

# Synod of Victoria and Tasmania Placements Committee

## Procedure for arrangements to consider issuing a call to a Congregation minister *without physical gathering*

These procedures are only for the special circumstances, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which restrict face-to-face gatherings.

### 1. JOINT NOMINATING COMMITTEE (JNC) SEEKING PRESBYTERY APPROVAL

When the JNC and the minister agree to proceed to Call, the JNC seeks the approval of the Presbytery, the authority of which is usually delegated to the Pastoral Relations Committee (PRC) (Regulation 2.6.6(m)). In these circumstances, it is suggested that the JNC provides the PRC with written material to demonstrate why they believe that the conversation should proceed to call, and any issues that have been or will need to be addressed. Such material should be provided to the PRC in advance of their meeting. In most cases, it should be possible for the Presbytery Liaison Persons (PLPs) to join the PRC video/teleconference for any discussion.

### 2. PASTORAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE (PRC) APPROVAL FOR PROCESS

The JNC should seek the approval of the PRC for the process to be followed for the Congregation meeting. Some suggestions are given below. The JNC should document a process which is suitable for the congregation's particular situation.

### 3. CONGREGATION MEETING (Reg. 2.6.6 (m)(i))

The main elements of the Congregational meeting are:

- (a) the JNC presenting the name and the reasons for recommending the issuing a call;
- (b) an opportunity for questions and prayerful discernment;
- (c) indication of support.

A meeting needs to be called for a particular date and time, which may be a meeting by phone or video conference. With **careful consideration of confidentiality**, some of the work of parts (a) and (c) can be done by different means, under the circumstances of restrictions on face-to-face gatherings.

#### Part (a)

The JNC could provide written material, by email or by letter, to eligible members of the Congregation (see Reg. 3.5.1(a)). It would be important to stress that such communications are **confidential** and are to be **deleted or destroyed** at the conclusion of the process. Providing such material in advance would make steps (b) and (c) easier when face-to-face meetings are not possible.

#### Parts (b) and (c)

Some congregations will be able to run video conferences. Most congregations should be able to run a phone conference. Phone conferences become challenging when the numbers are large, but they can be managed. There are a number of platforms available, including Zoom (which can be used for phone conferences as for video conferences). Typically, it involves phoning a particular phone number and entering a meeting identification number in order to connect. Passwords should be used, when the option is available, as sensitive matters are being discussed.

To run a phone conference might typically involve:

1. Informing all eligible members of the time and date of the conference and instructions for connection, and requesting RSVPs (which could be either by phone or email). This could be done through a “phone tree” where every Elder is asked to phone a group of people, and collect their RSVPs at the same time.
2. From the RSVPs construct a roll. Ensure that a quorum will be reached (See Reg. 3.8.5). Instruct people to phone in during the 10 minutes prior to the meeting and wait quietly. At the appointed time, the secretary should read through the roll inviting people to indicate their “presence”.
3. The JNC may then speak to any material sent around. Questions should be invited. Instructions should be given as to how support will be measured. Only those who have been present for the meeting are able to participate in the discernment, as ‘proxy’ voting does not enable a reflection on the conversation that takes place.
4. Those who have been present at the meeting are invited to indicate their support by a specified method, to scrutineers approved at the meeting. The scrutineers should be members of the congregation who are not on the JNC, although independent scrutineers recommended by the Presbytery could also be sought.

The ballot to indicate either ‘to support’ or ‘not to support’ calling the minister could be done by one or more of:

- i. email to a specified address (perhaps an email address set up specifically for this purpose); and/or
- ii. phone calls to a specified person; and/or
- iii. returning a ballot paper which has been distributed by mail or email.

A date and time for the closure of the ballot will need to be specified.

5. The scrutineers should contact the chairpersons of the JNC and of the Congregation regarding the ballot’s result. The latter should announce the results to the congregation by whatever means are appropriate.

Please note the importance of maintaining confidentiality during the process, especially in order to allow the Minister to know the results and be free to speak to other people about it in their own time rather than before the results are known.

Please also note that the normal bar is a 2/3 majority of those voting in a written ballot. (See step 6 in “Six Steps – filling a ministerial vacancy in Congregational Placement” within the document “1 JNC Information” at <https://victas.uca.org.au/ministry-mission/placements/>)

## NOTES:

### 1. PRESBYTERY PLACEMENTS

For Presbytery Placements with primary ministry in particular congregations, those congregations need to be given the opportunity to express their approval prior to the Presbytery meeting to decide on issuing a call. A similar procedure to that outlined above could be used for both the meetings of the congregations for their approval, and for the Presbytery meeting. “Approval” in this case could be taken to mean support by a 2/3 majority of those voting.

## 2. PRIORITY PLACEMENTS

For a Priority Placement, if the JNC and the Minister discern that a call to the placement is appropriate and should proceed the Joint Nominating Committee seeks the endorsement of the Congregation(s) as soon as possible and notifies the Placements Committee of the outcome of the conversation. If the Minister is not on the Available for Placement List, the Placements Committee arranges for early release from the Congregation and Presbytery in which the Minister currently serves (National Handbook of Procedures for the Placement of Ministers, p.10).

Under the circumstances of restrictions on face-to-face gatherings, “endorsement” by the congregation maybe sought in the manner described above.

For more information, please contact Sue Withers, Secretary of the Placements Committee [placements.secretary@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:placements.secretary@victas.uca.org.au)