



Presbyterian Church of Australia
in the State of New South Wales

APPLICATION GUIDELINES

for

**CANDIDATES FOR THE MINISTRY
& DEACONESS CANDIDATES**

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Produced by the Presbyterian Theological College Committee
of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia
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PREAMBLE

Being established in the local congregation, the Session is well-equipped for the vital task of screening and assessing prospective Candidates for the Ministry and Deaconess Candidates. In general, Sessions should be encouraging all members of their congregations to discover and develop their God-given gifts for ministry of some description inside and outside the local church. When members exhibit gifts of spiritual leadership and service, it may be very appropriate for the Session to encourage them to consider Candidacy in a careful and prayerful way.

Relevant Sections of these Guidelines may be copied for use by Sessions, Presbyteries, Candidates and Applicants.

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 pastoral charges.

For any questions regarding the content of this document, please address them to principal@christcollege.edu.au.

SECTION 1: APPLICANT/CANDIDATE

1.1 CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Candidature for the Ministry of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in the State of New South Wales (PCNSW) is open only to men who are members of the Church, are 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 a Communicant member for at least six months.

1.2 CHURCH ACTIVITIES AND OFFICES

It would normally be expected that an Applicant would have a record of service within and beyond 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
- # ministry to children and youth
- # membership of the Church Session
- # membership of the Committee of Management
- # other areas of church activity which involves the use of organisational, administrative and/or inter-personal skills
- # involvement in committees of the denomination (e.g. Presbyterian Youth, Jericho Road, Gospel, Society & Culture, Australian Presbyterian World Mission, METRO, Presbyterian Womens' Association)
- # activity in parachurch organisations

1.3 CHARACTER

It is important that Applicants be persons of good character as outlined in the Scriptures, and held in high esteem both in the church and in the community. Traits of character that would normally be expected are as follows, but are not limited to:

- # 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
- # respect for all people as made in the image of God
- # motivation and initiative out of a love for God and His mission

A confidential reference from the Applicant's present employer (if applicable) will be considered as part of the assessment as a Candidate, and, in addition, the names and contact details of four (4) referees must be provided. One of these should be the minister of the Applicant's congregation.

1.4 SCRIPTURAL KNOWLEDGE

An Applicant 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 in how we may glorify and enjoy God. He or she 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

1.5 CALL TO MINISTRY

The personal conviction that God has called the Applicant to the ministry of the Word and sacraments, or service as a Deaconess should be considered. If the Applicant is married or engaged, it is of great importance just how the Applicant's spouse/fiancé(e) appreciates and shares in the Applicant's conviction. It should be recognised that a call to ministry is not defined here as a subjective or mystical thing, but rather is demonstrated in many ways by ministry done prior to a formal application for candidature. A call to ministry can be verified, not just by a person's heartfelt desire, but by observation of qualities, including those listed in 1 Timothy 3. An Applicant is to expect to be asked questions about this call in the normal testing and assessment of the candidature by the Session and Presbytery. The Applicant would be expected to be able to make rational and coherent explanations about their call.

1.6 PRACTICAL ISSUES

There are practical issues which concern an Applicant's material welfare and which must receive careful, realistic consideration. Some of these issues include, but are not limited to:

- # the Applicant's physical and mental health
- # the Applicant's finances and source(s) of income during the application process
- # the Applicant's citizenship/visa status
- # arrangements for the care of children and any relatives

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 the Word and sacraments in the Presbyterian Church of Australia, or to be a Deaconess:

1. Discussion with the minister of the congregation in which the Applicant has his or her membership.
2. Completion of the appropriate application form (found on the Christ College website www.christcollege.edu.au), to be received by the Applicant's Session Clerk. This application should be submitted as early as possible prior to the Applicant's proposed entry to Christ College, thus ensuring adequate time for processing and a period of probation. Applicants should expect that this process will take between six months to one year.
3. Interview by the Session.
4. The Session Clerk will forward the application form together with any accompanying paperwork to the Clerk of the Presbytery, who, in turn, will pass it to the secretary of the Candidates' Review Panel (CRP) (crp@christcollege.edu.au).
5. The secretary of the Candidates' Review Panel (CRP) will organise a psychological assessment of the Applicant and arrange a mutually acceptable time for them to be interviewed by the Candidates' Review Panel subsequent to the psychological assessment.
6. Following submission of the report of the Candidates' Review Panel to Presbytery, the Presbytery will interview the Applicant, and, if it chooses, their spouse (where applicable). This may be done through a Student Committee of that Presbytery, and/or at a Presbytery meeting.
7. If the Presbytery is supportive and approves the application by a three/fifths majority, the presbytery clerk notifies the principal of Christ College (principal@christcollege.edu.au) with all necessary documentation.

1.8 PROCEDURE IN THE EVENT OF NON-ACCEPTANCE

If, following the interview, the Session does not approve the application, the Applicant 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, the Applicant may ask the secretary of the Candidates' Review Panel to arrange post-interview counselling. The matter is then at an end.

