

Presbyterian Church of Australia  
in the State of New South Wales

**GUIDELINES**

CANDIDATES FOR THE MINISTRY  
DEACONESS CANDIDATES

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Produced by the Theological Education Committee  
of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia  
in the State of New South Wales  
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Relevant Sections may be copied for use by Sessions, Presbyteries, Candidates and Applicants.  
Revisions will be sent to Clerks of Presbyteries, who are encouraged to keep this document up-to-date.

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## **1.1 CHURCH MEMBERSHIP**

Candidature for the ministry of the Presbyterian Church of Australia is open only to men who are members of the Church in good standing, and who have had their name on the Communicants Roll of a particular congregation for at least six months. Deaconess candidature is open to women of 21 years of age and older who have been members for at least six months.

## **1.2 CHURCH ACTIVITIES AND OFFICES**

It would normally be expected that a candidate would have a record of service within and without the congregation in which he or she holds membership. This service may have been in one or more of the following areas:

- # preaching and the conduct of public worship
- # public speaking
- # youth leadership in the Sunday School, Presbyterian Youth, etc.
- # membership of the Church Session
- # membership of the Committee of Management
- # activity in organisations such as Gideons International, Bible Society, Scripture Union
- # other areas of church activity which would have involved organising and administrative ability and the use of inter-personal skills.

## **1.3 CHARACTER**

It is important that candidates be persons of good character, held in high esteem both in the church and in the community. Traits of character that would normally be expected are as follows:

- # honesty with a high level of integrity
- # reliability
- # friendliness with an ability to relate to people
- # firmness of opinion without being arrogant or overbearing
- # ability to value and listen to other opinions, to seek and receive advice
- # ability to work as part of a team.

A written (sealed) reference from your present employer (if applicable) will be considered as part of your assessment as a candidate, and, in addition, the names and telephone numbers of three (3) referees must be provided.

## **1.4 SCRIPTURAL KNOWLEDGE**

A candidate could usually be expected to have a sound Scriptural knowledge, as the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God and the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy God. You should be informed and able to answer questions on the basis of the Scriptures on such matters as:

- # the Resurrection and Ascension of our Lord
- # Atonement
- # Propitiation and Forgiveness
- # Justification
- # Grace

- # the work of the Holy Spirit
- # the Person of Christ, His life, death and ministry
- # the Church
- # the Apostles Creed
- # the Westminster Confession of Faith

Examples of the sorts of suggested questions you may be asked relating to the above subjects are contained in Pro Forma 4.2

### **1.5 YOUR CALL**

The personal conviction that God has called the candidate to the ministry of the Word and sacraments or deaconess service is important. The call of God should be paramount in any consideration of a future in ministry. If the candidate is married or engaged, it is of great importance just how the candidate's spouse/fiance(e) appreciates and participates in the candidate's conviction of call. It should be recognised that a call to ministry is not primarily a subjective or mystical thing. Rather a call to ministry is something that will be demonstrated in many ways by ministry within the congregation prior to a formal application for candidature. A call to ministry is something that can be verified, not just by a person's heartfelt desire, but by observation of qualities, including those listed in 1 Timothy 3. A candidate is to expect to be asked intimate questions about this call in the normal testing and assessment of the candidature by the Session and Presbytery. The candidate would be expected to be able, given the personal nature of a call of God, to make rational and coherent explanations about the call.

### **1.6 PRACTICAL ISSUES**

There are practical issues which concern a candidate's material welfare and which must receive careful, realistic consideration. Some of these issues are as follows:

- # the candidate's health should be reasonably robust and a medical report from a qualified medical practitioner will be required;
- # the candidate's plans for financing himself or herself during the course, especially in the case of married candidates. Sources of funds which may be available are:
  1. personal savings, assets and vacation employment
  2. bursaries provided through the Theological Education Committee
  3. the candidate's family, home church and Presbytery
  4. a spouse's gainful employment as far as possible, in the case of a married candidate
  5. income from a Field Education Scheme appointment, a Home Mission appointment, AUSTUDY or other Government sources.
- # arrangements for the care and education of older dependent children who may have to remain elsewhere to continue studies or apprenticeships.

