

Training for and Sustaining Ministry in Rural Settings

Rural Working Group and Ministries Council Frequently Asked Questions

1. Is any help available for finding/providing accommodation for full-time and part-time probationary periods in remote/rural areas?

If a probationer would like a rural experience, but cannot easily access a suitable rural probation placement, support may be given according to individual circumstances. They will be fully supported in the process for setting up a placement and the training officer will help liaise with the supervisors and presbytery to see if accommodation can be found. This is often accomplished through lodging with a congregation member or renting a holiday let owned by a congregation member. Candidates are also encouraged to speak to presbytery about accommodation, as students have been allowed to stay in vacant manses at no cost on occasion; however, as congregations have started letting out manses this is increasingly difficult. It is important to remember that candidates cannot be asked to move house or travel unreasonable distances.

Similarly, many probationers have spouses who work full time and children who are in school, which restricts their ability and/or desire to do full-time probation placements in rural areas. In such cases a six-eight week rural secondment might be preferable.'

2. What are the criteria required for training ministers as supervisors within rural areas?

Each January all Presbyteries are asked to nominate individuals who meet the person specification for a supervisor to be trained. It is made clear that nomination does not mean training will be offered. Once all the nominations are in we gather them together with the names of those untrained the previous year and match them against the location of candidates and people in discernment in order to look for need. We can only train 24 people a year so have to be particular and careful regarding who is invited to training in any year.



“I had past experience supervising a series of enquirers and two probationers in my previous central belt charge and was keen to carry on with training work in my new more rural location. In the last three years I have had two readers in training on their second placements, both of whom are now making a real difference to the work of the church in this area. Training opportunities may vary from time to time, but it's really important that we train people in rural areas as well as urban ones.”

- Rev Richard Baxter, Kilmonivaig, Lochaber

3. Are rural placements offered to candidates-in-training—either full placements or the summer placements?

The learning, development and spiritual formation needs of each individual are the first priority when looking at setting up placements. We aim to ensure all candidates have a breadth of experience, while being realistic regarding their ability to access different placement settings, family commitments and the ongoing discernment of their call. If a candidate is sensing a call to rural or island ministry, we put in additional support to try and make a rural placement possible. Often these individuals will take part in the summer work experience programme, which is offered to all students to encourage rural ministry experience. Each summer presbyteries are contacted to ask if they have any work experience opportunities in a vacant charge, which are then advertised to students. Presbyteries are expected to provide accommodation while the Ministries Council pays for transport to the charge, pays the candidate £200 per week and covers the return travel from the charge. This is unsupervised and has proved to be an excellent experience for those discerning a possible call to rural or island ministry.

“During the summer of 2012, I was locum to the vacant linked charge of Clyne linked with Kildonan and Loth Helmsdale, in Sutherland. I stayed in the manse in Brora, which the congregations had partially furnished for my arrival, including beds in two of the spare rooms, so I could have friends and family visit. I had a glimpse into the reality of living in a manse and being embedded in a rural community. I enjoyed the freedom and responsibility of leading the two congregations in worship and ministering to their pastoral needs in a very different context to that I had experience elsewhere in my training. I also got to know the community well and they got to know me. The experience of

living and working in a rural charge led me to a sense that God was calling me to rural ministry, which is where I have been called.”

- Rev Susan Cord, Killearnan with Knockbain, Ross

4. I live in a remote/rural area and am considering a call to ministry training. What extra challenges should I bear in mind?

Main challenges include access to a wide range of placements, travel expenses and access to studies. We are currently developing off-site supervision which will enable access to a wider range of placement experiences. Candidates on a rural placement can claim for extra support for travel expenses to take the greater distances travelled into account. If a candidate lives over 1 ½ hours from a recognised academic provider they can gain permission to study via distance learning at Highland Theological College — UHI or Aberdeen.

