

Act 23 – Journey into Ministry

Number 23 of Class 2

Category: Mission & Ministry

Wednesday 19th May 2021

This is an extract - read full Acts of Assembly for 2021 [here](#).

The General Assembly, seeking to revise and update arrangements and procedures regarding the application process to become a Candidate for Free Church Ministry and oversight and support of such Candidates before they are licensed to preach the gospel, enact and ordains as follows:

The General Assembly note that the biblical qualifications for pastors and teachers do not focus entirely, or even primarily, on their academic achievements, natural gifting or theological knowledge (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-3).

They declare that the Free Church of Scotland seeks to identify and train faithful, reliable and humble men of God, motivated only by love for Christ and his people, who are called by God into a life of service.

SECTION A – Pre-Application

1. Prior to an applicant completing an application form, intending applicants should hold informal conversations with their Minister and Kirk Session and be given opportunities to test their teaching gifts within a local church. If candidacy looks likely, the Kirk Session should inform the Presbytery.
2. The Presbytery will then inform the Board of Ministry, who may then appoint a training mentor, in consultation with the Presbytery, and assist in training and developing the candidate's gifts.
3. The Board of Ministry will prepare guidance to assist congregations and Presbyteries in the pre-application stage.

SECTION B - Application Process

1. In order to apply to be a Candidate for the Free Church Ministry the applicant must be:
 - 1.1. Male.
 - 1.2. Over the age of twenty-one.
 - 1.3. Have been a Communicant Member of a Christian church for a minimum of two years.
 - 1.4. Have been a Communicant Member of a Free Church congregation for a minimum of six months.
 - 1.5. Have not applied as a candidate for ministry in the Free Church within the previous two years.
2. All Applicants shall complete the Application Form produced by the Board of Ministry.
 - 2.1. A Minister or Session Clerk shall make the Application Form available to any potential candidates within their congregation.

2.2. The Applicant shall give their completed Application Form to the Minister or to the Clerk of the Kirk Session.

2.3. Applications may be received by the Kirk Session at any time of year.

2.4. In order to begin studies at Edinburgh Theological Seminary in September the Application Form must be processed by the Kirk Session by the end of February of the same year.

3. Upon receipt of an Application Form, the Kirk Session shall discuss the suitability of the Applicant for the role of Minister.

3.1. The Kirk Session will interview the Applicant as soon as possible after receipt of the Application Form.

3.2. If the Applicant is married the Applicant and his wife will also meet with the Minister and his wife (or if the Minister is unmarried by the Minister and another married couple) to assess whether the Applicant's wife is supportive of his candidacy. The Board will provide a list of questions for discussion. The minutes of the discussion will be given to the Kirk Session and taken into consideration when they are making their assessment of the candidate.

3.3. The Kirk Session shall meet without the Applicant to come to a decision on whether his Application will progress to the next stage.

3.4. The Kirk Session shall inform the Applicant of their decision within seven days of the meeting.

4. Where an Application proceeds to the next stage the Kirk Session shall inform their Presbytery within seven days of their decision.

4.1. The Presbytery Clerk should be given a copy of the Application Form.

4.2. The Presbytery Clerk should send notice of the Application to all members of Presbytery taking care to secure the confidentiality of personal information.

4.3. Presbytery and Kirk Session Representatives should listen to sermon recordings of the Applicant prior to interview.

5. The Presbytery shall appoint a date to interview the Applicant and may appoint a Committee to carry out this stage of the process.

5.1. At the end of this interview, the Presbytery shall come to a view on whether the application should progress to the next stage of the process.

5.2. The Interview can be conducted by the Personnel Committee of the Presbytery, or other similar committee, where this role has been delegated to them by the Presbytery.

5.3. At least two members of the relevant Kirk Session must be present at the interview.

5.4. The Board of Ministry shall provide all Presbyteries with appropriate interview questions and guidance.

6. At its Ordinary Meeting, the Presbytery shall take up consideration of the Applicant and the Application Form. It shall be moved, seconded and agreed that the Applicant can proceed to the next stage of the process if the Presbytery decide the Applicant is suitable.

6.1. The Presbytery will receive the report of the interview committee with their recommendations.

6.2. The Applicant shall appear before the whole Presbytery and any further questions can be put to him by any member of the Presbytery.

6.3. The Applicant will be asked to leave the room and the Presbytery will then decide on whether his Application will be approved and recommended for consideration by the Board of Ministry.

6.4. The Presbytery shall come to a decision on the approval of the application by way of a suitable motion recording their approval of the Application.

6.5. The Presbytery shall inform the Applicant of progress with his application no later than seven days after the decision is taken.

7. The Presbytery must inform the Board of Ministry of any successful applications within seven days of approving an application, and they shall pass on all relevant documents to the Board at this time.

