addresses, which is 90 percent of the congregation’s membership.”

Urgent Pastoral Relations Matters

The governing body has been given special authority by the General Council Executive to deal with urgent pastoral relations matters on behalf of the congregation. This is a temporary measure in effect until August 31, 2021, and applies only in situations where the regional council is satisfied the situation is critical and can’t effectively be dealt with in any other way. There are additional requirements that must be met. If the governing body believes that a decision must be made about initiating a call or appointment, revising the terms of a call or appointment, or ending a call or appointment, they should contact their regional council pastoral relations staff for guidance. See [GS 49 Temporary Amendment of Bi-laws Re: Pastoral Relations](#) and [PR Temporary Amendment Resource](#)

The Meeting

All meetings must happen in real time; that is, people must be able to hear one another and to speak. Technology can make this possible. On-line video conferencing, e.g. Zoom or Skype, are some options; conference calling is another. It is possible for a person without a computer to call into the Zoom meeting. The Governing Body/Council will need to decide in advance how voting will be handled. There are some polling/voting options with Zoom. If the numbers are small, it may be more helpful to ask for those opposing and those abstaining to identify themselves and then confirm that all who have remained silent are in approval. Minutes need to be recorded as usual and should indicate how notice of the meeting was delivered, how the



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meeting was held, and that this was in light of the current situation. If such a meeting is happening, please consider speaking with regional council staff in advance.

Board of Trustees

If the Board of Trustees is required to meet during this time of physical distancing, it is important that they also ensure that each trustee has received notice of the meeting, including the pastoral charge supervisor if one has been appointed for your community of faith. The minutes should record how the meeting was held. If this is a special meeting, as designated in The Manual G.2.3.2, the notification process must be followed.

Email Decisions

In special circumstances it is possible to make decisions between meetings by e-mail voting. This is restricted to decisions deemed to be exceptional by the chair, and is not to be a regular practice. It is not recommended for situations requiring detailed discussion. It is only possible if every member of the voting body has provided an e-mail address that ensures confidentiality. The decision must be ratified at the next meeting and recorded in the minutes. See The Manual 3.4.2 for specific details on how to conduct e-mail voting.

Resources

United Church of Canada Website <https://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/being-community/governance-during-pandemic>

Information on how to hold Zoom meetings <https://zoom.us/docs/en-us/covid19.html>

Information on governance within The United Church of Canada [Manual 2019](#)