

The Uniting Congregations of Aotearoa New Zealand (UCANZ)

Recommendations

1. That the Guideline Paper on Parish Oversight be affirmed.
2. That churches be encouraged to share in the koinonia Bible studies in 2011 to deepen understanding of the ongoing journey for partner churches.
3. That partner church courts continue to explore, challenge and develop relationships at all levels of the church that reflect koinonia partnership.
4. That the principle of a UCANZ property oversight committee be referred for discussion to appropriate church committees and further consideration by Standing Committee and partner church leaders in June 2011.

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Report

2010 Report to the partner churches

In the last year there have been plenty of discussions within the churches about where the ecumenical journey is leading. A group continues to work at a national level in seeking to find a replacement for the former National Council of Churches and various denominations are discussing ways of working with each other. The Uniting Congregations of Aotearoa New Zealand (UCANZ) is not involved in the ongoing ecumenical discussions and continues to seek its place within the modern church environment. For some people this has brought a change of focus from one Greek idea to another – from *οἰκουμένη* (oikoumene) to *κοινωνία* (koinonia).

At the heart of koinonia is a sense of partnership, communion and the sharing of resources. This partnership is identified by the fishermen disciples (Luke 5:10) and by Paul and Titus (2 Corinthians 8:23). The koinonia relationship shares a common goal, is centred on mutual respect, and acknowledges diversity. The latter point is well illustrated in the offering of koinonia by James and John to Paul and Barnabas as they set off on their mission to the gentiles (Galatians 2:9). The concept is more than denominational – it also describes the relationship of diverse cultures, generations and theologies that exist within the universal church.

The work of UCANZ is centred around affirming the koinonia partnership that Cooperative Ventures represent up and down the country. We acknowledge the commonality of our faith, an appreciation of diversity, a willingness to journey together, and the exchange of gifts. Cooperative Ventures have found that there is a united foundation for our faith and the differences are usually worked through. They have found great joy and enrichment in encountering the traditions of our various churches – often being open to new expressions of worship and parish life. Cooperative Ventures have understood that theirs is a journey of faith and they accept some rainy days or rough roads as part of the overall trip. They also rejoice in sharing the resources of their partner churches – through both giving and receiving.

As the understanding of koinonia partnership continues to express itself, Cooperative Ventures look to their partner churches to affirm their journeys and support the essence of their partnerships. While the ecumenical partnership of the denominations undertakes a new formulation, we would seek the support for the koinonia partnership that exists within the parishes.

The Standing Committee of UCANZ are planning to distribute a Study Booklet on koinonia in 2011 and would like this to be provided to all churches as a resource to explore concepts of partnership and working together – not only ecumenically, but with other groups in the community in which a congregation exists.

Ongoing work

The Standing Committee of UCANZ has met regularly and has worked together with church leaders to develop the paper on Parish Oversight appended to this report. We feel that this lays the foundation for our ongoing task of reviewing the Guide to Procedures to better reflect the current church environment. It is our hope to present to the UCANZ forum 2011 a revised Guide to Procedures and to have that brought before the partner church courts in 2012. This paper is offered to the church courts and parishes for approval in principle, with the intent of developing a revised Guide to Procedures over the next year or so.

The UCANZ office continues to offer advice to parishes, ministers and partner churches on how to develop the partnerships that exist through the parishes. We seek to provide opportunities for resources to be shared at parish level and strongly encourage shared learning opportunities – especially in rural areas. There are some parishes that find that their union needs to be dissolved – often in dealing with practical issues rather than philosophical differences – and new cooperating ventures are being formed (although not as full cooperating parishes in the traditional format). Under the mandate given to UCANZ, we are to take some responsibility for all ventures where our partner churches share property, ministry or administration.

We would want to affirm the positive aspects of the ongoing journey of cooperation and celebrate the efforts of church leaders to meet with UCANZ to address the issues. We continue to pray and work for fuller cooperation at all levels of the church.

