

PROPOSAL FOR A JOINT CHURCH COUNCIL

Some Questions and Answers

For distribution to Church Councils/congregations

The following Questions & Answers have been received from various sources in the Network following the last Network meeting at which it was agreed that the proposal for a Joint Church Council be forwarded to Congregations and their Church Councils. These questions offer further clarification to the proposal recognizing that we can only clarify the principles on which a JCC will operate and not pre-empt future decisions of the Council.

- 1. How the JCC will be established?** The JCC will be established by a decision of the Presbytery at the request of the Church Councils of the congregations under Regulation 3.1.12 (e). As this request will be made through the NCC, the NCC has sent the proposal to Network Church Councils for their consideration and response. It is expected that Church Councils will seek both to inform their members and seek their views before they make a decision.
- 2. How will the JCC Membership be chosen and other membership questions?** The JCC needs to be large enough to represent the congregations but small enough to be efficient. It needs to include all ministers in Placement within the network. For these reasons the NCC proposal is that two members from each Network Congregation will comprise the bulk of the Membership of the JCC.
These members will be elected by the congregation as being “men and women, bearing gifts and graces with which God has endowed them for the building up of the church.” (Reg 3.1.11 (b)).
Initially they will be elected for a two year term with half the body retiring each year. This may be varied if needed by a decision of the Presbytery at the request of the JCC.
The question of appointing alternates may be considered desirable and would be a decision of the JCC.
- 3.** The NCC will request Presbytery permission not to have half of the JCC comprised of Elders [Reg 3.1.12 (b)] The Network encourages Leaders Meetings to fulfil this regulation so that the Leaders meeting has the people with gifts to meet the pastoral and spiritual needs of its members as well deal with other matters important to the life of the congregation. It is hoped that the new structure will provide an opportunity to renew and strengthen the role Elders play in the pastoral care and oversight of congregations and members within the Uniting Church.
- 4. How the JCC will work:** The JCC will replace the Network Coordinating Committee. The Network congregations have covenanted to no longer act alone but together and have formed the NCC to guide this process. By forming a JCC, the network will have a sound structure and governance procedures within the regulations of the UCA. The primary role of the JCC will be one of coordination. It is important for people to realize that the JCC is not an agent of anyone else, neither Presbytery nor any other interest group. It will be responsible to the Presbytery but is an agency of the congregations to assist the work of the congregations and address the pressing changes confronting them. This cannot be stressed strongly enough as many people seem to regard the JCC as something other than a Council of the Network congregations enabling them to work together. It is not a hierarchical body operating with its own political agendas and methods.

The JCC is required to make decisions by consensus and the Presbytery acts as mediator if irreconcilable differences arise.

5. **Finance and the role of the Treasurer:** The proposal recommends that the JCC establish a system for the coordination of the management of financial and property resources within the network. The possible operation of the Budget and the role of the Treasurer (including how the Treasurer is chosen) are currently being considered by the Network Finance Committee working with the Treasurers of the congregations. It is most likely that congregations will determine their own budgets which they will submit to the JCC for each year's activities. The coordinating function of the JCC means that all the Network's resources will be directed towards the priorities of the Network's congregations. These priorities will arise from the congregations and be agreed between the JCC and the congregations prior to the Network budget being set.
6. **Local initiatives & fundraising:** The fundamental principles on which the formation of the JCC will be based and will work from, include: 1) that a congregation is the primary expression of the corporate life of the Church and 2) That Network congregations have already decided to no longer act alone but together. Therefore, local initiative will be valued and encouraged by the JCC who will coordinate their acting *together* so as to enhance their mission across the network. Network Congregations will work through the JCC to develop priorities for mission and ministry so that available resources can be focussed accordingly.
7. **Role of the Leaders Meeting:** The Leaders Meeting is the meeting of the elected leaders of a congregation responsible for the life of each congregation. It is a development of the provision in Reg 3.1.10 (e). The Leaders Meeting will fulfil many of the responsibilities of the current Church Councils and Elders meetings. Where there needs to be coordination of activities of the congregations, the JCC will have responsibility. There will be a free flow of information and initiative between these two groups who will work together to effect the mandate of the Network and the mission of the church.
8. **Sense of belonging to a congregation:** There is no reason for people to feel that their relationship with their current congregation will change dramatically. However, some people may take the opportunity of the closer relationship between congregations in the network to join in the activities of other congregations or to worship in other places that better suit their needs.
9. **Ministry Model and Placements:** The current and pending ministry vacancies in the network and the fact that some of those congregations are looking for less than fulltime placements, means that the network has to find a new model for ministry. The July meeting of the NCC approved work on this through a committee of representatives from congregations and the Presbytery. The group is yet to meet. One change that is being explored is that of Placements being made to the Network. However, where ministers are to be called to a ministry within a congregation (either part-time or in conjunction with another responsibility) the congregation will participate in the decision to call.
10. **Trial period or gradual implementation:** Some people have suggested a trial period or a gradual implementation of the proposal. It is difficult to see how either of these

suggestions could be implemented without confusion and further unjustifiable delays. It should be realized that the JCC will take time to bed down and adjustments will almost certainly have to be made as the JCC learns from experience how best to achieve its goals. Approval for major adjustments will be sought from the congregations and may be suggested either by the JCC itself or by the congregations.