1.9 TRAINING

Training for Candidates in the PCNSW is to be undertaken at Christ College, Sydney. Once someone is accepted as a Candidate, they must commence their study at Christ College. The requirements of the course at Christ College should be obtained directly from the Academic Registrar, (registrar@christcollege.edu.au) who will take into account previous academic qualifications and the Candidate's educational standard. The first year is provisional, see Code 7.05.

The Candidate may, at their own request in writing to the Clerk of the Presbytery, withdraw from candidature. This information will then be passed to the relevant parties.

The Presbytery may, for sufficient reasons and by a simple majority, terminate a Candidate's candidature. It should notify the Candidate 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 Christ College of his intention to apply to a particular Presbytery for Trials for License. He should then make this 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 the application, the Presbytery may proceed to take the Candidate on trials and when all requirements have been satisfactorily fulfilled, proceed to license the Candidate as a Licentiate.

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

SECTION 2: SESSION

2.1 APPLICATION PAPERWORK

When a member enquires of the Session regarding candidature, the Session Clerk or Minister should give them the most recent copy of Chapter 7 of The Code ('Candidates for the Ministry'), and a copy of Section 1 of these *Guidelines*. This is 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/commissioning.

With continued interest and inquiry by an individual:

1. The individual should be encouraged to obtain the relevant Application Form from the Christ College website (www.christcollege.edu.au).
2. The individual should complete the form and return it to the Session Clerk.

2.2 ASSESSMENT OF APPLICANT

Despite the large amount of knowledge which the Session may have concerning the Applicant's standing in the community and congregation, it would normally be expected that the Session would formally interview the Applicant to make its assessment of suitability. It would not be unusual for the Session to meet with the Applicant on additional occasions. As a guide, the Session may be well advised to resolve to support the Applicant 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 Applicant (and of their spouse, if married)
2. the Christian ordering of their home and family life
3. the Applicant's length of membership in the Presbyterian Church of Australia
4. the Applicant's history of service within their church, and the outcomes in terms of church growth and development that have resulted from such service
5. the gifts which the Applicant 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

2.3 ACTION FOLLOWING ASSESSMENT

If the Session does not wish to support the individual's application, the Applicant should be informed as soon as possible. If the Applicant 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 Applicant is not unduly discouraged but positively encouraged to explore further avenues of service.

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

The Session Clerk should then send to the Presbytery Clerk the Application Form together with supporting documents as outlined on the form and a confidential report by the Session.

2.4 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, and other forms of support, provides encouragement to the Candidate.

SECTION 3: PRESBYTERY

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.

3.2 INTERVIEW OF APPLICANT

The Applicant will normally be interviewed by the Presbytery 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 Applicant are as follows:

1. the Applicant'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 Training, especially in the case of married Applicants
8. general health.

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

- a) commitment to the Christian faith
- b) support of the Applicant
- c) interest and/or participation in the ministry context in which the Applicant is involved.
- d) any other concerns or doubts regarding the Applicant.

The Committee should bear in mind the seriousness of the recommendation it is required to make to Presbytery about the suitability of the Applicant and its bearing on the welfare of the Applicant and the whole church. They should exercise due care in their deliberations. The Committee is urged not to proceed with undue haste at this stage as it prayerfully works its way through the interview process. The Committee should pay close attention to the report from the Candidates' Review Panel (see above).

As part of the interview process, the Committee may require male Applicants 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 Applicant.

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 should interview the Applicant.

3.3 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 Applicant may approach the Convener of the Presbytery Candidature Committee for post-interview counselling, which the Convener would then arrange as a Committee activity.

If Presbytery decides to approve the application, the Applicant becomes a Candidate. They should be advised immediately in writing. The principal of Christ College should also be notified (principal@christcollege.edu.au).

3.4 CONTINUING PASTORAL CARE

It is important for Presbytery to maintain continuing pastoral care of the Candidate. This may include, but is not limited to:

1. prayer by members of Presbytery
2. letters of encouragement and support from the Presbytery Candidature Committee
3. the reception and circulation of the Candidate's annual report from the Presbyterian Theological Centre Committee to relevant parties
4. meetings with the Candidature Committee to enquire of the Candidate's progress and to encourage the Candidate in their studies
5. encouragement of Sessions to offer vacation preaching supply and accommodation to the Candidate.

3.5 TRIALS FOR LICENCE (CANDIDATES FOR THE MINISTRY ONLY)

After successfully completing their final year of the Course of Training, a Candidate for the Ministry will receive their Exit Certificate from the College Committee of the General Assembly of Australia.

Section 7.10 of The Code ('Trials') makes provisions for the Candidate for the Ministry to apply for Trials for License in their designated Presbytery. 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 on the doctrine, practice and procedure of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, with special reference to the courts of the Church, 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, A conference with the Presbytery, or its Committee, on the aims and methods of the Christian Ministry.