

Governance in Congregations during COVID-19

May 2021

During this time when worship services have been temporarily halted or moved to electronic format, the life and work of the congregation continue in other ways that can be adapted to the current circumstances.

Congregations hold meetings to receive information and make decisions. With current provincial restrictions on gatherings of people, the best course of action may be to defer any meetings already scheduled and those not yet called, including the annual general meeting.

Another possibility is to hold the meeting through electronic means. There are a few videoconferencing options available now (e.g. Zoom, Skype) in addition to audio-only teleconference calls. Any electronic method is acceptable as long as the participants have the ability to communicate with each other orally or through typed messaging at the same time. As long as most members have and can use the needed technology, it is reasonable to proceed with a meeting. We recognize this will not be an option for congregations where electronic capacity is limited. Again, the best option may be to postpone meeting.

The congregation must be given advance notice of a congregational meeting, read aloud during public worship. The following directions set out how this notice requirement may be adapted for congregations not holding worship services due to COVID 19 in cases where there is congregational business that cannot be deferred.

Congregations vary in their circumstances. Some have e-mail addresses on file for most if not all members so that capacity may be used for giving notice of meetings. For others, telephone contact with members is the best way. The person calling the meeting (minister/chair of the annual meeting/pastoral charge supervisor) must act in good faith in calling the meeting and 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.

There is a minimum period of time between when the notice is given and when the meeting may be held. These minimum time periods still apply even in situations where the business is urgent, and wherever possible, additional time should be given to allow for broad communication of the notice.

The minutes of the congregational meeting should record how notice was given along with the rationale for choosing that method—for example: “Notice of the meeting was given via e-mail to all members for whom we have e-mail addresses, which is 90 percent of the congregation’s membership.”

The requirement for a minimum number of members to be present at the meeting still applies to meetings held by electronic means. See section B.5.5 of [The Manual](#), along with these other amendments:

- temporary suspension of B.5.1, annual meeting requirement, and
- the amendment of B.5.2, allowing the governing board to decide on the draft budget.

Depending on the business involved, the governing body of the congregation may have authority to deal with it on behalf of the congregation. The governing body has oversight of the financial situation of the congregation between annual meetings and general oversight of the interests of the congregation in addition to other specific responsibilities under *The Manual*. All decisions involving the appointment or removal of trustees must, however, be made by the congregation.

The governing body has been given special authority by the General Council Executive to deal with urgent pastoral relations matters on behalf of the congregation. This is a temporary measure in effect until December 31, 2021, and applies only in situations where the regional council is satisfied the situation is critical and can't effectively be dealt with in any other way. There are additional requirements that must be met. If the governing body believes that a decision must be made about initiating a call or appointment, revising the terms of a call or appointment, or ending a call or appointment, they should contact their regional council pastoral relations staff for guidance.