

Healthy Parish Relationships Guidelines

(An extract from the 10/16 Licensing of Incumbents Interim Report to Synod 2017, Appendix 2)

1. Preamble

Church leadership is an indispensable part of Christ's body. Men and women are gifts to the church to, "... prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the son of God ..." (Ephesians 4:12-13).

When the church's leadership and people work together, under the authority of Christ, the church flourishes and provides the best environment for gospel growth.

On the one hand, the people are to, "...respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you." (1 Thessalonians 5:12). On the other hand, leaders are not to lord over them and, "... whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant ..." (Mark 10:43). Servant leadership is the way of the Son of Man who, "... did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45).

In all our relationships, grace and love must prevail but particularly when it comes to ministers' relationships with each other and the church.

A proper understanding of expectations goes a long way toward healthy parish relationships. This document is designed to assist churches and ministers to work together. It focuses on the relationships of a) rector to the church and b) rector to other staff.

The Parish Council of each church may move something like the following motion at the beginning of each ministry appointment.

"The Minister, Wardens and Parish Council: –

- (a) give thanks for God's gifts to the church and strive to live at peace for the sake of the gospel;
- (b) agree to the church's amended version of the Sydney Diocese's, "Healthy Parish Relationship Guidelines" and;
- (c) agree to pray for those whom the Lord has given to provide leadership, teaching and pastoral support."

2. Other relevant documentation

We strive to relate to each other by grace and not by law. That said, the law is often based on good principles and knowing the law can actually lead to mutual understanding and hence better relationships.

These guidelines act as an omnibus document to help church workers through the maze of legislation. It is intended to work alongside existing legislation.

Listed here are some of the relevant documents that govern the way we relate in the church.

2.1. Anglican Diocese of Sydney, Employment Relations, Guidelines for Parishes

A very useful document which provides employment guidelines for all parish workers including employees, independent contractors, voluntary workers and Ministers/Assistant Ministers.

2.2 Remuneration guidelines

Remuneration guidelines for Parish Ministry Staff are published by the Secretariat on an annual basis.

2.3 Ordinances

2.3.1 Anglican Church of Australia Constitutions Act 1902, Clause 3(4) of the schedule

A part of an Act of the New South Wales Parliament which allows the Synod of each diocese to determine by ordinance the circumstances in which a clergy licence may be suspended or revoked.

2.3.2 Parish Administration Ordinance

Requires any person who preaches and conducts services to be licensed or approved by the Archbishop or regional Bishop.

2.3.3 Nomination Ordinance

Outlines the procedure for forming a nomination committee and making recommendations to the Archbishop.

2.3.4 Parental Leave Ordinance

Outlines parental leave entitlement for clergy.

2.3.5 Assistant Ministers Ordinance

Outlines the procedures for appointing an Assistant Minister and how that arrangement may be terminated.

2.3.6 Parish Disputes Ordinance

Can be used by Parish Council in cases of dispute involving a church worker, which may involve mediation.

2.3.7 Parish Relationships Ordinance

If a 65% majority of a Parish General Meeting determines that there is a relationship breakdown between the minister and parishioners, in certain circumstances, a licence review process may be invoked.

2.4 Statutory law

Stipendiary lay workers will be subject to various Commonwealth and New South Wales employment laws. Although these do not always directly apply to licensed clergy, they should be referred to.

2.5 The Ordinal, Book of Common Prayer

Clergy make important promises at their ordination. Anglicans take these very seriously and in some jurisdictions may even be legally binding.

3. Church relationship with staff

3.1 Rector

3.1.1 Employment status

The rector is considered an officeholder rather than an employee. He is licensed to a parish by the Archbishop of Sydney.

This is an unusual employment status and doesn't directly correspond with other secular employment arrangements. Clergy licensing is governed by Synod, and its various ordinances.

Since the Minister is regarded as an officeholder, the Sydney Diocese Employment Relations Guidelines recommends that care be taken not to enter into an employment contract.

3.1.2 Nomination process

The nomination process is governed by the *Nomination Ordinance 2006*, can be onerous but involves representatives from the parish, Synod and the Archbishop. It is worth doing well in order to find the right candidate for the right church.

Once a rector is nominated, there is no going back. It can be difficult to remove a rector, therefore choose wisely.

