

THE PARISH COUNCIL HANDBOOK

for old and new members



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Edited by Dr Ian Gibson, the Advocate

With a foreword by Mr Ken Spackman, the Registrar

The Parish Council Handbook
for old and new members
First edition

First published in 2017
by the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne
The Anglican Centre
209 Flinders Lane
Melbourne VIC 3000

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Produced for the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne
by Broughton Publishing Pty Ltd
32 Glenvale Crescent
Mulgrave VIC 3170

ISBN xxx-x-xxxxxxx-x-x

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FOREWORD

The Anglican Church has a long history of shared governance, both in the context of the parish and, of course, in the Synod, in which the ordained leadership of the church acts in consultation and cooperation with the laity, for the corporate good and the advancement of God's kingdom.

This useful handbook has been prepared for those who presently take part in the significant responsibility of parish governance by serving as a member of a parish council; and, equally and importantly, for those who may be considering doing so, either now or at a future time. It will also be useful for those who may have, or who have been invited to, put their name forward for parish council, and would like to know what they might be in for!

The handbook is intended to be a practical resource, and for this reason not only covers the details of parish governance as set out by the *Parish Governance Act 2013*, but also contains a glossary of common terms and a treasury of prayers for a range of occasions, for use by both individuals and parish council. The full text of the *Parish Governance Act 2013*, together with the rules for meetings and officers and the regulations, are also included in the appendices for ease of reference.

The handbook has been written and prepared by Bishop Bradly Billings, who was chair of the parish legislation review committee that drafted the *Parish Governance Act 2013* and presented it to the Synod in 2013. Bishop Billings (then an Archdeacon) moved the motion to adopt the new Act, which I was pleased to second. The motion was accepted on the final day of that year's session of Synod, with considerable acclaim.

Bishop Billings has been vicar of two parishes (Gisborne and Toorak), an Archdeacon, and is presently the Director of Theological Education and Clergy Wellbeing for the diocese. He has extensive experience in corporate governance, having served previously on two school boards, for several years as a director of Benetas (Anglican Aged Care), and more recently as the Chair and Executive Officer of the Melbourne Anglican Foundation.

The Advocate, Dr Ian Gibson, who substantially drafted the *Parish Governance Act 2013*, applied his considerable expertise and attention to detail in editing the work, suggesting several improvements to the text and clarifying many matters of importance.

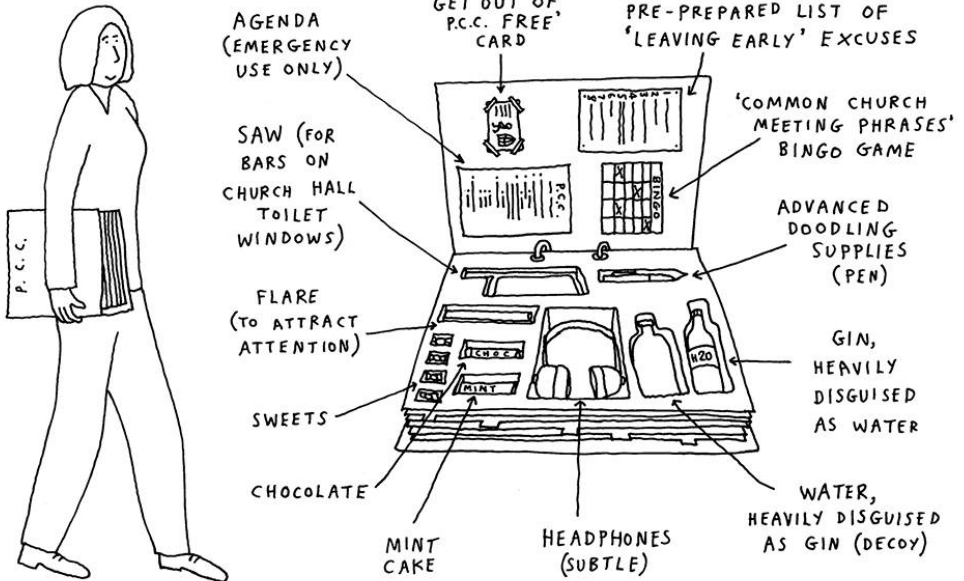
Both Bishop Billings and Dr Gibson are extremely well placed, and well qualified, for the task of producing this helpful and concise guide to parish governance for Anglicans in the Diocese of Melbourne.

I commend this useful and accessible handbook to the wider diocese, confident that it will be a blessing and benefit to parish councils everywhere.

Ken A. Spackman, Registrar

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1. THE PARISH

The Anglican Diocese of Melbourne has in the recent past, as part of its strategic vision and directions, invited its people to ‘see the parish with fresh eyes’. This entailed doing things such as gathering data on who lives in the community, the various activities that take place, and the different groups and organisations present. One suggestion that accompanied the invitation to ‘see the parish with fresh eyes’ was that parishioners take a walk around the surrounding streets and into the shopping centres and other places where people gather, and prayerfully observe the nature of the community. This points to the Anglican understanding of the parish. It refers to a locality, a geographical area, in which, of course, people live, work, study, fellowship and form community. Not all ministry is conducted in a parish setting—there are ministries to school communities, to workplaces, prisons, hospitals, aged care facilities, to the defence forces and emergency services, and many others. But all ministry, including parish ministry, does take place in the context of a community, however those communities are constituted, and whatever their size and composition.

This handbook is about parish ministry and, more particularly, about the parish council. So we begin with two fundamental questions. In this chapter the question, ‘What is a parish?’ and in the second chapter, ‘What is a council?’ They point to the overarching question we are attempting to answer in this handbook, which concerns what happens when those two words, ‘parish’ and ‘council’, come together.

