

The role of the Moderator in a Baptist Church

You have no minister. Your minister is leaving. Your minister has left.

So what next? Could a moderator be helpful?

Moderators

The Moderator's main task is to help a Church discern the future as it seeks God's will for its life and witness in the absence of a minister. This may well be in seeking a new Minister and a major way in which they can help a church in this is in the preparation of the Church Profile. (See *Facing A Pastoral Vacancy* http://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/388570/Facing_a_Pastoral.aspx). However, it should not be taken for granted that the church will automatically seek a new minister.

Appointment of a Moderator

A Moderator is appointed by the Church Meeting on the recommendation of the leaders and will not normally be a member of the Church. Your Regional Minister can help you find a suitable person but does not appoint them. As part of the process of the appointment of a moderator it would be important for the church's leadership to have an exploratory meeting with the moderator to see if there is an appropriate common understanding and to establish something of the nature of the role. The appointment should ultimately be made by the Church Meeting. Sometimes the Regional Minister may step in and act in the interim until a Moderator is appointed. It is wise to think early about a Moderator so as to enable a smooth transition for the future. It

may also be appropriate to review the role of the Moderator from time to time.

Role of a Moderator

Experience has shown that it is usually very helpful for a church to find a 'Moderator' as it seeks a Minister. This is usually a experienced Minister who will chair leadership and Church Meetings, especially those that may relate to the Pastorate. Whilst there may be people within the church who could chair these meetings, the advantage of an moderator would seem to be that s/he is neutral and can more easily facilitate everyone working together. However, the moderator would not be entitled to vote as he/she would not normally be a member of the church. Such a person may also be able to do some preaching as it is a good way to connect with the congregation. However, they may have limited opportunity for this if they have their own pastoral commitments to fulfil. They may be able to cover pastoral emergencies or 'specials' like baptisms and weddings, as well as offer pastoral advice and care to the leadership team. They can also liaise with the Regional Minister about the settlement process, although the Church Secretary (or equivalent) should remain the primary contact.

Varying roles of a Moderator

The possibilities of a Moderatorship are limitless. A Moderator can bring a healthy influence to a Church at a critical time in its life and prepare a Church for new ministry. Even when a new Minister is not in prospect the Moderator may be used of God to build up a Fellowship to embrace its challenges and opportunities. The relationship has brought mutual blessing to Church and Moderator while the 'releasing' Church has also found benefit for their sacrifice through the wider involvement in the work of the Kingdom. The period of vacancy provides an excellent opportunity for the church to engage in some form of review of it's life and mission such as Springboard.

Sometimes churches need more help after a Minister leaves and a different kind of Moderator. This is just the kind of thing to talk to your Regional Minister about. In some situations it might be more appropriate to consider an 'interim minister' who might work with the church on specific issues in preparation for the future.

Payment of a Moderator

A Moderator should be paid usual preaching fees, and should have expenses reimbursed. A church will want to give a worthy love-gift to its moderator when the task is finished. If the vacancy becomes lengthy, some interim gift(s) would be appropriate.

Finance and Pension

As a Church you may well have been paying into the Baptist Ministers' Pension Fund. When a minister leaves a church there are immediate implications that need to be considered. PLEASE NOTE that the responsibility to maintain payments does not cease when a Minister leaves. There are legal requirements involved which should be discussed with your Regional Minister and/ or BUGB Pension Office. If you wish to be able to reflect on these matters with the Regional Minister it might be helpful to give permission to the Pensions' Manager to share details of your church's situation with him/her. You may need to employ an Interim Member (of the Pension Scheme) or other worker to avoid a so-called 'cessation event'. You may be able to appoint a Moderator as an 'interim member' so as to avoid a 'cessation event', but they must be a member of the Baptist Ministers' Pension Scheme and under the age of 75.)

For the best advice on these matter please contact the Pensions' Manager, Mark Hynes: mhynes@baptist.org.uk