

LIFE & WITNESS

CONSULTATION RESOURCE KIT

FOR PRESBYTERIES IN THE UCA

November 2018 | Version 5



**uniting
church**
in Australia,
Synod of NSW & ACT

PREFACE

AIM: *To provide clear guidance for Life & Witness Consultations to be carried out in Presbyteries and to resource teams to undertake congregational consultations, adapting the process and timing to their contexts.*

A Guide to Using this Resource

This document is divided into several main sections.

- Section 1 sets out the rationale and statements of principle
- Section 2 sets out the procedural overview and the six-stage process, for how consultations can be undertaken in the Presbytery

We recommend all committee members and team members read this whole document to gain familiarity with it. It will help in understanding not only the processes involved but ways it can be streamlined and adapted to work within your church setting.

This kit will remain open to improvement and amendment from time to time. If you have any feedback on omissions, contradictions or suggested improvements, please feel free to convey this to the Secretariat.

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1 SECTION 1 – Rationale

1.1 The Role of Presbytery

The role of the Presbytery is set out in Reg. 3.1.3, and covers

- Oversight of Ministers
- Oversight of Congregations
- Wider work of the Church
- Selection and Oversight of Candidates
- Ordination, Accreditation or Recognition of Specified Ministries
- Oversight of Lay Preachers
- Placement and Appointment of Specified Ministries and Supervision of Vacancies
- Administration
- Strengthen the life and witness of congregations

The Presbytery also has responsibility to consult with congregations on their life and witness (Reg. 3.1.4) as one expression of its role of oversight.

1.2 Why conduct consultations?

As noted above a core responsibility of the Presbytery is to exercise oversight and to strengthen the life and witness of the congregations within its bounds. Exercise of these responsibilities is critical to the ongoing health and vitality of congregations. When the Presbytery undertakes its role diligently and faithfully it also builds a strong working relationship between the whole Presbytery and the congregations in its bounds.

Therefore, the reasons that the Presbytery undertakes consultations include:

- To strengthen congregations in their life and witness
- To be a catalyst that encourages congregations in their mission development, mission planning, mission implementation and innovative thinking.
- To develop co-operative partnerships between congregations in the Presbytery (particularly within the Zones of the Presbytery)
- To provide a “health check” for congregations to prevent more serious issues emerging in the future that might hinder their mission.
- To determine a congregation’s future needs with respect to the placement of Ministry agents
- To enable congregations to stop and reflect on its past, present and future
- To encourage a culture of accountability to one another for stewardship of our time and resources as we engage in the mission of God – both as Presbytery and as congregations
- To ensure each congregation is a safe place with respect to the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs of the people who connect with the congregation.
- To consider the place of each congregation within the wider church and to develop stronger connections between neighbouring congregations and other councils, agencies and bodies of the Uniting Church
- To ensure compliance obligations are fulfilled within the Church.

1.3 Towards Best Practice

This kit aims to describe best practice in Life and Witness consultations with congregations. The comprehensive process described may appear to be more than is required in some instances. The starting point in all cases will be a full examination of the congregation's mission and ministry, finances, governance and property. **Please adapt these resources to suit your context and streamline as appropriate.**

It is the role of the Consultation Team to make decisions as they progress through a consultation, in relation to the depth they will go, in any particular aspect of the congregation's life. In particular, at the "Reflect" stage, the Team will discern what they've heard and then decide on whether more engagement is needed, or move straight to Report writing.

For each consultation

- Ensuring that membership of each Consultation team is tailored to the specific needs of the congregation
- Liaising with Presbytery Committee to appoint teams to conduct Consultations
- Liaising with Presbytery Committee to establish a Terms of Reference for each Consultation
- Appointing a team leader (responsibilities of the team leader are set out in the Life & Witness Kit and team members to conduct the consultation)
- Arranging a briefing of the team prior to the commencement of the consultation
- Reviewing draft consultation reports to ensure that recommendations are consistent with Uniting Church Regulations and have been prepared according to the standards and expectations documented in the Life & Witness Kit, seeking revisions if required
- Ensuring efficient and effective communication throughout the consultation process, including referring outcomes and action items to the relevant Presbytery Committees for action and/or follow up
- Ensuring that throughout the process communication with the congregation is consistent and adequate.
- Ensuring that the congregation and relevant Committee receive the final consultation report and applicable recommendations

Presbytery Committee Responsibilities

- To initiate Life and Witness consultations according to the Regulations, Presbytery policy and as requested by Presbytery Standing Committee and Pastoral Relations Committee
- To select a team leader and team members for each Consultation team
- To declare a Life and Witness consultation is complete with the recommendations consistent with Uniting Church Regulations and have been prepared according to the standards and expectations documented in the Consultations Kit.