Happily, in relation to our first question, the *Parish Governance*

Act 2013 section 5 provides a helpful definition. Under the subtitle ‘The Anglican understanding of a parish’, it reads—

The parish is the geographical unit for organising the mission of God throughout the Anglican Church within the Diocese of Melbourne. The boundaries of each parish are those approved by the Archbishop in Council. The Anglican Church within the Diocese is constituted of clergy and lay people committed to building up the Body of Christ under the leadership of the Archbishop. This definition tells us some things of particular importance—

- That the parish is a geographical area (or unit). This means that each parish is especially responsible, in terms of its mission and ministry, for the community or communities within those boundaries (but, importantly, not necessarily for more than this).
- The purpose of organising the diocese into parishes is to facilitate the mission of God. This is, fundamentally, why the parish exists, and why there is one or more places of worship within it—to live out the call to mission that Jesus gave to his Church (Matthew 28.19–20). This is also primarily why the parish has a council, but more on that later.
- The boundaries of each parish are not randomly constituted, nor determined at our own whim or desire, but are those approved by the Archbishop in Council. This alerts us to the fact that all parishes, and all parish councils, work within the confines of the broader structures of the church, such as the Archbishop in Council, and the Synod.
- The Anglican Church, we learn, is made up of clergy and laypeople that are committed to building up the Body of Christ. That is, to further enhancing, growing and building this Anglican part of the wider Christian family. The parish, and the parish council, have an important role to play in this.

In fact, it is not too much to say that this is a large and important reason that the parish council exists!

- ✦ Finally, all of this is done under the leadership of the Archbishop. Because the Anglican Church is an episcopal church (led by bishops), both the diocese as a whole, and the parishes within it, can be thought as being ‘gathered’ around their chief pastor and leader—in the case of Melbourne, this is the Archbishop.

This tells us quite a bit about the meaning and purpose of the parish, and how it relates to the diocese in which it is located. It is worth noting, at this point, that the parish is the smallest unit of organisation within the Anglican Church. It is, therefore, inherently ‘local.’ For this reason, the name of each parish will normally include the place in which it is physically located. The parish is, however, not the only unit making up the whole of the church, but is one part within a much larger whole.

There is, for example, a parish of Malvern (St George’s), which has particular responsibility for Anglican ministry in the inner south-eastern suburb of Malvern. The parish of Malvern is one small part of a much larger whole, which can be described in the following way—

- i. The parish of Malvern is included in the deanery of Stonnington, which includes eight other parishes in the same part of Melbourne. The clergy and authorised lay ministers who are licensed to the parishes of the deanery meet together regularly for mutual prayer, support and encouragement.
- ii. The deanery of Stonnington is within the archdeaconry of Stonnington and Glen Eira, whose Archdeacon also has administrative and missional responsibilities and duties for both the Stonnington deanery and the neighbouring deanery of Glen Eira.
- iii. The parish of Malvern, the deanery of Stonnington, and the archdeaconry of Stonnington and Glen Eira, are each within

one of the three areas of episcopal care overseen by an assistant bishop.

- iv. The Diocese of Melbourne is, in turn, one diocese in the ecclesiastical province of Victoria, which also includes, in addition to Melbourne, the dioceses of Ballarat, Bendigo, Gippsland and Wangaratta.
- v. The Diocese of Melbourne is one diocese among the 23 individual dioceses that make up the Anglican Church of Australia.
- vi. The Anglican Church of Australia is, in turn, one part of the worldwide Anglican Communion, made up of those national churches having their historic origins in the Church of England.
- vii. The worldwide Anglican Communion is itself a part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church that stretches back in time all the way to Jesus and the first apostles, and which continues to exist today in a variety of forms and expressions across the globe.

Hence, we can understand the parish to be one part of the universal Christian church: a small, but important, part in the context of that larger whole. Furthermore, the nature of the parishes we are concerned with in this book are units within the Anglican Church, and a part of the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne. As such, the parish, through its clergy and its laypeople, is shaped and informed by the history and traditions, and the faith and practice, of the Anglican Church. This inevitably invites the question of what form the history and traditions take, and of what the content and particularities of the faith and practice might be. Here, the constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia is refreshingly helpful, for it sets out, in its fundamental declarations, a helpful summary of how the Anglican Church understands itself within the broader context of the worldwide

Christian church, and in the light of its own history and traditions, together with the sources of its faith and practice.

The 'fundamental declarations' (sections 1, 2 and 3) of the constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia, are—

1. The Anglican Church of Australia, being a part of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ, holds the Christian Faith as professed by the Church of Christ from primitive times and in particular as set forth in the creeds known as the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed.
2. This Church receives all the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as being the ultimate rule and standard of faith given by inspiration of God and containing all things necessary for salvation.
3. This Church will ever obey the commands of Christ, teach His doctrine, administer His sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, follow and uphold His discipline and preserve the three orders of bishops, priests and deacons in the sacred ministry.

The 'ruling principles' (section 4) further state—

4. This Church, being derived from the Church of England, retains and approves the doctrine and principles of the Church of England embodied in the Book of Common Prayer together with the Form and Manner of Making Ordaining and Consecrating of Bishops, Priests and Deacons and in the Articles of Religion sometimes called the Thirty-nine Articles.

This gives us a helpful overview of the Anglican understanding of the parish in the context of the larger whole of the Christian church, and of its purpose in terms of what it is called to do and proclaim. It reminds us that the parish is a missional unit. Those who make up the people of God in that particular place are a sign, and hopefully

a visible and active sign, of the presence of God in the midst of that community. As Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) so beautifully put it—

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.