### **1.7 PROCEDURES**

The following steps are seen as the normal procedures for a member when making an application for training to be a minister of Word and sacraments of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, or a deaconess:

1. Discussion with the minister of the congregation in which you have your membership.
2. Completion of the appropriate application form (Pro Forma 4.3.1 and 4.3.2 of these *Guidelines*), and giving it to your Session Clerk. This application should be submitted as

- early as possible prior to your proposed entry to the Theological Centre, thus ensuring adequate time for processing and a period of probation. Note that it is difficult to process applications in less than four months.
3. Interview by the Session, (note a sealed reference letter from your present employer should be brought to the interview) — see 1.3.
  4. If the Session is supportive, you will be required to submit to the Session Clerk -
    - i. a completed Application Form - see Pro Forma 4.3.1. and 4.3.2
    - ii. a recent Medical Examination Report, completed by a qualified medical practitioner - see Pro Forma 4 5.
    - iii. two typed 1000 word essays, as detailed on the application form (an evaluation of three books and an essay on the work of God in your life.
  5. The Session Clerk will forward the necessary paperwork to the Clerk of the Presbytery, who, in turn, will pass it to the convenor of the Presbytery's Candidature Committee.
  6. The convenor of the Candidature Committee will contact you and arrange a mutually acceptable time for you to be interviewed by the Committee.
  7. Following submission of the reports of the Committee to Presbytery, the Presbytery may (but will not necessarily) interview you, and, if it chooses, your spouse where applicable.
  8. If the Presbytery is supportive and approves your application by a three/fifths majority, all necessary documentation will be forwarded to the secretary, Theological Education Committee of the N.S.W. Assembly, who will contact you in due course, and arrange for further action regarding your training.

### **1.8 PROCEDURE IN THE EVENT OF NON-ACCEPTANCE.**

If, following interview, the Session does not approve your application, you may:

- # ask the Session Clerk or Minister to arrange post-interview counselling
- # ask that the application be forwarded to Presbytery for their review and decision.

The Presbytery may or may not accept the application for review. If Presbytery reviews the application and does not approve, the matter is at an end.

If the Session approves, but the Presbytery does not approve, then you may ask the convenor of the Presbytery Candidature Committee to arrange post-interview counselling. The matter is then at an end.

### **1.9 TRAINING**

The normal procedure for N.S.W. candidates is for training to be undertaken at the:

#### **Presbyterian Theological Centre**

77 Shaftesbury Road

BURWOOD NSW 2134

Phone: 02 - 9744 1977

Fax: 02 - 9744 5970

Email: [adminptc@ptcsydney.org](mailto:adminptc@ptcsydney.org)

Enquires regarding training in an alternative theological college, e.g. in Victoria or Queensland, should be discussed first with the Principal of the N.S.W. Presbyterian Theological Centre. The implications of training in an alternative college should be carefully considered before departing from the normal procedure.

The requirements of the course at the P.T.C. should be obtained directly from the Registrar of the Centre, who will take into account your academic qualifications and educational standard.

You should be aware that the first year of your candidature in particular is subject to an intensive review from the PTC Faculty and from the Theological Education Committee Assessors, who will submit a report to your Presbytery.

You may, at your own request in writing to the Clerk of the Presbytery, withdraw from candidature.

The Presbytery may, for sufficient reasons and by a simple majority, terminate your candidature. It should notify you in writing of such proposed action and of the reasons for it.

### **1.10 COMPLETION OF TRAINING — CANDIDATES FOR THE MINISTRY**

When a candidate for the ministry has fulfilled the requirements for entry to the final year of the course, he is to advise the P.T.C. of his intention to apply to a particular presbytery to be taken on trials for license. He should then make the application, either to the presbytery which initially accepted him as a candidate, or the presbytery under whose jurisdiction he will be in the final year of training. Following such application, the Presbytery may proceed to take the candidate on trials and when all requirements have been satisfactorily fulfilled, proceeds to license the candidate.

