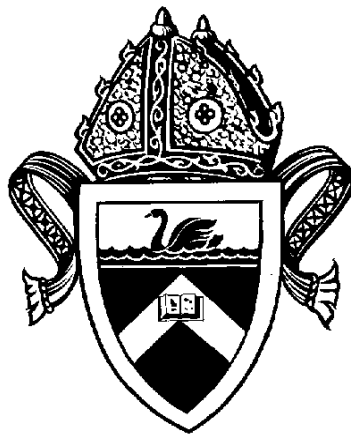


**ANGLICAN DIOCESE
OF
GIPPSLAND**



**PARISH ADMINISTRATION
HANDBOOK**

Information and guidelines for those involved
with the management and administration
of parishes especially clergy and members
of parish councils.

OCTOBER 2010

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INTRODUCTION

This handbook owes its origin to a similar document originally prepared in the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn by myself when I was Diocesan Registrar from 1983 to 2002. In turn that handbook drew on notes prepared for the Seminars on Church Administration held in that Diocese during 1989 and evolved from some of the material made available at seminars in Canberra and Wagga Wagga held in March and April 1988 since revised.

Material was also drawn from the Handbook of the Diocese of Sydney for the section entitled "Administration within the Church Framework"; "A Handbook for Council and Committee Members" by Gordon W. Kuhrt (Mowbray London & Oxford 1985) for the section on the Chair, Secretary and Committee Member; "A Handbook of Parish Finance" by Phyllis Carter and Michael Perry (Mowbray, London & Oxford 1984); "Design for Parish Life and Ministry Development", Division of Parish Service, Lutheran Church in America for the "Twelve Principles by Which Parish Life and Ministry May Flourish".

The section entitled "The Parish Framework" was written by myself.

The section entitled "Why bother with good administration in the church" is adapted from Adminisheet No.20 published by Administry, St Albans, UK entitled "Why waste your time on Administration?".

This version was updated in 2010 for use in the Diocese of Gippsland and was first used at the Parish Officers' Seminar held at Traralgon on 23 October 2010.

(Brian Norris)
Registrar
October 2010

Why bother with good administration in the church?

In 1934 the editor of Crockford's Clerical Directory wrote that, if the clergy "sacrificed real pastoral work to perfecting the machinery of the Church and bartered spiritual influence for the kind of efficiency which is recorded in statistical returns", they would violate their ordination vows. Even today there are still those among the clergy and laity who, if their judgement is less severe, are nonetheless highly critical of the administrative activities in which the modern Church is engaged and in which they find themselves obliged to participate.

This reaction is due partly to a fear of the negative aspects of 'bureaucracy' which can produce harshness, inflexibility and lack of enterprise. But the reaction is also partly due to an unbalanced theological perspective.

One of the results of theological developments since 1920 has been that many clergy and lay people of all ecclesiastical traditions possess a high conception of the Church as the Body of Christ, a high view of the ministry of the Word and Sacraments and a high standard of pastoral devotion and care. Yet something is missing. In concentrating on the greatness of the Church as the Body of Christ it is all too easy to forget that its greatness is, in every age, incarnated in an earthly institution.

Just as God was incarnate in human flesh, so the mystical Body of Christ is incarnated in a human situation. But, whereas in Christ we see perfect manhood united with deity, in the Church we see the treasures of the gospel in earthen vessels. In the Church we do not see some kind of isolated theological utopia but an institution with a particular structure which is shaped by the historical and social environment in which it is set.

Clergy find themselves engaged not only in such theological pursuits as preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments but also in a great deal of administrative activity, inseparable from the institution in which the Body of Christ is incarnated in the late twentieth century. But, whereas they have been taught to look theologically at preaching, the sacraments and pastoral work, they usually have no theological insight into administration.

The consequence is that many clergy and other church leaders resent time given to administration; they regard it as outside the 'proper work' to which they have been appointed; and some neglect it as much as they can. So we get the common but superficial judgement that today the Church is too preoccupied with administration instead of putting its energies into its 'proper work' or preaching the gospel and caring for people. These critics might well consider two propositions.

1. Bad, inefficient administration can hinder or restrict the preaching of the gospel.

F R Barry once said something to the effect that you cannot create a new Pentecost but you can produce conditions in which God may do his mighty works; and a great parish priest, C F Rogers, wrote: "Business-like methods, it is true, cannot create religion, but their absence may kill the life of the Church".

If a church, or an individual church leader, are inefficient or fumbling in administration they are to that extent failing to open up channels for the operation of the Holy Spirit; whereas, if administration is efficient, conditions are being produced in which he may more easily operate, or hindrances are being removed which at present make his activity more difficult.

It is always surprising that it should be thought doubtful that the Holy Spirit should use the administrator, the statistician or even the computer as channels for his working. Charles Forder once pointed out that, in his administrative work, the pastor is "doing no more than trying to do in his own life as God does in the world. God is a God of order as well as a God of love." A minister, while he will always leave room for personal initiative in the needs of the moment, must make himself a man of system and good organisation.

2. Inefficiency in administration hurts people and is the outward expression of lack of concern

This is true whether it takes the small scale of a single unanswered letter or the large scale of a chaotic, archaic ecclesiastical structure. Administration is part of the Church's pastoral activity, just as it is part of the individual minister's pastoral vocation. Pastoral reorganisation, the rational use of church buildings, a flexible system of appointments and payment, an efficient system of Church government - all these are expressions of concern for the people of God and for the most effective preaching of the gospel.

So far as a member of a church's full-time staff is concerned, most of his or her administrative activity is a real part of pastoral ministry, a source of intercession and a channel through which loving concern for people can operate. Writing a letter about the Sunday School outing, working on the church accounts or sitting on a diocesan committee, is to be engaged in pastoral activity, in caring and even praying. These activities are sacramental expressions of love and care.

Someone once said to the late Bishop Mervyn Haigh that a certain member of the clergy had a contempt for administration and that probably he would be all the better because he had this contempt. Mervyn Haigh replied with great emphasis: "No, he would not. I know you think that the pastoral is everything and the administrative nothing. But you are wrong. Good administration is there to make the pastoral possible, and without it the pastoral would find it hard to exist."

Or may we take these words of the last Bishop Kirk of Oxford, speaking of the administrative work of a bishop: "We may say that his administrative responsibilities give him as full opportunities of loving and leading his people as the more congenial occasions when he opens his heart to them from the pulpit or in the pastoral letter."

One of the greatest of Anglican parish priests has written the truth in the words of undying fire:

A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine;
Who sweeps a room as for thy laws

Makes that and the action fine.

"Sweeping a room" is perhaps a humble and inadequate metaphor for the intricacies of committee work and correspondence with which church leaders are beset; but the principle which underlies George Herbert's verse is as relevant in this connection as in any other.

Administration is part of the ministry of every Christian who holds office in a church which is incarnated in an earthly institution. Efficiency, coupled with love and prayer, in this part of his or her work will be the exercising of a pastoral ministry. It is that love and prayer which will prevent administration becoming impersonal and destitute of human sympathy. It is that love and prayer also which will enable him or her to ensure that administration is always the servant and never the master.

Adapted from Adminisheet No.20 entitled "Why waste your time on Administration?" published by Administry, St Alban's, UK.

THE CHURCH FRAMEWORK OUTSIDE THE PARISH

THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH THE ANGLICAN CHURCH ADMINISTRATOR OPERATES

1. THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

The Anglican Church of Australia is one of 20 or so autonomous churches which derived from and declare themselves to be in communion with the Church of England.

The Archbishop of Canterbury is acknowledged as "first among equals" by the bishops but with certain minor exceptions he has no jurisdiction outside England.

2. EARLY DAYS

The Anglican Church which was the established religion in England, came to Australia in 1788 as the chaplaincy to the settlement at Sydney. With the development of the colony, the chaplains were placed under the jurisdiction of an archdeacon in 1824 and were subject to the Bishop of Calcutta.

In 1836, the second Archdeacon of New South Wales, William Grant Broughton, was consecrated as Bishop of Australia.

3. NEW DIOCESES

The sub-division of the Diocese of Australia began with the formation of the Diocese of Tasmania in 1842 followed by Newcastle, Melbourne and Adelaide in 1847. Bishop Broughton became Bishop of Sydney in 1847.

The Diocese of Gippsland was separated off from Melbourne in 1902. Bishop Arthur Wellesley Pain was appointed as the first Bishop of Gippsland.

4. GENERAL SYNOD

In 1847 Bishop Broughton became Metropolitan Bishop of Australasia. His successor, Frederic Barker, was by Letters Patent, made Metropolitan of Australia.

However, no structure existed for dialogue among dioceses in the various colonies. Following an episcopal conference in 1868, arrangements were made for the appointment of a "General Synod" for purposes consented to by the dioceses. Its president was called the "Primate". The Bishop of Sydney filled this role until 1900 when it was decided that the Primate would be chosen from among the metropolitans.

The General Synod first met in 1872.

5. CONSTITUTION

After protracted negotiations, a formal constitution for the Church of England in Australia eventually emerged in 1961. Each state parliament adopted the constitution by means of uniform legislation.

In Victoria the Act is cited as the Anglican Church of Australia Constitution Act 1960.

6. THE PROVINCE OF VICTORIA

- *The system of grouping dioceses into Provinces has extended during the last two or three generations, and as the Church of England in Victoria turned into the 20th century, it rapidly expanded into a Province.*
- *In Australia, diocesan life has been allowed to develop in almost complete independence, and although unified organisation has been established, the cherished independence of Dioceses still marks the Church life in this country. We have seen how, in the middle of the nineteenth century, the question of synodical government became urgent in Australia.*
- *The Crown had founded the Church of England in the colonies as an established Church, endowed and privileged. The Bishops, not only in Australia, but in Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa, in their own names and supported by the insistent demand of the laity, asked for self-government. They were prepared to sacrifice both the prestige and the help of the Crown, and to trust altogether in their own members and the laws of their countries, which, from 1850 onwards, were beginning to obtain parliamentary governments of their own. That involved a struggle and a growth, both in Church and in State.*
- *Today, there are four (now five) Provinces in Australia and the government of the Church is vested in the synods of the separate Dioceses, Provincial Synods and the General Synod. Diocesan Synods have power to make laws and to manage their own affairs.*
- *The Synod of the Province of Victoria (now Provincial Council) and the General Synod have no effective powers of legislation, for ordinances passed by them must, in most circumstances, be accepted by the Diocesan Synod before they can come into force.¹*

7. ELECTION OF BISHOPS

The early Australian bishops received their authority from Letters Patent of the Crown. Decisions of the Privy Council in the period 1861-63 cast doubts on the continuing validity of this procedure in the case of self-governing colonies.

¹ "A Short History of the Church of England in Victoria 1847-1947", by H. W. Nunn. Issued by the Editorial Committee of the Centenary Celebrations, Melbourne Diocese, 1947. Accessed at http://anglicanhistory.org/aus/hwnunn_victoria1947/06.html on 15 January 2010.

Since that time the election of bishops in the Province of Victoria has been a function of diocesan synods or committees or Boards appointed by them.

8. BASIS OF CHURCH LAW IN VICTORIA

The Church of England Act of 1854 effectively froze the law concerning the articles, liturgy or formularies of the church to that which applied in England at the time the Act was passed.

The 1960 constitution replaced that provision so that alterations could then be made in accordance with a canon of General Synod.

9. NATURE OF CHURCH LAW IN OUR DIOCESE

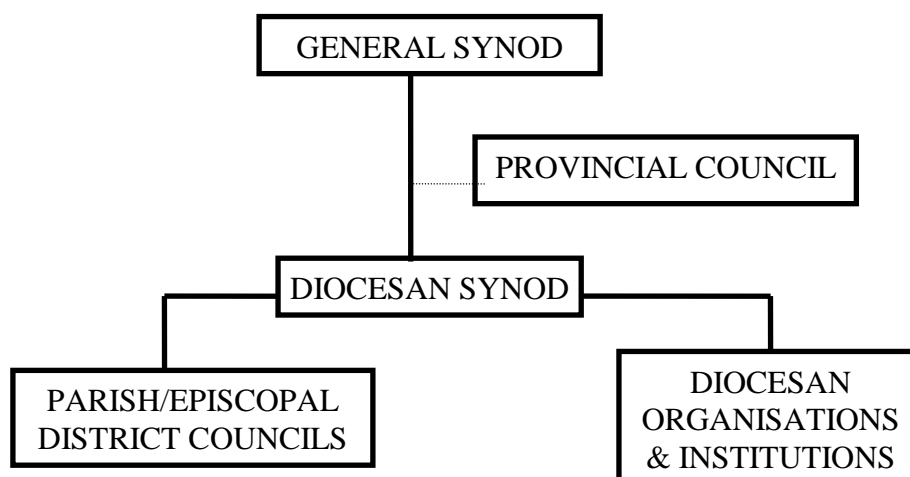
In establishing the nature of "law" in our Diocese on any particular subject, we need to look at:

- The Church of England Act 1854
- The Trusts Corporation Act, 1884
- The Anglican Church of Australia Constitution Act 1960
- Canons passed by General Synod since 1961 and adopted by this Diocese
- Acts of our own Synod
- Those parts of English law imported into our church prior to 1854 which have not lapsed or been replaced by our own legislation.
- practices and conventions of our own diocese.

10. TEMPORAL ACTIVITIES

With regard to the more temporal activities of the church (furniture, property, trustees, the regulation of parish affairs, etc) the 1854 Act enables the Diocese to pass legislation concerning the order and good government of the church in this Diocese.

11. GENERAL STRUCTURE OF THE CHURCH



12. WHO RUNS THE CHURCH?

- *The Synod is the supreme ruling power in each diocese of the Province. It consists of the Bishop, the Clergy and the Lay(men) as three separate Houses whose joint approval is required for every Bill, Regulation or Resolution.*
- *Questions of faith, doctrine and worship are not decided in Synod, but in general by the Bishop.*
- *The rector or incumbent in an Australian parish is protected by legislation and his office safeguarded by all reasonable restrictions, while the freest power is accorded to him in all spiritual and pastoral work. In his parish, he is essentially a constitutional ruler, not an arbitrary one.*
- *The laity, in their recognized position in Synod, as well as in diocesan and parochial life generally, have contributed to form a united voice of clergy and laity in all temporal affairs, and to express the corporate mind of the Church throughout the Diocese. In this country Acts of Synod generally portray a desire to assist the clergy, for the Australian Church is practically dependent upon voluntary contributions, in contrast to the endowment system in England, and the laity there, accustomed to live on the dead hand of the past, do not fully recognize the full meaning, like their brother Australian laity, of the duty of shouldering the temporal responsibilities attached to their office.²*

The Church of England Act 1854 provides that the synod may pass Acts in a number of areas including:

- the management and disposal of all church property, moneys and revenues (except trust funds)
- parish management.

All Acts are binding on the Bishop and his successors and all other members of the church within the Diocese.

13. THE BISHOP

The Bishop's Appointment Act, 1925 (Section 12) describes the powers of the Bishop as follows:

“When a Bishop of Gippsland shall have been installed he shall subject to all Acts of this Synod now or hereafter in force be a Bishop within the meaning of The Church of England Acts, and shall have and may exercise within the limits of the Diocese of

² ² “A Short History of the Church of England in Victoria 1847-1947”, by H. W. Nunn. Issued by the Editorial Committee of the Centenary Celebrations, Melbourne Diocese, 1947. Accessed at http://anglicanhistory.org/aus/hwnunn_victoria1947/06.html on 15 January 2010.

Gippsland all the powers and authorities which a Bishop of the Church of England may lawfully exercise within his Diocese and he shall be for all purposes the successor of the last preceding Bishop of Gippsland.”