8. The Applicant will be required to attend an Assessment Day.

8.1. Assessment Days shall be organised by the Board of Ministry.

8.2. The Board of Ministry, and several others appointed by them, will assess Applicants' suitability for Ministry.

8.3. At least one female assessor shall be present at each Assessment Day.

8.4. Assessment Days will take place as required.

8.5. The Board of Ministry or Representatives of the Board will conduct an interview with the Applicant during or shortly after the Assessment Day.

9. After the Assessment Day and Interview, a Report will come to the Board of Ministry.

9.1. The Board of Ministry shall come to a decision on whether the Applicant is a suitable Candidate for Free Church Ministry. They shall also assess his training requirements in the context of becoming a suitable person to be licensed for Ministry.

9.2. The Board of Ministry shall inform the Applicant of their decision regarding his candidacy within seven days of the next Board meeting. This must be in writing.

9.3. If the Applicant is accepted as a Candidate for the ministry, the Board of Ministry must inform the Applicant and the Presbytery of their decision regarding the training requirements within twenty-one days. This must be in writing.

10. When an Applicant is married then due consideration for his wife must be taken at every stage of the Application Process

10.1. The Board of Ministry shall ensure that the Application Form includes a section for wives to complete.

10.2. Wives should also attend the Assessment Day where possible.

SECTION C - Application Form

The Board of Ministry hold the responsibility for creating an Application Form and providing interview questions for Presbyteries.

1. The Board of Ministry shall create an Application Form to be used for Applicants for Free Church Ministry.

1.1. The Board of Ministry shall create Regulations to govern the content of the Application Form.

1.2. The General Assembly reserves the right to review the Application Form and any Regulations related to the Application Form.

1.3. The content of the Application form must comply with civil legislation.

1.4. The Application Form shall be reviewed by the Board of Ministry on a yearly basis.

2. The Board of Ministry shall create an Application Information Sheet to be released with the Application Form.

2.1. The Application Information Sheet will detail how to complete the Application Form and provide information on the process to become a Candidate for Free Church Ministry.

3. The Board of Ministry shall create interview questions to be used by Presbytery during the Application process, including questions regarding sensitive information, and provide these to each Presbytery.

3.1 The Board of Ministry shall create Regulations to govern the content of the interview questions.

3.2 The General Assembly reserves the right to review the interview questions and any Regulations related to the interview questions.

3.3 The interview questions shall be reviewed by the Board of Ministry on a yearly basis.

4. Retention of Records

4.1 The Board of Ministry is responsible for storing all information gathered during the Application Process in a manner that complies with civil law.

SECTION D - Decisions on Route to Ministry

Upon offering Candidacy to an Applicant, the Board of Ministry shall devise a study plan for each candidate. The Board of Ministry will arrange this study plan in conjunction with Edinburgh Theological Seminary.

1. All Candidates should complete the full course of study available to Edinburgh Theological Seminary and achieve a pass of the BTh.

2. All Candidates must complete the Presbyterian Church Ministry Module and attend Preaching Seminars as required by the Board of Ministry before being licensed.

3. Exceptions to the requirement for all candidates to complete the full BTh can be made in particular circumstances:

3.1 When the Candidate has already completed theological studies, he may be required to undertake courses at ETS at the discretion of the Board of Ministry.

3.2 ETS shall devise an examination which will assist the Board of Ministry in assessing the Candidate's knowledge if he has already completed theological study.

3.3 The Board of Ministry can in exceptional circumstances waive the requirement to study the Biblical languages.

4. The Board of Ministry shall publish a Candidate Information Guide in conjunction with ETS each academic year.

This shall be distributed by the Board of Ministry to all Candidates at the beginning of each academic year.

SECTION E - Support for Free Church Ministry Candidates

Free Church Candidates have a responsibility to live a life above reproach, suitable of that of a Minister of the Gospel and must make themselves available for mentoring and accountability.

1. Every Candidate will be provided with a mentor by Presbytery. The mentor will typically be a member of that Presbytery.

1.1 Mentors shall contact their assigned Candidate at least twice per semester.

1.2 Mentors shall discuss matters of personal and professional development with the Candidate.

1.3 All discussions between Mentor and their assigned Candidate shall take place in strict confidence unless a safeguarding issue is disclosed, or any matter that may call into question the integrity of the Candidate and their suitability for Ministry.

1.4 The Board of Ministry are responsible for ensuring that Mentors are in place and that Mentors are in contact with their assigned Candidate at least twice per Semester.

2. ETS shall appoint a Director of Studies to each Candidate.

2.1. The Director of Studies shall send a report to Presbytery and the Board of Ministry on the Candidate's academic progress at the end of each academic year.

2.2. The Director of Studies should also report on any other issues that have arisen over the course of the year.

2.3. If any issues regarding the academic progress of a Candidate emerge during the year the Director of Studies shall report this to Presbytery and the Board of Ministry as soon as is practicable.

