

*This document last updated 4 June 2020*

# Supporting a Redundant Congregation Member

## *Guidelines for Ministers*

Covid-19 has and will continue to have a significant impact on New Zealand's and the world's economy. The announcement in the budget that the wage subsidy scheme will be extended from mid-June indicates the Government expects many NZ businesses will experience a decline in their income of 50% or more. Large scale redundancies have started to be reported within the press and this is expected to continue.

These guidelines aim to help Pastors support redundant congregation members impacted by COVID-19.

### **What is Redundancy?**

The simplest definition is that an employee's position can no longer be sustained or is no longer required by the employer.

A great deal of sensitivity and emotionalism can arise in redundancy situations because of the human factors associated with having to lay-off an employee who faces job-loss through no fault of their own.

There are very clear guidelines employers must meet before making a position redundant and the Government has been clear to state that these legal requirements have not changed due to COVID-19.

### **Pastoral Care for Redundant Congregation Members**

The provision of pastoral care during employment crises mirrors the general principles for crisis-response pastoral care. There are 10 elements that should be considered. Many of these approaches/skills will apply to other COVID-19 related contexts you will be dealing with:

#### **1. Providing a non-anxious presence:**

Inviting the person to talk in an informal way, listening deeply to what is said, responding empathetically, asking appropriate questions, offering to pray – these are all things that can help ease crisis-induced anxiety.

#### **2. Knowing the person(s) you're dealing with:**

Are they known to you? Not everyone that you have the opportunity to assist will be a part of your church currently. Are they generally credible? Is there anything in what they are saying or in how they are presenting themselves that indicates a possible mental breakdown or mental health problems? Is there anything in what you are being told that you feel you ought to verify?

#### **3. Analysing the crisis:**

Helping the person gain an understanding of what is actually happening in their employment situation can be helpful, especially where businesses have been adversely affected by COVID-19. Factors are less likely to be personal. What are the contributing factors? What

are the real issues, not just the presenting issues? What are their effects? Who else will be affected?

#### **4. Identifying and assessing risk:**

Are there issues of personal safety at stake? Does the employment situation potentially involve criminal proceedings if there are allegations of misconduct?

#### **5. Formulating a response to the crisis in consultation with the person(s) suffering it:**

What needs to be done right now, and by whom? What strategies need to be put in place for dealing with the immediate issues and longer-term effects? What are their immediate needs around accommodation, food and basic needs? What might the Spirit be saying in the midst of all this?

#### **6. Involving others:**

Who needs to be consulted or involved? What specialist help might be needed?

Employment law is very specific - seeking legal advice is often an important first step to help the person evaluate their position. What support structures (including prayer support) need to be put in place? How might the church, as a community of faith help?

#### **7. Integrating faith and action:**

What prayers, scriptures, experiences and resources might be helpful in providing a biblical and theological framework for interpreting what is happening and for processing feelings associated with the crisis? How does faith inform the person's response?

#### **8. Communicating:**

Which persons, agencies and/or support groups need to be informed? What do they need to be told? What should they not be told? Do you have permission to share the issue as a prayer need or pastoral concern?

#### **9. Following up:**

Regular contact throughout the period of the employment challenges and subsequent to the crisis affirms the importance of a relational approach to crisis management. But avoid so much contact that you create a dependent relationship.

#### **10. Looking after yourself:**

Be aware of the toll that crisis-ministry can have on your own emotional wellbeing and energy levels, especially if your involvement is likely to be ongoing. Take appropriate steps to look after yourself. This is something that applies to crisis pastoral involvement across the board during COVID-19. Take advantage of the counselling and support services available through the WMCNZ ([support@wesleyan.nz](mailto:support@wesleyan.nz)).

### **Guiding Principles for Pastors**

In any case where a congregation member is being made redundant a Pastor's focus should be on pastoral care. Where appropriate they may encourage a congregational member to get professional advice or suggest a congregational member who has the appropriate skills to help in these situations.