The church elects five nominators at its general meeting every year. These people should be godly, well known and likely to act in the church's interest. Most years the nominators will be inactive however careful thought and prayer should be applied every year as though they will become active.

Nominators should have a clear idea of the type of minister that the church needs. They should have ongoing discussions with the Wardens.

An important question is whether the church needs a culture change for the sake of the gospel or ongoing improvement to the current culture. Nominators should seek a candidate who will lead such change/improvement.

Nominators will commonly filter all available clergy to come up with a preferred list. It is important to be realistic and to pick clergy who may be in a position to move.

Narrowing down the preferred list will involve speaking to referees, relevant people (like the bishops) listening to recorded sermons and attending their current church (bearing in mind the sensitivity for that church).

The nominators should interview the candidates more than once and should work hard to explain the uniqueness of their church and understand the candidates' strengths, weaknesses and characters, to determine a good fit. It is important to get beyond initial niceties. The nominators should consider the candidates they are pursuing and imagine the potential areas of conflict. This may direct their discussion with the candidates.

The candidates should make a careful study of the church profile along with other research. They should communicate clearly to the nominators any significant cultural change that they believe may need to take place. It is disingenuous to surprise the nominators once in the position.

Seeking God's wisdom in prayer should undergird the nomination process at every step.

3.1.3 Rector's responsibilities

Rather than a "job description" it would be appropriate to come to an advance agreement of the rector's responsibilities. These should be phrased in terms of ministry outcomes, rather than specific duties. For example, it is better to state, "The rector will be responsible for the pastoral care of church members" rather than, "The rector will visit sick church members on a frequent basis."

Schedule 1 of the Parish Administration Ordinance states, 'The minister has general responsibility for the spiritual welfare of the parish and each church in the parish and for this purpose has powers, rights and duties in accordance with his licence and authority from the Archbishop'.

The agreement should not contradict or repeat that already stated in the Parish Administration ordinance. However, it may include agreement as to how this is practised within the uniqueness of a particular church.

According to schedule 1 of the Parish Administration Ordinance, the main financial function of the Wardens are, 'to ensure the proper management, security and financial administration of all money and other property of the church (except money or other property for which the Wardens are excluded from exercising this function by the trusts on which such money or other property is held)'. They may also appoint certain paid workers, with the concurrence of the minister. The rector determines the duties performed by ministry staff.

Wardens are also responsible to keep order of each church property and grounds.

Put simply, the rector is responsible for the 'spiritual welfare' of the church and the Wardens and parish council for 'temporal matters'. In reality it is not quite that simple. The temporal matters can be managed in a way that facilitates the spiritual welfare of the church, so it is important for the rector and Wardens to work closely together. The rector should consult the Wardens and parish council on matters regarding spiritual welfare and vice versa. If the two do not work well together, disagreement and discord can easily result. The rector should meet with Wardens at least monthly, in addition to a monthly parish council meeting.

3.1.4 Rector's entitlements

A rector should have access to normal entitlements however, given the uniqueness of his position, flexibility is required. For example, a rector may need to perform ministry duties during public holidays. He is responsible for his own time management, ensuring that he has sufficient rest with minimal disruption to the church. It is not appropriate for a minister to accrue leave in lieu of unused public holidays.

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A church can encourage professional development by budgeting for it. Such a budget may include locum payments for study leave.

A rector should give ample notice for leave. He may negotiate with the Wardens additional study leave when it is considered to benefit the rector and the church.

It is important that current Wardens understand and respect agreements made between the rector and previous Wardens. Wardens often change and it can be frustrating for the rector to have to remind, educate and sometimes renegotiate agreements made in the past. If conditions have changed, Wardens may want to renegotiate an agreement with the rector. It is not acceptable to simply ignore a previous agreement. Eg. 10 years ago a rector negotiated with Wardens that a housing allowance would be indexed in line with rental prices in the local area. This agreement was ignored by subsequent Wardens and parish councils who failed to budget for an increase in his housing allowance.

Where possible, the Wardens should ensure that benefits and entitlements are provided so that the minister can personally flourish and grow, for the sake of the gospel. In cases of uncertainty, it is better to err on the side of reasonable generosity.

3.1.5 Professional Development (PD)

It is important for the rector to be involved in ongoing PD. MT&D administer a program to help ministers in the types of PD they should undertake and gives accreditation.