Worship

In a number of UCANZ-related meetings there have arisen worthwhile discussions about the modern understanding of worship and how an ecumenical understanding of how worship defines our life together could be developed. We believe that there is

opportunity for our partner churches to work on a shared understanding of worship and we would encourage their initiative in developing both conversation and resources.

Property

One of the regular concerns of Cooperative Ventures is the complexity of dealing with property issues when two or more partner churches need to be consulted. The development of regional property strategies by denominational courts have largely ignored the partnership nature of Cooperative Ventures and detract from the koinonia spirit. There is no desire to remove property from the vested trustees of the partner churches, but a simplified structure could provide a UCANZ property group that replaced regional court congestion. The UCANZ property group would bring proposals to the various property trustees, after consultation with the regional courts – but the parish would deal with only one property committee, which will have both local and national links.

While there are clearly a number of technical issues that would need to be carefully worked through, we would ask that the principle be accepted and suitable regulations brought to the national church courts in 2012 for implementation in 2013.

Rev Peter MacKenzie

On behalf of the Standing Committee of the Uniting Congregations of Aotearoa New Zealand

Appendix: Guideline Paper on Parish Oversight

June 2010

The Standing Committee of the Uniting Congregations of Aotearoa New Zealand (UCANZ) offers the following Guideline Paper on Parish Oversight as a foundational document for the ongoing revision of the Guide to Procedures for Cooperative Ventures. The paper affirms the partnership nature of cooperative ventures and calls for all partners to take their share of responsibility in the ongoing life of the parishes. This has been developed in consultation with partner church leaders and we now seek the endorsement of the parishes and partners of UCANZ.

This is a document which outlines the principles of partnership – there are a number of issues that are yet to be addressed, including the role of Joint Regional Committees, the role of the UCANZ office, the development of new ventures, and the resources (people, time and money) that may be available. The Standing Committee believe that this partnership concept can simplify our systems, give clarity to necessary roles, and define how the cooperative venture partnership can find expression.



Guideline Paper: Parish Oversight

Cooperative Ventures exist because of the partnership between two or more churches (Anglican, Congregational Union, Christian Churches [Churches of Christ], Methodist or Presbyterian). The concept of parish oversight has essentially developed on an *ad hoc* basis and the Guide to Procedures outlines a variety of ways in which oversight is governed. As denominational courts adapt to the current situation, it seems important to clarify what is meant by parish oversight for a Cooperative Venture.

When dealing with the diverse traditions of our partner churches there needs to be an awareness of the different authority structures. The key courts of parish oversight are; the Anglican Diocese, the Methodist Synod, the Presbyterian Presbytery, the Christian Churches Leadership Team, and the congregation for Congregational Union parishes.

It should be clear that 'being in partnership' means that all parties of a Cooperative Venture are called to give oversight to the mission and ministry of the parish. Parish Councils and ministers, regional and national courts, are charged with the duty to nurture the life of the congregations in their care. But there is an understanding that parishes require one partner to take a primary role in giving parish oversight. To describe this primary role and the consequent relationships we identify a Coordinating Partner as taking a special part in the life of the parish, supported by the other Participating Partners.

Coordinating Partner

The first task of the Coordinating Partner is to take responsibility for the working out of the partnership. This requires that genuine consultation be continually held between all the partners and the parish before any decisions are made. A meeting of the partners in

a parish should happen at least once a year to discuss any relevant issues. It is the duty of the Coordinating Partner to ensure that models of partnership are actioned and proper processes are followed.

As a sign of partnership it is generally accepted that the Coordinating Partner role will regularly move between the partner denominations of a Cooperative Venture. While this will normally be associated with a ministry appointment, there may be exceptions when the partners agree or when there is an alternative model of ministry. A review of Coordinating Partner should be held every five years to consider whether changes need to be made.

The Coordinating Partner finds expression in the following areas of parish life.

