Handbook for Appointing Baptist Ministers in Scotland

baptist union of scotland

1. Introduction

This handbook is for churches who are seeking a new minister and ministers who are seeking a new church. It sets out the usual ways this happens and the support the Baptist Union of Scotland provides.

Churches may be looking for a minister for several reasons. Often it is because a previous minister has left, or announced they will be leaving. In some cases it may be that a church is appointing a minister for the first time, or for the first time in many years after a period without a minister. Or it may be that a church is appointing an additional minister to work alongside the current minister(s).

Ministers may be looking for a church because they have been serving a church for some time and now feel the Lord is leading them to move on to a new ministry. Some will be looking to begin in ministry with their first local church appointment. Others may have previous experience of local church ministry but have been serving in other contexts and now sense a call back to the local church.

In each case it is ultimately the responsibility of the members of a local church to discern together that the Lord is leading them to invite a particular person to serve as minister. It is then for that person to respond to the call of the local church with the confidence that they too are being led by the Spirit. The challenge is how to reach this point with openness to God and spiritual wisdom. This handbook offers a series of steps that reflect the wisdom that has been gained over many decades by Baptist churches and ministers.

2. Prayer is an essential starting point

The aim of both the church and minister is to discern the mind of Christ. It is not a question of the church finding the candidate who looks most qualified or most attractive to them; the goal is for minister and church to be confident they are aligning themselves with the will of God. This cannot happen without committed prayer. The experience of the church in Antioch sets a pattern for us:

> *While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:2-3)*

The first responsibility of a church seeking a minister is to decide how they will pray for the Holy Spirit to lead them. It might be to hold a season of prayer and fasting, or a

special prayer gathering, or establish a regular prayer time focused on this. It will be natural that the search for a minister is a regular feature in intercessory prayer in Sunday worship and in church prayer meetings and small groups. Cultivating a shared dependency on God and an expectation that he will speak to the church is vital.

Similarly, ministers seeking a church will bring this into their own spiritual disciplines, making it a consistent matter for prayer and being attentive to words from God about this in their regular scripture reading. Some will invite a mentor or soul friend to become prayer partners for this season of seeking God for the future.

3. Interim Support for the Church – Appointing a Moderator

Churches often find it helpful to invite someone from outwith the church who has relevant ministry experience to offer a level support during the time they are seeking a minister. This person is often called a Moderator. The Moderator is typically a retired Baptist minister or the minister of a nearby Baptist church who is able to offer some time to the church.

There is no set role for a Moderator. In some cases the Moderator will just serve as an adviser to the group leading the search for a minister. In other cases the Moderator will become deeply involved in the church, preaching regularly, chairing leadership meetings and church meetings and providing some pastoral support. The chart below shows some possible models for the Moderator role.

Advises search group, or is invited to chair search group.	Chairs church meetings and leadership meetings. Occasionally preaches.	Chairs meetings and preaches monthly.	Preaches at least monthly, conducts funerals and helps with difficult pastoral needs	Preaches often, chairs meetings, regular involvement in pastoral visiting.

Churches often invite someone who is already known to them as a Moderator. The Baptist Union National Team or the BUS Regional Pastor can give advice on this appointment if needed. It is important for a church to agree with a Moderator what the scope of their role will be.

4. Who leads the search?

The constitutional documents of a church may set out a process for appointing a minister. It is important to check this at an early stage and to adhere to these requirements. Often a constitution will only specify the percentage of votes necessary in a church meeting to appoint a minister. In this case the church can devise its own process. What follows in this document is intended to assist in that process.

The search for a new minister can be time-consuming. It involves seeking, contacting and meeting with candidates; then considering their suitability and beginning to discern if they might be right for your church; and finally presenting a proposal to a church meeting. The church leadership team may take responsibility for this process, though it is more usual for a church to appoint a Search Group. This relieves pressure on the leadership team, who may already find they have increased responsibilities during a period when the church does not have a minister. More importantly, a Search Team may represent a broader range of the church family and include some people with experience or wisdom especially appropriate to the task.

Usually the church members are invited to suggest names for the Search Group. The leadership team then draws on these names (including any they may have suggested themselves) to propose an appropriate group to the church meeting. This will likely include a mix of ages, experiences, participants in different ministries of the church, etc. It is important that some members of the leadership team are also on the Search Group. The church meeting is then invited to agree to the composition of the Search Group as a whole rather than voting on individual members.

