# Presbyterian Church in Ireland

## Consultation Document A

# Presbytery Consultations

INSERT NAME OF CONGREGATION AND YEAR

Presbytery and

Consultation Team

# Resources and

# Guidance Notes



Version: December 2017

# Overview of Consultations

## The purpose of Consultations

A Consultation is a process by which Presbytery enquires into the life of a congregation in order to discover:

• **encouragements** to celebrate, for the edification of the congregation and to inspire the rest of Presbytery;

• **challenges** faced by the congregation, so that Kirk Session can be directed and equipped to deal with the most pressing issues;

• any **concerns** that Kirk Session may be struggling to deal with, requiring the intervention of Presbytery.

## The Consultation process

The process consists of a number of stages:

1. Presbytery should notify Kirk Session twelve weeks before a Consultation is due to take place. In preparation for the Consultation, Presbytery appoints a Consultation Team and the Kirk Session appoints a group of Congregational Representatives.

2. When the Consultation commences questionnaires are sent to the Kirk Session, Minister and Associate Minister (if applicable) and written replies returned to the Consultation Team within six weeks.

3. The Consultation Team meets with Congregational Representatives and, separately, with the Minister and Associate Minister (if applicable) for more focused discussions. This should take place within one month of the questionnaires being returned.

4. Based on this, the Consultation Team produces a Consultation Report for Presbytery summarising aspects of congregational life which can be celebrated, challenges faced by the congregation and, if necessary, any concerns for Presbytery to deal with. The report will recommend some issues for the Kirk Session to work on over the course of the next year.

5. Kirk Session then has one year in which to implement the recommendations of the Consultation Report. After this year, the Consultation Team will present a Follow-up Report to Presbytery and be discharged.

# Guidance Notes

## Coordinating Consultations

It is recommended that Presbytery appoint someone to coordinate Consultations on an on-going basis from year to year – a Presbytery Consultation Coordinator. This would make the process of setting up Consultations each year easier by maintaining a list of who has served on teams, which congregations are due for a Consultation, etc. and provide a way of passing on accumulated experience and dealing with common issues that may arise.

## Frequency of Consultations

Consultations should occur at ten-yearly intervals.

No Consultations should be undertaken within two years of an installation of a new minister.

In long-term Stated Supplies, Consultations should take place in the same manner as in settled situations.

## Informing the Kirk Session of the Consultation

Presbytery shall inform the Kirk Session at least twelve weeks in advance of the Consultation.

## The Consultation Team

The Consultation will be conducted by a Consultation Team appointed by Presbytery.

The team will consist of four-six members, at least two of whom should be Ministers. But ministers will not comprise more than 50% of the team; the rest shall ruling elders. Elders may be drawn from any congregation and do not need to be members of Presbytery.

The quorum for the Consultation Team will be three.

A Consultation Convener will be appointed to organise and chair all meetings of the Consultation Team, as well as writing and presenting all reports to Presbytery.

The Convener will be provided with the following documents by the Clerk of Presbytery or the Presbytery’s Consultation Coordinator:

• (A) *Presbytery and Consultation Team Resources and Guidance Notes* for the use of the Consultation Team,

• (B) *Kirk Session Consultation Questions and Guidance Notes* to be sent on to the Kirk Session,

• (C) *Review of Resources, Records and Policies* to be sent on to the Kirk Session for completion by Kirk Session and Congregational Committee,

• (D) *Ministers and Associate Ministers Consultation Questions and Guidance Notes* to be sent on to the Minister and an additional copy to the Associate Minister (if applicable).

As well as examining the returned questionnaires:

• as many of the Consultation Team as possible are strongly advised to **visit a service** in the congregation,

• the Consultation Team will **meet with a group of eight-twelve Congregational Representatives**, up to four of whom will be ruling elders,

• the Consultation Team will **meet with the Minister** and Associate Minister (if applicable).

## Inspections

A number of inspections will be carried out:

•All items on the **historical schedule** of the congregation.

•All **registers and minute books.** These should be checked by someone who is independent of the congregation to ensure that they are kept up to date and in good order. This could be someone from the Consultation Team.