According to Halsbury's Laws of England, the powers and prerogatives of a bishop in the Church of England are as follows:

- performing the duties of a minister of the Word;
- ordination of priests and deacons;
- confirmation of baptised persons;
- confirmation, consecration and investment of bishops;
- consecration of churches;
- visitation and correction of clergy;
- induction and licensing of clergy;
- appointing chancellors and other officers.

In our diocese the Bishop is the President of Synod, the chair of Bishop-in-Council and chair of the Trusts Corporation.

The Bishop is essentially the Chief Executive of the Diocese. He is the most significant initiator of action and the most obvious agent for change as well as being the chief pastor and defender of the faith in the Diocese.

14. BISHOP-IN-COUNCIL

The main function of the Council is to assist the Bishop in managing the “temporal” affairs of the Church and in all such matters he acts with the consent of the Council.

Specifically, the Council may do all or some of the following things:

- Manage and administer all the revenues arising from real and personal property held by any person or corporation in trust for the Diocese except such revenues as are specially provided for by separate Act of Synod or specially exempted by the terms of the particular trust.
- Manage any property and administer any funds raised or received for the purpose of the Diocese and in particular to administer the funds referred to in the Church Funds Act.
- Purchase real or personal property for the purposes of the Church or of the Diocese.
- Sell, mortgage, lease or otherwise deal with any real or personal property held by any person or Corporation in Trust for the Diocese, and the Anglican Trusts Corporation of the Diocese of Gippsland shall deal with all property and securities for the time being vested in it in such manner as the Bishop in Council may from time to time direct concerning the same.

- Generally to take such action as is necessary or expedient in all matters which may from time to time be referred to it by the Bishop or the Synod.

The Bishop-in-Council when requested by the Bishop shall take such action as may be necessary or expedient:-

- To promote religious education within the Diocese in conformity with the principles and formularies of the Anglican Church of Australia.
- To promote the mission of the Anglican Church of Australia at home and abroad.

15. THE ANGLICAN TRUSTS CORPORATION

The Anglican Trusts Corporation of the Diocese of Gippsland is a corporate body established under the Trusts Corporation Act, 1884. It is governed within the Diocese by the Trustees Act, 1972.

The functions of the Trust are:

Statutory Responsibilities

- Ensure that the Trusts Seal has been affixed in accordance with the decisions of BIC
- Receive advice of any new bequests or trusts in which the Diocese has an interest and to ask questions about the management of trusts.
- To meet when a new trustee is appointed in order to authenticate the seal and signatures.

Functions delegated by BIC (on 18/8/2005) and carried out in consultation with the Diocesan Finance Committee

Trust holds all church property within the Diocese and all funds passed to the Church for specific purposes (including funds of this nature passed to parishes).

The Trust, as a body corporate, is a legal entity, able to enter into contracts, to sue or be sued. In these matters it acts under the direction of Synod and Bishop-in-Council.

The membership of the Trust is determined by the Trustees Act, 1972 of the Diocese. It is as follows:

- The Bishop ex officio;
- The Chancellor ex officio;
- The Registrar ex officio;
- 4 persons resident in the diocese elected by Synod; and
- 2 persons resident in the Diocese appointed by the Bishop.

The trust is not a policy-making body. Diocesan policy is established by Synod and Bishop-in-Council.

16. THE REGISTRAR

The Registrar is appointed under the Church Funds Act 2001 Section 16 which reads:

“There may be appointed by the Bishop a person who shall be the Registrar of the Diocese and shall be responsible for the collection of the funds of the Diocese.”

In general terms the Registrar works in three main areas:

- supports the Bishop in his work;
- takes responsibility for a number of areas of Diocesan Administration;
 - manages the Diocesan Registry Office;
 - is responsible for the keeping of proper accounts;
 - is responsible for the financial administration of the diocese;
 - implement decisions of the Synod, Bishop-in-Council and the Trusts Corporation;
 - has custody and maintain records of all property;
 - ensures that all property is appropriately insured; and
 - arranges for the publication of the Acts of Synod.
- in relation to Synod, Bishop-in-Council and the Trusts Corporation:
 - acts as secretary; and
 - arranges the meetings of these bodies.

THE PARISH FRAMEWORK

1. WHAT IS A PARISH?

A “parish” within the Anglican Church of Australia is usually understood to be a group of people who:

- (a) are members of the Anglican Church of Australia;
- (b) ordinarily reside and worship within specific geographical boundaries except for persons who declare that they do not wish to be regarded as members of the parish; and
- (c) have been constituted as a parish by resolution of Bishop-in-Council.

The functions of a parish are generally to plan, organise, and carry out the pastoral, educational, evangelistic and missionary work of the Anglican Church in the community where it is placed, unaided by financial assistance from the Diocese. A parish is also expected to contribute to the work of the Church in the Diocese by way of an annual parish contribution. A sound commitment to the missionary work of the church is also expected.

2. THE NATURE OF PARISH MINISTRY

An important theme which underlies the parish concept is that of shared ministry. Sharing of ministry is a feature of the Church in our Diocese. The clergy of the Diocese share their parish ministry with the Bishop and the people of the parish. The Bishop shares his episcopal ministry with the clergy as well as Synod, Bishop-in-Council, the Trusts Corporation, the Registrar and the lay people of the Diocese.

None of this is to say that each office holder or organisation does not have specific duties or responsibilities. For example, in section 4 of the Parish Administration Act, the parish council is charged with maintaining in good condition and repair all church property within the parish. In the same way the priest in his licence is alone charged with the duty of preaching the Word of God, administering the sacraments, etc. although he may call on other authorised persons to assist him in these areas.

3. ACTS

The Diocesan Synod has passed a number of Acts which affect parish life. The purpose of these acts is not to restrict local initiative and effectiveness at parish level but to provide a framework for our common life as a Diocese.

The acts which have the most bearing on parish life are:

- The Parish Administration Act 1994 (as amended, several times).
- The Appointments Act 1994.

These acts cover the following areas:

- Parish Administration Act 1994:
 - Parish Constitution and Boundary
 - Parish Land and Buildings
 - The incumbent of a parish
 - Parish Council and officers of the parish
 - Annual General Meeting of a Parish
 - Annual General Meeting of a Church
 - Annual Meeting of a Committee of Parishioners
 - Elections
 - General matters
 - Finance
 - Episcopal Districts
 - Miscellaneous Matters

- Appointments Act 1994
 - Clergy Appointments Advisory Board
 - Tenure of Incumbent
 - Termination of Appointment of Incumbent
 - Assistant Ministers
 - General Matters

4. SOME DETAIL

4.1 The Rector and the Assistant Clergy

The duties and functions of clergy are not specifically defined in any diocesan act. However, the broad functions of clergy are set out in the licence issued by the Bishop. These functions are:

- to preach the Word of God;
- to read the Common Prayers; and
- perform all other Ministerial Duties belonging to the Office of Rector in the Anglican Church of Australia

As mentioned in an earlier paragraph, these functions are shared with the Bishop.

4.2 Parish Councils

(a) Membership

The membership of parish councils is set out in section 25 (2) of the Parish Administration Act. The size of the council may vary, in terms of Section 42(f) of the Act.

There are a number of factors which should be borne in mind when thinking about the membership of parish councils. These include:

- The parish council has a big influence on the progress and well-being of the parish; therefore it should generally comprise the most able and committed people in the parish, while being reasonably representative of the various points of view and giving opportunity to "untested" parish members to demonstrate their gifts and abilities.
- The membership should not be too static or there may not be sufficient stimulus for change; each council should have a balance between experienced members and those not so experienced, especially young people.
- It often happens that when a person is given the responsibility of membership of parish council a new level of commitment is undertaken by that person. This is a good reason to make sure that there is always room for new members.
- Generally the size of parish councils in other than small parishes should be about 15 lay people (the maximum for a single centre parish) if the real challenge of running a parish is to be tackled without a heavy workload falling on a few shoulders.
- It is important that a number of parish councillors or leaders put effort into seeking out and nominating suitable persons, before the annual electoral meeting. Perhaps the Council could appoint a nomination committee for this purpose.

(b) Functions and Duties

In Section 25(1) of the Parish Administration Act the Parish Council is described as "the governing body of a parish". The more detailed functions are set out in Sections 29A & 29B of the Act which reads as follows:

General duties of parish council

29A (1) *The parish council shall ensure that adequate provision is made for the proper preservation of and safe custody of the church registers and, in consultation with the incumbent, the sacred vessels and valuables of the church.*

(2) *The parish council shall provide for the collection of the offerings of the people.*

(3) *The parish council shall, subject to the Stipends, Remuneration and Allowances Act 1994, fix the stipend and allowances of the incumbent and other ministers of the parish.*

(4) *The parish council shall maintain in good condition and repair all church property within the parish.*

(5) *The parish council shall comply with such requirements about insurance, whether in relation to the church and buildings of the parish, public liability, clergy sickness and accident, or otherwise, as are specified by the Bishop in Council from time to time.*

(6) *The parish council shall ensure that this Act and any other Act and any resolution of Synod relating to the administration of the parish is complied with in the parish.*

Financial responsibilities of parish council

29B (1) *The parish council, subject to and in accordance with Part 5, shall arrange for money received by the parish to be deposited with a bank or such other institution as is approved by the Bishop in Council.*

(2) *The parish council shall ensure--*

(a) *that there are kept records of all receipts and payments of the funds of the parish, including funds of all centres of the parish and all organisations of the parish (other than funds to which sub-section (3) applies); and*

(b) *that the accounts of those funds are made up and closed as at 30 September each year; and*

(c) *that the audited financial statements of those funds are laid before the annual meeting of the parishioners.*

(3) *If, with the approval of the parish council, there are separate funds for a church in a parish, the parish council shall ensure--*

(a) *that there are kept records of all receipts and payments of those funds; and*

(b) *that the accounts of those funds are made up and closed as at 30 September each year; and*

(c) *that the audited financial statements of those funds are laid before the annual general meeting of the parishioners.*

(4) *The parish council shall direct the administration of parish funds, subject to any specific trusts.*

(5) *The parish council may raise funds for the purposes of the parish by direct giving or such other appropriate means as it determines, subject to this Act.*

(6) *The parish council shall pay out of the funds at its disposal the stipends, remuneration and allowances of the incumbent and ministers of the parish and the salaries of any lay workers.*

(7) *The parish council shall pay promptly all accounts required to be paid under this or any other Act or by resolution of Synod.*

The concept of a shared ministry has been mentioned earlier. Section 29 states that “the parish council of a parish, in co-operation with the incumbent, shall together initiate, conduct and develop the work of the church in the parish.” This should be kept in mind when a parish council is setting its objectives and planning its work program.

Experience suggests that parish councils do not have a good record of achievement against the full range of functions unless they annually set specific objectives and then adopt committee structures and strategies which will ensure achievement of those objectives. The Act only establishes a framework within which the parish council carries out its work.

4.3 **Churchwardens**

Churchwardens and their functions and duties are described in sections 30-32 of the Parish Administration Act. These officers would generally provide the main leadership and shoulder the heaviest lay workload. They are not figureheads. They are at the core of parish management. Persons should be nominated for these positions on the basis of potential performance alone. It is a good idea to have at least one new churchwarden every year to ensure that willing workers are not overburdened or become 'stale'.

PRINCIPLES OF PARISH LIFE

The purpose of referring to these principles is to give a vision of how parishes might function with the Grace of God and through the dedicated ministry of God's people. (Adapted from "Design for Parish Life and Ministry Development", Division for Parish Services, Lutheran Church in America".)

PRINCIPLE 1:

THE PARISH THINKS AND ACTS AS A CORPORATE BODY.

When the New Testament talks about the church, it uses language which expresses "corporateness". It describes the church as a body, rather than as a collection of individuals. Through God's action in baptism, individuals are brought into that body; and, in the body, people are built up together through the ministry of word and sacrament.

A parish that wishes to develop its life and ministry to the fullest needs to take deliberate steps to recognise and live out its role as, and in, Christ's Body. Were it to emphasise only the individual's personal relationship with God, it would be both unbiblical and unproductive.

On the other hand, when a parish engages in corporate thinking and planning, people work together for common goals. They share a faith that binds them together within the family, the Body of Christ.

PRINCIPLE 2:

THE PARISH ENCOURAGES THE PERSONAL COMMITMENT OF ITS MEMBERS.

St. Paul's description of the church as one body recognises that the body has many members. Each of these members needs to receive support and encouragement within the Christian community to develop and live out her or his commitment to Christ in Christ's church.

The parish seeks to be a channel by which the Holy Spirit can work in and through the lives of its members. Imaginative programming that takes seriously the variety of needs, skills, and situations of members provides means for the parish to encourage its people. Unless these needs have been cared for, many other worthwhile programs and plans will fail. Thus effective pastoral ministry programs are important. Both individual and corporate development together offer the best opportunity for a full, responsive parish ministry.

PRINCIPLE 3:

THE PARISH PLANS TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF ITS MISSION.

Any parish has limits to its resources. To use its resources to greatest effect, it plans its mission by identifying those areas in which it is important for it to be working (key result areas), setting objectives to be achieved in those areas, then developing and implementing the actions necessary to achieve those objectives.

In planning its mission the parish needs to ask such theological questions as: "Why are we doing what we're doing?" "Does the way we live and work together reflect the Gospel we proclaim?" Through the process of reflecting upon, searching for, and sharing different understandings of God's purpose for the parish, a common sense of identity and mission can develop.

PRINCIPLE 4:

THE PARISH RECOGNISES AND RESPONDS TO ITS OWN UNIQUE HISTORY AND COMMUNITY SITUATION

Every parish is related to every other parish as part of the one Body of Christ. Within the Body, every parish shares the same basic functions of spiritual journeying, caring, and empowering. However, no two parishes are exactly alike. Each parish has its own life story of traditions and heritage which is unique.

Each has its own special setting within the community where it is located. It has a place in and responsibilities to that community; its mission is shaped by the opportunities, values, and challenges of that community.

Every parish has its own particular, specific ministry, its own reasons for being; it has its own unique set of relationships among people, and its own programs and activities appropriate to its needs.

Therefore, the parish looks to its annual meeting, its parish council and diocesan agencies, for guidance on the variety of options that it can develop into a program for its unique situation.

PRINCIPLE 5:

THE PARISH RECOGNISES A PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHER PARISHES IN THE DIOCESE AND DIOCESAN AGENCIES

All living beings are nourished by relationships with others. Parishes give to and receive support from other parishes and the diocesan agencies.

When the parish sees the need and desirability of working with other parishes or diocesan agencies, it seeks ways in which parishes can cooperate to provide ministries which could not otherwise develop, such as youth ministry, chaplaincies in major institutions and Anglicare.

The parish does not see the diocesan agencies as threats. Rather, it relates to them for sharing, learning and support, mutual growth and development.

PRINCIPLE 6:

THE PARISH WORSHIPS IN WAYS WHICH EXPRESS ITS LIFE AND BACKGROUND

As Anglicans we recognise a sense of responsibility and appreciation for our own liturgical heritage. Within this heritage there are a variety of liturgical styles. The styles followed need to reflect the needs of the people. To achieve this there should be variety in worship e.g. family services, youth services, formal services and informal services. For growth these also need to be oriented towards outsiders.

The parish takes seriously the idea that its worship life is not just the responsibility of the priest or a small worship committee. Instead, the people in the parish sense their involvement in the responsibility for worship. The forms they use adequately express their relationship with God.