At this stage the church meeting should also be clear about the remit of the Search group. Normally it would be to lead the search for a new minister up to the point of presenting a candidate to the church meeting. This would involve creating a church profile, seeking candidates, meeting with them, when appropriate inviting them to visit the church to preach and to meet the congregation. If a candidate is presented to the church meeting but not appointed (either because insufficient members vote in favour or because the minister declines the invitation), it is the responsibility of the Search Group to continue seeking a minister.

5. Preparing a Church Profile

The first task of a Search Group is to prepare a written description of the church, designed to give potential ministers a clear picture of the church and the kind of minster it is seeking. This is usually called a Church Profile. A profile will typically address these questions:

a. *Who are we?* A short description of the church, usually including something about the life and values of the church, brief history, membership and attendance, ministries of the church, leadership structure, geographical location, etc.
b. *Where we are heading?* What are the hopes and vision of the church? What are our strengths and our challenges? What has been happening recently?

c. *What are we looking for in a new minister?* A general description of the person and the role. Is there any particular experience, strengths or qualities we would especially value?
d. *Ministry practicalities?* Is it a full-time post? Is there a manse or housing allowance? Do you require the minister to be accredited, or otherwise to pursue BUS accreditation if appointed? Also, if the church holds a complementarian theology and therefore would only seek male candidates, it is helpful to state this.

6. Preparing a Minister's Profile

Ministers seeking a new appointment are encouraged to complete a profile which they can send to any churches they wish to consider them as candidates. Using the standard outline helps ministers to ensure the key areas of interest to a church are covered and it enables Search Groups to compare candidates' profiles more readily. Usually churches would ask a minister for a profile rather than a letter of application.

The standard outline for a Minister's Profile can be found in Appendix 1.

7. Connecting ministers and churches

There are several ways of connecting with potential candidates.

a. The Baptist Union of Scotland will put your profile on the 'Ministry Opportunities' area of the BUS website. All BUS ministers are made aware that vacancies are advertised here and any other people visiting the website or searching for ministry opportunities may also see this. *Churches should use the proforma in Appendix 2 to submit their web-posting to BUS*.
b. Ministry opportunities that appear on the BUS website will also be listed by the Baptist Union of Great Britain (covering England and Wales). They will appear in a password-protected area of their website to which BUGB ministers have access.
c. The Search Group may know ministers, or receive suggestions of potential candidates from church members, whom they choose to approach directly. Typically they might contact them and ask if they would be willing to receive the church profile and give it prayerful consideration.
d. The BUS National Team will be aware that you are seeking a new minister and may suggest to particular ministers that they consider your profile.
e. In some cases there may be a candidate within your church who either has appropriate training and experience or who might be suitable to become a trainee minister based in your church whilst undertaking part-time training at the Scottish Baptist College or another training institution.

f. You may decide to advertise on Christian recruitment sites. This will give you access to a wider audience, though experience has shown that churches receive a high number of unsuitable and unqualified candidates if they take this route.

8. The Importance of Accreditation

Baptist churches have long recognised that one of the things we do well together is to accredit ministers at a national level. The BUS Board of Ministry (a panel of about 20 people appointed by the BUS Council) facilitates a thorough process of discernment which tests the call, character, competence, training and experience of applicants. If they are then accepted for accredited ministry they agree to abide by the Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Ministers and the Ministry Agreement (which includes a commitment to personal spiritual development, continuing ministry development and supportive fellowship with colleagues). Following this they complete a three-year pre-accredited period in ministry before becoming fully accredited.

Given the high level of trust that is given to a minister, in the church and beyond, we have recognised that this thorough testing of call, character and equipping is extremely wise. In our Baptist way of being church it is of course possible for a local church to appoint anyone they believe is right, regardless of accreditation. However, together we have come to recognise that accreditation is extremely desirable:

a. For the well-being of the local church, who need to be sure that due diligence has been observed in the appointment of someone to the trusted office of minister
b. For the well-being of the minister, who needs the assurance that others have tested their call and provided a secure framework of support and accountability
c. For the well-being of the wider community, who will assume that someone who presents as a 'Baptist minister' in, for example, a hospital or school will have met a national standard to become a minister and be accountable to a validating body.

