

## Governance during the COVID-19 crisis

The page contains tips for continuing your governance during the Covid-19 pandemic. If you have questions or need support, please contact Jody Maltby: [jmaltby@united-church.ca](mailto:jmaltby@united-church.ca).

### **How do we give notice if we need to have a congregational meeting?**

According to the United Church Manual, 2019 (section B.5.4) if a community of faith wants to have a congregational meeting there are specific requirements for giving notice, depending on the topic. In each case, notice must be read during public worship. Not all of our congregations have the ability to live stream worship.

The General Council has provided the following advice for communities of faith wishing to hold a congregational meeting.

In light of the pandemic and the closure of congregations for worship, notice of a congregational meeting could be delivered by email or post to the address on file for congregational members. Each congregation's context is a little different. Some have the email addresses for most if not all members so can use that capacity for notice. For others, telephone contact is the best.

The important thing is that the minister/governing body/chair calling the meeting are acting in good faith, and that they choose the option for notifying members that, in their reasonable opinion, is the best way of getting in touch with the largest number of people under the circumstances. Quorum requirements would still apply.

It's also important for congregations to record in their minutes how notice of the meeting was given and the rationale for that e.g. "notice of the meeting was given via email to all members for whom we have email addresses, which is 90% of the congregation's membership". That will answer any questions raised later about the legitimacy of the meeting.

If communities of faith follow these steps, then any decisions that come out of the meeting will be legally solid.

### **How can we hold a meeting when we can't gather in person?**

According to The United Church Manual, 2019 (section A4), meetings can occur:

- a) in person;
- b) by telephone conference call;
- c) in any other way where participants can communicate with each other at the same time (for example, by instant messaging or webcam simulcast technology); or
- d) by e-mail, as long as the requirements for e-mail meetings in the Procedures for Holding a Meeting and Decision-Making are met. (found in section 3.4.2 of Appendix

If you wish to meet by conference call, you may book the regional system by contacting Rachael Howes at [rhowes@united-church.ca](mailto:rhowes@united-church.ca)

If you wish to use video technology, we recommend using Zoom: <https://zoom.us/>  
You can find resources for using Zoom here: <https://shiningwatersregionalcouncil.ca/zoom-video-conferencing/>

At the discretion of the chair, decisions may be made between meetings by e-mail voting in circumstances the chair considers to be exceptional. A congregation may not make a decision by e-mail to appoint, remove, or accept the resignation of trustees.

E-mail voting may be conducted only if every member of the voting body has already provided the voting body with an e-mail address that ensures confidentiality.

At the direction of the chair, the secretary circulates a proposed decision and initiates a vote by e-mail on it.

- The email must contain
  - a) the proposed decision and sufficient background to inform the other members of the voting body; and
  - b) a specified time for replying to the e-mail, allowing for at least 48 hours from the time that the e-mail is circulated.
- The e-mail must be circulated to all members of the voting body, with all members' e-mail addresses visible.
- Members may ask questions of clarification and offer comments by e-mail, ensuring they are visible to all members.
- Members must vote by e-mail, ensuring their vote is visible to all members.
- Members must vote in the affirmative or negative without any conditions.
- A member may object to making this decision by e-mail, and if any two members so object, a meeting must be held in one of the other ways set out in the bylaws.
- Members may vote before the deadline, and may change their votes up until that time.
- If the number of votes cast is less than the minimum number of members required to be present for a meeting, the decision is not approved.

Following the deadline, the secretary must inform all members of the voting body of the voting results by e-mail. The secretary must include the proposed decision and the outcome of the vote in the minutes of the next regular meeting of the voting body.

### **Should we still hold our Annual Meeting?**

According to the United Church Manual, 2019 (section B.5.1) the congregation or pastoral charge must meet annually. This meeting must be held as early as possible in the calendar year.

If a community of faith had not yet held its Annual Meeting prior to the pandemic, you can still meet using the information provided above regarding notice and format for meetings.

At the Annual Meeting, a congregation is responsible for:

- electing a chair and a secretary of the annual meeting;
- receiving the annual reports from the governing body, committees, and other groups in the congregation or pastoral charge;
- electing the governing body, regional council representatives, and members of the committees; and
- considering and making a decision on the draft annual budget.

Most, if not all, of these decisions could be made by email provided your congregation is comfortable using email. We do encourage you to consider holding your meeting via Zoom. Regional staff can help you with tips to manage a large video meeting.