• All church property should have up-to-date **safety certificates for electrical and gas installations.**

* All church property should receive a **general architectural inspection** every ten years and this report should be lodged with the Consultation Team.

## Gas and electric Inspections

• It is the responsibility of the congregation to arrange and pay for all necessary inspections.

• Approved contractors in Northern Ireland are those who are NICEC approved (electrical) and Gas Safe Registered (gas).

• Approved contractors in the Republic of Ireland are those who are on the Register of Electrical Contractors of Ireland (electrical) and on the Register of Gas Installers Ireland (gas).

• Manse safety inspections should take place every ten years.

• Church gas installations should be inspected annually.

• Church electrical installations should be inspected every five years.

## Analysing the information in preparation for discussion

When the responses have been returned, members of the Consultation Team will individually examine the returns and record their impressions using their own copy of *Form 1: Individual Impressions* on page 8. The form lists eleven areas of congregational life which include the nine areas addressed by the questions to Kirk Session, a tenth area ‘Property and Finance’ relating to information gathered from the *Review of Resources, Records and Policies* and a final area ‘Other.’

•Taking into account all the information gathered from the questionnaires and the visit to a service, the member should consider each area of congregational life.

• If there are signs of encouragements which could be celebrated and they would like to know more about these encouragements, they should tick the corresponding box in the green column headed ‘encouragements’.

• If there are signs of challenges which the Kirk Session need to deal with and they would like to know more about these challenges, they should tick the corresponding box in the amber column headed ‘challenges’.

• If there are both encouragements and challenges of interest, both columns should be ticked.

• There is also space in the final column to make notes on each area of congregational life to help discuss the impressions with the rest of the team later.

The Consultation Team will then meet to discuss its impressions. It is important that the views of all members of the team are heard and considered so that the process is not led by the views of the loudest or most senior member, so the Convener is encouraged to make sure that all members give their thoughts.

On the basis of this discussion and impressions from the visit to a service, the Consultation Team will agree on two or three areas of congregational life to discuss in more detail with the Congregational Representatives in order to find out more about encouraging aspects of congregational life which can be celebrated, challenges for the Kirk Session to deal with, and possible concerns for Presbytery to consider. The Convener will record these areas using *Form 2: Convener’s Summary* on page 9.

• For each area of congregational life the Convener should tally the number of ticks for encouragements by each member of the Team and record this in the column headed ‘Total encouragements’.

• For each area of congregational life the Convener should tally the number of ticks for challenges by each member of the Team and record this in the column headed ‘Total challenges’.

• For each area of congregational life the Convener should add these two to record the total in ‘Overall total’.

• The Convener should use these totals to get an idea of which areas of congregational life are of greatest interest and lead a discussion to decide which two or three areas to focus on and record these in the column headed ‘List two or three areas of focus’.

• If there are any particular questions that the Team would like to ask in any of these areas they should be recorded in the column headed ‘Note any specific questions you would like to ask during discussion’.

## Discussion with Congregational Representatives

The Consultation Team will then organise separate discussion meetings with the Congregational Representatives, the Minister and the Associate Minister (if applicable). The order and timing of these would be at the discretion of the Team, but should happen as soon as reasonably possible.

The aim of this discussion is to hear the story of the congregation in a fuller way than written answers can provide. All Congregational Representatives should be encouraged to share their thoughts rather than allowing one or two confident people to dominate conversation. Some optional questions are provided on pages 15-18 for the Team to optionally make use of during discussions. The questions may be used as they are, used as inspiration to form new questions, or ignored entirely if the Team is happy to come up with its own questions. They are a resource to help the Team, not a rigid template to restrict it.

When the Consultation Team meets with the Congregational Representatives they should expect to find a group of eight-twelve people who are broadly representative of the congregation, its organisations and its ministries, consisting of:

• up to four ruling elders,

• at least two young people (no older than 25),

• a balance of genders.

The Minister should not be a part of the Congregational Representatives and will not be present during its discussion with the Consultation Team.

One of the elders will be appointed as Chairperson for the Congregational Representatives and be responsible for coordinating with the Consultation Convener to arrange meetings and exchange information. The Clerk of Session should send the Chairperson’s contact details to the Consultation Convener.