Ministry

The Coordinating Partner takes responsibility for overseeing the process of ministry appointments, including developing a parish profile, interviews, and character and good standing checks. The Coordinating Partner must ensure that all partners are fully involved in the process and that there is consultation with partner church leaders and Joint Regional Committees {where appropriate} before an appointment is officially confirmed. The Coordinating Partner also ensures that an induction service involves all the partners of the Cooperative Venture, a Code of Ethics and Letter of Appointment are signed, and that the UCANZ office is notified.

If the Coordinating Partner and appointed minister are not from the same church there must be deliberate attention given to the issues that arise, including ministry reviews. Such difficulties should be considered at the time of making the appointment. In all appointments, care should be taken to identify ministers who are committed to the ecumenical nature of cooperative ventures and any orientation or mentoring provided where it is deemed necessary.

When a ministerial vacancy occurs the Coordinating Partner will convene a meeting of partners (including the parish and Joint Regional Committee {where appropriate}) to decide which partner will act as Coordinating Partner. The Coordinating Partner takes a lead in helping the parish to develop both parish and minister profiles.

Where there is local shared ministry the Coordinating Partner ensures the appointment of a suitable ministry enabler, organises appropriate calling processes and gives direction to the ministry team. Other models of ministry may also have specific needs.

Complaints

The Coordinating Partner will generally handle complaints that arise from a Cooperative Venture and should ensure that other partners are made aware of possible liabilities arising and the outcomes. Where a minister is involved, it should be their own denomination that handles any complaints.

Property

Property is generally vested with trustees of one or more of the partners. All property belongs to the partnership, and the Coordinating Partner is responsible for ensuring that all the partners are aware of any property developments, have a

say in the process, and that their interest is maintained. Final approval for property development rests with the property trustees that hold the title, but all partners in the parish must be consulted first. Details of any decisions and any changes to the Property Schedule must be notified to the UCANZ office.

Parish Reviews

A review of the life and work of a parish is also a review of the partnership - and therefore a review should involve all of the partners. In the past parish consultations have been organised by a local Joint Regional Committee but there are now limited resources in many areas to ensure that this happens effectively. A review may use the questions and processes of a partner denomination, but such a review should involve representatives of all the partners and the Joint Regional Committee {where appropriate} and should consult the courts of those partners. Care should be taken to distinguish between parish reviews, ministry performance, and ministry appointment reviews.

Lay Workers

The Coordinating Partner maintains a record of those authorised to celebrate the sacraments according to their denominational tradition. They should also ensure that all employed staff have appropriate contracts and conditions of employment.

Participating Partner

Participating Partners in a Cooperative Venture have responsibilities in maintaining contact with the parish and with the Coordinating Partner. When moving from the Coordinating Partner role, there is a need to provide continuity for both the parish and the new Coordinating Partner. It is important that Participating Partners provide personnel to attend meetings called by the Coordinating Partner to advance the work of the parish. This is especially true when dealing with property matters.

There is also an ongoing responsibility to make parishes aware of the various resources that are available and to provide encouragement to ministers in exploring traditions different to their own. Ministers and laity should be encouraged to experience the wider church life of the partners.

Cooperative Ventures also have a responsibility to ensure that Participating Partners are active and visible in the life of the parish. Deliberate attention should be paid to ensuring that all partners are honoured in the life of parish and that events are fairly publicised. The worshipping life of the parish should reflect the traditions of all its partners.

Uniting Congregations of Aotearoa New Zealand

At a national level the Standing Committee of Uniting Congregations is the governance body for Cooperative Ventures. The UCANZ office is the administrative centre for Cooperative Ventures and manages those tasks that have been united. The Standing Committee, working through the office, has the task of monitoring the partnerships within Cooperative Ventures. In some regions the Joint Regional Committees are delegated this task. It is important that decisions made by partners are reported to the UCANZ office by the Coordinating Partner.