**REMIT A, 2018**


Re: Book of Forms 176.1.10 – equalizing ministers

You are asked to approve or disapprove this change.

**Recommendation No. 7** (A&P 2018, p. 260, adopted, p. 36)

That new Book of Forms section 176.1.10 read as follows and be remitted to presbyteries under the Barrier Act.

176.1.10 Equalizing ministers: Where there are more elders than ministers on the constituent roll of a presbytery, the presbytery may, on an annual basis, add to the constituent roll ministers from the appendix to the roll, who are serving as interim moderators, to act as equalizing ministers.

The report related to this proposal is as follows:

**2018 ACTS AND PROCEEDINGS** (p. 258-60)

**Overture No. 4, 2017** (A&P 2017, p. 583)

Re: Provision for “equalizing ministers” at presbytery

There are 45 presbyteries in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Half of the membership of the constituent roll of each presbytery is made up of ordained Presbyterian ministers and members of the Order of Diaconal Ministers. Most serve congregations but there are others who are employed as seminary professors, chaplains, missionaries, regional staff, national office staff and a few other categories. The complete list of the vocations that make a minister eligible to be placed on the constituent roll of a presbytery can be found in Book of Forms section 176 and following. For simplicity of language, in this report the term “minister” will refer to ordained ministers of Word and Sacraments as well as members of the Order of Diaconal Ministries.

The other half of a presbytery’s constituent roll is made up of elders. Each pastoral charge has the right to appoint a representative elder to serve on the constituent roll of its presbytery. When a presbytery has more ministers than pastoral charges, the presbytery may ask some pastoral charges to appoint equalizing elders so that the number of ministers and elders on the roll is more or less equal. Parity between ministers and elders at presbytery is one of the foundations upon which the denomination’s governance is based.

Every presbytery also has an appendix to the constituent roll. Any minister within the bounds of the presbytery who is not listed on the constituent roll is added to the appendix. Very often such ministers are retired or without a pastoral charge. While they have no vote at presbytery, they may attend presbytery meetings, engage in discussions and serve on committees. Some also help by serving as interim moderators for pastoral charges.

The framers of Overture No. 4, 2017 point out that, for a variety of reasons, some presbyteries have significantly more elders than ministers on their constituent rolls. For example, when a pastoral charge is vacant for a prolonged period, there is no minister on the roll of presbytery to correspond with the elder appointed from that pastoral charge. In an approved ecumenical shared ministry, a Presbyterian congregation may be served by a minister of another denomination. That means the session appoints a representative elder but there is no voting minister from that pastoral charge on the presbytery roll. Some congregations are served by stated supply ministers. If that minister is employed less than half time, the session still appoints a representative elder but the minister is not eligible to be placed on the constituent roll and is placed on the appendix to the roll instead. Circumstances like these have led to situations where the ministers on the constituent roll are outnumbered by elders, sometimes by substantial ratios. The overture suggests that having significantly more elders on the roll could impact decisions that “affect the livelihood and oversight of
ministers” and that presbyteries are meant to be a court “where ministers are answerable to and supported by their peers.” Therefore, the overture requests a mechanism for presbyteries to appoint equalizing ministers.

Whether or not presbyteries in which elders outnumber ministers will necessarily make inferior decisions related to the livelihood of ministers or be unable to hold ministers appropriately accountable is debatable. Nevertheless, the Clerks recognize the denomination’s polity values the elder-clergy balance and believe there is value in upholding this principle. Elders and ministers bring a range of knowledge and experience to every court. Ensuring that broad perspectives are involved in the work and discernment of presbytery is generally thought to be healthy and helpful.

As one way of addressing a potential imbalance, the Clerks propose that, on an annual basis, each presbytery that appoints equalizing elders should evaluate the need for those elders. Keeping in mind that in any event each pastoral charge is expected to appoint a representative elder to the presbytery, on a chosen anniversary, the presbytery should add up the number of ministers on the constituent roll and the number of representative elders to determine whether or not equalizing elders are needed. It is possible that equalizing elders are simply reappointed year after year without assessing if the need for them continues to exist.

Following the 2017 General Assembly, the Clerks invited sessions, presbyteries and synods to comment on proposed legislation that would allow interim moderators who are not already on the constituent roll, to be added to the constituent roll of presbytery when needed to provide elder-minister parity. The following legislation was proposed.

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.

Twenty sessions, 11 presbyteries and one synod responded to the request for study and report. The Clerks are grateful for each submission.

Of the sessions, 18 expressed support for the legislation. Maintaining lay-clergy balance at presbytery was identified as an important principle. One session suggested that any minister on the appendix to the roll, regardless of whether or not the minister is an interim moderator, could be considered for membership on the constituent roll. The other two thought equalizing ministers were unnecessary.

Ten of the 11 presbyteries also expressed support for the proposed legislation. Some indicated that their presbyteries operated with a 2:1 or 3:1 elder-to-minister ratio. Others wanted to expand the parameters of the legislation to allow stated supply ministers appointed to less than 50% ministry and those who are on the appendix and actively involved presbytery work to be eligible for membership on the constituent roll. Still others suggested each presbytery should be able to decide for itself which “appendix ministers” could be moved to the constituent roll. One presbytery appreciates the flexibility implied in the proposed legislation, that adding such an interim moderator to the constituent roll would be optional and not mandatory. Some of these additional suggestions would require a more profound level of reflection on the meaning of ministry and the constituent roll than this.

The responding synod spoke against the concept of equalizing ministers and in support of a governance model that favours elders over ministers. It expressed the idea however, that, if “retired or otherwise interim moderators” bring value to the presbytery, then they should be made voting members of the court because of what they offer and not just to make the numbers even.

The Clerks are grateful for the feedback received. Clearly most responders support the proposed legislation while a small minority do not agree with the idea.

The constituent roll of a presbytery is fundamental to the structure of the Presbyterian form of government. The formation of that roll must not be taken lightly. Those on the constituent roll bear substantial responsibility for the life and wellbeing of congregations, ministers and, by extension, for the denomination. It is intended that ministers on the constituent roll are those who are engaged in ministry in congregations,
chaplaincies, missions, certain college faculties and staff positions as described in Book of Forms section 176. These ministers work with the representative elders to care for, oversee and hold accountable every minister and congregation within its bounds.

The Clerks of Assembly are not certain this amendment to the church’s polity is necessary. Ministers on the appendix to the roll are already welcome to offer time and gifts to bolster the ministry of the presbytery. They may already speak at presbytery meetings and serve on committees even if they do not have a vote, nor the responsibility that comes with the vote.

The Clerks believe ministers on the appendix to the roll, who are serving as interim moderators, are well suited to serve as equalizing ministers because they are entrusted with the care and wellbeing of a congregation and report regularly to the presbytery regarding the discharge of their duties. Based on the feedback and support of the majority of sessions and presbyteries that responded, the Clerks of Assembly offer the following recommendations.