

**BE IT RESOLVED that:** DCC for the Victorian & Tasmanian District approves the Alternate Meeting Guidelines, and also their communication to Parishes and Congregations for use. Passed via **Resolution 20/073 Mon 27 July 2020**

## **ALTERNATE MEETING ARRANGEMENTS**

### **BACKGROUND:**

Currently in the Victorian & Tasmanian District almost all formal parish and congregation meetings involve physical attendance in person, although this method of meeting may not necessarily be prescribed in all constitutions.

Our Constitutions require that we need to be able to conduct formal church business under all circumstances, including but not limited to:

- Annual General Meetings – including appointment of officers and approval of budget;
- Special Meeting;
- Call Meetings etc.

The COVID-19 Pandemic and the subsequent State of Emergency in 2020 has placed significant restrictions on people movements, social distancing and gathering sizes. It was expected that from July 2020, gatherings of 50 would be allowed, and this would begin to enable appropriately organised AGM's etc for most Parishes and Congregations. However, this has subsequently been limited to no more than 20 for regional Victorian areas and no gatherings for Melbourne metropolitan areas. Furthermore it is uncertain regarding how long these restrictions will remain.

The guidelines below have been developed by the Victorian and Tasmanian District Church Council (DCC), with input from their Electoral and Constitution Committees. They allow for a range of alternate ways for congregation members to be "present" for formal decision-making meetings.

### **WHEN:**

These guidelines apply when gathering sizes are restricted such that a quorum cannot be achieved through a physical attendance in person meeting. Such as during the current COVID-19 declared State of Emergency, or may also apply in other major circumstances that prohibit large gatherings (please discuss with District Administrator and or member of DCC if you think these other circumstances may apply).

DCC has approved these Guidelines which are intended to be temporary based on the extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 Pandemic and will apply until the next District Convention of Synod (likely May 2021) or unless declared otherwise by DCC.

*Note: While these guidelines were prepared to deal with the Victorian lockdowns, the Guidelines can also be used in Tasmania.*

## HOW:

Relevant technical guidance regarding reporting meetings such as AGMs has been provided by the Federal Government with a special determination under the Corporations Act for holding virtual AGMs refer to attachment 2 (applies to companies). There is also information provided by **our regulator the Australian Charities and Not for profit Commission**, who are more flexible in their approach (refer to attachment 1).

The Victoria and Tasmania DCC are supportive of its Parishes and Congregations moving to alternative meeting formats. It encourages Parishes and Congregations to consider the above Corporations Act Determination and particularly the ACNC advice when planning their formal decision-making meetings.

In particular when considering alternative meeting arrangements Parishes and Congregations need to consider:

- that constitutional requirements for formal meetings are met (ie. eligibility, notice period, quorum, and a record of voting & outcome)
- that the meeting business is conducted fairly and the principles of natural justice are upheld.
- how the method of meeting is agreed, documented and communicated to members.
- a variety of voting formats,
- ensure information is made readily available prior to meetings and opportunities for feedback, questions and clarification are possible in advance.
- the most appropriate and suitable method for the Parish/Congregational demographics and context.

## Some Recent Examples

**Mixed method:** A regional congregation needed a Special Meeting. They gave notice, then issued a proposal and background which had been under some prior discussion (meetings, email correspondence, phone calls etc). A ballot was undertaken via both email and hard-copy via residents' mailbox. There was then 2 weeks (in their case) to return the ballot either via email to the Secretary, or to the ballot box in the Church Office by the deadline.

**Zoom/Teams/other videoconferencing:** Zoom or other video conference format can host a meeting with a large number of people. The host/chair has the ability to direct conversation and debate (as they would in a face-to-face meeting) via various tools. Participants can indicate their willingness to speak via chat functions, put a virtual or real hand-up if they wish, and questions can be additionally moderated through a Q&A function.

Voting can be via the poll tool or a show of hands that is visible to scrutineers. Email or text responses to voting may also complement this. In all circumstances meeting organisers must plan well, provide training if necessary, and have contingency options available should the technology not perform as desired or for those that don't have access to the preferred technology.

### **GCB and DCC**

General Church Board, College of Bishops, District Church Council and other Governance Groups regularly attend formal meetings via Videoconference – both prior to and during COVID-19. These virtual meetings have been extremely effective and have often in fact improved the meeting effectiveness and giving more opportunity for representation. The Vic/Tas DCC recently held their Strategy Day on line using a variety of interactive tools, and also enabled a wider range of participants including national church representatives.

### **REFERENCE DOCUMENTS**

- ACNC advice Attachment 1:
- Corporations Act Determination Attachment 2

### **HELP:**

When you have considered a possible plan, if you want further input, please contact the District Administrator [stephen.mildred@lca.org.au](mailto:stephen.mildred@lca.org.au) or 9236 1240. If necessary he will involve a representative from the Electoral Committee.