In no parish does everyone think exactly alike or have a uniform understanding of the Biblical message or Christian theology. Frequently, such diversity can be a valuable asset. However, members must work toward common understanding of basic Biblical and theological questions; widespread differences of opinion and their resulting polarisation can make a fruitful ministry extremely difficult.

PRINCIPLE 7:

THE PARISH USES SMALL GROUPS TO MEET A VARIETY OF NEEDS AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE TOTAL LIFE OF THE PARISH

The needs of people within a parish vary. One of the most effective ways of meeting this variety is to form small groups which provide opportunity for study, fellowship, support, service, or special interests. Planning and decisions on parish activities can occur in small committees, task forces, or the parish council.

Just having small groups is not enough. They must function with understanding of the skills in effective teamwork. They must see their tasks and activities within the framework of the parish's whole ministry or they may become detrimental to the life of the parish. A small group, existing on its own and for itself, can easily become an exclusive clique. All groups must sense their interdependence, their membership in the one body.

PRINCIPLE 8:

THE PARISH PLANS FOR CHANGE

Many people say that about the only thing constant in our world is change. If this is true, a parish's views of and response to change is important if it is to be effective. For growth to occur there must be a willingness to change, particularly in areas of worship styles, music and lay involvement in ministry.

One way of approaching change is evolution: "just let it happen". While this approach does not upset many people, it does not produce much positive action either. A second approach

to change is **revolution**: "A radical break with the past and the introduction of something altogether new." This kind of change frequently produces counter-resistance.

A good alternative is **planned change**. This recognises that change is inevitable and, frequently, desirable. It anticipates reactions and responses of people and plans for them accordingly.

The parish which has a common vision of its mission will make changes in its life and ministry to fulfil that mission more faithfully. It plans these changes, taking into account its people and money resources, as well as the feelings of its members.

Developing this style helps the parish deal with external and perhaps unexpected changes and gives the members some measure of control over an otherwise uncertain future.

PRINCIPLE 9:

THE PARISH ENCOURAGES CANDOUR, OPEN COMMUNICATION, AND HEALTHY MANAGEMENT OF CONFLICT

Attention to the way people work together and relate to each other is essential. The parish should be the kind of fellowship where people can be open and honest with one another and be accepted for what they are. It should be the kind of fellowship where differences of opinion are not swept under the carpet or allowed to develop into win/lose contests, but are dealt with fairly and creatively. Communication should be free-flowing and two-way.

When this kind of climate is present, the parish is freed to be the vehicle of the Holy Spirit; its plans and programs work, and the congregation's ministry is enhanced.

PRINCIPLE 10:

THE KEY ROLE OF THE PRIEST IS RECOGNISED

The specific role of the priest in parish development may vary from parish to parish. However, he must be vitally involved, for it is unlikely that much will occur unless the priest is "on board". The priest supports and encourages corporate vision and action, shares leadership responsibilities with members of the parish, points people and groups towards the many available resources, offers theological and biblical assistance, and helps interpret the Church's ministry and mission to the whole parish.

As the purpose and direction of the parish is clarified and as new opportunities for ministry appear, the priest re-evaluates his own skills and goals. These new opportunities enhance and add meaning to ministry. As the priest and parish struggle and search together to determine what is God's will for that parish in that place, a sense of mutual ministry can develop as they recognise that it is through the interdependent efforts of all that the ministry of the parish will happen. In a shared leadership role, the priest may be able to develop his or her own gifts more fully and find a more satisfying relationship with members of the parish.

PRINCIPLE 11:

THE PARISH RELIES ON INTERNAL INITIATIVE

From time to time nearly every parish is in need of assistance from outside the parish. The partnership among parishes together with the diocese and diocesan agencies is vital to a parish's life and growth.

However, over-dependence upon outside help can be detrimental; lasting results are achieved when there is commitment within the parish and when the parish's resources are fully developed.

The role of outside resource people is to provide training, theory, instruments, processes, and consultation when necessary, so that the parish can develop its resources and build a style of life and operation which generates its own motivation and creative approach to ministry.

PRINCIPLE 12:

THE EFFECTIVE PARISH VALUES AND USES A WIDE RANGE OF SOCIAL AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES

Like just about everything else, the work of the church has become more and more complex. Today's highly complicated world has made it necessary for parish leaders to be better equipped and better trained than ever before. There is a great need to identify the kinds of skills needed by leaders, and then to provide the training and support those leaders need.

PLANNING FOR A BETTER PARISH COUNCIL

1. INTRODUCTION

(a) Any organisation of people will need to plan in order to achieve its purpose. In the Church, planning frequently is not given enough emphasis. Also it is not uncommon to find that there is a diversity of views among members of a parish about their corporate purpose. People assume that the Rector knows what that purpose is. Some would say the purpose of the congregation is for education or moral teaching, for worship or prayer. Others would say the purpose is for fellowship. Planning causes the Church to come to terms with its purpose because, until there is some measure of agreement about purpose, effective planning cannot take place.

(b) Absence of planning in the Church is defended by those who suggest that the Holy Spirit guides the Church so human planning is either unnecessary or shows a lack of faith. In the New Testament Jesus describes discipleship in these terms:

"For which of you, deciding to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it." (Luke 14 V28.)

And when Jesus makes arrangements for his journey:

"And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him ... because his face was set towards Jerusalem." (Luke V51-53.)

(c) The Parish Administration Act makes it clear (Section 29) that the Parish Council and the incumbent shall together initiate, conduct and develop the work of the Church within the parish.

(d) Each parish council needs to spend some time in analysing its own situation so that it may find the strategy which it believes God wants it to adopt. This is best done by setting aside a block of time specifically for this purpose.

(e) The sort of in-depth analysis and discussion which a parish council needs to go through to find the strategy appropriate for its situation cannot be done effectively in normal monthly meetings. The parish council can best do its work by arranging a different occasion from the usual meeting specifically for this purpose.

(f) Experience has shown that at least one whole day is needed for a parish council to develop a strategy. However, many parish councils find that spending a weekend together at a live-in conference centre is much more effective.

(g) The best time for a parish council to develop its strategy is at the beginning of the year.

2. THE PARISH PLANNING WEEKEND

- (a) Parish councils which have had most success in developing and keeping to a strategy for the growth and the effective working of their parish have adopted some or all of the practices outlined in this section.
- (b) The aim of the weekend should be for the parish leadership to develop a commonly shared vision of the mission of the parish. If the parish is to achieve its potential there needs to be agreement on not only the objectives and goals, but the strategies, programs and organisational structure which will be used to achieve the objectives.
- (c) The parish council which spends a whole day or a weekend at a live-in conference centre outside the parish learns to plan more effectively. It is better to spend the whole weekend together. Members may arrive on Friday evening and leave either Saturday evening or (better) Sunday afternoon, and thereby give good quality time to parish planning.
- (d) A conference outside the parish allows all the members to concentrate their attention on the topics under discussion during the weekend without being distracted by the cares of every-day living. More importantly by spending time praying, eating, talking, singing, studying together, the parish council builds up an experience of community, shared experience and mutual understanding which facilitates its work throughout the coming year.
- (e) It is suggested that both the members of the previous year's parish council and the new parish council attend the weekend. Other significant members of the parish leadership should also be invited; all the clergy, parish secretary or administrator, Sunday School and youth group leaders, leaders of pastoral care groups, synod representatives, lay readers, etc
- (f) It is strongly recommended that attendance at the Parish Planning weekend be regarded as an essential part of the responsibilities of a parish councillor. This should be made clear to the congregation well before nominations for parish council are invited. Financial considerations should not preclude good people offering themselves for service, so the cost of the weekend should be a charge on parish funds. Some parishes have found it beneficial for wives and husbands to attend also, and their costs also charged to parish funds. It is, however, unwise to try and combine a 'family' outing with a planning event because there are too many distractions.
- (g) Many parishes have found that having a leader or visiting speaker from outside the parish helps to open up new areas of opportunity or growth. An outsider will often bring a different perspective and different experiences which expands the vision of what is possible. A local leader may not feel free to stimulate fresh thinking or new ideas nor will a local leader be well received doing so by participants.
- (h) It is worthwhile to spend some time discussing the mission of the Church, at least every 3 or 4 years, and what that means for the local parish. Discussion on the meaning and availability of spiritual gifts and whether the local parish has adequate means of identifying and encouraging the exercise of gifts is often helpful, and should be a regular part of the weekend.

- (i) An important function of the parish planning weekend is to encourage the growth of community and the exercise of spiritual gifts in the parish leadership. Time needs to be allowed for people to get to know each other at a much deeper level than can be achieved at Sunday services or monthly meetings. Experience suggests that at least 2-1/2 hours is needed for a group of people to establish confidence in each other and to be able to listen sensitively to each other.
- (j) Members should be encouraged to think and pray about the matters to be discussed before coming to the weekend. Papers discussing the major issues could be circulated to all members well in advance - say two weeks if this is helpful to the parish style of operating. Papers should not only raise questions but propose options. Papers should identify advantages and disadvantages of each option. Papers should be action-oriented, i.e. facilitate decisions which will lead to specific action.
- (k) It is important for parish council to have a set of clearly stated objectives. Objectives should be written down. For each objective a series of specific goals should be identified so that progress towards the objective can be checked. Goals should be practical, believable and measurable.
- (l) The weekend should be carefully planned. It is suggested that a committee of 2 or 3 plan and manage the weekend. A written agenda should be circulated but it should be made plain that the agenda is a guide and may change with the circumstances of the event.
- (m) It is a good idea to decide on the structure of committees of parish council and the way in which responsibility for various areas of action will be delegated to groups or individuals during the weekend. Appointment of members of those committees and others to be given specified responsibilities could also be done at the weekend.
- (n) In parishes where there has been little turn-over in membership of parish council for some years and there is a high level of agreement about the mission and objectives of the parish it may be helpful to spend a whole weekend exploring in depth one aspect of the parish's activity. Examples would be pastoral care or evangelism. An outside speaker could be particularly helpful in this case.
- (o) The agenda should include some bible study related to the matters in hand. It is not sufficient to assume that a Christian frame of mind comes through the services in which participants will take part. Biblical models and perceptions need to bear directly upon the life of a congregation. This study should not be academic but participatory and take place in groups, where there is mostly discussion and drawing, perhaps acting or modelling.
- (p) Small group methods enable maximum participation by all present. Groups should be no more than 5 people and consist of those who are not usually closely associated with each other. The venue of the event will require suitable furniture in the way of tables and chairs as well as heating or cooling and other amenities.
- (q) The way in which decisions are made should be handled carefully. Formal meeting procedures are the result of a great deal of experience, and can help keep a meeting on

track - on the other hand they can be used to stifle discussion and ram through a decision which does not have the whole-hearted support of members. The most important thing about a decision is not that it is made, but that all members of parish council are committed to it. Discussion needs to continue until all participants have had opportunity to say what they think - and space to change opinions. Votes should not be taken too quickly. Consensus decision-making can ensure that all are committed to the decision. (On the other hand a danger is - it can allow a minority to manipulate or even control the meeting and can allow one or two to try the patience of others.)

3. THE AGENDA

(a) The main features of the weekend could include:

- a review of the current circumstances of the parish:

- its membership
- finances
- changes over recent years
- compare last year's plans with achievement
- what was achieved?
- what was begun but not yet finished?

- what is God calling the parish to do in the next few years?

- what resources and assets are available:

- actual?
- potential?

- what are the liabilities?

- what is needed?

- what are the opportunities, responsibilities open to the parish?

- a plan for the coming year.

(b) The emphasis should be on the big issues and broad policy. Leave the details of administration to be discussed at normal monthly meetings.

(c) A possible agenda might be:

(i) Review of last year's plans.

(ii) The current situation:

- members (composition of parish by social groups, etc)

- finances
 - trends
 - particular problems.
- (iii) Bible study in small groups leading to a "purpose statement" in the present circumstances (a 'purpose statement' should be no more than 10 words).
- e.g. What is God showing us to be our primary focus of activity in the coming year?
- (iv) Application of that primary focus:
- liturgy and worship
 - pastoral care
 - evangelism and Church growth
 - outreach
 - support of missions
 - youth work
 - Sunday School
 - education
 - administration.
- (v) Other ongoing activities:
- finances
 - buildings.
- (vi) Diocesan events that affect our Parish program.

4. THE PROGRAM (for a week-end)

- (a) It is suggested that most of Friday night be devoted to community building. One method is to ask each member to talk about him/herself for 5-10 minutes, covering what has happened in his/her life, how that person became a Christian, why that person is present, what are the hopes being shared for the parish. The evening concludes with prayer or Compline.

- (b) Saturday morning, following worship and breakfast, may be devoted to a review of the current circumstances of the parish and to seeking God's guidance for the future. One good idea is to have a speaker from outside the parish to introduce new ideas and perspectives for the future in the Bible Study.
- (c) Saturday afternoon and evening might be devoted to working out how to apply the primary focus of the parish's development to specific areas of activity. It is a sound idea to have some light-hearted activity on Saturday evening as part of community building.
- (d) Sunday morning, following worship and breakfast, may be devoted to developing specific plans for the coming year in each area of activity. This session needs to give each committee of parish council a clearly defined action plan for the coming year.
- (e) Sunday afternoon may include a session in which the plans developed during the weekend are drawn together into a coherent and agreed statement which may be used during the coming year to check how well the plans are being achieved.
- (f) The weekend needs to be managed so that plenty of time is allowed for informal discussions as part of the community building for the parish leadership. It is also important that the weekend be built around prayer and worship. Members should be constantly aware of the importance of listening to God - both in the scripture, in worship and in what others are saying.
- (g) If the planning event is for one day, (especially if it is the first one experienced by participants), the suggested agenda for a weekend will have to be curtailed. Clear starting and finishing times are needed. Any unfinished business needs to be handed over to a continuing group, and a time scale placed on the work of that group.

For the shorter time these should not be omitted:

- initial community building
- Bible Study
- guest speaker (if that helps)
- group discussion on major issues
- setting priorities.

Detailed short and long term planning can be done by the on-going group and confirmed by Parish Council later.

5. FOLLOW UP

- (a) Many planning events have been thought to be a waste of time because they have not been followed up and the momentum is lost. The follow-up work needs to be placed in the hands of those who are reliable and energetic. A written report covering what was done and decisions made at the weekend should be circulated to all who attended and made available to parishioners.

The results of the planning event should be conveyed to the members of the parish also in a variety of ways. Not everyone understands what they read so it needs to be explained patiently and enthusiastically.

- (b) About half way through the following year, and again around September/October the parish council could review what it has achieved against the goals agreed during the planning weekend, and, if necessary, decide on changes in action needed so that goals may be met.
- (c) The planning event needs to be explained to anyone unable to attend, especially anyone who may have negative feelings about the program.
- (d) In the enthusiasm of a planning event the hopes of participants may be built up beyond reality.

Plans need to be tested with these questions:

Is it realistic?

Is there someone available to carry out this task?

- (e) Plans may need to change because people's circumstances change. God may lead his people in another direction. Christian planning will require persistence, patience, flexibility, faith and prayer.

THE CHAIR of PARISH COUNCIL

The Chair plays a crucial role in an effective parish council. He or she:

- * maintains order or permits disorder
- * makes sure that the meeting starts and finishes on time or is late in starting or lets the meeting drag on unnecessarily
- * promotes an atmosphere of courtesy and good humour or allows rudeness and other negative behaviour.

The Chair sets the tone, the ethos, the atmosphere.

The Chair may believe strongly in democracy, or in delegation, or in shared leadership but a parish council still needs an effective Chair if it is going to work.

