

The most important thing that a congregation does is choose its own minister. It must be realised that the congregation calls a minister of *its own choosing* and must not allow anyone to influence that decision.

The Interim Moderator

In a vacancy the Presbytery will appoint a minister to act as the Interim Moderator of the parish. That person is, for all intents and purposes, the minister of the parish until a minister is called and inducted (i.e the minister for the interim period). It is that person's job to see that the parish continues to operate as normal.

The Interim Moderator moderates the Session, chairs meetings of the Selection Committee, organises preachers etc. Some of these tasks may, of course, be delegated to elders. Chiefly it is the task of the Interim Moderator to assist the parish to find and call a minister.

The Interim Moderator's task is to ensure that all is done according to the laws of the church. It is not his job to impose his will on the congregation or to seek to influence the congregation as to who should be called.

If an Interim Moderator seeks to do these things the Session ought to protest in the strongest possible terms. If the problem continues, the session ought then to write to the Presbytery and ask for a new Interim Moderator to be appointed.

Procedure

The details are set out in Section 6 of the Code. It is very important for the Session Clerk and the Secretary of the Committee of Management to have an up-to-date version of the Code and to make themselves familiar with it. This is perhaps more necessary during a vacancy. If an Interim Moderator knows that people are familiar with the Code, he is less likely to pull the wool over their

eyes.

The following ought to happen as soon as possible after the Interim Moderator is appointed by the Presbytery.

1. There should be a meeting of the Committee of Management and the Session (perhaps a combined meeting) where the former works out the Terms of Call (forms are available from the Ministry and Mission Office) and the latter determines recommendation for the Selection Committee.

2. A congregational meeting is called to determine the Terms of Call and to elect a Selection Committee.

3. The Selection Committee then gets on with its work. The following should be noted and strictly adhered to:

- ♦ Any approach to a minister about coming to the parish must be made only by the Interim Moderator or the Session Clerk and no-one else.
- ♦ Any minister making enquiries about the parish should do so only to the Interim Moderator or the Session Clerk.
- ♦ The selection committee should look at one minister only at a time. It should make enquiries, interview him/her and then make a decision as to whether to recommend that name to the congregation.
- ♦ Only when the committee has decided not to proceed with a particular name should it then look at another name.

4. During this time the Session is to update and if necessary alter the rolls and keep the work and activities of the congregation running as smoothly as possible.

Extra work always falls on the Session and particularly to the Clerk. Be sensitive to him/her.

Seek to assist wherever possible perhaps by sharing some of the responsibility that he/she would normally carry.

Similarly the Interim Moderator is also under added strain. Ministers rarely want this task. They have their own parishes to care for and being an Interim Moderator is an added burden so they usually want the vacancy filled as soon as possible. However don't allow him to railroad you into calling someone you don't want.

5. Take the time to find out as much as possible about a prospective minister. Don't assume that because he is having some difficulty in his current parish he will have the same problems with you.

Ask him lots of questions. Be specific and direct. Don't accept glib answers. For example, don't just ask " *Are you prepared to work with the women on our Session?*". The next questions ought to be , "*Will you be willing and pleased to ordain and induct other women who may be elected by the congregation?*" or "*Would you be happy to work with a woman as a Session Clerk?*". Many ministers are quite prepared to answer yes to the first question but are not prepared to agree to the others.

An interview by a selection committee should take at least two to three hours.

6. Be discreet. It can be embarrassing for a minister, an Interim Moderator and a parish if it is broadcast to all and sundry that Mr X is going to be our minister when in fact he hasn't been called.

Quite possibly Mr X hasn't told his own parish that he's seeking a call, so if it doesn't happen he may be in an awkward situation.

Confidentiality is important.

Conclusion

Choosing a minister is a very important task. It takes time. It is better to be vacant for a longer

period than to call the wrong person. Once inducted a minister holds office indefinitely.

Despite of this, it should be noted that if a parish is vacant for more than twelve months, a Presbytery has the right to make an appointment. This appointment is most likely to be for twelve months but may be for up to five years. Nevertheless the congregation is not obliged to call the appointed minister if it regards him or her as unsuitable.

Remember the minister is the choice of the congregation and not the Interim Moderator or anyone else.

After a while, people in the congregation can get a little depressed and a Session and Selection Committee can become tired if the vacancy takes some time to fill. It is the task of the leaders of the congregation to maintain enthusiasm and dedication.

A vacancy can be a time to discover people's hidden talents and also to rely on a wonderful sovereign God to supply all our needs.



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