1.4 Types of Consultations

The primary form of consultation in the UCA is the Life and Witness Consultation. This consultation is generally held every five years, but some adjustments in this schedule may occur to co-ordinate with the life-cycle of the congregation's leadership, ministry and mission. A consultation (potentially of a less comprehensive nature) may be initiated at the discretion of PRC or on request from the congregation prior to the appointment of a Joint Nominating Committee. There may be extensions or end of placement consultations, when reflection on mission and ministry needs for the future can be discerned.

Consultations have the potential to be significant events in the life of a congregation, and provide guidance and feedback to a Minister in Placement. A consultation is an opportunity for leaders to consider the mission and purpose of the congregation's life together and take positive steps to build on strengths, reflect on limitations and develop strategies for the future.

In conducting a Life and Witness Consultation, Consultation teams will seek to demonstrate their Presbytery values, Vision and Mission Statements and the Presbytery's policies.

The Presbytery Committee will consider the reasons a consultation is being initiated and the desired outcomes for the congregation. They will provide the Terms of Reference to inform the work of each consultation team. The composition and leadership of each team will be appropriate to the situation and context of the congregation, the reasons for which the consultation has been initiated and the complexity of the consultation.

2 SECTION 2 – Procedural Overview

2.1 Overview

Life and Witness consultations are generally conducted every five years. This schedule may be adjusted by the PRC in light of the timing of ministerial changes, seeking of extensions in placement and other factors.

2.2 Roles and Responsibilities

The Presbytery Committee (PRC, Consultation, Mission Strategy committee etc.)

1. Maintains control of the cycle of consultations and their next due dates.
2. Maintains a list of available team leaders and team members, noting their gifts and skills and training of teams.
3. Initiates Consultation and
 - Sets the Terms of Reference, objectives and preferred timeline, in liaison with PRC, Standing Committee as appropriate
 - Recruits a Team Leader, and a team
 - Informs congregation
4. Receives and endorses Report and builds in follow up if necessary.
5. Notes actions to be taken by SC and PRC, and takes oversight over their implementation.

The Team Leader

1. Assembles the team
2. Collates and reviews all documents
3. Reviews and revisits (if needed) the Terms of Reference with Presbytery committee/PRC
4. Plans the consultation – actions required, meetings to take place, roles of team members and congregation representatives
5. Manages the conduct of the consultation
6. Coordinates the production of the report
7. Works to ensure that the consultation process is timely by planning for meetings in advance and setting a clear timeline for the consultation.

Team Members

1. Participate by attending meetings, visiting the congregation
2. Read background information and documentation
3. Listen carefully
4. Document what is heard and observed
5. Reflect with other team members on what is heard
6. Assist in writing the report

Church Council/Congregation

1. Provides documentation that is requested by the Consultation Team
2. Church Council communicates information about the consultation with the wider congregation
3. Participates in meetings and conversations as requested.
4. Works co-operatively with the consultation team

Minister

1. Assists the Church Council to engage with the consultation process
2. Participates in meetings, conversations and interviews conducted as part of the consultation
3. Explains to the congregation the process being undertaken
4. Encourages congregational participation in the process
5. Notes any conflicts of interest during the consultation process and discloses these as necessary

Access to Information

For a consultation to be conducted in a timely manner it is important that the Church Council responds promptly to requests for information by the consultation team. The Presbytery Office and other Presbytery Committees will also be able to provide information directly to the Consultation Team, and wherever possible this should be the case to limit the work required of congregations in this process.

Information given to a consultation team is to be treated as confidential unless specifically noted as public, or posted in a public forum (such as a Facebook page or website) by congregational leadership. Some information shared with consultation teams may be of a sensitive nature, so great care must be taken to ensure it is only distributed, or its contents shared, with the full permission of parties to the information.

