

PROVISION FOR EQUALIZING MINISTERS

(A&P 2017, p. 278–79, 30)

Overture No. 4, 2017 (p. 583)

Re: Provision for “equalizing ministers” at presbytery

Overture No. 4, 2017 requests that a mechanism be proposed to provide for the equalization of ministers in presbytery, similar to the current legislation that provides for equalizing elders.

The framers of the overture correctly point out that in some presbyteries there are more voting elders than ministers. In establishing the roll of presbytery, it has long been the practice of the church to strive for parity between ministers and elders. Normally, each pastoral charge is entitled to have its minister and a representative elder on the constituent roll of the presbytery. If a congregation is served by more than one called or appointed minister, or if there is a minister serving in a non-congregational ministry and is on the presbytery’s constituent roll, pastoral charges are called upon to appoint equalizing elders to maintain the balance between ministers and elders. This is outlined in the following legislation.

176.2 Ordained elders:

176.2.1 one from each pastoral charge or mission field in which is an organized session (see section 114.7) and

176.2.2 sufficient elders to make their number on the roll equal to the number of ministers and members of the Order of Diaconal Ministries. Sessions in rotation shall be given the privilege of choosing such equalizing elders, one per session, to be chosen annually. These may be re-appointed but not for more than three years in succession. This shall be done in rotation except that preference may be given to congregations in multi-point charges with no current representative.

When a congregation has a long-term vacancy, there is no minister on the roll of presbytery to correspond with the elder appointed from that pastoral charge (Book of Forms 176.2.1). Sometimes, such as when an ecumenical shared ministry has been approved, a congregation is served by a minister of another church or a congregation is served by a minister of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, but at less than half time. Such ministers are not eligible to be on the constituent roll. These circumstances have led to situations where even though every eligible minister is on the roll of presbytery their numbers are still less than the number of elders on the roll.

If the presbytery has equalizing elders on its roll, whenever possible the number of equalizing elders should be reduced to begin the balance. This can be done when the need for an equalizing elder comes to an end permanently or for an extended period. For example, a Presbyterian minister who serves as a chaplain in a hospital retires and is replaced by an Anglican chaplain. The person who was serving as an equalizing elder for the Presbyterian chaplain is no longer needed to provide a minister-elder balance within the presbytery.

The Clerks suggest that interim moderators, who are not already on the constituent roll, could also be a possible source of clergy to balance the presbytery. Each time there is a vacancy, a minister of The Presbyterian Church in Canada is appointed by the presbytery to be interim moderator of the vacant charge. These are often retired ministers or ministers serving in employment such that they are not eligible to be on the constituent roll but are listed on the appendix to the roll. These ministers of our church, when serving as interim moderators, have a duty to care for the wellbeing of a congregation and report regularly to the presbytery regarding the discharge of their duties. The Clerks of Assembly believe that it is important that any minister being added to the constituent roll in a new category of “equalizing ministers” be connected with the ministry of a congregation and clearly accountable to the presbytery. An interim moderator fulfils these requirements.

Just as equalizing elders are only selected when there is a need to balance the roll of presbytery (normally only once per year), an individual would serve as an equalizing minister only to balance the roll and would be appointed by the presbytery on an annual basis. In order to facilitate this proposal, the following legislation is suggested for consideration by the church. Following a process of study and report, the legislation could be sent to presbyteries under the Barrier Act for ratification.

176.1.10 Where there are more elders than ministers on the constituent roll of a presbytery, the presbytery may add to the constituent roll ministers who are serving as interim moderators, retired or otherwise, to act as equalizing ministers.

Recommendation No. 6 (adopted, p. 30)

That the above report re equalizing ministers be sent to sessions, presbyteries and synods for study and report back to the Clerks of Assembly by January 31, 2018.