

GUIDELINES FOR CHURCH MEETINGS

If a member of your local church expresses a call to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Work there is a definite role that the Church Meeting plays as the

first stage in the formal assessment process.

As from General Assembly 2007, the formal assessment process will proceed as follows: Church Meeting decision, Synod decision, the Assessment Board makes the final decisions about forwarding a candidate for training and the Education and Learning Board decides the method of training. These decisions are taken after the Assessment Conference interviews and candidates will be informed of the decisions within two weeks of the Conference. The process can be halted at either the Church Meeting or Synod interview stages.

The Church Meeting, if it is able, recommends the candidate and sends them on for further interviews.

A further role may be to offer pastoral support either when the candidate begins training as an student or if a candidate is not commended for training.

These two roles, to be part of the decision-making process and to offer on-going pastoral support, can seem to be in conflict. The Elders and Ministers in each church need to ensure that the local Church is able to exercise both roles. The candidate should not be present at the Church Meeting during this discussion although it may be helpful for the candidate to share with the meeting something of their journey and sense of call before being excused.

Interviewers appointed from amongst the Elders should talk to the candidate and their family or those close to the candidate and then report to Church Meeting making a recommendation to the meeting. The Church Meeting recommendation should be sought once a candidate has satisfied the pre-assessment criteria and begun the formal candidating process. Some local Church Meetings find it difficult to refuse the request of one of their members to candidate but it is their responsibility to do so if that is the prayerful conclusion of the Meeting. Where the Church Meeting decision is to recommend a candidate, that decision should be accompanied by an objective account of the length of time the candidate has been a member of the church and the type of service given both in the church and in the wider community (if known). Where necessary a full account of any reservations should also be expressed. This will provide the kind of background material the Synod interviewers and Assessment Board need.

Since the Minister of the Church is asked to give a personal reference the Church Meeting report is signed by the Church Secretary or another Elder.

The Church Meeting needs to ensure that both the candidate and their family or those close to the candidate feel supported during the candidating process which may take some time if the candidate needs to fulfil the pre-requirement criteria. Ensure that the family or other supporters are given an opportunity to be involved and to ask their own questions. People need to consider the profound changes that occur when someone close to them is called to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Work. They also need to be reassured that there are as many ways of being the minister's family or close support as there are individuals involved.

The Assessment process is the way in which the whole Church seeks to discern the will of God in the life of one member and further to discern the nature of the Call. It is a shared exploration between the candidate and representatives of the wider Church. It may be that the call is not to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Work. In such a situation the local Church has a key role to perform as the individual seeks to find the right way in which to use their particular gifts. The local interview will also have a role to play in assisting the individual to find the right way forward.

Checklist ~

When the Synod Candidating officer asks for a Church Meeting recommendation and report on a candidate, check that;

Before the interview

- you have appointed interviewers to meet the candidate and, separately, the family or those close to the candidate.
- the interviewers have the information about the pre-assessment criteria and candidating process;
- the interviewers understand the pre-assessment criteria and any pre-assessment preparation the candidate has undertaken;
- support has been arranged for the candidate during and after the candidating procedure;
- the interviewers have met the candidate and the family or those close to the candidate.

In the interview

- check the candidate understands, accepts and is committed to the schedules for ordination or commissioning and the Basis of Union;
- from the areas to be discussed throughout Assessment focus in the interview on faith and sense of call (see 'Candidating and Pre-Assessment Overview - Areas to be discussed throughout Assessment').

In the report to the Synod Candidating officer include

- comments in the light of the interview on the candidate's sense of call and understanding of mission and the Church in the World;
- a comment on the concerns of, and support shown by, the family or those close to the candidate.

- Comment on the candidate's service in the local church and the community and his/her relationship to other church members by referring to the Marks of Ministry for Ministers of Word and Sacraments or Core Competencies for Church Related Community Workers.

Check that

- the Church Meeting has agreed to the report and recommendation;
- the Church Secretary or another Elder has signed the recommendation;
- the report and recommendation has been returned to the Synod Office.

This commendation will go first to the Synod Candidating officer but in due course will also be seen by those who interview on behalf of the Synod and the Assessors at the Assessment Conference.

Finally, the Synod will be able to offer help and advice if you have any concerns about your part in the candidating process.

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