



EQUIPPING FOR... **ELDERSHIP**

Book of Forms Changes – 2019

Don Muir, Associate Secretary, General Assembly Office

The 2019 General Assembly adopted three amendments to the legislation of the church. Here is a summary of what has changed.

Equalizing Ministers

There are 45 presbyteries in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. The constituent roll of each presbytery is made up of ordained Presbyterian ministers, members of the Order of Diaconal Ministries, and elders.

Most of the ministers serve pastoral charges while others are employed as seminary professors, chaplains, missionaries, regional staff, national office staff and the like.

Each pastoral charge in the presbytery appoints a representative elder to the presbytery. If there are more ministers on the constituent roll of the presbytery than there are pastoral charges, the presbytery will appoint equalizing elders so that the number of ministers and elders is even.

Parity between ministers and elders at presbytery is one of the principles 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, without a pastoral charge, or working in some non-church form of employment such as a teacher or politician. While they have no vote at presbytery, they may attend the meetings, engage in discussions and



serve on committees. Some support the presbytery by serving as interim moderators for pastoral charges.

For a variety of reasons, some presbyteries might have 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 representative elder appointed from that pastoral charge. Similarly, 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 Presbyterian minister from that pastoral charge on the presbytery's roll.

Circumstances like these have led to situations where the ministers on the constituent roll are outnumbered by elders and the presbytery may wish to address this.

Therefore, following consultation with the church at large, the Assembly approved legislation that allows presbyteries to add to the constituent roll interim moderators who are on the appendix to the roll. This would be done when the presbytery deems it necessary to achieve elder-minister parity. Such interim moderators would be called “equalizing ministers.”

Interim moderators have been identified as appropriate equalizing minister candidates because they are appointed by the presbytery to care for the wellbeing of a pastoral charge and report regularly to the presbytery about their work. This is similar to what most ministers on the constituent roll do regularly.

The adopted legislation is worded as follows:

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.

As the legislation indicates, presbyteries ought to examine their constituent rolls, on an annual basis, to determine if equalizing elders or equalizing ministers are needed to attain the desired balance.

Note – Pastoral Charge definition

A pastoral charge is usually made up of one congregation, but it could include two or more congregations united by presbytery into what we usually call a two-point charge or a three-point charge, and so on.

Deposition of Ministers

A Special Commission of the General Assembly that was looking into an appeal regarding the deposition

of a minister, noticed that two sections of the Book of Forms were somewhat at odds with each other. Sections 252 and 373 both gave reasons a minister might be deposed, but the reasons were dissimilar.

After receiving input from Sessions and presbyteries, the Assembly concluded that section 252, located within the Presbytery portion of the Book of Forms, should only record the principle that it is the presbytery that has the right and responsibility to depose a minister from that office and not list reasons for imposing this censure. Further, the definition of deposition, and the reasons for imposing it, should only be found in section 373 which is located within the Judicial Process portion of the Book of Forms.

With that decision, as of the 2019 General Assembly, section 252 now reads:

252. It belongs to the presbytery to depose ministers of Word and Sacraments from the ministry. (see sections 345–380 on disciplinary cases, section 441, Appendices A–64 and A–65)

Censure

As the Clerks of Assembly worked on sections 252 and 373, it became evident that clarity and consistency of the language was also needed in other legislation related to censure (sections 365–375).

Censures are used solemnly following a disciplinary case where a charge against a minister or office bearer has been proved by a church court. The censures of our church are admonition, rebuke, suspension, removal from membership or office, and in the case of ministers, deposition. The church agreed to eliminate excommunication from the list of censures in the new legislation.

Revised Book of Forms

A revised version of the Book of Forms will be posted on presbyterian.ca and a revised edition of the paper copy will be made available by the autumn. Watch the newsfeed of the denomination’s website for an announcement about their availability.

Barrier Act

Session Starter

Don Muir,

Associate Secretary, General Assembly Office

Prayer

Living God, we humbly ask that you clothe us with your love. May the peace of Christ rule our hearts. May the word of Christ guide our thinking. With gratitude, we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Introduction: Book of Forms section 293.1

No prepared law or rule relative to matters of doctrine, discipline, government or worship shall become a permanent enactment until the same has been submitted to presbyteries for consideration.

Scripture: Colossians 3:12

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience.

