

# Equipping For ... Eldership

## Minister-in-Association

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Following graduation from Knox College, I served three pastoral charges over the next 23 years. I thank God for this experience and deeply appreciate the friendships made and the extraordinary privilege of being invited into the lives of individuals and families at deeply significant moments.

When I was appointed to the General Assembly Office, for the first time in a long time I had the freedom to worship wherever my little car could take me on a Sunday morning. I took advantage of this opportunity to visit a number of pastoral charges and enjoy a variety of worship services and styles.

I had become a nomadic minister.

Once the novelty wore off, I realized how much I missed belonging to a community of faith. I started regularly attending the Presbyterian congregation closest to my home. Eventually, the lead minister suggested that I become a minister-in-association there.

What is a minister-in-association?

Naturally, not all Presbyterian ministers serve pastoral charges. Some are retired. Others are studying. Still others are institutional chaplains or teachers in seminaries and elsewhere. Some ministers are without a pastoral charge between calls. A few serve in the denomination's national office. In 1978 the General Assembly approved a statement that urges ministers, like these, to be associated with a congregation as opposed to not attending anywhere or wandering about nomadically.

The minister, by associating with a particular congregation, is encouraged to be a helpful resource for both the congregation

and the incumbent minister(s). The congregation, in turn, is encouraged to treat the associating minister like it would any other member of the congregation. While remaining under the care and discipline of the presbytery, the minister could be added to the membership roll of the congregation and afforded all the privileges and responsibilities of membership. Such a minister is called a minister-in-association.

A minister-in-association agreement outlines the nature of the minister's service to the church. For example, the agreement might state that a minister-in-association who is employed as a hospital chaplain will offer an annual hospital visitation workshop, coordinate a visitation to seniors program and lead worship while the called minister is on vacation. A retired minister might help people grow in their faith by leading Bible studies. In some cases the agreement might state what pastoral functions the minister-in-association will *not* perform, such as officiating at weddings or funerals.

The type of service provided will vary from place to place depending on the needs of the congregation and the gifts of the minister associating with it.

The minister-in-association agreement is to be approved by the associating minister, the session and the presbytery before it takes effect.

Sessions may choose to include, in the agreement, a process for reviewing it periodically in case the session or the minister-in-association wants to make changes. The session could also invite the presbytery to assess the minister-in-association agreement when the presbytery conducts its regular congregational visitations or when the congregation is

involved in a search process for a new minister.

For your convenience, the template provided in the Book of Forms, Appendix I, is printed here.

## **Book of Forms APPENDIX I**

MINISTER IN ASSOCIATION WITH A CONGREGATION TO WHICH HE/SHE IS NEITHER CALLED NOR APPOINTED (A&P 1978, p. 227, 78; 1987, p. 465–66, 260–61, 41–42, 69; 1988 p. 281)

Ministers in good and regular standing, who are not called by or appointed to a congregation, should be associated with a congregation. Such association does not detract from the fact that they are primarily under the care and discipline of the presbytery.

Through its clerk, or a designated committee, the presbytery plays an important role in formally establishing this relationship. A minister without charge should take the initiative by selecting the congregation with which he/she wishes to associate and request the clerk to formalize the relationship. However, if after several months of the minister being without charge he/she has not approached the clerk (or committee), the clerk (committee) should contact the minister and work with him/her to ensure that a relationship is established.

When the congregation has been selected, the clerk should write to the session of the selected congregation:

1. to state that the minister wants to be a member of the congregation under the category of minister-in-association;
2. to ask that the minister's name be added to the congregational roll;
3. to explain that by this action,

1. the session agrees to show the same pastoral concern for the minister as it would show to any other member of the congregation,
2. the minister will have the rights and privileges accorded to regular professing members, including election as a ruling elder in the congregation,
3. the session agrees that if a matter arises which might eventually result in disciplining the minister, it will immediately refer the matter to the presbytery and not initiate action itself;
4. to request that the session and the minister prepare an agreement as to the nature of the service the minister-in-association will offer to the congregation and its pastor, and that the terms of this agreement be submitted to the presbytery for its approval. Should the session and the minister-in-association wish to change the terms of the agreement, the changes are to be submitted to the presbytery for approval.