For this reason the Baptist Union of Scotland strongly recommends that when appointing a minister churches appoint someone who is on the BUS list of accredited ministers. If this is not already the case then churches are strongly encouraged to make it a condition of the appointment that a person should apply for accreditation and (assuming they are accepted) fulfil the requirements of the accreditation process.

Normally people seek accreditation when they begin as a minister. However, a church may be considering a candidate for ministry who has served other churches, perhaps outside of the Baptist network, for some years and gained considerable experience. It is

still entirely appropriate to ask such a person to pursue accreditation; the benefit of the discernment of the Board of Ministry and the support and accountability of the accreditation process has proved immensely beneficial for ministers at all stages of experience.

The Baptist Union of Scotland maintains a list of accredited ministers. If a church is uncertain whether a candidate is on the list, they can contact the Baptist Union. Further information about accredited Baptist ministry can be found in the Ministry Handbook on the Baptist Union of Scotland website.

9. Church and Minister Exploring and Discerning a Call from God

When a church finds a candidate who looks on paper to be a good fit for the church, the Search Group may decide to take things further. The steps listed below describe a typical process, though a church may adjust this due to the particular circumstances.

Experience has proven that it is best to deal with one candidate at a time. As noted above, the aim of both the church and minister is to discern the mind of Christ. It is not a question of the church finding the candidate who looks most qualified or most attractive to them, nor for the minister to find the most attractive offer on the market. The goal is for minister and church to be confident they are aligning themselves with the will of God. For this reason churches have found that it is best to deal with one candidate at a time, and ministers have similarly found that it is unwise whilst talking to one church to begin discussions with another. In both cases, if they receive other interesting approaches whilst in conversation, church or minister can indicate that they are currently in a discernment process but if this does not lead to an appointment they will contact the interested party then.

The typical steps in a discernment process are as follows.

a. Informal meeting: The Search Group has read the profile of the minister and decides to invite them for an informal meeting to get to know each other better. This is ideally in-person but if travel is an issue it may be by a video call. (Note: In earlier times it was normal to invite a candidate to preach in the first instance. However, now almost all ministers have a significant online footprint where many of their sermons can be found, so it is better for a Search Group in the first instance to review preaching online and then use a first meeting with the candidate to focus on getting to know one another.)
b. Preaching visit: If both sides warm to one another in the informal meeting, then it is usual to invite the candidate to preach in the church. This will be an opportunity for them to get more of a feel of the church and for more members of the congregation to meet the candidate. Some or all of the

Search Group might have lunch with the candidate. (*Note on confidentiality:* It may be at this stage that the candidate wishes their interest in the appointment to be kept confidential, probably because their own church does not yet know they are considering a move. This should be checked with the candidate. If that is the case then it is right to present them in the church as a guest speaker but not mention at this stage they are a candidate for the role of minister.)

c. Second visit: If the Search Group feels the Lord is leading them to proceed with this candidate, they are invited to visit again. On this occasion church members would need to know that this person is a candidate for the role of minister. (It may be that it is still agreed to keep this confidential as far as reasonably possible; for example, church members are requested not to discuss this outside the church or post about it on social media.) On this second visit they would again preach and contribute to worship in other ways – possibly being interviewed or invited to share a testimony. This visit would also include an opportunity to meet the congregation more widely, such as in a church meal or social event. There would also be time set aside for a more structured interview with the Search Group.
d. Decision by Search Group: Following this visit the Search Group may decide it is right to propose that the church meeting invite this person to become the minister. If this is the case then a church meeting needs to be called according to the terms of the church constitution. Or it may be that the Search Group feels it is not right to proceed with this candidate, in which case they can be sensitively thanked for their interest but told the church does not wish to proceed. The candidate will be helped if the Search group is able to give them some information on why they reached this decision.
e. Third Visit: Another possibility following stage (c) is that the Search Group decides it would be desirable to invite the candidate for a further Sunday visit. This can be arranged, to hear them preach again and ensure any outstanding concerns are addressed during this time; this will also provide further opportunity for meeting members of the church. Often at this stage the Search Group feels quite confident that they will be recommending the church appoint this person as minister, in which case a church meeting can be announced for the week immediately following the third visit. (This is sometimes described as a person coming as ‘sole nominee’ for the appointment.)
f. Church Meeting Decision: If and when the Search Group decides to recommend a candidate to the church, they make the recommendation in a properly constituted church meeting. In a context of prayer and worship they share the reasons for their proposal and then there is an opportunity for other

members to ask questions and share views and insights. Following this, the church members make a decision by secret ballot.