1. THE CHARACTER AND ROLE OF A CHAIR

(a) Authority

The Chair is a person of authority. This statement may be shrugged off by a person in this position who is normally of modest disposition but it does not alter the fact. Indeed it is far better to recognise the fact and then realistically think through its implications. A Chair has real authority. Some revel in it, while others dread it but a good Chair recognises it and seeks to use it well.

The Chair has authority in order to enable the whole council to achieve its objectives; its overall objectives and its objectives in each part of the agenda.

This is the Chair's task and it requires two kinds of skills:

*** Intellectual Skills**

The understanding of objectives and how to use committee procedure. This requires clear thinking.

*** Social Skills**

The ability to get people to agree on objectives and the means to achieve them requires understanding of people.

This does not mean that only an academic psychologist or sociologist can be a good Chair. But the Chair must be concerned to think clearly about objectives and procedures and to care strongly about the whole group achieving its objectives together.

The Chair is, at the same time, a leader of the parish council and a servant of the council. In exercising both these roles the Chair enables the council to work.

(b) **Misuse of Authority**

The Chair needs to be aware of two temptations to misuse authority.

The first temptation is to dominate: that is, use the authority to get his or her own way. To avoid succumbing to this temptation, the Chair needs to have respect and Christian affection for the parish council. To manipulate people is to treat them as less than responsible persons. This way of treating people leads to resentment, hostility and lack of co-operation.

The second temptation is to abdicate: that is to allow the council to drift aimlessly or to allow someone else to take control. This is not humility or democracy, but it might become anarchy or tyranny. Shy and sensitive people may get hurt, and able people may just give up in desperation.

(c) **Should a Chair be neutral?**

No, but the Chair needs to make sure everybody has an opportunity to express other views, and that conflicting arguments are fully understood. He or she needs to be careful not to overstate personal views, or to answer 'from the chair' every comment made by other members. If the Chair feels strongly on a controversial matter it may be wise for them to leave the 'chair' for part of the meeting. There is a real conflict of roles where a Chair embarks on passionate advocacy of one side of a difficult controversy.

One suggested solution to this problem is to distinguish 'social leadership' and 'task leadership'.

- **Social Leadership** is the role of the Chair who needs to lead and be accepted as the leader of the whole council.
- **Task Leadership** is a role best carried out by another member of the Council. This role involves the presentation of a particular proposal or project to the Council. If the matter is handled this way it avoids the possibility of the Chair losing acceptance as social leader.

2. PRAYERS

(a) **Why?**

It may seem obvious that there should be prayers at a meeting of parish council but it is often worth asking 'Why?' about the seemingly obvious. There are two main reasons for prayers.

- (i) God tells us to seek him for wisdom, and to desire first his Kingdom, his glory and his will. God is interested in every aspect of our lives, but when Christians meet together God is present in a special way. The issues on the agenda may be committed to God for his guidance and his blessing - and this is true of the accounts for payment, the sewerage, the social evening as well as debates on the need for a parish mission, worship and pastoral care.
- (ii) Prayers establish the ethos of the council. Readings from the bible and prayer remind members that the work of parish council is God's work.

It is this setting of the spiritual ethos and atmosphere which is a crucial responsibility of the Chair. When this is right then the Chair has achieved the major task - the uniting of the council in agreement of the supreme objective.

When council members disagree or misunderstandings arise or mistakes are made, there is much greater likelihood of a willingness to accept disagreement in mutual respect, to offer and receive explanations about misunderstandings and to offer and receive apology without hostility.

(b) **When?**

It seems obvious to suggest 5-10 minutes at the beginning and 2-3 minutes at the end, but there is no need to be rigid in this pattern. There are good reasons for prayers later in the meeting, when some members are often late in arriving, or there is a particularly contentious matter later in the agenda. It is the Chair's responsibility to think through the best way.

One alternative is 2-3 minutes at the beginning, 5-8 minutes in the middle, and The Grace at the end. This has the advantage that latecomers are part of it, it provides a change in the middle of the evening and it can be relevant to the mood and the various needs of the meeting.

(c) **How?**

As in all prayers, the parish council should endeavour to make sure that it is not a meaningless ritual, but a sincere expression of the heart and will. It is, then, important not only to talk to God, but to listen to Him. The reading of a passage from the Bible and a brief meditation on it is a suitable preparation for a period of prayer.

The prayers can follow any format but it is best if some relate to particular people and issues in the parish. For example, over a series of meetings one can go through the list of pastoral ministry visitors and the people they visit, praying for them by name.

It is very important to share the leadership of the prayer time with others - most members of parish council would be prepared to take their turn. However, they need to be asked well before the meeting. This is an important part of the parish council meeting and requires preparation, ease and commitment. The Chair should be clear about how long may be given to the prayers.

A word of caution - those leading prayers at parish council meetings should beware of using prayers as veiled opportunities for preaching at others. Sensitivity is required to avoid a kind of spiritual blackmail situation where there has been such an emphasis on unity from the Chair or the person leading the prayers, which it sounds as though his or her views are automatically from the Holy Spirit and no one must dare disagree.

3. PROCEDURES

Making parish councils work depends very much on good preparation.

(a) Time

It is the Chair's responsibility to make sure that the council meeting starts on time and that the aim is to end on time. The only way to achieve this is to be prepared with a clear agenda and to have all the necessary information available. It is desirable for the Chair to work through the agenda beforehand and pencil against each item the time he or she thinks is needed. The Chair therefore needs to be clear about the objectives of each item and the nature of any proposals that may be brought forward.

(b) Control

The control of the meeting is in the hands of the Chair and must not be allowed to drift into the hands of anybody else. The role of the Chair is to enable the whole council to achieve its objectives and this requires firm leadership. This firm leadership will be accepted when it is courteous and fair.

The Chair should quietly but firmly prevent irrelevance, unhelpful repetition, unbecoming language, interruptions to other speakers, members speaking too often or for too long. Such interventions by the Chair should be gentle and preferably with a smile or even a joke. It is important to avoid giving offence, and so it may be useful for the Chair occasionally to remind the whole council about such unhelpful contributions.

How formal or informal should the procedures be? As a general rule the larger the meeting the more formal the procedure and conversely the smaller the meeting the more informal the procedure.

(c) Debate

Some straightforward issues require only one or two contributors then agreement is sensed and the proposed approval. But sometimes the Council needs to have a long discussion on an issue. The Chair's task here is to keep the objective clear in his or her own mind and the minds of members, to keep the discussion moving, to involve as many members as possible, and occasionally to summarise points that have been made.

It is the Chair's responsibility to indicate the purpose of the discussion if it seems unclear, and to prevent the council going round in circles or getting into a mess.

(d) **Proposals**

Proposals should be presented at the right time and in the right form. It may be right for a proposal to be made at the beginning of the debate. This will be so when it comes from a person or group who have already given the matter careful attention. Then the council knows exactly what is being discussed.

However, in some situations the Chair should not allow a specific proposal to be presented until the general issues have been well discussed and the council has a proper understanding of them and is ready to give responsible attention to the proposal.

4. **DEALING WITH A DIFFICULT ISSUE**

Very often a complex issue becomes a source of greater controversy not only because of the issue itself, but because members are coming to the issue at different levels, and there is no clearly agreed structure to the discussion.

(a) **The Medical Model**

It has often been suggested that the way in which a medical practitioner treats a patient can provide a model for procedure in dealing with a complex issue:

- (i) What is the matter?
- (ii) How long has it been a problem? What is the background?
- (iii) What is the present situation? How serious? Has any emergency action been taken?
- (iv) Diagnosis - what is the **real** problem?
- (v) What are the various options or possibilities?
- (vi) Decision - action and prescription.

Now this pattern can be applied to many parish council discussions. Some members leap straight to the diagnosis - without really knowing fully the facts of the case. Others leap on to the decision - without considering the different possibilities. The Chair should think carefully about how he or she is to enable the council to move coherently through the stages of discussion. He or she needs to be clear and help them to be clear. He or she may do it by having the different stages written on the agenda or on a blackboard or flip-chart, or

by announcing in the debate when the council is moving on from one stage to another.

(b) **The Gradual Approach**

Parish council members are justifiably anxious when asked to make a decision quickly about a major change of policy, some new scheme, or a matter of controversy. A gradual approach is usually wiser.

It must be remembered that people come to an issue from different backgrounds with quite different temperaments and levels of understanding and expectations.

The gradual approach can be employed by having two separate debates on the subject at different meetings. At the first meeting no proposal is put forward and no decision taken. The idea is floated, the vision is discussed, the aims are clarified, and problems and objections are raised without any sense of pressure.

There is no need for members to commit themselves to any particular view or to take up entrenched positions. A consensus view may seem to emerge if sufficient time is given, but still there will be no proposal and no voting.

The second meeting may have before it a clear and specific proposal. This will have been developed in the light of the discussion at the first meeting and in the knowledge that members share common information and understanding of the matter.

Any scheme will take note of the problems, and endeavour to minimise the force of objections voiced at the earlier meeting. There will be no sense of surprise or bewilderment.

There may still be honest difference of opinion, but at least there will be no reason for feelings of misconception or manipulation.

5. **WORKING WITH PEOPLE** (including the 'difficult' ones)

One of the great pitfalls of any kind of leadership is the development of a 'them-and-us' complex. Whether its origins lie in a feeling of superiority ('they ought to agree with what I think') or even persecution ('they are always criticising me'), the result is destructive to co-operation in leadership.

The parish council is a group of people called together to share common tasks, responsibilities and objectives. The crucial element in the Chair's role is to foster a sense of cohesion, fellowship, and commitment to the common task.

Nothing will more quickly destroy the sense of shared purpose than the Chair, implying any feeling of being 'over against' the council, either by seeming to 'use' the

council for his or her own ends, or to 'fear' the council as opposing his or her own ends.

The Chair needs to give attention to people skills. To learn how to deal with the so-called 'difficult' people. The Chair needs to ask of these people:

Who are being difficult?
Why are they difficult?
How are they difficult?

(a) **Who are being 'difficult'?**

It is natural to single out individuals when asking this question but the root of the problem may lie with the Chair or the council as a whole. We should ask questions about the council:

(i) **Is it meaningful** (or pointless)?

Is there a clear spiritual objective behind the council's work?

Are there clear aims and objectives behind each item on the agenda?

Is there a sense of direction?

(ii) **Is it friendly** (or threatening)?

Is there a happy welcoming atmosphere?

Does the Chair greet the members, and always speak to each one with courtesy?

Does he or she know them as friends?

(iii) **Is it orderly** (or chaotic)?

Is the agenda clear and the business well prepared?

Does the meeting start on time and follow an orderly pattern? Does the meeting end on time?

Do members have a proper chance to contribute discussion and decision?

When parish councils have any element of the pointless, the threatening, the chaotic, it is not surprising if members become agitated, perplexed, defensive, i.e. DIFFICULT!

(b) **Why are they 'difficult'?**

(i) **For good reason**

If the meeting seems pointless, disorderly, or threatening, it is no wonder that members occasionally erupt with expressions of perplexity or indignation, while others retreat into themselves in total silence. This is their way of making the point.

(ii) **Without realising it**

Some members may not realise that aspects of their behaviour cause difficulties to the council (e.g. too talkative, too quiet, too much in a rush). They need the gentle but firm control from an alert Chair to enable them to curb that particular characteristic. Members often need help and encouragement.

(iii) **Is it temporary or permanent?**

People are not always the same. The Chair needs to be 'pastoral' in his or her relationships with members. Some members may hurry to a parish council meeting after a terrible day at work, or be worried about sick children or any number of pressures or problems. These things may affect their contributions in a temporary way which is quite out of character.

6. RESPONSIBILITIES

The responsibilities of a Chair are much more than chairing meetings. With the rector he or she needs to take the main responsibility for co-ordinating the mission of the parish.

If a parish council is to be effective its Chair needs to be attending to tasks outside of the meeting such as:

- giving strong support to the rector in his or her ministry;
- checking the implementation of council decisions;
- affirming the work of members and the parish generally;
- ensuring the planning of the work of the parish and, in particular, ensuring that achievable objectives are set for the year and monitoring progress towards them;
- planning the agenda for each meeting;
- ensuring that the council does not spend its time on trivia by ensuring that its various committees do the more detailed work, particularly the executive committee;
- providing the lay leadership figurehead on public occasions;

- consulting with the priest on the management and mission of the parish;
- reporting to the parish as a whole.

7. CONCLUSION

The role of the Chair is very difficult but very crucial. He or she enables the council to work!

Lao-Tse, the Chinese philosopher, put it very neatly:

*"Of a good leader,
When his task is finished, his goal
achieved,
They will say,
'We did it ourselves'."*

THE PARISH COUNCIL SECRETARY

1. INTRODUCTION

- * A good parish council secretary is worth his or her weight in gold.
- * Many people think the secretary's work is primarily concerned with producing minutes of meetings. But there is far more to it than that. The Secretary is the executive officer of parish council and works closely with the Chair in the management of the business of the council.
- * Some parish councils appoint a minute secretary so that the secretary can get on with the job of being the executive officer which involves preparing the agenda in consultation with the Chair, reading correspondence, speaking to reports and generally giving full attention to assisting the Chair.

2. APPOINTMENT AND QUALIFICATIONS

- . The secretary is appointed by the parish council from amongst its own membership.
- . The appointment of a Secretary is one of considerable importance to the effective working of a parish council so careful consideration needs to be given to the selection of the right person prior to any meeting at which appointments will be made.
- . What are the qualities and qualifications to be sought in a Secretary?

- **Methodical & Orderly**

The parish council secretary needs to be:

- * tidy and precise in attitudes towards information, planning and communication
- * lists need to be accurate
- * agendas, minutes and other papers need to go to every member without exception and at the proper time
- * the secretary needs to be able to think ahead, foresee problems, and suggest coherent ways for the council to deal with routine matters of administration.

- **Clear in Oral & Written Expression**

The secretary will largely be responsible for agenda papers, minutes and reports. These are all important aspects of communication and need to be clear, effective and as interesting as possible. The secretary may also carry the main responsibility for outgoing correspondence.

- **Good in Relationships**

The Secretary's relationship with the Chair is particularly important. They need to work well together and complement each other's strengths and weaknesses.

The secretary may also need to press others to produce reports and other papers by certain deadlines. This may be achieved by a certain infectious enthusiasm and bright personality as well as by a more serious and business-like approach.

- **Committed to the Task**

The secretary needs to be committed to the work of the parish council especially in the achievement of the council's objectives. Unless he or she is so committed, the routine and tedious work of the secretary will become an irritating chore.

The good secretary will get on with the job quickly and not put things off.

The sense of momentum and energy is important for the morale of any parish council.

St Paul said "... all things should be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40, RSV). This is no less true of parish councils and the secretary needs to believe it and be committed to working to it as a basic way of doing things.

3. BACKGROUND MATTERS

There are several matters of which other parish council members are almost completely unaware but which are important to the effective operation of the council. If the secretary has them under control probably no one will notice but if the secretary does not, all kinds of problems will begin to emerge.

- **Legislation & "Standing Orders"**

The secretary will be familiar with the appropriate sections of the Parish Administration Act, particularly Section 33, any standing orders determined by the parish council and any "local" practices followed by the council.

The secretary will ensure that all other members are familiar with these.

- **Relations with the Chair**

Chairs have very different styles depending on their personality, ability, their own perception of their role, the tradition of the particular parish council. However, the way in which a Chair operates will depend on the qualities of the secretary.

In some parish councils the Chair's role is confined to conducting the business of the meeting itself in an efficient way. In this situation, the secretary has a major executive role in initiating and planning ideas, programs, agendas, etc. and in making sure that decisions and recommendations are put into effect.