**Prior to the meeting**, in order to help with preparation, the Consultation Convener must send the Chairperson:

• a copy of the Kirk Session’s answers,

• a list of the two or three areas of congregational life to be discussed, and

• any specific questions that the Team intends to ask and has already prepared.

**During the discussion** with the Congregational Representatives each individual Consultation

Team member will record their thoughts on *Form 3: Consultation Team Discussion Notes.*

• Each member of the Team should have one copy of this form for each area of focus for the discussion and record at the top which area the notes are for.

• It is important to discuss and record both encouragements to be celebrated and challenges to be dealt with, so there are two sections labelled ‘Encouragements’ and ‘Challenges’.

• Below this there is one box for recording any concerns that the Team member thinks Presbytery may need to deal with instead of the Kirk Session.

## Discussion with Ministers

The discussions with the Minister and Associate Minister (if applicable) should be quite relaxed and informal and provide an opportunity for ministers to be open about what they are finding encouraging or challenging, both in terms of ministry and home life. The emphasis here should be on listening and providing a pastoral environment.

To discern the pastoral needs it may be helpful to consider the circumstances of the Minister that may provide particular challenges to their well-being. This is a list of potential areas for conversation, but is by no means exhaustive:

• If they are in a Presbytery that is dispersed over a wide geographical area, how do they cope with isolation?

• If they are in a large congregation managing a team ministry, how do they cope with the potential frustrations of ‘wasting time’ on management rather than direct ministry?

• If they are in a linkage, how do they cope with the doubling up (or more) of organisations and the likely increased administrative and organisational burden they have to take on.

• If they have moved to an area that is culturally quite different to where they previously lived or ministered, how are they coping with the adjustment?

• Have there been or are there currently any family crises such as a sick parent?

## Reporting to Presbytery

When all the discussions have been completed, the Consultation Team members will meet to discuss their individual impressions and agree on recommendations. The Consultation Convener will then write the Consultation Report using *Form 4: Consultation Report* on page 12.

There is space on the form for recording any encouragements or challenges which have arisen out of discussions but were not originally selected as areas to focus on.

The Report should recommend an aspect of congregational life which the Kirk Session should focus on developing over the next year. This could, for instance, be a challenging area which needs to be addressed, or an encouraging area with potential for greater fruitfulness. Recommendations for action should be as specific as possible to help give the Kirk Session direction and to make it easier for the Consultation Team to identify progress when preparing the Follow-up Report.

The Consultation Team or Consultation Convener must meet with the Minister and Clerk of Session to verbally inform them of the content of the Report prior to it being reported to Presbytery, while making it clear that the recommendations will still have to be agreed by Presbytery.

The Consultation Report will be presented verbally to Presbytery and a written copy submitted to the Clerk of Presbytery.

If the Consultation Report is approved by Presbytery, then the Clerk of Presbytery will send the Report to Kirk Session.

The Consultation Team will not present the Consultation Report to the congregation (or the Follow-up Report), nor is the Kirk Session required to do so. However, if the Kirk Session wish to share any of the contents or a summary, it is free to do so.

## Follow-up

After one year the Consultation Team will consult with Kirk Session to hear about progress regarding the recommendations of the Consultation Report, then meet to discuss their views on this progress and agree on what should be reported to Presbytery.

The Consultation Convener will make a Follow-up Report to Presbytery. Providing that the Consultation Team is satisfied with progress made, this should be a brief verbal report.

If the Follow-up Report is approved then the Consultation Team will be thanked and discharged.

# Example timelines

**These are examples to help visualise the timing of the process, but are not intended to restrict when a Consultation should start or finish.**

## Starting in September

May Presbytery meeting: Congregation chosen and Kirk Session informed of timeline.

September Presbytery meeting: Consultation Team established and Consultation officially commences.

October: Questionnaires returned.

Consultation Team discusses questionnaires and chooses areas to focus on for discussion.

November: Consultation Team meets with the Congregational Representatives, Minister and Associate Minister (if applicable).

Consultation Team draws up its conclusions and the Convener writes the Consultation Report, then shows it to the Minister and Clerk of Presbytery.

