



# EQUIPPING FOR... **ELDERSHIP**

## Ministry Options During Financial Constraint

*Don Muir, Associate Secretary, General Assembly Office*

**T**he 500th anniversary of the Reformation was commemorated around the world in 2017. As we reflect on the enormous transformation that swept through the Church as a result of the thoughts, writings and sermons of John Calvin, John Knox, Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, and others, we also realize the Church continues to be reformed. For example, there are shifts regarding theological education, the way we carry out mission, the nature of preaching, the sound of music, the architecture of our buildings and so on. Today's Church would not be recognizable to the disciples.

Another change of the past few years is the increased number of pastoral charges that cannot afford full-time ministry. This presents a significant challenge for both congregations and ministers. There are a number of options that may be considered in such circumstances. Not all will apply to every situation, but it is hoped the suggestions introduced here may stimulate creative ideas and revitalized ministries.

In every circumstance, presbyteries should be contacted as soon as it becomes evident meeting the minister's stipend may be a challenge. The presbytery may provide advice or other assistance to help meet the challenge or enable change to take place in an unhurried and thoughtful manner.

### **Stewardship and Planned Giving**

Congregations should first consider if they have explored all the ways to encourage generosity in the congregation. There are methods of receiving gifts beyond what

appears on the Sunday offering plate. Contact Karen Plater ([kplater@presbyterian.ca](mailto:kplater@presbyterian.ca)) or Janice Meighan ([jmeighan@presbyterian.ca](mailto:jmeighan@presbyterian.ca)) in the Stewardship and Planned Giving national office for ideas and support.

### **Multiple-point charge**

When the distance between congregations is manageable in terms of travel, it is possible for them to be joined by the presbytery to form a multiple-point charge. The advantage is that the minister's stipend is shared with another congregation or two. The disadvantage is the minister's time is also shared another congregation or two.

### **Amalgamation**

Some congregations ask their presbytery to permit the amalgamation of two or more congregations. This scenario also assumes a degree of geographical proximity.

Example: Knox Church approaches St. Andrew's Church, located 10 km away, about the possibility of amalgamating. Knox has an average worship attendance of 65 while St. Andrew's is 40. Both find their budgets stretched to cover the costs of local ministry, mission opportunities and building maintenance. Knox has a minister and St. Andrew's is vacant. With the support of their congregations, the sessions approach the presbytery with a plan for Knox to sell its church building and transfer assets and members to St. Andrew's. St. Andrew's agrees to welcome the Knox minister as their own. This could

produce one stronger congregation in terms of people, resources and energy. A guide for amalgamations is available on the PCC website.

### **Ecumenical Shared Ministry**

The Presbyterian Church in Canada has entered into an agreement with The Anglican Church of Canada, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and The United Church of Canada for sharing ministry.

An ecumenical shared ministry happens when people worship and serve God together while maintaining their denominational identity. Each participating congregation requires the approval of its judicatory body (presbytery in our case).

Ecumenical shared ministries take many forms. For example:

- A United congregation and a Presbyterian congregation share a building and support staff salaries. They may worship together or separately.
- An Anglican congregation and a Presbyterian congregation share a minister while maintaining their distinctive forms of worship.

These are just two illustrations of how Presbyterians can carry on effective ministry with the support of sisters and brothers of other denominations. The Ecumenical Shared Ministry Handbook is available on the PCC website.

### **Minister called by two congregations**

A minister may accept a call from two separate congregations. This means each congregation receives 50% of the minister's time (roughly 22-23 hours per week on average). The minister might even be a member of two presbyteries if the congregations to which the minister is called are found within the bounds of two presbyteries. (When belonging to two presbyteries, the Clerks of Assembly recommend the minister's eligibility to be a commissioner to the General Assembly rests with the presbytery of first induction.)

It might also be that a minister is called to a percentage of time greater than 50% in one congregation and be appointed to a less 50% stated supply ministry to a second congregation. The Calling

a Minister handbook (Supplement VII) details implications of part-time ministry.

Note: Ministries need to be at least 50% time to be called by a pastoral charge and placed on the constituent roll of a presbytery.

### **Change to the minister's call**

In rare cases, ministers may be willing to work less than full time. If this becomes a necessity, a minister and congregation can discuss changes to the call that would reduce the time the minister spends with the congregation from 100% to something less. The stipend would be reduced proportionately.

The minister should ask another minister to moderate session and congregational meetings that deal with this subject in order to provide impartial guidance. Such a process begins with the minister and session and includes decisions regarding what parts of the current ministry would be reduced or eliminated due to the reduction in time. Once the minister and session are satisfied with the proposed reduction, a congregational meeting would be called for the congregation to consider the change to the terms of the call. If the congregation approves the change, the proposal is placed before the presbytery for consideration and possible approval.

Care should be taken to provide sufficient notice so that both minister and congregation have adequate time to prepare for the new arrangement. A minister only remains on the constituent roll of the presbytery when called to a ministry of at least 50% time.

### **Dissolution**

If all other possibilities fail, a session may ask the presbytery to dissolve its congregation. In this instance funds need to be available to pay a transition allowance to the minister. This gives the minister time to find alternative employment. Even in its demise, the congregation gives life to others through the assets gleaned from the financial reserves of the congregation or the sale of property vest with the Trustee Board of the denomination that are reinvested in the life of the church.

Remember ... in every situation, seek presbytery advice as early as possible.