The Lifelong Ministry Development (LMD) guidelines requires a) A ministry development plan, b) A minimum of 30 hours LMD activities per year and c) Journal entry for each hour of LMD activity. The LMD approved PD activities allow much scope for the minister to develop a PD plan suited to his and the church's needs.

3.1.6 Regular review

It is recommended that a review be conducted with the Wardens once a year. This should include an open and honest discussion about the things the rector is doing well and the areas in which he could improve.

It should be two way and the rector may make certain request of the Wardens in order to facilitate and encourage the ministry.

3.1.7 Disputes

It is expected that disputes be dealt with in a directly personal way within the church before escalating to the Bishop or enacting an ordinance.

Schedule 1 of the Parish Administration Ordinance states, 'The policy of the Anglican Church of Australia in the Diocese is that any dispute between the minister and any of the members of this Church should be solved in a prayerful and pastoral manner, having regard to the rights and duties of those persons, rather than by legal decision.'

In the case of personal disputes, it may be necessary to use a mediator that both parties approve.

Conflict resolution can be time consuming and sometimes feels like a distraction to ministry. Conflict resolution requires careful communication and patience. If done properly, it may consume much time but will ensure that ministry flourishes.

The *Parish Disputes Ordinance 1999* provides helpful guidelines when a dispute involves a church worker.

3.2 Rector and Staff

3.2.1 Purpose

Paul writes to the Philippians *"I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* Phil 1.3-6

This section of the guidelines are designed to help staff teams of paid and voluntary workers serve together in a healthy gospel partnership that brings joy to each other and advances the work that God is doing in each church of our Diocese.

They are meant to be discussed in each church and applied to the circumstances of each staff team and the context where they serve.

3.2.2 Appointment

The appointment of any staff is a long and complex matter and needs considerable care to ensure that there is real clarity on the ministry partnership that is being entered into. The SDS website provides The Employment Relations Guidelines to assist in this process and covers many important areas for the rector (with the wardens and parish council) and staff member to discuss, agree on and document.

3.2.3 Clear role description

A written role description outlining the primary and secondary responsibilities of each team member brings clarity for each member of the team. It allows each member to be focused in their work, avoids confusion and potential conflict, and provides a basis for being able to assess how each member is performing. This role description should be negotiated and agreed on before a position is offered and accepted. It is helpful for a discussion to take place every year in the review process (below) about how the role description matches the reality of what is being done. Changes in the functioning of the staff member or the role description can be discussed and agreed on at this point. (Note Appendix A for a pro-forma)

3.2.4 Regular review

A regular staff review enables each staff member to set goals for each year and then along with others on their 'review team' assess how they are going in achieving those goals, what additional resources or help might be needed or what changes need to be made to the goals. A 'review team' could consist of the team member and their spouse, the rector, a warden and two members of the church selected by the staff member.

3.2.5 Termination

The formal ordinance that needs to be followed in the termination of a clergy person is the *Assistant Minister Ordinance 1990*¹, and of a layperson The Fair Work Act 2009.

There may be a whole range of factors that lead a rector to decide to terminate a staff member's appointment in the parish. Sometimes it might be guided by a changing financial situation, sometimes by changes in the needs of the parish and other times by the suitability of the staff member to carry out the ministry needed. All our relationships as Christian co-workers should be marked by love, openness and honesty. A regular review process should provide the mechanism for open discussion on how a staff member is fulfilling their role in the parish. If a rector is not happy with a staff member's conduct, performance or capacity in the ministry it is essential that this is discussed openly with a view to addressing those concerns. This is best formally documented and confirmed by both rector and staff member so there is an objective record of what reviews and discussions have occurred. It should not be a 'surprise' to the assistant minister if the rector has issues with their performance and a termination is discussed. The staff member needs to understand the rector's concerns and be able to share their perspective with a view to agreeing on a way forward.

A recommended process for a rector to follow is:

- (i) Clearly alert the assistant minister (either verbally or in writing) that they are not fulfilling their responsibilities properly and provide details of these areas. Inform them of the need to improve their conduct or performance or further develop their capacity to carry out their role, or they risk being dismissed.
- (ii) Provide the assistant minister with a reasonable amount of time to improve his or her performance or conduct.
- (iii) Offer to provide the assistant minister with appropriate training or opportunity to develop his or her skills.