In other parish councils, and especially where the rector is in the chair, the Chair plays a major executive role in terms of preparing for and following-up the work flowing from the parish council meeting.

There is no one correct pattern but it is vital that the Chair and secretary are clear in their own minds about the traditions of the parish council and their own expectations about their respective roles.

Honesty and clarity are vital from the very beginning, otherwise misunderstanding, bad feeling and ineffectiveness will result. The ideal is a relaxed and happy working relationship where Chair and secretary communicate regularly and frankly and each knows the main features of what the other is doing.

- **Correspondence**

The way correspondence is dealt with depends largely on arrangements made between the secretary and the Chair. Straightforward queries can be simply dealt with. Enquiries about policy and more complex matters need to be discussed with the Chair or await the next meeting of the parish council. If the meeting is more than a week away, the secretary needs to acknowledge the letter immediately and explain when a more substantial reply might be expected.

- **Routine Dates and Deadlines**

There is a story of a notice on a track across the desert in the outback. It says: "Choose your rut carefully, you'll be in it for the next 200 miles".

There are routine procedures in parish council work where a well-worn rut is invaluable for the peace of mind of all concerned. Some secretaries seem to be like the tribe of Indians which was surprised afresh each year by the advent of spring.

The next meeting of the parish council need not take anyone by surprise and still less throw the secretary into a panic, that is, if there is a clear routine.

The parish council secretary needs to develop a simple planning chart along the following lines:

All agenda items to secretary by	Agenda checked with Chair/- executive	P.C. agenda circulate by (7 days before meeting)	P.C. meeting date	Minutes circulate by (2 weeks after meeting)
----------------------------------	---------------------------------------	--	-------------------	--

20 February	24 February	27 February	6 March (complete this column for the year first)	20 March
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A chart such as this needs to be drawn up for the first meeting of the newly elected parish council for its approval. There is nothing sacred about the format above but some form of programming is essential.

Two features need to be emphasised:

- (a) The agenda and any associated papers need to be in the hands of parish council members at least seven days prior to the meeting to enable adequate time for consideration and to enable any necessary clarification to take place before rather than during the meeting.
- (2) It is very important for the minutes to be circulated promptly after a meeting so that those responsible for action may be reminded of it. Some means of highlighting follow-up action in the minutes is highly desirable. The action flowing out of one meeting will form the basis of the agenda for the next meeting.

4. PREPARING FOR THE MEETING

- **Date, Time and Place**

Whenever possible dates, venues and times need to be agreed well in advance. A regular date, venue and time is a good routine to build up, e.g. fourth Tuesday, 7.30pm, Parish Meeting Room.

The secretary needs to ensure that the proposed meeting place is set up properly and that it is warm or cool. The secretary also needs to ensure that any special facilities which might be required are available, e.g. overhead projector. The secretary may also need to check whether refreshments are available.

- **Paperwork**

Has everyone received an agenda? Are the matters listed to be presented in such a way as to achieve a decision (e.g. recommendations)? Are all outstanding matters from previous meetings brought forward for noting or decision.

- **Confer with the Chair**

The secretary will have already spoken to the Chair in drawing up the agenda. However, it would be useful to talk to the Chair a couple of days before the meeting to revise the agenda on the basis of new information, urgent correspondence, etc.

The good secretary will make sure that the Chair is not caught out or embarrassed.

5. MINUTES

The minutes are a record of the business transacted at a meeting. The preparation of minutes for a parish council is a demanding task. There is no simple or easy way to success. The following notes may help those who are new to this task:

(a) Taking Notes

The minutes will be written up from notes taken at the meeting so it is vital that note taking is given proper care and attention. Don't rely on your memory!

It is suggested that the secretary keep an exercise book for notes using the left hand page for essential matters (motions, amendments) and the right hand page for notes of discussions and suggestions made. Each section needs to be clearly numbered as on the agenda and the notes need to be as neat and methodical as possible.

Do not attempt a full account of all that was said but you will need to take more notes than you will need.

When there is discussion on a major issue make sure the notes include:

- the main facts of the situation or background
- the precise words of all motions and amendments actually put to the council, whether they were passed or lost
- the main arguments used in support or against the motions and amendments
- the decision or conclusion. If events move quickly, and the secretary is in the slightest doubt about the wording of a motion, he/she needs to ask the Chair or mover to read it again slowly.

(b) Recording Decisions

The most important thing about a decision is not that it is made, but that all members of the parish council are committed to it. The secretary needs to help the Chair to ensure that everyone understands what is being decided and will commit themselves to carrying it out. A motion or decision needs to specify:

- who will do what, when
- it may also need to specify how it is to be done.

The secretary needs to make sure that his or her notes cover each of the above points. If they do not, the secretary needs to ask the Chair for clarification.

It is always a good idea for the secretary to read his or her notes of the motion or decision to the meeting before the final vote is taken.

When a decision is being recorded ask yourself: Is this decision realistic? Do we have someone who will be willing and able to act on it? If not, then is it better not to make the decision?

(c) **Writing the Minutes**

- **When?**

The basic message is: Do not put it off! The job needs to be done and it will become harder each day it is delayed. Aim to read through your notes within 24 hours of the meeting to see that they make sense and contain the essential facts. Check any areas of uncertainty with the Chair or another appropriate person.

Aim to write draft minutes within two or three days and ask the Chair to check them through. Then they can be duplicated and sent out.

- **How?**

Some councils still have minutes handwritten into a minute book, but it is now more common for a typed copy to be pasted into a minute book.

It is wise not to paste the typed copy into the minute book until after the minutes of the previous meeting have been confirmed. If amendments are necessary, a new page can be typed before pasting in.

Generally it is not necessary to record the names of movers and seconders of motions.

Only record the main facts and arguments arising from debates held during meetings.

The main value of minutes is to record decisions made.

(d) **Action**

What really happens as a result of the parish council's work? If nothing much happens, is the parish council effective? The secretary and Chair need to be absolutely clear about the action agreed and who is responsible for it and, furthermore, which of them will remind the

person, group or committee concerned and find out whether the action has been taken or at least, put in train.

A good technique is to include under "Business Arising" in the agenda of the subsequent meeting a brief summary of the decision taken and the name of the person responsible for implementing it. The Chair can then call upon that person to report on progress.

If the decision has not been implemented by the subsequent meeting then list it again on future agendas until it is implemented.

For long term decisions it would be more appropriate to list the matter on the agenda for a meeting in, say, three months time. The secretary needs to ensure he or she has a reminder diary so that he or she does not forget to list such matters.

6. RETENTION AND STORAGE OF RECORDS

It is the responsibility of parish council to ensure that the parish records are retained and stored in a safe and secure place.

Minutes need to be kept in a hard-cover well bound book. Once the minutes for a meeting have been corrected and endorsed at a subsequent meeting the certified copy needs to be pasted in the minute book.

When the book is full the secretary needs to purchase a new one and have the old one stored securely with other parish records.

There is no need for the minute book to include detailed monthly financial statements, but it needs to include a copy of the audited annual financial statements of the parish.

Parish council needs to ensure that a suitable, secure, lockable cupboard is provided in the vestry or parish office for the storage of all parish records including service record books, baptism, marriage and burial registers and minute books.

At the end of each year the Secretary needs to ensure that all appropriate records are passed on to the incoming secretary.

There is no need to keep copies of correspondence on which action has been finalised for more than 7-10 years. The exception would be correspondence which is likely to be of historical interest.

Financial records, such as invoices, accounts and dockets, need to be kept during the year and presented to the auditor with the draft annual financial statements. These records need to be kept for 5 years for GST purposes. Annual financial statements need to be fixed into the minute book.

THE PARISH TREASURER

1. INTRODUCTION

It is said that solvency is a matter of temperament and not of income and the way a parish feels about its financial position is sometimes significantly influenced by the attitude and temperament of the Treasurer.

The Treasurer will desirably be a person who is strongly involved in the life of the parish particularly its vision for the future and the financial implications of that vision.

While this means that the Treasurer needs to realistically assess the parish's resources before giving advice, he or she, along with the other members of parish council, needs always take care that money is seen as the servant and not the master in any situation. Sometimes a parish becomes so worried about money that it becomes a constant niggle at every parish council meeting and the parish frequently drifts into a situation where it seems to have lost its sense of direction.

Sometimes there may not be enough money available to embark on a particular course of action; but if it is right, if it is fully explained, and if it catches the imagination of the congregation, then more often than not, the money will be forthcoming.

This is why the treasurer needs to be more than simply the person who knows how to keep a cash book or to prepare a budget. He or she needs to understand the mission of the church in the parish context and to have a feel for what is right and possible.

The Treasurer, along with the other members of parish council has to be in a position to be able to appreciate the church's needs and resources, and to know that needs and resources are not only measured in money terms. The needs of the church include the need to proclaim the whole Gospel to the whole world. The resources of the church can be defined so as to include the abilities and depth of commitment of the church members and supremely in terms of the infinite resources of God, who calls us, and who enables us to respond to his call.

The parish treasurer is vital to the health of every parish and the debt which the church owes to the devoted service of its many thousands of parish treasurers is known to God alone.

The treasurer is typically a low-key character who often hopes that his or her work will go unnoticed so that the parish can carry out its work largely unaware of any financial constraints. Parish finance is only noticed when it is going badly; like a thumb, we only remember we have one when it is sore. But we need our thumbs and we could not get very far without them.

If the treasurer can take from the rector and the parish council that debilitating strain on their spiritual energies which is created by financial worry, he or she can release them for the work of the Gospel through the life of the parish fellowship.

This is the justification for the Treasurer's work and the satisfaction of it.

Now to some detail.

2. DUTIES OF THE TREASURER

In Section 34 of the Parish Administration Act the functions of the treasurer are defined as follows:

The duties of the treasurer of the parish council are -

- (a) *to present a statement of the financial transactions of the parish at each meeting of the council;*
- (b) *to ensure that copies of the audited financial statements are placed on a notice board at all churches in the parish at least 7 days before the annual general meeting;*
- (c) *to carry out such other duties as are assigned to the treasurer by the parish council.*

3. APPOINTMENT AND QUALIFICATIONS

A parish treasurer does not have to be a qualified accountant or a trained bookkeeper. The Treasurer is appointed annually by the parish council from its own membership.

The appointment of a Treasurer is one of considerable importance to the effective working of a parish council so careful consideration needs to be given to the selection of the right person prior to any meeting at which appointments will be made.

What then, are the qualities and qualifications to be sought in a treasurer?

(a) General

The treasurer needs to like and be comfortable with figures. A person who has difficulty balancing his or her cheque book would probably not be relaxed about being a treasurer.

(b) Methodical and Orderly

The parish treasurer needs to be:

- * Tidy and precise in attitudes towards information on sources of funds received and expenditures incurred, budgeting and preparation of financial statements.
- * Prompt in banking all moneys and payment of accounts and other commitments subject to approval by the parish council. Stipends

should always be paid promptly and on a specific day each month (or fortnight).

- * The treasurer needs to be able to think ahead, foresee problems and to suggest clear ways for the parish council to deal effectively with its financial resources and to rise to any financial challenge.
- * The treasurer needs to be able to present a realistic picture of the parish's financial position and be in a position to do so as far as possible at all times.

4. GETTING ON WITH THE JOB

4.1 When a new treasurer takes over there will be many practical details he or she will grasp quickly. If he or she can work for a while in collaboration with the former treasurer, much of this will be passed on at that time; but some of the information only crops up once a year, so ideally the new treasurer should work in tandem with his or her predecessor for a whole financial year so that he or she can see what happens at various stages. This is sometimes quite impossible. Treasurers may leave the district at short notice. Sometimes they can fall ill and be unable to share the work with a successor or to explain it to him or her. For all these reasons, it is most helpful if the treasurer keeps the books up to date at all times.

4.2 Treasurer's Notebook

A treasurer's notebook is also invaluable. Such a notebook would contain general information and also a check-list of matters which need attention at particular times of the year. This approach will greatly simplify the task of handing-over to a new treasurer as well as being a useful aid to the person who has compiled it.

The general pages would contain such information as:

- * name and address of bank;
- * bank's branch number;
- * full title(s) and account number(s) of parish account(s);
- * details and whereabouts of investment documentation, loan documents, etc.;
- * names and addresses of persons authorised to sign cheques on behalf of parish council or subsidiary accounts;
- * how many signatures are needed on cheques;
- * name and address of auditor;
- * name and address of stewardship recorder (if any);
- * names and addresses (and telephone numbers) of diocesan personnel whom it has been found useful to consult indicating the subject matters for each person;
- * names and addresses of Missionary and other church bodies customarily supported by the parish;

- * copies (with dates) of any relevant parish council minutes authorising opening of bank accounts or relating to treasurer's procedures, etc.'
- * details of any items held in safe custody by the bank;
- * details (with amounts and due dates) of any periodical payments made by the bank.

In addition there may be a page of information which needs to be checked through every month. Each parish will need a different one, but the following is a sample of what monthly pages might contain:

- * stipend/salary details for - rector
 - curate
 - parish secretary, etc.
- * regular items contained in Diocesan account (ministry cost, pledge, superannuation, long service leave, family allowance)
- * reminder to remit mission money received from parishioners.

Then there will be a series of pages, one for each calendar month throughout the year on which some of the above information could be repeated. Again, each parish's details will be different, but these are the kinds of things that might feature in such a list:

October

Close accounts for year ending 30 September.
 Take all necessary documentation to auditor.
 Ascertain date of Annual Parish Meeting.
 Prepare budget (if not done in latter part of previous year).

November

Present audited accounts to parish council at this month's meeting.
 Electricity bill due.
 Prepare copies of annual accounts for annual parish meeting.

March

Water and sewerage rates due.

... and so on.

An additional benefit of this kind of monthly check list is to help plan cash flow by noting the months in which heavy bills come due for payment (e.g. the gas bill in August if the rectory is on gas fired central-heating), or put on deposit if it is not going to be immediately needed.

4.3 Methods

4.3.1 General

The person who takes on the administration of parish accounts, takes on a great deal of responsibility. So does anyone who takes over the accounts of any organisation, be it tennis club or football club; but there are additional constraints in the case of the parish treasurer. A tennis club probably exists only for the sake of its own members, and is not involved in a wider association or organisation within which it has "family" loyalties as well as legally-binding links. The parish is different for these reasons.

The treasurer does not have a free hand in what he or she does. The treasurer is the servant of the parish council and the parish council is subject to church legislation and practices developed over time by the wider church.

All money placed in the parish council's care includes all money put on to the collection plate in church, becomes trust money, to be used for religious and charitable purposes in accordance with laws and acts relating to trust funds. For this reason the treasurer is particularly responsible to ensure that the cash books and other records and documents are kept accurately and in proper order.

4.3.2 Retention of Records

All cash books should be kept permanently. The current and the immediate past ones will be needed for use and reference; the older ones should be kept in the church safe or other safe place of custody. Vouchers such as bank pay-in-slips, bank statements, cheque stubs and receipted accounts should be retained at least until the accounts to which they relate have been properly audited.

4.3.3 Transactions

For everyone's protection, all transactions should be made, as far as possible, by cheque or bank transfer. This means that all movements of money are recorded and anyone who has a right to do so can see from the books exactly what is happening. This is desirable, not because there may be a suspicion of dishonesty (that, fortunately, is extremely rare), but so that everything may be open and above board and that anyone who wishes to make enquiries can be assured that no money is being misappropriated. It protects voluntary workers, and guards against that kind of well-meaning sloppiness by which so many small voluntary associations get into a hopeless mess.

