



May 19, 2020

Calling a Minister When In-Person Meetings and Public Worship is Not Possible

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the usual in-person meetings and worship services involved in the search for, calling and inducting a minister are not possible. The Clerks of Assembly, however, believe that the importance of equipping the church for ministry, even during these restricted times, means that allowances need to be made, still within our polity, for a congregation and presbytery to proceed to a Call. This is especially compelling when the wellbeing of the congregation deems it beneficial to move forward without delay.

The principles and procedures for discerning a Call (Book of Forms 213ff) remain in effect. The method for carrying them out may vary slightly given the current circumstances. The presbytery must be satisfied that the actions of the interim moderator may be sustained, and that the Call is a genuine gospel call and may likewise be sustained.

Since some members do not have access to the Internet, interim moderators may need to make further accommodations to include them in the call process.

Search Process

A search committee conducts the search, prepares a short list of candidates and holds interviews by Zoom or another telecommunications method.

Guarantee of Stipend

The Search Committee and Session agree on the terms of the Guarantee of Stipend, including any flexibility with respect to the negotiation of stipend, housing or other benefits. These meetings can also take place with appropriate technology.

Recommendation to Session

The Search Committee recommends a candidate to the Session.

Meeting the Candidate

The Session establishes a means for members of the congregation to become acquainted with the candidate. Normally this happens over a weekend and typically includes a congregational meet-and-greet with the candidate and a service of worship where the candidate preaches for the Call. The meet-and-greet could take place by one or more video gatherings with written questions posed by members of the congregations and answers circulated by email to members and adherents.

Preaching for the Call

A candidate could be asked to record a sermon or an entire service. A link to the video would be sent to members and adherents of the church. Since this video is only for the purpose of discerning the Call, it would be advisable to remove the video after a reasonable length of time, perhaps within 48 hours. The length of its availability would be announced to the congregation. If the congregation has chosen to conduct live worship using videoconferencing technology, the candidate could be invited to lead the service and preach. A written copy of the sermon and prayers could also be sent to members and adherents.

Congregational Meeting

Ideally, the congregation would gather in real time by means of appropriate technology to consider extending a Call to the minister. If this is not feasible, an email survey could, under these extenuating circumstances only, suffice. Care needs to be taken to ensure that only professing members vote on the Call. The concurrence of adherents can be noted in this process.

Call Documents

Provided the Session and interim moderator are satisfied the congregation has expressed its wish for the candidate's name to be inserted in the call documents, the interim moderator would do so. Once the call documents are filled out by the interim moderator, they may be distributed to elders so they can contact members and adherents and record the names of those who support the Call. Once this has taken place, the elders send them back to the interim moderator for compilation.

Electronic versions of the blank call documents are available to the interim moderator on the presbyterian.ca website.

Call Considered by Presbytery

The interim moderator prepares the call and guarantee of stipend documents and forwards them to the presbytery, which shall, using appropriate technology, consider sustaining the Call and, subject to acceptance by the candidate, request the candidate's release by the other presbytery.

The date and plans for induction can be left in the hands of the interim moderator along with other appropriate members of the presbytery. Normally, the induction would wait until worship can be held again in person. In the meantime, the presbytery can grant permission for the ministry to commence, stipend to be paid, and notice sent to the Pension and Benefits Office with a start date that will precede the induction.

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