

Church of Scotland - Ministries Council

Guardianships, Sisting of Vacancies, and Continued Vacancies

Introduction

As the Ministries Council has supported Presbyteries through the planning process required by the General Assembly of 2010, a process affirmed by subsequent General Assemblies in 2011 and 2012, some queries on Guardianships and sisting of vacancies have arisen. This paper deals with some of the common questions.

1. What is Guardianship?

Guardianship was agreed by the General Assembly of 2011 as a replacement for the term Continuing Vacancy, to refer to congregations which would continue as a congregation but without a settled ministry. It is not intended to apply in situations where a vacancy is sisted pending further readjustment (see Q 5 below).

2. Does the Presbytery need to prepare a Basis of Guardianship?

Yes. For the avoidance of doubt, as Guardianship is an instrument of adjustment under Act VII 2003, as amended, section 10(4), a Basis of Guardianship must be prepared in every case. This is particularly so as a congregation is agreeing to relinquish its right to call.

Concurrence need be sought from the Presbytery Planning Task Group (PPTG) of the Ministries Council only where the outcome varies from what is provided for in the Presbytery Plan. In other words, if a union, linkage, reviewable tenure or guardianship, or any other instrument of readjustment, as Presbytery sees fit, is in the plan, then concurrence is not required.

3. Do Guardianships continue indefinitely?

Some Guardianships will continue indefinitely; others may be of a shorter duration. Act VII 2003, section 10(4), allows for the Presbytery to recommence vacancy procedure in terms of Act VIII 2003, either at the request of the Kirk Session, or on the initiative of the Presbytery, subject to the right of appeal or dissent and complaint.

4. Should a Basis of Guardianship contain a review date?

If the underlying reason for a Guardianship was to fit in with a neighbouring reviewable tenure, or an expected retiral, or a vacancy in a neighbouring charge, it may be helpful to include a review date.

5. What does it mean to sist a vacancy?

Sisting is what happens when a Presbytery is involved in negotiation re the future of a particular charge. The expression is used to signify that the search for a minister is temporarily suspended. Vacancies are also sisted during an Interim Ministry. Sisting is largely procedural, and normally lasts for a shorter period than Guardianship. Presbytery should consider whether guardianship is more appropriate than sisting.

6. Our congregation has not yet found a minister, and we have permission to call, which has recently been extended for a further six months. Do we need a Basis of Guardianship?

No: a Basis of Guardianship is not required where a congregation has permission to call but has difficulty

in finding a minister and is in a long term vacancy.

7. How can ministry take place in a Guardianship?

The ministry in a Guardianship may be delivered in different ways: with a locum, a reader or Ordained Local Ministry, or via the ministry within a parish grouping. While it will be possible to specify this within a Basis of Guardianship, it will be for local parties to determine what should be contained within said basis.

8. What is a continued vacancy?

Congregations were formerly placed in a continued vacancy when a Presbytery was clear that it was not the plan to have a settled ministry, whether full time or part time, in post in a particular charge. Guardianship replaces continued vacancy as a tool for readjustment.

9. Will a congregation in Guardianship receive a Vacancy Allowance?

A charge in Guardianship will have a 'Guardianship Allowance' of £580 a month (as may be uprated from time to time) deducted from its Ministries & Mission contribution. No allocation of FTE under a Presbytery Plan need attach to the charge for that. But (for example) if Presbytery wanted the charge to have Sunday pulpit supply and two days a week pastoral cover, then that would 'cost' 0.25 FTE of the Presbytery Plan allocation.

10. Where can I find out more about Guardianship?

The General Assembly's Act VII 2003 (as amended) offers some information: a link to the website for this is below. Section 10 (4) refers. There is also information in the Ministries Council Report to the 2011 General Assembly, on p.4/9, and a link to this is also below.

Act VII 2003

http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/7137/2003_Act_7_revised_2011.pdf

Ministries Council Report to General Assembly of 2011

http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/5750/ga11_ministries.pdf