

Church of Scotland

Faith Action Programme Leadership Team

Frequently Asked Questions Guardianships, Sisting of Vacancies, and Continuing Vacancies

Introduction

As the Mission Planning Process is being implemented by the Presbyteries, following the General Assembly of 2021, and the agreement of Mission Plans in most Presbyteries, 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.

2. Does the Presbytery need to prepare a basis of guardianship?

Yes. For the avoidance of doubt, as guardianship is an instrument of adjustment, as per Act 7 2003, as amended, at 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.

3. Do Guardianships continue indefinitely?

Some guardianship will continue indefinitely; others may be of a shorter duration.

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.

6. How can ministry take place in a guardianship?

The ministry in a guardianship can be delivered in different ways; with a locum, a reader or Ordained Local Ministry, or via the ministry within a parish grouping, or via local worship leaders; 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. It is best not to include this within a basis of

guardianship, as any changes would require a series of Kirk Session and Congregational Votes.

7. 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.

8. Guardianship Allowance

- 9.** *A congregation in guardianship will receive a guardianship allowance equivalent to 0.25 FTE, to be counted against the Presbytery's allocation of ministries. This is a sum equivalent to the standard vacancy allowance.*