December Presbytery meeting: Consultation Report presented to Presbytery.

The Kirk Session then has one year to implement the recommendations of the Consultation Report. The results of this would be reported at the February Presbytery meeting.

## Starting in February

November Presbytery meeting: Congregation chosen and Kirk Session informed of timeline.

February Presbytery meeting: Consultation Team established and Consultation officially commences.

March: Questionnaires returned.

Consultation Team discusses questionnaires and chooses areas to focus on for discussion.

April: Consultation Team meets with the Congregational Representatives, Minister and Associate Minister (if applicable).

Consultation Team draws up their conclusions and the Convener writes the Consultation Report, then shows it to the Minister and Clerk of Presbytery.

May Presbytery meeting: Consultation Report presented to Presbytery.

The Kirk Session then has one year to implement the recommendations of the Consultation Report. The results of this would be reported at the September Presbytery meeting.

# Form 1: Individual impressions

**Each Team member needs one copy of this form.**

(to untick, place cursor to immediate right of tick mark and click)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Area of congregational life** | **Tick if you would like to know more because there are signs of** | | **Make notes in this space if you wish** |
| **encouragements** | **challenges** |
| **A. Outreach** |  |  |  |
| **B. Discipleship** |  |  |  |
| **C. Leadership** |  |  |  |
| **D. Worship** |  |  |  |
| **E. Pastoral Care** |  |  |  |
| **F. Mission** |  |  |  |
| **G. Sacraments** |  |  |  |
| **H. Relationships** |  |  |  |
| **I. Staffing** |  |  |  |
| **J. Property and Finance** |  |  |  |
| **K. Other** |  |  |  |

# Form 2: Convener’s Summary

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Area of congregational life** | **Total encouragements** | **Total challenges** | **Overall total** |
| **A. Outreach** |  |  |  |
| **B. Discipleship** |  |  |  |
| **C. Leadership** |  |  |  |
| **D. Worship** |  |  |  |
| **E. Pastoral Care** |  |  |  |
| **F. Mission** |  |  |  |
| **G. Sacraments** |  |  |  |
| **H. Relationships** |  |  |  |
| **I. Staffing** |  |  |  |
| **J. Property and Finance** |  |  |  |
| **K. Other** |  |  |  |
| **List a few areas of focus** | **Note any specific questions you would like to ask during discussion** | | |
| 1. |  | | |
| 2. |  | | |
| 3. |  | | |

# Form 3. Consultation Team Discussion Notes

Each Team member needs a copy of this form for each area of congregational life discussed with the Congregational Representatives.

## Area of congregational life discussed:

|  |
| --- |
| Encouragements to celebrate |
|  |
| Challenges for Kirk Session to deal with |
|  |
| Concerns for Presbytery to consider looking into in a separate process |
|  |

# Form 4. Consultation Report

|  |
| --- |
| Which areas did discussion focus on? |
| 1. |
| 2. |
| 3. |
| Encouragements to celebrate |
| Area 1: |
| Area 2: |
| Area 3: |
| Other: |

|  |
| --- |
| Challenges for Kirk Session to deal with |
| Area 1: |
| Area 2: |
| Area 3: |
| Other: |
| Concerns for Presbytery to consider looking into in a separate process |
|  |

## Recommended action for Kirk Session and/or Congregational Committee to take in the following year

Convener:

# Optional Discussion Questions

**These questions are entirely optional and are provided to give the Consultation Team ideas for helpful questions to ask during discussions. They can be used as they are, modified, used as inspiration for the Team’s own questions, or ignored entirely.**

## General questions

What has encouraged the congregation in the last five years?

What has been most challenging for the congregation?

How open is the congregation to change?

* What evidence is there of this?
* What further changes would you like to see happen?

What is the strategy, plan or vision for [insert area of congregational life being discussed]?

* Who implements the strategy, plan, or vision?
* How is the congregation involved?
* What have the results been?
* What challenges have you faced implementing the strategy and how have they been dealt with?

Why do people join your congregation?

Why do people leave the congregation?

## A. Outreach

What brings unchurched people from the community into the church?

How does the church engage with the community, outside of the church?