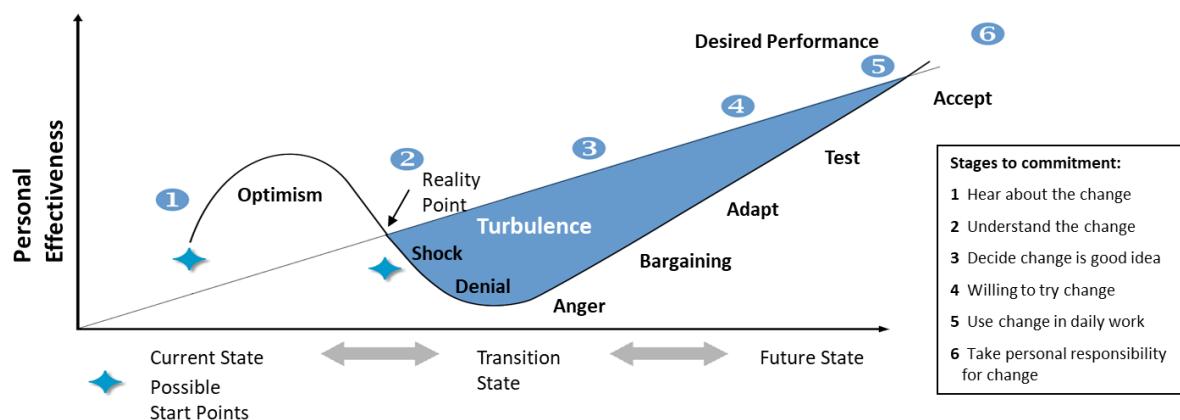
Pastors should recognise that it takes specialist skills to manage redundancies or advise on the legal requirements for making an employee redundant. A list of professional advisors and links is included at the end of this document.

## How do people respond to being made Redundant?

An employer must have a genuine reason to support making a person redundant and they must act in good faith and consult with the person before making their final decision.

A person is likely to become aware their position may become redundant after meeting with their employer, or receiving a letter, email, phone call or video conference from the employer. In the current COVID-19 environment employers may also set a reasonably short period for consultation (i.e. 24 hours).

People will respond in various ways to receiving a redundancy notice. For the majority who are shocked by the notice, they will follow a pattern of behaviour like the one below:



When first talking to a congregational member who has received a redundancy notice it is possible, they will be experiencing shock, denial, anger or be in a bargaining mode. The types of questions they have may fall into different categories. Some questions will be best answered by the employer and pastors can help to clarify and shape these questions. Other questions will be directly aligned with providing pastoral care. The most likely questions will relate to information, personal and implementation concerns.

### Example of these questions are as follows:

#### Information Concerns

- What is the change to my job?
- Will I still have a job?
- Why is it needed?
- What is wrong with the way things are now?
- What will I be paid when I am made redundant?
- What does my agreement and Company policy say about redundancy?
- Can I be made redundant while the Company receives and pays the Government Wage subsidy?
- How much and how fast does the organisation need to change?
- Do I have any options, other than redundancy?

These are questions a Pastor cannot answer, because they related to the person's job. The best thing a Pastor can do is help to clarify these questions and encourage the congregation member to go back to their employer to answer the questions.

#### Personal and Implementation Concerns

- How will the change impact me personally?
- How can I get suitable advice before the final decision is made?

- What is in it for me?
- Will I win or lose?
- How will others look at me?
- Will I have to learn new skills? Can I do it?
- How do I find a new job?
- How will I be able to afford my rent, mortgage, weekly bills?
- What do I do first? Second? Third?
- How do I manage all the details?
- What will happen if my plans don't work? Where can I go for help?
- How long will it take me to get a new job?
- How do I get a new job when COVID-19 restrictions are in place?
- Is what I am experiencing typical? Normal?

Some of these questions may require some specialist skills, but most will be of a pastoral nature and a Pastor may be able to help the person work through them

## Specialist Guidance

A person will need to get appropriate guidance from a specialist during the consultation period with their employer. This consultation will occur before the redundancy is finalised.

Some key areas people will need to work through are:

- Telling a spouse, family and friends they have been made redundant.
- Reviewing finances and setting a new budget.
- Preparing or updating a resume.
- Developing a plan to find a new position.
- Practicing interview skills.
- Putting a job-hunting plan and new budget into action.
- Talking regular to people who can provide support, guidance and/or counselling where needed.
- Staying active and setting new targets to celebrate.

## Professional Advisors and Links

Citizens Advice Bureau (<https://www.cab.org.nz/>)

Community Law Centres (<https://communitylaw.org.nz/> 0800 367 222)

Youth Law Centres for children and Youth under 25 (<http://youthlaw.co.nz/> 0800 884 529)

Specialist Employment Lawyers (FindLaw New Zealand  
<https://www.findlaw.co.nz/default.aspx>)

Budgeting (Sorted <https://sorted.org.nz/tool/budgeting-tool#/welcome>)

Work and Income (<https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/employers/redundancy-support/index.html>)