## Do we have a quorum?

### Session Starter

*Don Muir, Associate Secretary,  
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### Prayer

Almighty God, we bow before you seeking wisdom and compassion as we strive to fulfill your mission in, and through, the church. Empower us by your spirit so that our love may be grounded in truth and come alive through the decisions we make and the actions we take. This we pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

### Introduction: Book of Forms section 122

The moderator and twenty-five percent of ruling elders on the session, or two, whichever is greater, constitute a quorum.

### Scripture: 1 John 4:1 NRSV

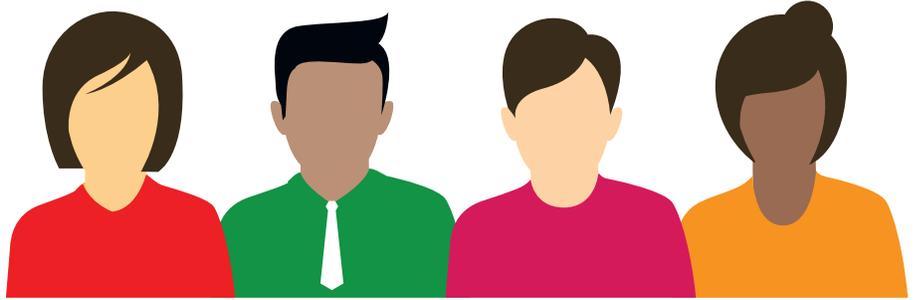
Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

### A Brief Commentary

This portion of 1 John points to the vital, yet challenging task of discernment. Christians are called to weigh words, thoughts and deeds in our best effort to decide if they are grounded in God or some false spirit. In the verses leading up to this passage, love for one another is recognized as an essential guide for Christian discernment.

### Reflection

The word “quorum” comes from the Latin for “of whom”. In long-ago England, the word was part of a Latin phrase used to commission justices of the peace. The phrase was addressed to those “of whom” their presence was required to manage business that could not be legally conducted without them. In time, “quorum” took on the more general definition we use today, that is, a minimal number of members of



an organization required to conduct its business.

Making decisions by mutual consent is one of the basic principles upon which Presbyterian church government is founded. Group decision-making is intended to provide at least two positive outcomes. First, it is meant to prevent the tyranny of those who might intimidate others into submission. Second, it is believed that when Christians gather in prayer, reflect on scripture and exchange ideas, we are more likely to discern the mind of Christ for the church.

For this reason, we empower ministers and elders to make decisions at session, presbytery, synod and the General Assembly – trusting them to seek the mind of Christ together.

Because it is unrealistic to expect perfect attendance at every meeting, the church accepted the concept of quorum so work can continue even when some members are absent.

According to the quorum formula, if a session is made up of a minister and 12 elders, the number of elders required before decisions can be made, is three. That said, even if that bar is met, a session might postpone the discussion of a subject of major consequence until more elders are available to contribute to the discernment.

### Follow up:

1. Curious about other quorum requirements? See Book of Forms sections 172 (Board of Managers), 183 (Presbytery), 267, 267.1 (Synod) and 278.10 (General Assembly).
2. Since there is no stipulated quorum for a congregational meeting, what do we do if we hold a meeting and it is poorly attended?

## What's on your mind?

### What is included as “utilities” in a guarantee of stipend?

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When a pastoral charge calls a minister, the members enter into a discernment process. They place their trust in the Holy Spirit to lead them to a minister of Word and Sacraments who is faithful to the Gospel and demonstrates the gifts and skills required to lead and serve the pastoral charge.

A call document is a spiritual and legal agreement. It confirms that the members of the pastoral charge are prepared to call a specific minister. Respect, encouragement and allegiance in the Lord are promised to the minister along with stipend and benefits that are to support the minister while working within the pastoral charge.

The stipend is made up of three parts.

1. Stipend  
(meeting or exceeding minimum standards of the church)
2. Housing  
(housing allowance or manse)
3. Utilities

### What is meant by the term “utilities”?

The General Assembly has stated that utilities include heat, hydro, water and sewer services, basic monthly telephone charge. (A&P 1978, p. 405)

In 1978, landline telephones were the norm and so monthly telephone service cost and business-related long distance fees were expected to be paid by the pastoral charge. In today's world of personal computers, tablets, mobile phones and other devices that open up a wide range of instant communication, stipends often cover some, or all, of the costs related to them.

There is some variation regarding how utilities are paid.

Some ministers have utility invoices sent directly to the congregation where the treasurer pays them.

Other pastoral charges reimburse on voucher. This means that the minister is invoiced by the utility

company and pays the bills. The minister then submits the cost of utilities to the treasurer who reimburses the minister for these expenses.

Still other pastoral charges provide an estimated allowance, agreed upon with the minister, which is meant to cover the cost of utilities. This figure is added to the housing allowance. In call documents, this allowance is often expressed by the words “a housing allowance of X dollars, inclusive of utilities.” This allowance will need to be renegotiated from time to time as the cost of utilities changes. In the call and guarantee of stipend, the congregation also promises to “... adjust the stipend and allowances annually in view of any changes in the cost of living or the needs of our minister.”

For more information, please see:

- Book of Forms, Appendix A-29
- Calling a Minister: Guidelines for Presbyteries, Interim Moderators and Search Committees, especially p. 21, E.3 and p. 23, F.3.

While this second resource doesn't have quite the same authority as the Book of Forms, it is a helpful resource that is regularly used by the church. Both are available on the PCC website.