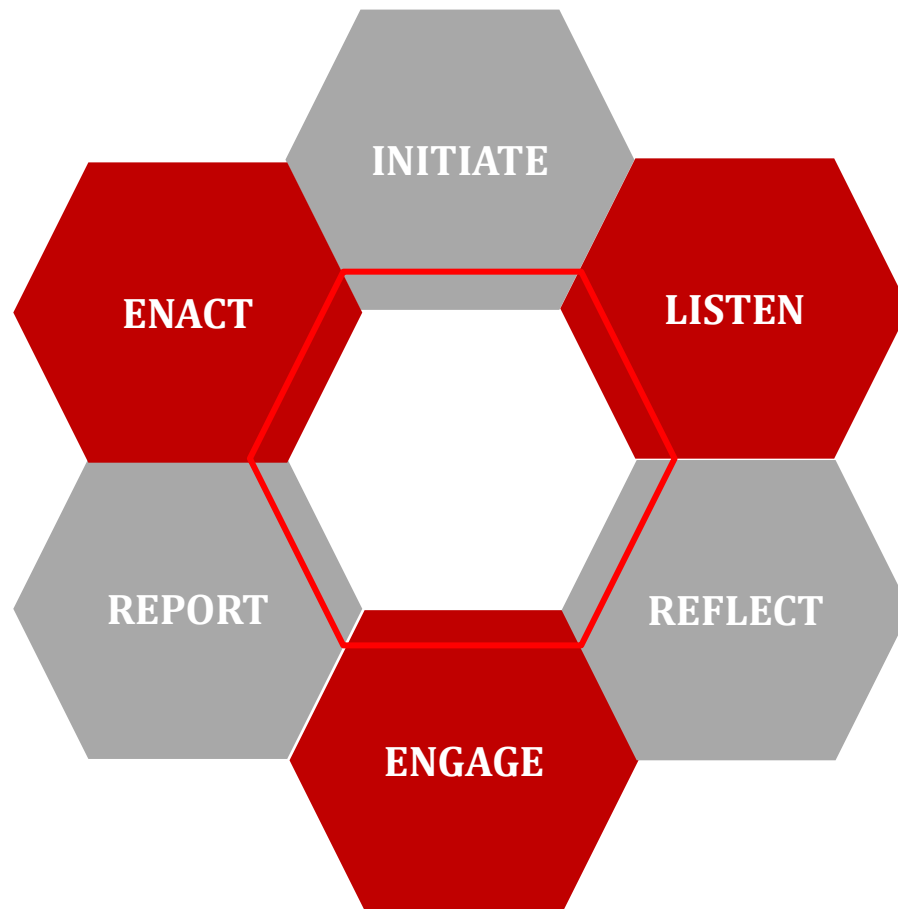
Timing

The ideal timing for a L & W to be conducted and report done is within 3 months (noting unforeseen circumstances may lengthen this) Some consultations could be carried out over 1 weekend or 1-2 Sundays, with team meeting prior, and connecting several times to reflect and prepare the report. Much can be done by email, Skype or phone contact, where face to face is difficult and/or time consuming.

Dealing with Conflict

Where serious conflict arises, either with the consultation team or within the congregation, during the time of the consultation, the advice of the Presbytery Minister, Pastoral Relations Committee Chair and/or Presbytery Chair should be sought at the earliest opportunity.

2.3 Life and Witness Process



Stage	Objectives/Outcomes
INITIATE	The Consultation is established with the Terms of Reference, a Team with appropriate leadership and skills and communication to all parties to ensure a smooth commencement. Data gathering takes place.
LISTEN	The Team becomes familiar with the congregation and its ministry, its joys and challenges. It meets the congregation and its leadership, attends services and activities. The Team will understand the congregation's property use, its finances and its governance.
REFLECT	The Team prayerfully considers what it has heard. On consideration of the congregation, its strengths, challenges and hopes for the future, the Team formulates the Report, unless more engagement with the congregation is needed.
ENGAGE Optional	Through meetings, conversations and/or workshops, the Team will explore the hopes, questions and issues facing the congregation, seeking to guide the congregation to renew its vision and ministry. e.g. mission planning. This could be recommended to come after the L & W.
REPORT	The Team seeks to formulate and document its recommendations based on what was heard and discerned. The Team will test the report with key leadership in the congregation, and seek to ensure the document is of the highest quality and usefulness for the congregation's future growth. Presbytery committee receives the congregation report then congregation and team discharged.

ENACT	The Presbytery committee and the Congregation take responsibility for enacting the recommendations of the report. They follow up the dates set in the report for follow-up of recommendations.
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2.4 Implementation

STAGE 1. INITIATE

The relevant Presbytery Committee, having agreed that a consultation will take place with a particular congregation, will establish the team, communicate with the Congregation. (Much of this can be done by phone and email)

- Appoint a team leader and team for the consultation.
- Existing information is assembled: (Should be available from Presbytery)
 - Three years of Annual Financial Returns
 - Any annual reports to Presbytery by the Congregation or Minister
 - Report from last consultation
 - NCLS report or community data on relevant local government area.
 - List of properties under beneficial stewardship
- Presbytery documents a Terms of Reference for the consultation, clarifying any particular issues to which the Team should pay attention if needed. (*Template-Terms of reference guidelines*)
- Communicate with the Congregation's Church Council and set a timeline for the consultation following this discussion. (*Template-Sample Letter to Church Council & Template Information for congregations*)
- Request information from the Congregation, including timing of any upcoming events that could impact the consultation. (*Template-Data Checklist*)
- Gather information as team, and meet to plan visits etc. (*Template –Detailed Listening Plan, Template-Property plan*)