g. Extending the Invitation: If the church meeting discerns that it is right to call the candidate as minister, this is communicated to the candidate as soon as possible, including the number of members present at the meeting and the percentage of members present that voted in favour. Most church constitutions would require a two-thirds vote in favour in order to extend a call to a minister. However, most ministers would expect a vote of 90% or more before they accepted a call. (Few ministers would accept if they thought one third of the church did not support them.)
h. If the call is accepted by the candidate then a starting date needs to be confirmed, terms and conditions agreed and plans for a welcome or 'induction' service to be made. The Ministry handbook Part 2, available on the Baptist Union of Scotland website, provides guidance for this.

Appendix 1 - Standard outline for a Minister's Profile

This document provides an opportunity to present yourself to a prospective church. A series of sub-headings offers a framework for covering the key areas. In each section a series of questions is suggested. *It is not expected that you will answer these comprehensively or address all of them*. They are offered as a guide to your own reflection and presentation, and you should feel free to compile the profile as you feel most appropriate.

A. Name

B. Personal Gifts and Ministry Style

- How would you describe your general approach to ministry – where would you see your key strengths.
- What particular gifts, skills and experience have enriched your ministry?
- What aspects of ministry do you particularly enjoy and excel at?
- What aspects of ministry do you find a particular challenge?
- What observations have fellow leaders and congregation members made about your ministry?
- What would you like to feel will define your ministry in the coming years?

- How do you sustain yourself spiritually as a disciple of Jesus and a servant of the church?

C. Theological Principles, Values and Priorities

Search teams might reasonably expect an Accredited Baptist Minister to have a basic grasp of Christian faith and discipleship, so this is an opportunity for you to explain how your particular approach to ministry is shaped by your understanding of our shared faith.

- What particular aspects of Christian faith have defined and shaped your identity as a minister?
- What is your most natural style of worship and church life?
- What has been the relative importance of evangelism, social justice, Biblical teaching, pastoral work, specific age groups etc. in your ministry thus far?
- How do you understand and operate in leadership and what is the place of the church members in this?
- What streams, movements and styles of church life have particularly influenced you?
- Are there any particular theological positions or approaches to church life that you would find it difficult to minister in?

D. Conversion and Christian Experience Prior to Ministry

This is an opportunity for you to share something of your spiritual journey, including how it has shaped and influenced your approach to ministry now.

- What were the early influences on your life?
- How did you become introduced to the church?
- What led you to commit your life to Christ?
- How is Christian discipleship shaping your life?
- How did you sense a call to ministry?

E. Most Recent Experience in Ministry

This is an opportunity to root the general information above in the reality of your ministry in recent years. It is likely to include responses to some of the following questions:

- How would you summarise your last 5 years of ministry?
- What would you see as your key achievements in that time?
- What difficulties and issues have you encountered and how have these contributed to your development as a minister?

- How would you describe your relationships with the leaders of your current church, members of the church and congregation, and other churches and ministers?
- How have you engaged in Continuing Ministry Development and how has your ministry been impacted by this?
- How do you participate in the life our Union and relate to other churches?
- Why do you feel it is right to explore moving to a new church at this time?

F. Interests Outside of Local Church and Other Information

This is an opportunity to share something of the person you are outside of your role as a minister, this might include:

- Particular interests and hobbies
- Your family and social life
- General information about your life journey
- Anything else you feel it would help a church to know about you

G. Key Priorities for Future Ministry

What is the most important contribution you hope to make in your next appointment?

H. Employment/Education History

Please outline your Employment/education history since leaving secondary education. This should include a clear, chronological account of your main occupation including periods of ministry, employment, further education, unemployment, travel etc, starting with the most recent.

I. Relevant Qualifications and Experience

This should be presented as a clear chronological list of gained awards or specific roles, including dates, starting with the most recent.

J. Personal Details

Provide here your address, email and phone number.

If you are married it is helpful to add the name of your spouse and any dependent children.

Appendix 2 – Proforma for Churches to Submit their Web-Posting to BUS.

Please complete this form, keeping it to around one side of A4, and return it to ivy@scottishbaptist.org.uk. It will then be posted on the BUS website.

Name of Church	
Role to be Filled	
Who We Are	
Where we are heading	
What we are looking for	
For further details contact…	