4.3.4 Petty Cash

There will, of course, need to be a petty cash float so that the rector and assistant clergy together with other church officers may buy small items and be reimbursed in cash rather than by cheque. However, all such transactions should be recorded and based upon written petty cash vouchers (pads of which are available from most stationers), accompanied by receipts where possible. The vouchers will be kept so that they may be examined by the auditor at the

year's end. Again, if a church officer is allowed a cash float he should keep account of amounts received and expended, and should submit statements from time to time to the treasurer with vouchers attached so that the treasurer has the information for audit purposes.

4.3.5 Bank Orders

Many regular payments may be made by standing order, credit transfer, or direct debit. These methods do not involve letters, envelopes, or stamps, and save a great deal of time and expense. The treasurer, however, needs to keep an eye on them if he wants to maintain a proper cash flow - it is easy to forget and run up an expensive overdraft unnecessarily.

4.3.6 Bank Signature Authorities

When a new treasurer is appointed (or a new bank account opened) the bank will require a new authority. This will state who may sign cheques. The treasurer will hold the cheque book so he or she is an obvious signatory; but in case he or she is ill or away there ought to be alternative names - the rector, churchwardens or the parish council secretary. Cheques drawn on parish accounts are to be signed by not less than two members of the council authorised by the council for this purpose.

4.3.7 Church Collections

Church collections should be counted as soon as possible after the service, always by two persons authorised to do so by the Parish Council. The amount collected should be recorded in the service register immediately. It is usual for collections to be divided into loose cash and envelope offerings. Envelopes need to be opened and recorded separately. Procedures vary from parish to parish but the rector, treasurer, and parish council should satisfy themselves that the methods adopted are as efficient as possible.

As soon as the collections and contents of stewardship envelopes have been counted and recorded and their accuracy verified, they should be bagged ready for banking and put into the church safe overnight. In many areas, it is possible to put money into the night safe at the bank if arrangements have been made in advance. Every effort should be made to avoid having parish money overnight (or even during the day) in a private house.

4.3.8 Banking of Church Funds

All money should be banked as soon as possible, preferably on Monday morning. This does not need to be the treasurer's job. He or she may need to delegate it, particularly if his or her work does not permit a weekday visit to the bank.

When parish council money is banked, the person doing so should make sure that the counterfoil of the pay-in slip, or the deposit book, states the source of

the money paid in e.g. 'cash and envelope collections 21 June 1993', or 'Christmas Card Sales December 1993', or 'proceeds of coffee morning at 24 Smith Street', etc. This is a useful cross check and, more importantly, if money is paid in by persons other than the treasurer, the counterfoil allows him or her immediately to know which part of the accounts to enter the credit. Without the counterfoil, he or she may simply get a bank statement with an amount he or she is unaware of and might waste a great deal of time on detective work finding out who paid it in and for what purpose.

After money has been paid in, the pay-in slip or book (with the bank's stamp on it) should be returned to the treasurer so that he or she can enter the amounts in the books. Alternatively, it may be put back into the church safe to be collected by the treasurer in order to make up the books.

4.3.9 Bank Interest & Charges

Large sums of money should never be left in a current account where they will earn no interest, though the balance kept in the account should always be large enough to ensure that anticipated withdrawals do not cause an overdraft and attract interest charges. Some banks waive charges for transactions if a minimum balance is maintained in the account. It is important to find out from the bank what their arrangements are in respect of charges and to work the account in such a way as to minimise charges and maximise earnings. Any amount over and above immediate needs should be transferred to an interest bearing deposit account.

4.4 How many bank accounts?

Some parish councils like to have a multiplicity of separate bank accounts, each dealing with one section of parish business - a general account for the parish council, separate accounts for other church centres, a furniture and fittings fund, a Sunday School account, a fete fund, etc. In this case, each account will have its own cheque book, pass book and bank statements and some accounts could have different signatories to others. All the separate accounts will be subject to annual audit, and their transactions summarised in the annual accounts of the parish.

There may be occasions on which this may be desirable or necessary such as giving a measure of freedom of decision-making to a vestry of one of the parish centres where the parish has decided to delegate day-to-day management functions. Another case could be where the parish council has decided to establish a rector's discretionary fund or hospitality account on which the rector operates alone or with another authorised person.

However, before acquiescing too easily in requests to open separate bank accounts, consider the snags. It can create difficulties and misunderstandings as to who is actually responsible for which accounts or who is authorised by whom to initiate expenditure. It can complicate the work of the treasurer if he or she has many sub-accounts to administer and sub-treasurers responsible to

him or her. If money is raised for some parish purpose it is generally more satisfactory to have it handed over to the parish treasurer so that members of the parish council are fully aware of all items of income and expenditure relating to the church. This is particularly true if the sum is earmarked for some particular purpose. Little sub-accounts hidden away here and there by particular groups can cause trouble, especially if the parish council thereby gets the impression that there is parish money over which it has no adequate control.

If a member of the congregation has a coffee morning or some other function to raise money for, say, church kneelers, new hymn books, church repairs or missionary work, the proceeds should be given to the treasurer or paid into the parish council account, so that the council is aware of all that is being done in the name of the Church by members of the congregation. If the money has been raised for a specific purpose, then the parish council will have to ensure that it is used for that purpose. This procedure enables a parish council to be in effective control, and not, for instance, to find someone re-furnishing part of the parish hall, a project which it has not approved.

To have a single composite parish council account under the control of one treasurer may also avoid bank charges or an overdraft. One section may well be in temporary deficit but generally other sections will be in credit so that overall no financial penalty is incurred. It is easy for the treasurer to use a cash book with a multi-column analysis lay-out so that all the parish council's financial affairs are contained within the one bank account.

4.5 The Cash Book

There are no rules governing the type of cash book which should be kept. Some treasurers prefer to keep their accounts on scraps of paper (even on the backs of envelopes). Treasurers of this kind need to be quietly replaced as soon as possible.

A very small parish with the minimum of transactions might be able to get by with a cash-book showing income on one side and expenditure on the other, and no more than a single column of figures on either side of the book; but the most satisfactory way is to have a multi-column cash book with headings approximating to the main budget headings. In this way it is much more easy to extract figures at the end of the year for the annual accounts, but it is also very useful for keeping a watch on the figures during the year, so that if income or expenditure is very different from the expectations as forecast in the budget, a parish council may be alerted to the situation.

The treasurer should make up his accounts regularly (at least monthly). The bank could be asked to send a statement automatically made up to the last day of each month. The treasurer should reconcile his or her accounts with the statement each time it arrives. If any cheques are still outstanding after, say, nine months at the most, a letter should be sent to the payee since cheques cannot be presented later than thirteen months from their original date.

4.6 Income

In most cases, the main source of parish giving will be through the Sunday collections, both loose and envelope.

Many parishes, however, will have additional sources of income. Some will have a parish hall which is let out; some are fortunate enough to have bequests held by the Property Trust on which regular income is received; occasionally there are investments made from past savings; and there can be few parishes which do not have coffee mornings, fetes, or other fund-raising functions.

The parish accounts can reveal a great deal about the parish. Are the special events the financial life-line of the parish? Is the regular giving of the committed congregation sufficient to keep the wheels turning? Or does the church have to rely on the impulse buying of the less-committed well-wishers who are persuaded along to a fund-raising event?

Some parishes insist that any special efforts should help cement the social and fellowship aspects of the life of the congregation (and this should never be despised - fetes can be great fun), but that any proceeds accruing from them should go outside the parish to some missionary or charitable cause. This is excellent so long as an adequate amount does thereby go out of the parish.

What the parish must not do is regard the ministry cost and pledge to the diocese as charitable giving in this sense. It is not; it is part of the inescapable commitment of being part of a larger diocesan family and is second only to maintaining the stipendiary ministry in the parish.

If the parish has income from specific trusts held by the Diocese, care should be taken to comply with the terms of these trusts. If there is doubt as to whether certain payments fall within the orbit of a particular trust, the Diocesan Registrar will be able to assist.

No further explanation is required about most of the items marked 'income' in parish accounts, except for three matters - bequests and collections.

4.7 Appropriation of Church Collections

Special gifts to the church are usually given with a specific purpose in mind and the expenditure of these gifts should conform to that purpose. However, the case of general gifts given through the collection plate during services are not as clear as the specific case referred to above. It is not always easy to know what was in the mind of the donors in the pew on Sunday morning but it may be said with certainty that members of congregations know and understand quite clearly that their contributions will be applied to the general purposes of the church.

In the hands of rectors and parish councils such collections are undoubtedly moneys held in trust and must be so administered. The purposes of the trust would cover all legitimate expenditure on the maintenance of the parish ministry, any church-sponsored social welfare work, contributions to the Diocese and missionary work.

Contributions to non-church organisations would not come into this category and specific fundraising would be necessary if contributions were to be made in this direction.

4.8 Bequests

The Church has reason to be grateful to those who in the past have left money to it; without the permanent results of such giving, we would be hard put to maintain the ministry and services we now do. Such cushioning is, of course, a mixed blessing in that it may leave the living church complacent about its financial responsibilities for the furtherance of the Gospel.

Bearing this in mind, however, we should never despise bequests and from time to time members of the Church should be reminded that they ought to remember the Church in their own will. Too many Christians refuse to face the fact that death is an inevitability which needs to be prepared for in a Christian way.

There is an embarrassed conspiracy of silence about it and even preachers who dare to make death the subject of their discourse are often criticised for being morbid. They are not - they are being realistic, and reminding their congregation that, since Christ has drawn the sting of death, they can look the facts of death in the face without fear. Many people have not made a will at all, and for this there is no excuse. Christians do not have to be particularly wealthy to be able to leave some of their possessions to the Church. When doing so, it is advisable to discuss the matter with a solicitor who may then choose to contact the Diocesan Registrar for further advice.

Bequests which are hedged in with too many conditions can be a burden rather than a help to the church. A badly-worded legacy can cost the church a great deal in legal fees to determine what the testator really meant and whether a certain proposed allocation of the bequest is within the terms laid down. Nevertheless, if conditions are laid down they must be strictly adhered to because a bequest is a trust.

Bequests left to the Diocesan Foundation 'for the general purposes of the Diocese of Gippsland' can be of tremendous value in enabling the Church to embark on some pioneer work which might otherwise be impossible but the testator must be able to trust the Bishop and the Diocesan Council enough to lay down so wide a definition of the purposes.

It is possible to include more specific wording such as 'for the evangelistic work of the diocese' or 'for educational purposes within the diocese', or 'for the

purposes connected with the maintenance or extension of the fabric of a parish church building', but all these phrases are of doubtful interpretation, and should be resisted if possible. If a particular solicitor is not an expert in ecclesiastical law (and few are) it may be wise to ask the Diocesan Registrar for advice.

4.9 Missionary and Charitable Giving

Many items of expenditure in a parish budget are self-explanatory. However, something needs to be said about missionary and charitable giving.

Often we are well enough aware of the need to ask individuals to give to the Church through the parish council, yet tragically blind to the need for the parish council itself to look beyond its own immediate needs and its own boundaries to the needs of the wider Church and to all humanity.

Many parish budgets are too inward-looking, and the parish council which can easily be persuaded that gas and electricity bills must be paid and the church building kept clean and tidy and properly equipped, shuts its eyes when the wider Church is mentioned.

Well-worn slogans like 'charity begins at home' are trotted out, or the parish council is told that 'we would like to give to missions, but if we did we could not keep our own plant going', or 'it is for individual church members to give to the charities of their choice, not for the parish council to do their charitable giving for them'.

Just as an individual's Christian credibility rests upon whether he or she is prepared to back his or her profession of faith by acts involving the disposition of possessions so the credibility of the parish council as a Christian body rests upon whether it spends all its money on itself or whether its eyes are open to wider needs.

Many parishes teach that their congregation should tithe either literally by giving a tenth of their income away or metaphorically by setting aside some lesser percentage of their disposable wealth. On this principle, a parish council should aim to give away no less a percentage of the parish budget. Some do this by ensuring that there are gift days specially devoted to missionary giving.

Others ensure that the tithe is met first and the gift days are additional offerings. Some parishes are known to give away half their income and that does not include the ministry cost and pledge to the Diocese which is not counted as missionary giving but as bearing the parish's due share of necessary centralised expenditure. If a parish is asking members of the congregation to be good stewards of their money, parish council in its turn must likewise not spend all its income on its own internal needs. These principles must be borne in mind when the budget is being drawn up.

The means of distributing the parish council's "tithes" needs to be carefully thought out. It is all too easy to have a list of bodies customarily supported, and to divide the amount available in the same proportions year by year as an agenda item taking up less than five minutes of the parish council's time each year. In that way, the recipient bodies may be materially supported but the understanding of the congregation and its commitment to the work it thereby supports is minimal.

There needs to be information and education, so that the congregation knows something of the work of the missions and charities supported. Some missionary societies provide link persons who correspond with supporting parishes and send personal news and pictures, even tape-recorded messages. The parish council needs to discuss means by which the congregation may become aware of the realities behind donations and the means by which the congregational awareness may be fed back to the parish council in order to affect the pattern of giving.

4.10 Audit

Parish auditors are appointed at the annual general meeting of parishioners held by 30 November in each year (see section 42(g) of the Parish Administration Act).

Much depends upon the size and complexity of the accounts and whether or not a suitable volunteer can be found. If a professional fee is likely to be incurred, the auditors should be asked in advance for an estimate. The annual meeting should be asked to bear this in mind when making the appointment, though if it has been previous practice to employ a paid auditor, the previous year's fee may be shown in the annual accounts and the treasurer will already have inserted a figure in the proposed budget for the year.

As soon as the books for the year have been closed, the treasurer will need to send or take to the auditor all the papers which will be needed in order to carry out the audit. This will include the cash book(s), receipted bills, pay-in slips or deposit books, bank statements, cheque stubs, interest statements, etc.

It is not for the auditor to prepare an income and expenditure account or statement of funds and other assets held. This is the treasurer's job. The auditor's function is to check those statements, to see that all items purporting to have been paid have in fact been paid, that all items purporting to have been received have indeed been received, and that payments which have been made have been properly authorised.

When the auditor is satisfied that the accounts are correct and complete, and in accordance with the vouchers and receipts examined, he or she will sign a statement at the foot of the accounts such as "I/we have examined the foregoing receipts and payments accounts for the year ending 30 September 20.. (and the statement of funds and property held as at that date) with the

books and vouchers and certify the same to be correct and in accordance therewith'.

The audited accounts are then presented to the annual general meeting of parishioners. The parish council will have seen copies of these accounts and should have discussed them and their implications with the treasurer at a meeting between the end of the financial year and the public presentation of the accounts. The parish council should formally adopt the accounts for presentation to the annual general meeting.

4.11 The Annual General Meeting of Parishioners

The presentation of accounts at the annual general meeting is governed by section 42 (c) of the Parish Administration Act.

The Act would be complied with if the treasurer held the only copy of the accounts and simply read the figures from them to the annual meeting. The meeting would be asked 'Any questions?' and if there were none, 'Do you approve of the accounts?'; the Chair would sign them and the signed copy would be filed and that would be that.

This, however, would be a travesty. Nobody at the annual meeting can take in the significance of a mass of figures as they are read out. At the very least, the treasurer should see that copies of the audited accounts are duplicated and made available to each member of the annual meeting to examine. He or she should take the meeting through the main headings and point out their significance. It is helpful to print for comparison the corresponding figures for the previous year in a column parallel to figures being presented, so that any changes can be immediately obvious and questions asked and explanations given.

