

Registration of Ministries Committee – General Assembly 2019

A Nomination Committee receives an application from a minister. It is delighted. They've been spreading the word and praying hard. They weren't sure if they'd get any applications. When one comes in, they're thrilled. Quickly a meeting is arranged to discuss it.

What is the question that the Nominating Committee should then ask? What is the thing that they should be focusing on as they meet to talk and pray? As they seek to discern God's will what should be at the centre of their thoughts?

Surely, it is, 'Is this the right minister for us?' That is, will this person be a good fit? Does their vision for ministry resonate with ours? Do they have sort of skills we are looking for? Are they the sort of person who will enable this congregation to play its part in God's mission in this community?

The question a Nominating Committee should be asking is, 'Is this person the right minister for us?' All you who have been part of this process know that that is far from a simple question. It demands insight and patience, listening and discernment, focus and concentration.

What the Nominating Committee shouldn't need to ask is, 'Can this applicant do the job?' That is, does this applicant have a feel for worship in the Church of Scotland? Do they know how to take a funeral? Can they moderate a Kirk Session meeting? Do they understand how Presbytery works? Is their knowledge of Church Law up to date?

The task a Nominating Committee faces is complex enough without this. They should be able to take for granted that someone applying for a vacant charge has the necessary understanding and experience to fulfil the role of a Church of Scotland Parish Minister.

That is one of the purposes of the Register of Ministries, and helps explain the role of the Registration of Ministries Committee.

This Committee shares with the rest of the church a concern that many charges are vacant. It wants to assist any Church of Scotland minister not currently serving in a parish, who wants to explore that option. It plays its part by ensuring that when ministers make that transition they have the necessary knowledge, the relevant experience and an understanding of the culture so that their ministry can start well.

In the last 18 months the Committee has considered applications from Church of Scotland ministers who have been serving in a variety of roles. For some, the nature and location of that service means they are ready to make that transition, immediately. The experience of others however, has been very different. The nature of their service, or the location of their ministry, or the life-events they have experienced, means that they are not ready, immediately, to serve as a parish minister. Rarely, if ever, has that simply been the Committee's assessment. These applicants are well aware of some of the gaps and have been wondering how to address them. Through talking with the Committee and using the options available to it, it has always been possible to create a pathway that allows each applicant to address these gaps.

The Committee is still new. Every applicant it meets is helping improve how it works. It is grateful to everyone who has offered feedback. In the coming year it expects to continue refining its ways of working.

Moderator, I present the report and ask the Principal Clerk to move the deliverance.