A licentiate is usually directed to an appointment by the Ministry and Mission Committee and becomes eligible for a call.

These *Guidelines* are simply that: guidelines. They are not a requirement and do not have the weight of the Code or Regulations. They are, on the other hand, presented as suggestions that can be relied upon to serve a Session well in a situation which may not occur very frequently in many parishes.

### **2.1 ENCOURAGEMENT TO MEMBERS**

Being established in the local congregation, the Session is well-equipped for the vital task of screening and assessing prospective candidates for the ministry who are members of that congregation. In general, Sessions should be encouraging all members of their congregations to discover and develop their God-given gifts for ministry of some description within and without the local church. When members exhibit gifts of spiritual leadership and service, it may be very appropriate for the Session to give encouragement and to suggest that they consider the matter of ministry (pastoral or diaconal) in a careful and prayerful way.

### **2.2 APPLICATION PAPERWORK**

When a member makes enquires of the Session regarding candidature, the Session Clerk or Minister should give him a copy of Chapter 7 of The Code, and a copy of Section 1 of these *Guidelines* so that he or she will have an understanding of the stages through which candidates pass as they move through training to licensing and ordination or commissioning.

With continued interest and inquiry by the member:

1. The member should be encouraged to obtain for him a copy of the folder containing the relevant Application Form (Pro Forma 4.3.1 and 4.3.2). It is important that this be obtained directly from the Presbyterian Theological Centre.
2. The candidate should complete the prescribed form and return it to the Session Clerk.

### **2.3 ASSESSMENT OF CANDIDATE**

Despite the large amount of knowledge which the Session may have concerning the member's standing in the community and congregation, it would normally be expected that the Session would formally interview the candidate to make its assessment of suitability. It would not be unusual for the Session to meet with the candidate on additional occasions and the assessment process should normally take some period of time. As a guide, the Session may be well advised to resolve to support the candidate's application by the same three/fifths majority that governs the Presbytery.

In the assessment process, the Session should satisfy itself on the following matters:

1. the Christian character and convictions of the candidate, and of his spouse, if married
2. the Christian ordering of their home and family life
3. the candidate's length of membership in the Presbyterian Church. The regulations require at least 6 months membership but a longer period of say two years minimum is more desirable for satisfactory assessment
4. the candidate's history of service within the church, and the outcomes in terms of church growth and development that have resulted from such service.
5. the gifts which the candidate may possess including
  - # preaching and/or public speaking
  - # leadership skills
  - # people skills and general standing in the congregation
  - # management skills
  - # emotional (of self) control
6. the applicant's sense of divine call to the work of ministry
7. practical aspects bearing on the applicant:
  - # home and family background and circumstances
  - # standing and good reputation in the community at large
  - # present health
  - # financial circumstances
  - # work adjustments that may be necessary

### **2.4 ACTION FOLLOWING ASSESSMENT**

If the Session does not wish to support the member's application, the member should be informed as soon as possible. If the member so desires, a further meeting with the Session can be arranged during which the grounds of the Session's non-support may be supplied. The Session is to be prayerful and compassionate throughout such proceedings so that the member is not unduly discouraged but positively encouraged to explore further avenues of service.

When the Session does not support the member's application, it should notify Presbytery of the application received and of Session's subsequent action. If the Session resolves to support the member's application for candidature the resolution should be minuted in the Session minutes.

The Session Clerk should then send to the Presbytery Clerk the following documentation in the folder obtained from the P.T.C.:

- 1) Letter of application by the candidate (original)
- 2) Confidential Personal Report by Session
- 3) The originals of
  - i) Application Form
  - ii) recent Medical Examination Report
  - iii) two 1,000 word essays (see questions 26 and 30 on the Application Form.)