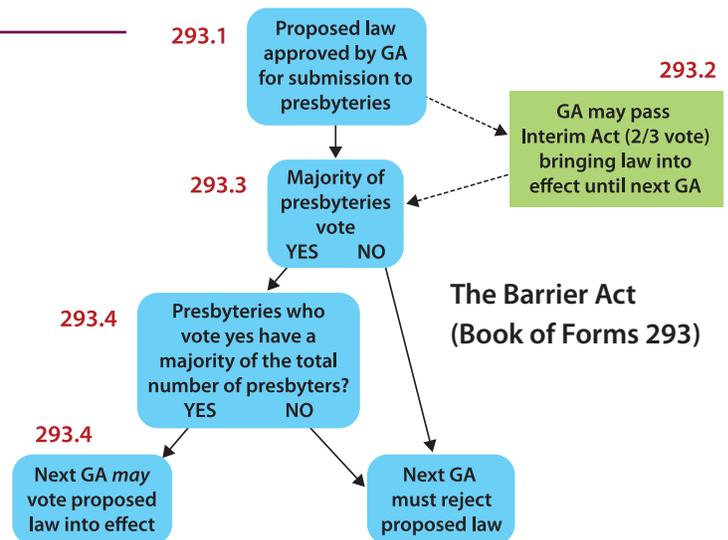
A Brief Commentary

Paul writes to the "saints and brothers and sisters in Christ" in Colossae. In the third chapter, Paul reminds them that, as people raised with Christ, they must discard tattered rags of behaviours like malice and slander while clothing themselves with compassion and patience.

Reflection

The Barrier Act. What is it?

The Barrier Act is a decision-making process of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. It is used when changes to the law or doctrine of the church are proposed. The agreement of two General Assemblies and, between the Assemblies, the approval of a majority of presbyteries whose membership represents a majority of all those on the constituent rolls of the presbyteries, is required before the proposed change can be made.



Here is an example of how the Barrier Act functions.

- Step 1:** The 2019 General Assembly adopted a recommendation to amend how Term Service for Eldership works and to send the legislation to presbyteries for their consideration. The proposed amendment would allow Sessions flexibility regarding the length of the term of service and how often elder elections are held. The information sent to presbyteries about this legislation is called a remit.
- Step 2:** As presbyteries meet during the remainder of 2019 and into 2020, each one is expected to approve or disapprove the remit and to let the General Assembly Office know its decision by April 1.
- Step 3:** If the majority, as described above, approves the remit, it will be placed before the 2020 Assembly where it can be adopted or dismissed. If the presbytery majority disapproves the remit, the 2020 General Assembly will dismiss it.

This is an important process because it means the General Assembly consults with the wider church before making changes to the law or doctrine of the denomination. It is a process that requires patience and, we trust, leads to decisions marked by compassion.

While Sessions are not immediately involved in the Barrier Act process, elders will benefit from understanding why and how this important decision-making process takes place.

Follow up:

1. What do you see as the benefits and challenges for the church in this process?

What's on your mind?

What decisions did the General Assembly make regarding sexuality?

Don Muir, Associate Secretary, General Assembly Office

Many Presbyterians are deeply interested in the life and witness of the church as it relates to questions of sexuality. It's a topic that has been discussed at every level of The Presbyterian Church in Canada and by many other Christian bodies.

The 2019 General Assembly made the following decisions after a process of prayerful discernment.

1. That the following be approved and remitted to presbyteries under the Barrier Act: The Presbyterian Church in Canada holds two parallel definitions of marriage and recognizes that faithful, Holy Spirit filled, Christ centred, God honouring people can understand marriage as a covenant relationship between a man and a woman or as a covenant relationship between two adult persons.

That congregations, Sessions, ruling and teaching elders be granted liberty of conscience and action on marriage.

2. That the following be approved and remitted to presbyteries under the Barrier Act: That congregations and presbyteries may call and ordain as ministers, and elect and ordain as ruling elders, LGBTQI persons (married or single) with the provision that liberty of conscience and action regarding participation in ordinations, inductions and installations be granted to ministers and ruling elders.
3. That the Clerks of Assembly be instructed to provisionally prepare guidelines to ensure that calls to LGBTQI ministers and the election of LGBTQI elders are facilitated in presbyteries and congregations.
4. That the Moderator write a pastoral letter to the church.

LGBTQI is an acronym used to refer to people whose sexual orientation is not heterosexual and/or whose gender identity does not conform either to binary male/ female categories or the "assigned" gender at birth. LGBTQI is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex.

5. That as a matter of urgency, the Life and Mission Agency provides a means for those affected by this decision to express their concerns, views and pain in a safe environment, and that these concerns be reported back to the 2020 General Assembly before the report on remits is received and its recommendations considered.

These decisions are also posted on the presbyterian.ca website.

Items (1) and (2) are not final. Presbyteries are to review these matters as part of the Barrier Act process and the 2020 General Assembly will make the final decision regarding them.

Mindful that the theme of the 2019 General Assembly was "Receive the Holy Spirit," *Living Faith* (4.2.2) speaks to us words of peace and patience as we to ponder these matters and seek the will of God.

The Holy Spirit
accompanies us on our journey of faith.
We may not always be sure
of this presence.
Yet God's Spirit is with us,
sometimes gently, sometimes powerfully,
guiding us in the midst of life,
our comfort and our help.
Christian life is a pilgrimage:
it begins, continues, and ends in God.