3. The Board of Ministry reserve the right to hold a meeting with a Candidate at any point.

3.1. The Board of Ministry can use such meetings to discuss any matter regarding the progress of the Candidate.

3.2. The Candidate may bring a friend or their Mentor to any of these meetings (such a friend should be a communicant member in the Free Church or another Christian church).

3.3. The Board of Ministry shall bring any concerns regarding a Candidate to the Presbytery as soon as is practicable.

3.4. At the end of each academic year the Board of Ministry shall report to Presbytery on each Candidate's progress.

4. The local congregation where the candidate is serving shall send a report to Presbytery and the Board of Ministry on the Candidate's involvement with the local congregation at the end of each academic year.

4.1. Where this is a training congregation, details of training undertaken by the candidate should be provided in the report.

5. At the end of each academic year, Presbytery shall certify that the Candidate is able to continue in his role.

5.1. They shall review all information received from the Board of Ministry, the local congregation and ETS on the Candidate's Progress.

5.2. They will interview the Candidate and discuss matters related to his Candidacy and continued suitability for ministry.

5.3. If any particular issues are raised by a Candidate's Mentor, Accountability Partner, Director of Studies or the Board of Ministry these will be discussed with the Candidate.

5.4. In their assessment of the Candidate, the Presbytery shall satisfy themselves as far as possible that the Candidate is a suitable person to sign the Formula.

5.5. The Presbytery will issue a certificate, before the commencement of the ensuing academic year, to the Candidate, ETS and the Board of Ministry to certify his continued status as a Candidate.

6. A Candidate is under the pastoral oversight of the Presbytery of the Congregation in which he is a Communicant Member.

SECTION F - Ending a Candidacy

1. The candidacy shall be kept under review by the Presbytery and the Board of Ministry. This review may on occasions lead to the conclusion that there are potential grounds to end the candidacy.

2. If the ETS Senate has cause for concern about a candidate, they shall report this to the Presbytery and the Board as soon as possible.

3. Prior to the commencement of a formal process of terminating the candidacy, the Presbytery and the Board shall seek to help the Candidate to resolve the problems leading to concerns over their suitability as a candidate for the ministry.

4. Should such efforts fail to resolve the situation, a review committee will be established comprising three members of the Presbytery and three members of the Board of Ministry. The Board's representatives shall include the Chairman who will also act as Convener of the Review Committee.

5. The Review Committee shall have powers to interview the Candidate, to arrange support for the Candidate, and to recommend to the Presbytery to terminate the candidacy should the concerns raised regarding the candidacy be confirmed.

6. The candidate shall be given every opportunity to find a resolution of the problem.

6.1. The Committee shall consult with the ETS Senate and receive a report from them on the Candidate's progress, character and suitability as a candidate for the ministry.

6.2. The Committee shall consult with the Minister of the candidate's training Church, where he is on a Minister-inTraining programme.

6.3. The Committee shall consult with the Board and receive a report from them on their oversight and examination of the Candidate.

6.4. The Review Committee shall consider the candidacy and the problems that have arisen, taking cognisance of the Senate's report, the Board's report, and the record of the Presbytery's previous deliberations on the matter, before proceeding to interview the Candidate.

6.5. The Candidate shall be invited to appear before the Review Committee, accompanied by a friend or his mentor, to address the concerns that have been raised and to seek a solution. The process may require more than one meeting with the Candidate before a final recommendation is made.

6.6. The Candidate shall leave the room before the Committee considers the details of the interview and come to a recommendation on the matter.

7. Should the Review Committee find that the potential grounds for terminating the candidacy have been confirmed by the review process, they shall report to the Presbytery and the Board accordingly, with their conclusions and recommendations. The Committee shall also inform the candidate of their conclusions and recommendations.

8. The Presbytery will meet to reach a final decision on the Committee's recommendation.

8.1. The Candidate and a representative of the Board of Ministry will have a right to address the Presbytery before the Presbytery reaches its decision.

8.2. The Candidate shall leave the room before the Presbytery considers the details of the recommendation on the matter.

8.3. The Candidate and the Board of Ministry will be informed of the final decision in writing within 7 days.

8.4. The Presbytery in consultation with the Board will ensure that suitable pastoral support is made available to the Candidate.

9. Any decision made by the Presbytery regarding ongoing candidacy can be appealed by the Candidate to the General Assembly or one of its Commissions within 10 days of receiving the written decision.

10. The Chairman of the Board of Ministry will also have a right to appeal the decision of the Presbytery to the General Assembly or one of its Commissions, within 10 days of receiving the written decision, where the proper procedure has not been followed or relevant information has been disregarded by the Presbytery.

SECTION G - Repeals

The General Assembly repeal the following Acts: Section 1 of Act 19, Class 2, 2016; Act 38, Class 2, 2015; Act 48, Class 2, 2012; and Act 37, Class 2, 2012.