## 2.5 PRAYERFULNESS OF SESSION

Session should pray for, support, and encourage members of their congregations who are in training, or whom they believe God wants to call to consider training. Session should take an active interest in the allocations of funds from the Outreach Budget of the Church to provide financial assistance to the candidate. Such assistance also provides encouragement to the candidate, out of all proportion to the amount involved.

These *Guidelines* are simply that: guidelines. They are not a requirement and do not have the weight of the Code or Regulations. They are, on the other hand, presented as suggestions that can be relied upon to serve a Presbytery well.

## 3.1 ESTABLISHMENT OF CANDIDATURE COMMITTEE

Presbyteries normally establish a Presbytery Candidature Committee. Even while there are no applications to consider and no candidates to oversee, there is a continuing role for such a committee to help raise the awareness amongst the congregations of the need to have members consider a call to ministry.

The functions of such a Candidature Committee would be:

1. taking a primary role in contact with applicants for the ministry; making arrangements for preaching assessment appointments; undertaking the interview of candidates; and making recommendations to Presbytery (see 3.4 below).
2. undertaking post-interview counselling, as required
3. maintaining an ongoing role of liaison with candidates in training
4. taking opportunities to promote candidature for the ministry and deaconess candidature to men and women within the Presbytery. This may involve arranging communications between congregations and the Theological Centre by having members of the faculty or students visit the Presbytery for preaching and/or teaching seminars.

## 3.2 MAINTENANCE OF SUPPLY OF PRO FORMAS

It is helpful if copies of the pro formas listed in Section 4 are maintained for the information of members of Presbytery. However, applicants must be directed to obtain the application form directly from the P.T.C. This comes in a folder which is to be maintained by the Presbytery and forwarded to any subsequent Presbytery to which the candidate may be transferred.

## 3.3 DOCUMENTATION

In order for the candidate to be assessed by Presbytery, it will be useful if all the documents below have been lodged with the Presbytery in the folder obtained from the P.T.C:

1. completed Application Form

2. confidential personal report by Session and extract minute
3. candidate's letter of application (original)
4. recent medical examination report
5. candidate's two 1,000 word essays; one a review of three books, and the other on the work of God in the applicant's life.

### **3.4 INTERVIEW OF CANDIDATE**

The candidate would normally be interviewed by the Candidature Committee (if there is one). The points on which the Committee could usually be expected to draw firm conclusions in its assessment of the candidate are as follows:

1. the candidate's Christian character and conviction and sense of divine call
2. satisfactory length of membership in, and strength of service to, the Presbyterian Church
3. basic Biblical knowledge and understanding
4. aptitude for preaching and public speaking
5. capacity for making acceptable contact with people
6. conduct of himself or herself during the interview, and ability to answer questions clearly
7. plans for financing himself or herself during the course of study, especially in the case of married applicants
8. general health, including a medical report from a qualified medical practitioner.

A menu of carefully designed possible questions for the Interview is included in Section 4.2 - Pro Formas. The Menu is not intended to be complete but to provide a range of questions on the points for assessment.

At the discretion of the Candidature Committee, the spouse of the candidate could be interviewed regarding:

- a) commitment to the Christian faith
- b) support of the candidate
- c) willingness to take part as a member of any church the candidate may minister in.

The Committee should bear in mind the seriousness of the recommendation it is required to make to Presbytery about the suitability of the candidate for training for ministry and its bearing on the welfare of the candidate and the whole church and exercise due care in its deliberations. The Committee may, at its discretion, choose to engage a practising Christian psychologist to conduct a psychological assessment of the candidate, the cost to be borne by either the candidate, the Presbytery, or a combination of both. The Committee is urged not to proceed with undue haste at this stage as it prayerfully works its way through the interview process.

As part of the interview process, the Committee may require the candidate to conduct a service or preach a sermon at a nominated church. In this case, the Presbytery could be notified of its actions so that as many of its members as possible may avail themselves of this opportunity to hear the candidate.

Following the interview process, the Committee needs to report to Presbytery. Presbytery will then usually come to a decision on whether the applicant should proceed to training or not. Of course, Presbytery itself may wish to interview the applicant. When advising the date for the Presbytery interview, it is also proper for the applicant to be informed of those points on which further elucidation is required.