How many adult professions of faith have there been in the last two years?

How has the local area changed in the last five years?

Are there intentional pathways to draw people in from being outsiders to members of the congregation? How have you seen this happen?

What proportion of children in church programmes would be churched compared to unchurched?

## B. Discipleship

How well attended are Bible studies, prayer meetings and small groups?

* What age groups are involved?
* Why do people come (or not)?

What sort of resources, programmes, activities, and relationships have helped you to grow and mature in your own faith?

What role do the organisations you’re involved with play in discipleship e.g. opportunities to make new disciples, helping disciples to grow, providing opportunities for disciples to encourage one another?

How are people prayed for and supported in work they do outside of church?

How are gifts related to ministry outside the congregation identified, celebrated, and encouraged?

How are young people encouraged to be involved in the life of the congregation as they move through their teenage years?

What opportunities are there for different generations to mix and encourage each other?

## C. Leadership

How are people equipped to lead in church ministries?

What training events have leaders attended in the last two years?

How have these been helpful?

How does Kirk Session keep informed about organisations in the church and support their leaders?

How are new leaders recruited?

How do organisations plan for new leadership e.g. to prepare for when the BB captain retires?

## D. Worship

How has the preaching helped you to understand the gospel better?

How has the preaching helped you to understand the implications of the gospel for life?

How has the preaching helped you to think about the application of faith to current

affairs and contemporary culture?

What sort of diversity is there in the style of music, the themes covered by lyrics, and the general tone of praise?

How often do you celebrate the Lord’s Supper? Is there ever any discussion about this?

If there was an area you’d like to see improve, what would it be?

How are children and young people ministered to on a Sunday morning?

How do you help young people transition from youth ministry to involvement in the wider ministry of the church e.g. adjusting from Bible Class to being in for the whole service?

What has worked well to engage people in prayer?

## E. Pastoral Care

How does the congregation care for the Minister and his/her family?

What typically happens when a ruling elder calls with a member of their district on a normal pastoral visit?

How are members encouraged and equipped to care for one another?

If there was an area you’d like to see improve, what would it be?

What practical things do members do to love and support one another that have been found to be helpful?

## F. Mission

What connections does the congregation have with missionaries and evangelists at home and overseas and how are they supported?

How do you partner with others in local and global mission?

What opportunities are there to pray together about local and global mission?

What has been the most memorable thing the congregation has done to learn about or support mission in the last five years?

How does the congregation hear about the wider work of the church that we support through the United Appeal for Mission?

How are members encouraged to support the work of the wider church by giving to the United

Appeal for Mission?

## G. Sacraments

What do you find most helpful about the way the Lord’s Supper is celebrated?

What do you think could be improved?

How would you describe the tone or feel of Communion services?

How would you describe the invitation or welcome to the Lord’s Table?

Why do you think people resist becoming communicant members?

What do you find most helpful about the way baptisms are carried out, from the point of enquiry through to the administration of the sacrament?

What do you think could be improved?

How is the congregation taught about the sacraments?

How are people prepared to become communicant members?

## H. Relationships

How are disagreements and tensions handled in the congregation?

How are disagreements handled within groups such as the Kirk Session or organisations?

How have disagreements between groups handled e.g. between the Kirk Session and

organisations?

What opportunities are there to develop relationships between members and do many people take advantage of them?

What challenges are there to improving relationships and fellowship within the congregation? How do you partner with and support the work of other Presbyterian congregations?

How do you partner with and support the work of other local congregations?

How have you felt supported and encouraged by Presbytery?

How are members encouraged to pray for organisations within the congregation, other congregations, and the wider church?

## I. Staffing

How could you see additional staff being helpful?

How do the staff equip the congregation to do the work of the church together, rather than merely doing the work for the congregation?

## J. Finance and Property

What challenges have there been to congregational finances in recent years?

What teaching has there been on giving in the last two years?

Do you have a clear picture of what the congregation spends money on and why?

What would you like to change about your buildings and why? What challenges would there be to doing this?

What have you changed about your property in the last ten years? How has this benefitted the congregation?

Do you anticipate having to make any major expenditures relating to property in the next ten years? How are you preparing for this?