

Methodist Church Of New Zealand

Te Hahi Weteriana O Aotearoa

Administration Division
P O Box 931
CHRISTCHURCH

Information Leaflet No. 152

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GUIDELINES FOR PARISH STEWARDS

The role of Parish Steward in the Methodist Church has a long tradition. There are parallels in Co-operating and Joint Ventures, but the names used are different. The role and tasks outlined are seen as important and there is a need for them to be designated to wise and faithful people within the congregation/parish.

What is a Steward? Another way of describing the role has been as "a watchful servant". A person responsible to and careful towards others, "to run the household and give the other servants their share of the food at the proper time." (Luke 12: 42 T.E.V.)

The office of Parish Steward (formerly known as Circuit Steward) began when someone was needed to take charge of the money from the weekly Class Meetings, given for the upkeep of the Minister. Later as circumstances demanded, the Steward became responsible for the care of the weekly offerings from the Church services, the payment of stipends, and in some places the collection of pew rents, which paid for the upkeep of buildings. In the days of last century, the office was always held by a man who was expected to be an exemplary keeper of the society's cash.

Today the Parish Steward is much more free of those financial restraints. With streamlined, computerised accounting and separate treasurers, both women and men Stewards are able to concentrate more on the pastoral aspects of the task.

The Parish Stewards' functions are both administrative and pastoral and are listed in the Law Book of The Methodist Church of New Zealand.

APPOINTMENT OF PARISH STEWARDS (Law Book Section 3:5.6.2)

EITHER

Two Parish Stewards shall be appointed annually, who shall act as the Executive Officers of the Parish Meeting, one of whom shall be nominated by the Parish Superintendent and one by a member of the Meeting. If the Superintendent fails or declines to nominate, any member of the Meeting may nominate. Such Stewards shall be elected at the annual Parish Meeting by an absolute majority of the votes of those present. Parish Stewards will not normally serve for more than five years consecutively.

OR

Three Parish Stewards shall be appointed to act as the Executive Officers of the Parish Meeting. They shall normally serve for three years. They shall retire by rotation, one each year. One such Steward shall be elected at the annual Parish Meeting by an absolute majority of the votes of those present. The Meeting shall appoint the incoming Parish Steward, to be

nominated in alternate years by the Parish Meeting and the Superintendent Minister.

You will note that the method of appointment and length of term of office are clearly set out. There may be occasions when it is prudent for a Steward to stay in office for an extra year; such as at the time of a change of Presbyter.

Every effort needs to be made to free Parish Stewards of other responsibilities within the Parish. It is important, therefore, to look ahead for a replacement Steward. Parish Stewards need to be chosen for their administrative and pastoral skills. People with spiritual insight and experience, with an understanding of the work of ordained ministry, local church and the wider Connexion are needed for this role. The Parish Stewards work as a team, each undertaking the duties best suited to their gifts and skills. They need to relate well to one another, as well as to the whole Ministry team of Presbyter, Deacon(s) and lay people.

FUNCTIONS OF PARISH STEWARDS (Law Book Section 3:5.6.3)

Note: The word Minister as used in this section includes Ordained Presbyter, Deacon and Lay Ministers appointed to specific covenanted ministries.

The Law Book is a useful tool with which Parish Stewards need to be familiar. The Introduction pages, Sections 1, 2, 3 and 7 are important Sections.

Parish Stewards are the Executive Officers of the Parish Meeting. As such they have a responsibility to ensure that the decisions of the meeting are carried out. It is **not** their task to do everything, but rather to have general oversight.

Parish Stewards are required to maintain regular discussion on Parish life with the Ministers of the Parish. A regular meeting with the Ministers needs to be part of the ongoing life of the Parish. This meeting may include other key people in leadership and would include regular evaluation of the work of the Ministers and Parish as a whole.

Parish Stewards exercise a pastoral role in relation to each Minister stationed to serve in the Parish and to each Minister's family.

This is a very important part of the Parish Steward's work. Pastoral care needs to be seen in terms of the practical, physical needs of housing and office facilities, as well as in terms of support and encouragement for both Minister and family.

Ministers **and** family need someone to:

- listen
- pray with
- affirm them and their work
- share their faith journey
- encourage honest dialogue
- encourage goal setting.

Time needs to be taken to establish trust and offer personal support in a way that is sensitive to the particular family needs. It cannot be assumed that the Parish Steward will necessarily form a close friendship with the Minister and family. The relationship needs to be seen first as a work related one, providing a sounding board and an awareness of signs of stress and fatigue. This care is exercised towards all Presbyters, Deacons and Lay People in Covenanted Ministry roles, including University, Hospital or Prison Chaplains who are part of the Parish.

Parish Stewards ensure that the decisions of Conference with respect to annual leave, study leave and long leave applicable to any Minister stationed in the Parish, are duly observed and to consult with each minister regarding arrangement for such leave, including provision for a supply ministry as necessary.

Study Leave provisions are outlined in Information Leaflet No. 7.

Leave should be recorded in the Minister's Record of Service Entitlements book held by individual Presbyters. If your Presbyter has not got a copy they are available from the Connexional Office.

Parish Stewards facilitate communication within the Parish, to hear and act upon concerns arising within the Parish.

Listening is a very important function. The Parish Stewards need to be perceived by both the Ministers and the whole congregation as people who are able to listen to and represent fairly the many different viewpoints often present within a Parish. Parish Stewards are often called upon to convey the opinion of the Minister to the congregation and the views of the congregation to the Minister. This communication role is of particular importance in Parishes where there are a number of different congregations. Should any formal complaint be made against a member, Parish Stewards would refer to Law Book Section 8. This procedure must be carefully observed.

Parish Stewards carry out the functions relating to the appointment or change of ministry contained in Section 2:11.1.1 and Section following, including arrangements for the reception of each newly appointed Minister to the Parish. The Stationing procedures alter from time to time and it is important that Parish Stewards are well informed of the current process. Information Leaflet No. 50 sets out regulations regarding parsonages. Stewards should consult with the District Superintendent regarding stationing issues.

As well as ensuring that all the correct steps are taken, it is essential that the grief experienced by both Minister and people is taken seriously and attended to. Only then will it be possible to begin building a healthy relationship with the incoming people.

It is the Parish Steward's task to ensure that all the practical details of moving run smoothly.

Parish Stewards have the right to invite the District Superintendent to visit the Parish.

(Law Book Section 4:8.1-10)

Each Methodist congregation is part of a Parish and each Parish part of a District. The Superintendent, therefore, has oversight and responsibility for the Parishes within the District.

LAY-CLERGY DIALOGUE

It is suggested that a Lay-Clergy Dialogue take place during the first year of the appointment of a Presbyter. The District Superintendent has responsibility for arranging for persons to facilitate this event. The dialogue is to enable both Presbyter and Congregation to state clearly their priorities in terms of the tasks to be undertaken by the Presbyter and to consider the total ministry needs of the congregation/parish and how they will best be met.

Questions about the Lay-Clergy Dialogue are asked on form M6P which is completed each year by the Parish Superintendent as part of the statistical data of each Parish.

Information Leaflets are available from:

Administration Division
P O Box 931
CHRISTCHURCH.

A file of these leaflets would be a valuable asset for Parish Stewards. Presbyters are sent copies of all new and updated leaflets in the Connexional Mailing.

A number of leaflets are now available on the Church website www.methodist.org.nz