STAGE 2. LISTEN (This could be done over a weekend)

The Team seeks to understand the congregation's life and context by attending a range of activities, meeting with leaders and congregation members. Suggested ways could be:

- Meet with the Church Council (*Template-Listening file notes, Template-Questions for Church Council & Congregations*)
- Follow the detailed listening plan for the events/groups that are visited. (*Template-Detailed listening plan above*)
- Attend services and activities of the Congregation (*Template-Listening file note, Template-5 Marks of Mission, Template-Managing Conflict strategies*)
- Be available for 1-on-1 appointments with congregation members
- Meet with staff and key leaders
- Request any further information or documents
- Examine the Church roll
- Conduct a survey of the congregation (*Template-Survey for attenders V1, done pre-consultation may be useful*)
- Undertake inspections of all properties or delegate to Pres committee (*Template- Internal & external inspections*)

STAGE 3. REFLECT (1 meeting face to face or Skype)

The Team spends time together praying and reflecting on what they have experienced and heard.

- Review the information gathered by completing the Reflection summary e.g.:
 - What do we know? What do we not know?
 - What questions are facing the congregation in their life and mission together?
 - What is a helpful theological reflection/theme?
(*Template- Questions for reflection by Consultation teams, Template – Reflect stage Team summary*)
- Develop a plan for working with the congregation, if this is needed NOW. Is more information needed? If NO, move to the STAGE 5 REPORT. Do we need to ENGAGE further? If YES move to STAGE 4 ENGAGE.

STAGE 4. ENGAGE (Optional if needed)

The Team works with the congregation to explore their situation and options for the future.

- Meet with Church Council or
- Conduct Prayer meeting or do a mission study (e.g. 10 Vital signs of a Church)
- Facilitate a workshop with the congregation or
 - Present context, issues facing the congregation
 - Present questions, affirmations and challenges
 - Listen as congregation works on issues and develops ideas for the future
- Distill emerging ideas and challenges or
- Document outputs from meeting or
(*Resources from UME website -Healthy Churches Expo.*)
- (Resource) Conducting a Mission Study
<http://nswact.uca.org.au/media/1342/Conducting-a-Mission-Study-a-step-by-step-guide-of-easy-to-follow-mission-planning-processes-for-Congregations.pdf>
- (Book) *Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as Spiritual Practice for Congregations*; Gil Rendle, Alice Mann; 2003; (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.)

STAGE 5. REPORT

The Team documents their findings, the results of discussions with the congregation and the Team's reflections on the congregation's life. It formulates recommendations for the congregation.

- Document the Team's findings (*Use Reflection stage summary*)
- Reflect on outcomes of discussions and write report. (*Template- Life and Witness Consultation report*)
- Reflect on how the congregation's mission is supported by its property.
- Present clear options and recommendations. (*Guidelines for report writing*)

- Develop a draft Report and arrange a quality assurance review (if needed)
- Send a draft report to the Church Council (excluding recommendations) for checking errors and omissions only.
- Present the report to relevant Presbytery Committee with recommendations including time framed follow up.
- Present the final report to Church Council and the Congregation once approved, in a timely manner.

STAGE 6. ENACT

Recommendations are recorded and enacted by the congregation with oversight of appropriate Committee of the Presbytery. The need to follow up on recommendations and actions is diarised by the appropriate Presbytery Committees. (*Template- Enact Stage*)

Additional information

CONSULTATIONS ON LIFE AND WITNESS OF A CONGREGATION

Reg 3.1.4 (a) Consultations on the life and witness of a Congregation shall be conducted by the Presbytery with the Congregation including any Ministers, Youth Workers, Pastors or Lay Pastors serving in placements in the Congregation and any Community Ministers serving in the Congregation.

(b) The purpose of the consultation shall be to strengthen the life and witness of the Congregation, to assess future ministerial and lay leadership needs, and to review the records of the Congregation.

(c) A consultation shall normally take place every five years at the discretion of the Presbytery regardless of the duration of any current placement.

(d) The Presbytery may conduct a consultation at any time on its own initiative, or at the request of the Church Council or of a Minister serving in a placement in the Congregation.

(e) The persons appointed by the Presbytery to undertake the consultation shall:

(i) consult with such bodies and persons within the Congregation as it determines;

(ii) report to the Presbytery and the Congregation; and

(iii) make such recommendations regarding the life and witness of the Congregation (including matters relating to placements and property) as they think fit.