“Studying at Highland Theological College enabled me to stay in my local area, maintaining my job and my involvement in my local church during my degree. It took time to get used to joining classes via videoconference (VC) but the lecturers and students were very good about including those of us in “VC land”. I was able to attend lectures in real time, interacting with lecturers and participating in class discussions. Classes were recorded so I could catch up if I missed a class for any reason. It can be a challenge to study from a distance but the support staff at HTC were excellent about providing resources and answering questions. I and my fellow VC students talked during breaks and kept in touch by email. Regular conference days were great opportunities to meet each other in person, and I could attend classes on campus whenever I was in Dingwall. HTC staff and students have continued to be key supporters and friends since I graduated in 2015.”

- Heather Major, PhD student researching rural mission and ministry

5. What provision is made in the training of new Ministers, OLMs and Deacons for the specific and definitive needs of Rural Ministry?

We train people for ministry in such a way that they are prepared for any ‘type’ of ministry they may be called to by God. Aspects of rural ministry, as all other ministries, are woven into training, which is now taking the form of action set

learning and facilitated discussion. As training is developed, individuals in rural ministries are instrumental in creating a robust programme, which prepares candidates for ministry. If an individual expresses an interest or sense of call to rural ministry then support is put in place for them to gain experience of this before the completion of their training.

“In my training for fulltime ministry in word and sacrament, I worked and lived in a rural area, so placements were in a rural setting. I was not given any specific training in terms of rural ministry and what it entailed through the conference programme, apart from a session from a minister in a rural charge who spoke about how quiet and that there wasn't a lot to do in them! When I was ordained and inducted to my rural charge, I soon discovered that I was required to be 'a trustee' of two village halls - no one ever warned me about these types of anomalies in rural parishes. There was also another trust to which the Parish Minister was connected to so, in my rural charge, there is a lot to do and it is certainly not a quiet life!”

- Rev Sheila W Moir, the Parish Churches of Maxton & Mertoun linked with Newtown linked with St Boswells

6. Is there a facility for candidates who wish to train for ministry from a rural area to be remotely supervised at any point during their training?

This is currently under development.

7. What can congregations do to help, support and retain ministers in rural charges?

Congregations can actively support and encourage their ministers to access the support services offered by Ascend e.g. Ministerial Development Conversations, pastoral supervision and the conferences for ministers in the first five years of ministry.

“It was helpful to discuss my parish context with someone who was distant and didn't know my circumstances. This enabled me to take a fresh look at what I was doing, and how God been leading me, and how He might want me to continue into the future. It was good to consider the initial questions beforehand, and to discuss my answers with the MDC facilitator. It was good



that there was no pressure to answer or conclude in certain ways, yet the facilitator helped me to focus on the key questions that I needed to explore and develop in the coming period. It was helpful to be encouraged to write down specific ongoing actions to be part of the action plan.

“Especially in rural contexts, I think it is helpful to have someone from outside the situation with whom to consider how best we can develop in the future. We can all improve, and sometimes it’s harder for those who know us to ask the penetrating questions that we need to answer. We can become too comfortable with those we know, and not consider as deeply or widely as we would with someone to whom we have to explain everything; someone who can spot the issues we are skirting around. In rural charges we often form strong relationships with others in presbytery. I thoroughly recommend MDC to any minister, and especially those in rural contexts.”

- **Rev Stewart Goudie, North West Lochaber**

8. Are enquirers and candidates informed about the advantages and disadvantages of rural ministry during their training? If so, how is this facilitated?

They are, but this is not explicit, rather it is woven throughout the training provided by the Ministries Council. Where a candidate shows an interest in rural ministry they are encouraged to complete a rural placement or where this is not possible are supported to connect with ministers in rural or island parishes. All are encouraged to apply for summer work experience each year.

“During my time as a Mission Development Officer I got very involved in rural matters. When I became a candidate for the Ministry of Word and Sacrament, transferring from OLM I was keen to spend all if not some of my probation in a rural charge, as previously it had not been something that I had considered. I was able to organise time on an island parish which was an amazing experience. It encouraged and confirmed my call to minister rurally.”

- **Rev Mandy Ralph**

Find more resources for the rural church on the Church of Scotland website:

https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/connect/rural_church