Even this is not really enough, because many of those present at the annual meeting will not be sufficiently familiar with figures and numbers to take in the significance of a column of them. The treasurer may want to include with the accounts a supplementary statement showing what percentage of income and expenditure is represented by each item. The meeting then knows without having to calculate it, whether the parish council has given one per cent or fifty per cent of its income to missions and charities, or whether the heating of the church and premises accounts for ten or seventy-five per cent of the total. The percentage increase in the totals between the last year and the previous one can usefully be given, and compared with the Consumer Price Index as published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

In this way, the congregation can see whether its income and giving are keeping pace with inflation, or whether an apparent increase in giving represents a fall in real purchasing power. At times a comparative chart showing trends over a number of years may be useful, since particular years may not be typical.

The visual chart (e.g. a circle divided into segments or a row of ten cent coins showing how much of each \$1.00 received came from what source, and how much of each dollar spent went to each purpose) is even more revealing than a column of percentages. This kind of presentation helps many of the congregation who are better at visualising than at abstract thinking. They can then see where the money comes from and where it goes.

If the treasurer is not very good at this kind of thing (or, particularly, if he or she is not helped by it, and thinks it is beneath the dignity of the annual meeting) he or she ought to ask a friend who is good at visual aids to prepare some charts on the basis of the figures supplied. The Treasurer will probably be astonished at the way this contributes both to the ease, and the depth at which, the annual meeting grasps the financial facts presented.

4.12 The Budget

The treasurer needs to prepare a realistic budget for a year knowing the pattern of expenditure in the previous year. Ideally the total year's figures would need to be available to prepare a reasonably sound budget; but if the Treasurer prepares it a month or so before the end of the year, he or she can do a bit of intelligent estimating of the annual totals on the basis of ten or eleven months' figures and the knowledge of previous years' pattern of receipts and payments (do annual donations all arrive in September? Is there a fuel bill to be paid that month?). The advantage of having complete and relevant information is obvious, but many treasurers feel that this leaves the adoption of the budget too late in the year, and that a budget ought to be adopted by a parish council before the first day of the year to which it relates. Each parish must make up its own mind about that.

The budget will be drafted by the treasurer and probably discussed with the rector and the committees of parish council before going to the full parish council. If the receipts and payments cannot balance without budgeting for a deficit, this must be resolved. Providing there are reserves which can be called upon, a small deficit in one year is tolerable; but unless there are exceptional reasons, to **budget** for a deficit is a very unwise thing to do. It means that the church plans to spend money it does not expect to receive. In that case, expenditure must be contained until such time as income improves, and the budget will reflect this. A budget should be monitored over the course of the year and if the position improves, a supplementary budget may be considered.

When the parish council has agreed on the budget for the year, it should be publicised so that the parishioners may know the details of how the parish council intends to spend the money it expects to receive in the year ahead.

4.13 Borrowing Funds

From time to time parishes need to borrow money for a capital purpose such as a new building or a major renovation. The parish may need to borrow funds to enable it to meet extra commitments such as a stewardship campaign.

Borrowings by parishes need to be approved by Bishop-in-Council.

Any project requiring funds to be borrowed needs to be carefully costed and preliminary negotiations with a lending institution need to be undertaken.

There needs to be a clear resolution by parish council to proceed and if appropriate, consultation with parish members.

BEING A MEMBER OF PARISH COUNCIL OR A CHURCH COMMITTEE

Books are available to help a Chair and a secretary, but there is very little to help the ordinary member of a committee. We have already seen that the Chair plays a crucial role - but his or her objective is to enable the committee to work, and the committee is the sum total of its members.

Every member of a committee should play a vital role in the task of the committee. Certainly every member will play a vital role in the morale of the committee - for good or ill. But we must start at the beginning.

JOINING A COMMITTEE - (What am I letting myself in for?)

1. Why am I joining?

There is some strange double-think about joining committees. In some situations, membership is highly prized as conveying privilege, prestige and power. In other situations membership is regarded with careless indifference, resignation or even annoyance.

*At meetings of clubs, by an effort of will,
I always contrive to keep perfectly still,
For it takes but a word of annoyance or pity
And wham! there I am on another committee!*

Many people will recognise a mixture of motives if they are really honest. The important matter is the relative strength of the different motives. The crucial motive question is **commitment** to the work and objective - are you really interested, really concerned about the task?

The reader should exercise great caution about joining a committee because of its privilege, prestige and power unless he or she really believes in the importance of its work. Similarly we should be very wary of joining a committee through pressure of duty or because 'there is no one else so suitable' or simply 'no one else', unless we are willing to be really committed. Many committees do not work properly because people have become members for the wrong reasons.

2. How do I join?

One of the many rude definitions of a committee is

*A group of the unfit
Chosen by the unwilling
To do the unnecessary.*

Membership of some committees is by election after due nomination - as in the case of the parish council being elected at an annual general meeting. However, other committees may develop their membership by appointment or by co-option. Either way, you may find yourself approached to see whether you are willing either to be appointed or to be nominated for election.

But what about a situation where you may be very interested in a project, and think that you have some real competence to offer, but no one approaches you. Should a person ask to be nominated? This is not an easy question to which there can be a black and white answer. The situations in various parishes are so different. However, the old adage - 'one volunteer is worth ten pressed men' - is very often true. So let it be known discreetly that you would be willing to stand for election to the parish council, or even ask a friend if he or she is willing to nominate you. Or again, let it be known to the rector or wardens or leader of a particular group that you are especially interested in the church buildings or grounds, or youth work, or missionary societies, or evangelism, or whatever other committees there are - or might be (if there was the interest).

3. The commitment of joining

There are so many members of committees who never really make a firm commitment to the work of the committee. This is sometimes betrayed in the 'them-and-us' complex. That is, when the committee works well, it is '*we* decided this or did that', but when it is not working so well, it is '*they* who caused the problems'. The government emphasises collective cabinet responsibility, and we need to develop a strong sense of collective committee responsibility.

(a) Commitment to the task

Some of the reasons for having a committee and our commitment to each one are:

- (i) Sharing information - am I really competent or knowledgeable in the task of the committee? If not, or if so, am I really interested to learn from others, and contribute as much as possible?
- (ii) Sharing vision - am I open-minded to investigate new possibilities, new ideas, new developments?
- (iii) Making decisions - am I willing to accept the responsibility of making decisions in company with others, and working through the implications?
- (iv) Reviewing results - am I willing to think critically about past decisions and actions, look for improvements, and admit mistakes or weaknesses honestly with a view to the future?

(b) Commitment to the members.

The morale of a committee is a vitally important factor. It is a team game, and the members will not help the team if they strike out just in the direction of their own particular interests. There may be a place for a prima donna in a ballet company, but beware of the prima donna in a committee. Am I willing to develop real friendship

with the members, to understand them as individuals - with their own unique backgrounds, gifts, interests, problems, strengths and weaknesses?

- (c) **Commitment to the committee** - its strengths and weaknesses. The strength of a committee is that it enables a sharing of experience, knowledge, wisdom, vision, responsibility and action. The members need to believe that the committee together will think better and decide better than any individual on his or her own - and only tackle such issues that will be better handled in this way. The weakness of the committee is that 'everybody's business can end up as nobody's business'. The members need to feel a commitment to effective action - and a sense of personal and individual responsibility.

PREPARING FOR A COMMITTEE- (doing the homework)

There are many different kinds of committees - some more formal in character, like a parish council, others more informal (like a youth group committee, perhaps). Not all the following issues may be relevant to every committee, but all are worth asking.

Do you know?

1. The task of the committee.

It may sound a silly question, and in some cases the task may be straightforward and quite clear. But it is still worth asking. Can you put the answer simply and briefly? What is the task of the parish council? To support the rector, or to look after the church buildings, or to raise the necessary money each year, or to oversee all aspects of the church's life, to determine the objectives of the church's mission and to agree policies designed to meet those objectives?

There can be misunderstandings about the function of a committee. Does the Finance Committee simply scrutinise the accounts of the past year, prepare the budget for the forthcoming year and monitor income and expenditure throughout the year, or does it also have a stewardship function of encouraging planned giving or any other fund-raising schemes. Clear terms of reference are important.

Are you clear about the purpose and task of your committee? Check it out with the leaders privately, rather than causing embarrassment in the committee itself. It may then be necessary and helpful for the leaders to clarify the purpose within the committee itself. If you have newly joined a committee, ask for a copy of any annual report, set of accounts, brochure, publicity etc. which has been produced recently.

2. The members

Make sure you know who is on the committee, and especially who are the officers. Ask for a list of the members - with Christian names as well. It is helpful for the list to include addresses and telephone numbers. In many situations it would be most helpful if members called for each other, walked together or offered lifts, etc. This would be a help to the elderly or infirm, an encouragement to the shy or lonely, and a saving if you are travelling some distance. Knowing people's names, faces and homes

helps towards knowing them as people. That leads to friendship, which is so valuable if a committee is to work.

3. The dates

If a committee is to meet regularly it is usually well worthwhile to plan dates for a whole year. If the group meets more occasionally or infrequently it is still best to agree the date of the next meeting as soon as possible. Check all the dates in your diary and let the Chair or secretary know immediately if several are impossible for you, or if any are unsuitable for the local community, e.g. clashing with a major event in the local school, or the village fete, etc.

4. The agenda

If you are a new member, ask when the agenda is circulated. The agenda and other papers must be available a suitable time before the meeting. Consult the minutes of the previous meeting and mark the items where decisions were made. Do you know that action was taken, or is a follow-up item listed on the agenda? Are the agenda items clear, and do you understand the purpose of each item? If not, contact the secretary or Chair beforehand to clarify. Do not leave it to the day of the meeting or it may be impossible to obtain the necessary information. Read through any accompanying papers. Underline or mark in the margin matters for question or emphasis. If in doubt, ask! If there are major problems with an item, try to have a chat beforehand with the person making the proposal or report. The aim is to help the committee work.

When it is a fairly large, formal committee you need to think well in advance in order to catch the closing date for agenda items. In other committees, you must still plan ahead to give the Chair and secretary opportunity to plan the agenda properly. If something really urgent comes up, do not leave it to the 'any other business' slot at the end before mentioning it. It is best to speak to the Chair about it just before the meeting. If that is impossible mention it at, or near, the beginning of the committee. In the large or formal committee you might have to do it as a point of order - 'Mr Chairman, would you and the committee please allow time for the consideration of the matter XYZ?' If the matter is clearly urgent, the Chair and committee will obviously agree and the Chair has quickly to rethink the timing of the agenda. However, if the Chair is uncertain about the significance of the item, he can rule it out of order completely, or ask the committee if they wish to discuss the matter.

To summarise this all-important section:

Read the papers carefully and as early as possible.

Think about the issues, and whether you need more information.

Ask questions about any matters of difficulty.

Plan well ahead if you wish to introduce new items to the agenda.

Any committee member who does not do this homework carefully and then complains about the committee not working properly, is like the man (in Abraham Lincoln's

story) who murdered his mother and father and then threw himself on the mercy of the court on the ground that he was an orphan! (Houle, *The Effective Board*, p.35.)

5. **The papers - where are they**

It is a scandal how often members turn up to committees without the papers for that meeting - the agenda, minutes and other papers. It is like a batsman arriving at the wicket without his bat, or the musician forgetting the music score. However, the committee member needs to keep track not only of his present set of papers but also other important papers for reference, e.g. the annual report and accounts, etc. and the minutes of previous meetings in chronological order.

The solution to knowing where your papers are is some simple system of filing. If you are on just one committee you might manage with one ring binder, or file or folder. At the simplest level it needs three sections with clearly marked dividers:

- (a) papers for the next meeting;
- (b) background papers; and
- (c) minutes of previous meetings.

‘Efficiency depends more on planning than on filing, for the chief purpose of filing to prepare the ground for planning’ (C R Forder, *Parish Priest at Work*, p.25). True - the committee member who does not file carefully is unlikely to plan thoughtfully. Much time will be saved by keeping papers tidy.

Where members are on several committees that are related, they need separate files or folders for each committee, and clearly labelled. A churchwarden might need files for:

- 1. Parish Council
- 2. Finance Committee
- 3. Buildings Committee
- 4. Evangelism Committee.

If you think that this emphasis on task-description, structure and mechanics is rather overdone, just remember the woodsman who said that if he had only ten minutes to cut down a tree, he would use the first two minutes to sharpen his axe. Many church committees mean well, and expend a great deal of energy, but the axe is not at all sharp. They have not done the homework.

ATTENDING A COMMITTEE - (Was it a good meeting?)

There is often a feeling of frustration or at least disquiet after a committee meeting. Sometimes it is worse than that - there is grumbling and dissension. 'Was it a good meeting?' is a question frequently discussed - even at some length. If that same thought and energy could be channelled into making the next committee a better meeting, it would become a constructive rather than destructive activity.

The Chair's role is very important (as we have seen), and the way the secretary produces the agenda and other papers. However, there are many significant ways in which the ordinary member can contribute and make it a 'good meeting'.

1. Conscientious - about attendance

Some bright spark said, 'Not all committees are dull - some are cancelled!' It is certainly good if committees can be lively, fairly brisk and with a real element of humour. But let's be honest, they are not meant to be fun times. A committee meets to work, and often its decisions are weighty (and expensive) in their significance. Often the discussions are tricky, complicated and touching deeply felt anxieties (e.g. about patterns of worship, renovation of church buildings, evangelism, finance).

The first rule about attending a committee is to attend - to be there. Obviously illness or other emergencies cannot be foreseen. But if you know that other commitments will regularly clash with the committee, you must think through the priorities in your time and interests. It *may* (in some situations) be right to stay on, but such situations will be exceptional. Non-attending membership often prevents someone else joining the committee. It is bad for morale and the sense of continuity. Even if careful minutes are produced, the absent member misses the contributions to the discussions, and the feeling and spirit of the meeting. Every absence weakens the committee!

An apology for absence should be sent to the Chair or secretary as soon as the member knows he or she is unable to attend. It should not be left to the last minute, because the absence of particular members might affect the way in which the agenda is approached. It is probably unwise to table, at the parish council, a report on youth work, if two or three youth leaders on the council are unable to be at the meeting. It is courteous and helpful, then, to send apologies as soon as possible and mention the reason for absence.

2. Christian - in approach

It is a strange and significant fact that some Christian people who are generally kind, reasonable, good tempered and helpful can almost undergo a character-change in a committee. Some conclude that the very idea of a committee is somehow demonic.

But it is not the committee-concept that is to blame - but the way it is used. However, there are some particular problems that need to be understood. Some members find the formality of motions and amendments difficult and strange. Some find the idea of debating difficult in a larger group, when they are used to conversations in a group of four or five at most.

Earlier we talked about commitment to the task and to the members, but we must be specific here about commitment to the Lord of the task and the Lord of the members. 'We are God's fellow-workers; you are God's field, God's building' (1 Cor. 3.9). The participation of every member 'in spirit and in truth' is necessary so that God's presence, blessing and power will not be quenched.

The theological truths underlying a Christian committee certainly include the following:

- (a) **God's presence and gifts.** Jesus said 'If two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them' (Matt. 18.19-20). God is with his people in a special way when they share together and acknowledge him. God loves to answer prayer, and specially to give wisdom to those who sincerely ask for it.
- (b) **Unity in Christ.** Members of the committee may be very different in many ways - age, background, prosperity, ability, spiritual maturity - but if they are Christians, what unites them is more significant than what divides them. Paul said, 'You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have been clothed with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal.3.26-28).
- (c) **Interdependence in Christ's body.** We are all different, and God gives to each Christian different gifts. But like different parts of the human body, we all *belong* to the body, and each part *needs* the other parts. 'The eye cannot say to the hand "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet "I don't need you!" (see 1 Cor.12.4-31).

The Christian mind must be in evidence at committees - Christian truth and love. Spirituality is not opposed to efficiency - they can and should walk hand in hand.

