



# PARISH STEWARDS

Guidance for Parish Stewards in the  
Methodist Church of New Zealand

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# Handbook for Parish Stewards

## A Pastoral and Practical Guide

This handbook is designed to support newly appointed Parish Stewards in understanding their role, responsibilities, and the pastoral skills required to carry out their ministry faithfully within the Methodist Church of New Zealand – Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa. It should be read alongside the *Leaders' Meeting & Parish Council Handbook* and the *Methodist Laws and Regulations* (See Section 2 and 3)

Parish Stewards hold a role of trust. At its heart, the role of Steward is a ministry of relationship, care, communication, and accountability—serving both the parish and its ministers for the sake of the gospel.

### 1. The Role of the Parish Steward

Parish Stewards are **Executive Officers of the Parish Council**. They are appointed by the Parish Council or the annual Parish Meeting and serve for a defined term, as outlined in Methodist Law.

Their role sits at the intersection of **governance and pastoral care**. Parish Stewards:

- Support and care for ministers and their families
- Act as a key communication bridge within the parish
- Help ensure church processes are followed with integrity and compassion
- Represent the wellbeing of the parish in matters of ministry and appointment

Parish Stewards are *not* supervisors of ministers, nor are they advocates for one group against another. They work collaboratively with ministers, Parish Council, and Synod Superintendents.

### 2. Appointment and Tenure

Parish Stewards may be appointed in one of the following ways:

- **Two-Steward Model:** Appointed annually, one nominated by the Parish Superintendent and one by members of the Parish Council, elected by the Parish Meeting. Stewards normally serve no more than five consecutive years.
- **Three-Steward Model:** Appointed for three-year terms, retiring by rotation, with nominations alternating between the Parish Meeting and Superintendent Minister.

All Parish Stewards must be:

- Members of the congregation

- On the Membership Roll
- Willing and able to exercise pastoral responsibility with discretion and maturity

### **3. Core Functions of Parish Stewards**

Under Methodist Law (S3: 7.6.3), the functions of Parish Stewards include:

#### **a. Supporting Parish Life**

- Maintaining **regular, open conversation** with the parish ministers
- Sharing insights about parish life and listening carefully to concerns
- Supporting missional priorities agreed by the Parish Council

#### **b. Pastoral Care of Ministers and Their Families**

One of the most significant responsibilities of Parish Stewards is their **pastoral care of ministers**.

This includes:

- Taking an interest in the wellbeing of ministers and their families
- Offering support during times of stress, illness, or transition
- Acting early when concerns arise and addressing them constructively
- Encouraging healthy boundaries, rest, and self-care

This care should be exercised respectfully, confidentially, and without judgement.

#### **c. Communication and Listening**

Parish Stewards:

- Help facilitate healthy communication across the parish
- Listen carefully to concerns raised by members
- Discern what needs to be addressed locally and what should be referred to Parish Council or Synod
- Help prevent misunderstandings from escalating

Listening well is central to the role and requires patience, humility, and prayerfulness.

### **4. Ministry Appointments and Changes**

Parish Stewards have a formal role in matters of ministerial appointment and change.

#### **Change of Appointment**

A question regarding a change of appointment may be raised by:

- The Synod Superintendent

- The Parish Stewards
- Any five members of the Leaders' Meeting and/or Parish Council

A minister seeking a change of appointment is required to notify both the **Synod Superintendent and the Parish Stewards**.

### **Welcoming New Ministers**

Parish Stewards are responsible for:

- Assisting with arrangements for the reception of a newly appointed minister
- Helping the parish prepare spiritually and practically for a transition
- Supporting both departing and incoming ministers with care

### **5. Leave Support and Oversight**

Parish Stewards play a vital role in supporting ministers to take appropriate leave.

This includes:

- Annual leave
- Study leave
- Long service leave
- Parental leave
- Leave relating to illness or disability

Arrangements for leave are made **in consultation with the Parish Stewards and the Synod Superintendent**.

Stewards help ensure:

- Conference decisions on leave are followed
- Ministers are supported to take leave responsibly
- Supply ministry is arranged when required

Supporting leave is a pastoral responsibility, not merely an administrative one.

### **6. Parish Governance and Meetings**

Parish Stewards are:

- Members of the **Parish Council**
- Ex officio members of each **Leaders' Meeting** within the parish

They are expected to:

- Participate regularly and responsibly in meetings

- Help uphold good governance practices
- Work collegially with the Chairperson, Secretary, and Treasurer

They do not act independently of the Parish Council but carry delegated authority as executive officers.

## **7. Relationship with the Synod Superintendent**

Parish Stewards have the **right to invite the Synod Superintendent to visit the parish.**

They may do so:

- When significant concerns arise
- During times of conflict or transition
- When additional oversight or support is needed

Don't forget to include Synod Superintendents for significant celebrations and in times when ministry is going well and needs to be acknowledged.

This is an important safeguard for both parish and minister.

## **8. Skills and Qualities Needed for the Role**

Effective Parish Stewards typically demonstrate:

### **Pastoral Skills**

- Active, empathetic listening
- Emotional intelligence
- Sensitivity to cultural and family contexts
- Ability to hold confidentiality

### **Relational Skills**

- Clear and respectful communication
- Willingness to have difficult conversations graciously
- Collaborative approach to leadership

### **Discernment and Wisdom**

- Ability to distinguish between issues needing pastoral care and those needing governance response
- Prayerful discernment
- Openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit

### **Integrity and Accountability**

- Acting in the best interests of the whole parish

- Respecting Methodist law and processes
  - Being trustworthy and reliable
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## **9. A Ministry of Trust**

Parish Stewards serve the church during moments of stability and moments of change. Their role is often quiet, sometimes demanding, and always relational.

When exercised with humility, faithfulness, and love, the ministry of Parish Steward helps sustain healthy ministers, strengthen parish life, and support the mission of God in the local community.

*“Serve one another humbly in love.”* (Galatians 5:13)

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*This handbook is intended as a practical companion for Parish Stewards and should be read in conjunction with official church policies and the Methodist Laws and Regulations.*