### **3.5 ACTION SUBSEQUENT TO INTERVIEW**

If Presbytery decides to proceed no further at this stage, the applicant is usually notified in writing together with reasons for Presbytery's decision. If he or she so desires, the candidate may approach the convener of the Candidature Committee for post-interview counselling, which the convener would then arrange as a Committee activity.

If Presbytery decides to approve the application the candidate should be advised immediately in writing. The secretary of the Theological Education Committee is to be advised of the decision and a copy of all documentation in the candidate's folder is to be forwarded to the T.E.C., including:

1. completed application form and essays
2. confidential personal report by Session
3. recent medical examination report
4. extract minute from the candidate's Session
5. confidential preaching assessment by Candidature Committee
6. confidential personal report by Candidature Committee and/or Presbytery.

### **3.6 CONTINUING PASTORAL CARE**

It is important for Presbytery to maintain continuing pastoral care of the candidate. Ways listed below could be explored and, as appropriate, followed:

1. prayer by Presbytery
2. letters of encouragement and support from the Candidature Committee
3. the reception and circulation to interested parties of the candidate's annual report from the Theological Education Committee
4. the Candidature Committee to avail itself of the opportunities presented by the candidate's vacations to meet with the candidate, to enquire of his progress and to encourage him in his studies
5. encouragement of Sessions to offer vacation preaching supply and accommodation to the candidate.

### **3.7 TRIALS FOR LICENCE**

Code 7.05 make provision for a candidate for the ministry who is qualified to enter the final year of the course of training to apply to a presbytery to be taken on trials for licence. This may be the presbytery which initially accepted the candidate, or the presbytery currently having jurisdiction.

“The trials shall be of the following nature:

- a) The conduct of an ordinary service of worship on a Sunday, in the presence of a minister and elder appointed by the Presbytery or its Committee, who shall confer with the candidate and shall report to the Presbytery or its committee; and
- b) An oral examination, in private, on the doctrine, practice and procedure of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, with special reference to the courts of the Church and the organisation of the congregation and also to the doctrine of the Church and Sacraments as dealt with in chapters xxv, xxvii, xxix of the Westminster Confession of Faith; and,

- c) A conference with the Presbytery, or its Committee, on the aims and methods of the Christian Ministry”.

Following the receipt of a satisfactory report on the manner of the conduct of a) above, the following oral Questions 1 and 2 could be asked, in private, by the Presbytery (or its Committee).

1. Have you attended any Congregation, Session, Presbytery and/or Assembly meetings? Please tell us about your impression of how those meetings were conducted. Did they meet your own expectations of what a congregation/ Session/ Presbytery/ Assembly meeting should be like? How familiar are you with the Code? Do you think the Code will be a help or hindrance to your ministry?
2. What are the main points of doctrine that you see as being distinctive to the Presbyterian Church of Australia? Please explain your understanding of the doctrine of the Church and Sacraments, particularly as that may relate to the relevant chapters in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

What are the main points of the practice and procedure of the Presbyterian Church of Australia as you see them? Do you have any particular opinions about how a congregation should be governed and/or organised?

As noted above, the Code requires that a conference, involving the candidate and the Presbytery (or its Committee), about the aims and methods of the Christian ministry, should be conducted. This conference may be as much for the benefit of the candidate as for the information of the presbyters. It may also best be conducted in an open-ended and unstructured manner, allowing for liberty of expression and opinion on these matters.

The following Pro Formas are included on the following pages

- 4.1 Confidential Personal Report by Session
- 4.2 Menu of possible questions for Interview
- 4.3.1 Application Form for Candidates for the Ministry
- 4.3.2 Deaconess Application Form
- 4.4 Authority to release Medical Information
- 4.5 Medical Examination Report on Candidate
- 4.6 Preaching Report by Candidature Committee
- 4.7 Confidential Interview Report by Candidature Committee/Presbytery as a Whole