3. **Co-operative - with the Chair**

It is no easy task to be a Chair. It may not be too obvious if some other members have not done their homework, but it will be painfully obvious if the Chair has not. It may not be too significant if another member loses concentration for a minute or two, but if the Chair loses track, the committee can run into confusion within seconds.

Leadership can be a lonely business - an American president had a notice on his desk 'The buck stops here'. The committed committee member will want to appreciate the pressures of leadership, to share the burden of responsibility, and not to 'pass the buck' but to shoulder it alongside the Chair. Just as damaging as the Chair seeing himself as over against the committee, is a committee member seeing himself as over against the committee. Co-operation is with a view to enabling the committee to work. It involves being particularly sensitive to several things:

- (a) **Pressure of time.** Starting on time, finishing on time and sharing out the time fairly on different items is of the highest significance for the morale and effectiveness of the committee. We have already seen how it is important in agenda preparation and chairmanship. But committee members can torpedo the most carefully prepared agenda and meticulous chairmanship if they do not appreciate the pressure of time. Members should plan to be in their seats by five minutes before the starting time. That will allow opportunity for greetings, last minute messages and arranging of papers. Often the room has to be rearranged in a suitable way - the Chair should be consulted about this.

If there are inaccuracies in the minutes or errors of fact in the agenda or accompanying papers they should have been notified to, or discussed with, the responsible person some days beforehand. This is a matter of courtesy and efficiency. A hassle over detail in the minutes is a sure way to lower the morale right at the beginning of a committee.

If you agree firmly with what someone else has said, there is no need to repeat it, but there is a need to indicate your agreement. This may be done by vigorous nodding, or a clear 'Hear, hear!', or by saying, 'I entirely agree with Mrs X' or 'I support that'. Such clear expressions of agreement may show a Chair there is a real consensus and the committee can quickly pass on to other business.

Beware of vague rambling, irrelevant comments, lengthy reminiscence of times long ago, and prolonged exhortation. Brisk humour will often be very valuable. It can be helpful if a member asks the Chair how long can be spent on a particular issue in the light of the rest of the agenda. Again a member can invite the Chair to close the debate or to put the matter to the vote. All members should understand the problems of 'running out of time'.

- (b) **Respect for order.** Some small informal committees work almost like a relaxed family discussion. Members chip in when they feel like it, there are no formal motions, amendments or voting, but there is general agreement at the end. That is fine - provided it is genuine. But ask the questions - has everyone had a really fair chance to contribute, or have one or two been 'squeezed out'? Are you sure everyone agreed? This is why procedures have been developed over the years in many committees of speaking 'through the chair', and of clear proposals and votes. The aim is not to curb freedom, but to enable the freedom of every member to participate properly.

The Chair's task is to 'keep order' in order to preserve the freedoms of the members. This is why respect for the chair and for order is so significant - the alternative to 'order' in a committee is not 'freedom' but anarchy (which is but another form of tyranny). The standing orders (if they exist), and the procedures are to enable the committee to work.

- (c) **Difficult situations.** It is a great help to a Chair and to the whole work of a committee, when members are alert to the development of difficult situations.

These situations may arise because of a difficult issue, a procedural muddle, or a question of personality or clash of personalities.

It is perfectly in order for a member to ask the Chair how a complex matter is to be approached, or to ask whether the discussion has not strayed off the point. If any members become over excited or the temperature rises, it is invaluable if other members contribute in moderate tones, pour oil on troubled waters, and propose ideas which mediate between opposing views where this is possible.

4. Courteous - to everyone

Courtesy and respect to fellow-members is an obvious part of a Christian approach to committee work. However, experience shows that constant reminders of this elementary principle are needed. It may be because church committees often have to make difficult decisions on very sensitive issues. It may also be because the committees are often not managed well and get into a muddle of crossed wires and misunderstanding.

The foremost quality of Christian character is love. 'Love is patient and kind ... it is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs ... love never fails' (1 Cor. 13.4-8). 'Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others' (Phil. 2.3-4). How will this work out in mutual relationships in a committee?

- (a) **Listening** - especially to those with whom you may disagree. It is often difficult to keep up concentration when a discussing a difficult issue. But the courteous member will not interrupt deliberately. Special temptations to avoid are the quiet conversation with your neighbour while others are speaking, and muttered critical comments which are only half audible. These are only too common, but are seriously discourteous to the person speaking, to the Chair, and the whole committee. The aim of listening is really to understand other views.
- (b) **Encouraging** - especially the shy, the quiet, the vulnerable and the anxious. It can be more significant sometimes to 'win the person' rather than to 'win the argument'. Encouragement is one of the neglected gifts of the Holy Spirit (Rom.12.8) and is invaluable in a committee. A spirit of encouragement will avoid nagging, going back over old problems, bullying or veiled threats.

Courtesy is not only right and good in itself - it pays handsome dividends. It wins friends, and wins a hearing. Members will normally be very attentive to the views of the courteous.

5. Clear - on the issues

Sometimes one can hear this comment after a committee - 'I wasn't quite sure what was going on when we were dealing with one item. But everyone else seemed to

understand it all so I kept quiet!’ It may be said rather ruefully, or perhaps indifferently, or even gaily, but it is dangerous. Members of the committee have been chosen to take responsibility, and they are accountable for their work. Responsibility necessarily involves clarity about the issues.

- (a) **In debate.** Are you clear about what is being discussed, and (just as important) *why* it is being discussed? What is the point of having this item on the agenda? Is it just for information, or for brainstorming to provide ideas? Or is it with a view to decision here and now? Has the Chair indicated whether he is thinking in terms of just a few minutes (a minor item) or a full-scale lengthy discussion (major item) when arguments and alternatives can be explored in detail. If it is a complex item, are you clear about the different stages in which the issue should be approached?

When the actual discussion starts, it is important to be clear about what other members are saying. If you cannot hear, or cannot understand something, it is usually wise to ask the Chair immediately (on a ‘point of order’, if necessary) for the member to speak up, or clarify the point of difficulty. Members are sometimes loath to intervene in this way, but if it is done with courtesy it can save much embarrassment and misunderstanding later on.

It is also important to be clear about what *you* are saying. It is a good idea to write down key words, phrases or names, so that you can speak clearly and concisely. Although this is especially helpful if you are new to committee work, it would be good if some of the ‘old hands’ practised it too.

- (b) **In proposals.** Are you clear about what is being proposed? Does the proposal not only say what should be done - but also how, by whom and by when? - in other words, have the implications been thought through? Are you sure that everyone understands the proposal in the same way, and it is not ambiguous? In many church councils it is worth thinking how the proposal will appear to non-members.

Amendments can often lead to confusion. It is important for members to know what the amendment is, how it will affect the substantive proposal, and that it is perfectly in order to speak to and vote for amendments even if one wishes to vote against the substantive proposal. Insist that the Chair makes it crystal clear what the amendment is.

- (c) **In decision.** The ordinary member will do well to understand the options before a meeting that is running out of time. It may, in certain circumstances, be very helpful to propose deferral of items or adjournment of the meeting. If you are unhappy about the contents of a proposal or the way in which it has been discussed, but do not want to vote against it, remember the procedural device ‘that the motion be not put’. It is usually good to follow such a motion up with suggestions as to how the motion can be made acceptable or how the method of dealing with it can be satisfactory.

However, where a committee has reached a decision time, whether on a small issue or a big one, clarity about the decision is vital. If the chairman is expecting a vocal response to his 'do you agree?', then speak up clearly. A mumbled response is bad for the morale of the proposer, and difficult for the Chair to interpret. If the Chair says, 'Those in favour - please show', then really lift your hand or arm clearly so that your response is obvious.

Abstaining from a vote may well be legitimate in certain situations, but is a dangerous habit to get into. Some members do not like to make their minds up or commit themselves. However, abstention does not absolve one from the implications of decisions made by the committee.

6. Controversial - where necessary

The very word 'controversy' fills some people with horror and fear. It may sound unchristian or unkind but it really means to differ, to dispute or to argue against. It may be *necessary* to dispute someone else's assertion about facts, or to differ from someone's interpretation of the facts. Unity and agreement are important, but they must be true and genuine. The committee must get facts as accurate as possible, and then try really to agree. 'Unity' by ambiguity in the proposal, or by the muzzling of those who disagree is not the genuine article. Jesus himself was often engaged in controversy with the Pharisees and Sadducees, and even with his own disciples.

There is nothing wrong with controversy in itself - the important questions are why and how someone is controversial. Controversy may well move through different stages in a committee:

- (a) **Disagreement.** If you know, from the agenda, that a proposal is being moved that you think is inadequate or wrong-headed in some way, then the first action may well be to talk to the proposer before the meeting - preferably several days before. If the proposer can be convinced either to withdraw his proposal, or to accept amendments - fine.

Each idea needs to be examined on its own merits, irrespective of its origin or proposer. But disagreement is inevitable on some issues - because we are imperfect people, with limited knowledge, wisdom and holiness. If there is no apparent disagreement on a committee, the members should seriously ask whether they are being manipulated or muzzled in some way.

Disagreement should always be explained with reasons, with moderation, and with a pleasant attitude. Reasons should be simple, clear and listed by the speaker. An attitude of moderation and pleasantness is more likely to win a hearing for your case.

However, if neither the proposer or the committee are immediately persuaded by your initial presentation of disagreement, it may be right to move on to the next stage.

- (b) **Argument.** If you feel the issue is important enough, then speak up again. If you are unconvinced by any replies to your disagreement, or if what you originally said has been disregarded or misunderstood, then stand your ground. Of course, it is worth being very careful about developing an argument. Ask yourself - is the issue really important enough? Have I a really good case?

It is in situations where two or more people are actually arguing over facts or opinions that it is of the highest importance to preserve order and dignity. The tradition of speaking to and through the Chair is not to be despised.

Keep calm (even if you feel strongly), and remain courteous (even if you feel provoked). By all fair means, argue the case, but remember that winning the people may be more significant than winning the argument. Remember also that it is not always necessary to think in terms of 'all or nothing'. Have you considered a suitable amendment to the proposal, or possible mediating proposals that meet legitimate concerns on both sides of a disagreement. Finally, it may sometimes be right to try to postpone or delay decision till later.

But, if all this fails, we may have to face up to the reality of -

- (c) **Division.** If the chairman presumes a substantial agreement, and says something like 'Well, we are agreed then on such-and-such', it may be right to ask for a vote. This will enable everyone to see what is the measure of agreement or disagreement. Further, it is in order for any member to ask for a count of the votes to be recorded. This sort of request should be used very sparingly in most church committees. Division is sad, but in this fallen world even Christians must learn 'to agree to disagree'.

So there will be -

- (d) **Winning and losing.** The old adage is so important in committee work when there is controversy - 'generous in victory and gracious in defeat'.

God grant me
the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

It is not controversy and difference of opinion that must be avoided at all costs, it is bitterness, hard feelings, pride and conceit. Whenever controversy has been felt necessary, it must always be in the spirit of the Christian approach and courtesy to everyone. There is no need for controversy to develop into a row.

7. Concerned - that the committee works

We have come to the end of this section 'Attending a committee', so we go back to the beginning and ask the question 'Was it a good meeting?' Frankly it was probably not perfect. That's not surprising since it was made up of far from perfect members.

But the answer to the question should not be in terms of whether I always had my say, or my views were the best, or whether all (or most) of the votes went my way, but in terms of whether the committee *worked*. In terms of military metaphors, we must ask about:

- (a) **strategy** - was the overall objective or task served by the committee's work?
- (b) **tactics** - was there clear progress in terms of particular details which contribute to the overall objective?
- (c) **morale** - was the committee's corporate spirit of commitment enhanced, or at the very least maintained at a good level?

LEAVING A COMMITTEE - (how long is enough?)

If careful thought should be given to joining a committee, then the same care should be given to the question of leaving.

1. Ways of leaving

At the beginning of this section we noted that some committee members are appointed as a result of election, and some through nomination or co-option. These different methods of joining a committee have a bearing on the different ways of leaving. It may be -

- (a) by resignation - normally through personal choice;
- (b) by election - i.e. by not being voted back by the voters;
- (c) by time limit - because there is a maximum time of service, and the limit has been reached.

2. Reasons for leaving

If a member leaves because of not being re-elected, or because of serving up to the time limit, then the reason is simple enough. However, there are many situations where committees are virtually self-perpetuating, and members ought seriously to think of voluntary resignation. Reasons might include - lengthy service already, the availability of suitable replacements, loss of freshness and the need for 'new blood', and waning of enthusiasm.

Whatever the sort of committee or method of appointment, a member who finds that changed circumstances severely restrict his attendance should seriously reconsider his position. Erratic attendance is a seriously debilitating factor in many voluntary organisations. There is a real question of integrity involved in someone holding a place on a committee, and failing to play a responsible part in its debates and decisions.

3. Limitation of tenure

Because of the problems involved in life-time or indefinite tenure of committee membership, many organisations have introduced systems of time limits. These are of two distinct types:

- (a) **Definite overlapping terms.** This system means that members serve a definite term of office (say, three, four, or more years). But the terms of office do not begin and end together - they are staggered so that a roughly equal proportion end each year. For example, if a committee has members serving three-year terms, one-third of them will retire each year; if four-year terms, one-quarter will retire each year. This system gives a definite beginning and ending, and permits long-term planning. It enables both continuity and change in reasonable proportions. The definite limit also motivates some members to be more committed. At present the Parish Administration Act does not provide for this mode of operation. It could only be introduced into a parish informally.
- (b) **Limitation of consecutive terms.** Although a parish council is elected for one year, some members serve consecutive terms of 15, 20 and many more years. In other committees, the election or co-option is for (say) three years, but members may be re-elected or re-nominated an indefinite number of times. The limitation of consecutive terms makes this impossible. There are many variations, but examples are:

4 or 5 terms of 1 year on a parish council,
1 term of 5 years on a committee,
or 2 terms of 2 or 3 years.

Some groups allow fresh terms to start after a gap of one or two years. Where such schemes are introduced, they should be agreed by the competent authority a clear year before being made operative. The necessary percentage of the committee who have served longest in excess of the agreed period will resign at the end of the first year (and similarly the second year, and so on).

- (c) **The pros and cons of limitation.** Arguments in favour of the limitation of consecutive terms include:
- (i) it prevents automatic reappointment for an indefinite period;
 - (ii) it enables the removal of 'difficult' or unhelpful members;
 - (iii) it provides a definite opportunity to introduce 'fresh blood' and wider representation.

However, there are some problems, and arguments against the system which include:

- (i) many committees require several years of membership to gain a thorough understanding of the enterprise, and work through long-term objectives;
- (ii) it demands the loss of exceptionally valuable members after an arbitrary period;
- (iii) the setting of an arbitrary limit implies that a committee needs protection against its own members. Is that good for morale? Is it the best or only way to remove 'dead wood'?
- (iv) are exceptions to be made for the minister(s), leader(s) or other officers? If so, is not the discrimination difficult (or embarrassing) to justify? But if not, does it introduce a strangely arbitrary element into the area of leadership?

It is a complex debate, and the implications of adopting a system of limitation of consecutive terms must be thought through with the greatest care. A short-term advantage (e.g. removal of one or two quite unsuitable members) may be bought at the price of long term disadvantage (e.g. the removal of a superb churchwarden, treasurer or other key resource person with no suitable replacement).

Without coming down firmly on either side, it may be fairly suggested that groups should beware of either of the extremes - of indefinite and very lengthy membership, or of short and fixed periods. Most committees ideally need some real continuity for long-term planning and effectiveness, and real freshness of vision, vitality and commitment.