¹ Superseded by the *Assistant Ministers Ordinance 2017* from 1 January 2018 [inserted following Synod 2017].

- (iv) Assess whether the assistant minister has improved in their conduct, performance or capacity.
- (v) Before you dismiss the assistant minister you must tell them the reason for the dismissal and give him or her an opportunity to respond.

[Note this is a draft recommended process and the current review of the Assistant Ministers Ordinance before Synod in 2017 is expected to outline its own process for managing a termination. These guidelines would be updated to reflect whatever process Synod decides]

3.2.6 Task and relationships

Ministry is not done in isolation - there are many tasks to be done. However, as we see in the passage above, ministry is also a partnership. Care must be taken to develop loving relationships within the staff team. This takes time and will involve opportunities to share, pray and read the scriptures together.

3.2.7 Regular meetings

1. Staff team – Organised parish ministry requires weekly team meetings to co-ordinate and plan. These meetings also provide an opportunity to develop relationships within the staff team as you meet over a meal, read scripture, share and pray for each other.
2. Days away - Sometimes the pressing matters of each week can dominate the weekly staff meeting and there is little time to discuss new ideas. Going away two or three times a year, as a staff team, for two or three days allows time for a more extended time to discuss the 'big picture', new ideas of how ministry might be done as well as providing time to relax together.
3. One to one with rector – a regular meeting (monthly – six weekly) one to one, between the rector and each staff member, provides an opportunity to discuss matters in the team members areas of responsibility and to provide feedback on how they are going personally and in their role.

3.2.8 Team covenant (how we work together)

Developing a team covenant or agreement on how the team functions together can contribute significantly to team harmony. This agreement covers things like how the staff team meet, how to function when members' responsibilities overlap, how to respond to other staff members' children or spouse if they serve in another staff member's ministry area, how to appoint leaders and how to resolve conflicts. (Note Appendix C for an example) Regarding team communication, it helps to clarify what things can be communicated via email and what would be better discussed in face to face conversations. Further, if there is a church office which provides working space, clarify expectations for the proportion of time spent working in that space and time spent working at home.

3.2.9 Professional development

Each staff member needs to continue to develop their convictions, character and competencies to enable them to continue to be fruitful in their ministry. The rector and parish council need to agree on how much time each staff team member can devote to professional development and what financial support is available. This would cover conferences, courses of study, books and fees for mentors/courses and pastoral supervision.

Ministry Training & Development has established a professional development process called "Lifelong Ministry Development (LMD)" to provide an intentional, self-directed and accountable approach to help ministers maintain their zeal and fervour in serving the Lord (Rom 12:11). This provides a very helpful structure to professional development and provides accreditation. More details are available on the MT&D website.

3.2.10 Outside ministry

Each staff member needs to be committed to serve in ministry in their church but what about their contribution to the wider church, like beach missions, camps or missions? Staff members may have much to contribute here and in turn find encouragement and source new ideas from serving in other places. Furthermore, they may be able to take and train church members. The rector and parish council need to agree on a policy.

3.2.11 Holidays, days off and time in lieu

Annual leave is an entitlement to both lay-workers and clergy but public holidays for lay-workers only. rectors with parish councils need to determine their own policy around public holidays for clergy staff. It is also important to agree on what the expectations are on days off for each staff member and how many nights are staff expected to be doing parish ministry? Also, following particularly busy periods is there any provision for time-off in lieu? How is that organised?

3.2.12 Stipend, allowances and other benefits

The Guidelines for the Remuneration of Parish Ministry Staff are produced annually and available on the SDS website. These guidelines provide detailed information on many different areas, however many of the provisions are guidelines only and need to be negotiated between the rector (with the approval of the parish council) and staff member. This needs to be negotiated before an appointment is made, included in the letter of appointment and discussed in the annual review each year.

3.2.13 Socials

Some opportunities for staff team members to socialise together, as well as with their spouse and children, can contribute significantly to building healthy relationships and team harmony.

4. Concluding Remarks

The guidelines outlined in this document do not have legal force and cannot contravene other legislation.

It is expected that in most situations there will be gospel unity and peace involving church workers.

In the case of disputes, fulfilment or non-fulfilment of the above may be considered appropriate evidence before a tribunal or equivalent.

Hebrews 12:14 “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”