11. How do Uniting Church agencies relate to the JCC? This is not a question that has been decided by the NCC. However, it would seem that, according to the JCC's principles of working, if an agency has a relationship with a congregation, the agency relates to that congregation about day to day matters. Where there is a policy or resource decision to be made, the agency will also need to consult with the JCC.

12. Duties and responsibilities of the respective bodies: The relative duties and responsibilities of the JCC and the Leaders Meeting will be as follows. We propose that the regulated duties of the Church Council will be shared between the two bodies each in their respective areas of responsibility. In presenting this model we have sought the guidance of the Synod Associate General Secretary, Peter Blackwood. These arrangements are subject to the approval of the Yarra Yarra Presbytery.

[Reg 3.1.13 (a)]The Church Council shall give priority in its life to building up the Congregation in faith and love, sustaining members in hope, and leading the Congregation to a fuller participation in Christ's mission in the world. This priority shall be reflected in the agenda of its ordinary meetings.

Both the JCC and the Leaders Meeting will be guided by this Regulation in the fulfilment of their respective responsibilities: The Leaders Meeting for its congregation and the JCC in coordinating the work of all the congregations.

In the following list of duties,(i) to (vi) the Leaders Meeting will fulfil these in their own congregation always bearing in mind in their planning and execution that they are in a covenant relationship with other congregations in the Network. This will mean they will seek ways to work together and share resources where possible.

(b) The duties and responsibilities of the Church Council include the following:

- (i) sharing with the Minister(s) in mission and in the pastoral care and spiritual oversight of the Congregation;
- (ii) nurturing the members and adherents in their growth in grace;
- (iii) making decisions in accordance with the Regulations concerning baptism, confirmation and membership, and the keeping and reviewing of the rolls of the Congregation;
- (iv) assisting the Minister(s) in the conduct of worship and in the administration of the sacraments;
- (v) determining the time and place of services of public worship;
- (vi) carrying out its functions concerning applicants for the ministries of Minister of the Word, Deacon, Community Minister, Pastor, Lay Pastor, Lay Preacher and Youth Worker, having regard to the Regulations;

In the following regulations (vii to xi) the responsibilities will be shared between the Leaders Meeting and the JCC in the ways indicated.

(vii) managing the financial affairs and the general administration of the Congregation including the reception, preparation and presentation of all necessary budgets, statements and reports; *The Leaders Meeting will be responsible for the framing of the congregation's annual budget and the administration of the congregation's finances. The Joint Church Council will have responsibility for finding the resources for all the budgets and the allocation of available funds according to the shared priorities of the Network.*

(viii) managing and controlling property in accordance with the Regulations; *Congregations, who are the beneficial users of UCA property will have responsibility through the Leaders Meeting for the maintenance and use of that property according to their own mission plans and priorities. The JCC will have the responsibility for coordinating the use of property so that the mission of the congregations can be financed most effectively. A proposal for changing the use of a property can be an initiative of a congregation or the JCC. Such a change will require the agreement of the JCC, the congregations and the Presbytery.*

(ix) preparing and presenting to a meeting of the Congregation an annual report concerning the life and work of the Congregation including its worship, mission and service, and making recommendations with regard to the program for the ensuing year; *It will be expected that the Leaders Meeting will fulfil this responsibility in the congregation and the JCC fulfil it to all the congregations together.*

(x) exercising oversight of the appointment of officers and leaders of Congregational organisations; *The Leaders Meeting will be elected by the members of the congregation according to the Regulations appropriate to Church Councils [viz.3.1.14] and will have responsibility for the oversight of leaders of other organisations in the congregation. The JCC will be a resource for the Leaders Meeting in the case of difficulty or dispute within the congregation where the matter is not the proper responsibility of the Presbytery.*

(xi) referral of matters to Presbytery as prescribed. *Matters concerning the Network will be referred to the Presbytery through the JCC. If a congregation has a matter concerning the JCC which it wants to refer to the Presbytery it may do so confidentially. It is expected that the JCC will operate within its meetings and in its relationship to the congregations through open, honest, personal and respectful methods of communication and likewise congregations to the JCC.*

(c) **Conduct of Meetings:** Meetings shall be conducted in accordance with "A Manual for Meetings in the Uniting Church" unless the Church Council has adopted or shall adopt other standing orders or meeting procedures. *The JCC will make decisions using consensus decision making processes. It is the view of the NCC that all congregations would benefit from adopting this method of meeting procedure and it is hoped that it will be adopted by all Leaders Meetings. The JCC may assist in providing training for Leaders Meeting members in this method of meeting.*

Network Governance Group:
13th July, 2010