

Signing a Call to a Minister.

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REFERENCE has already been made in an article in a previous issue of the Magazine to the serious obligations under which signatories of a call place themselves. There are engagements entered into that are apt to be soon forgotten as if the act of signing a call was a matter out of hand out of mind. The matter is too serious to be treated in such a way and every serious-minded and honest person putting his or her name to a call ought to do so with a sense of responsibility and a sincere desire to perform the obligations entered on.

For the benefit of those interested in the subject the procedure leading up to and in connection with the signing of a call may be briefly outlined. (1) *Election of a minister*. The interim moderator (according to Act IV. of the Free Church General Assembly) is expected to call a meeting of the congregation at an early date after intimating the vacancy, unless there are special grounds for delay in filling it up. When an election has taken place, the Presbytery proceeds according to the laws of the Church but if the circumstances are such that the Presbytery do not feel warranted in proceeding to moderate in a call, *they* are to hold a meeting with the congregation and are not to proceed until they have exhausted all means for producing harmony and should these efforts fail the matter is to be referred to the superior courts. As already indicated the election of a minister rests with the members in full communion. Where there has not been complete unanimity the proceedings in connection with the signing of the call, as will be seen later on, is affected thereby. (2) *Request for moderation in a call*. When a congregation of a sanctioned charge are prepared or think themselves prepared, to call a minister, it is usual for them to appoint a deputation to represent them at the bar of the Presbytery, and to convey their desire that the Presbytery would moderate in a call. The interim-moderator of the session usually reports to the Presbytery the condition of the congregation and the amount of their agreement as to the choice of a minister. If this report be unsatisfactory the Presbytery are called upon to proceed in accordance with rules laid down in the Act of the General Assembly of the Free Church (1859) referred to above. (2) *Moderation in a call*. When a Presbytery are prepared to moderate in a call, they fix a day and hour for doing so

-- notice of day, hour and place must be given from the pulpit of the vacant congregation, seven days intervening between the notice and the day appointed. (a) *Open Call* or *Call at large*. Where there has not been complete unanimity among the communicants at the election the Presbytery must moderate in a *call at large*, i.e., when the form of call is produced no person's name is inserted. (b) *Closed Call*. If there has been unanimity in the election, the minister's name who is the choice of the communicants is inserted in the form of call. The Presbytery meet in the place and at the time appointed. Divine worship is conducted and thereafter the form of call is produced and read. In the case of an *Open Call* the congregation are asked: "Whose name is to be inserted in the call?" In the case of a *Closed Call* the question is asked: "Are the congregation willing to proceed with the call?" When the call has been agreed to the persons present whose names are on the communion roll sign the call and these only. Adherents simply concur in the call given by communicants. No one who is not in full communion and whose name is not on communion roll has a right to sign the call according to church law. The communion roll must be produced at the time of the signing of the call carefully revised and attested by the Presbytery. Needless to say, that the communicants who have not communicated for years have no right to sign the call; ill health, no doubt, for a considerable time would not be considered a sufficient reason for removing a name from the communion roll. (1) When an *Open Call* is moderated in, it can only be signed by communicants present at the time of the moderation. (2) When it is a *Closed Call*, the call may be subscribed by communicants *who are absent* when a mandate authorising subscription is produced. It is always advisable that these mandates should bear the signature of the communicant. *Attestation of Call*. When the call has been subscribed by all the communicants and adherents present who desire to subscribe it or by mandatories, the Moderator of Presbytery attests it as subscribed. *Sustaining the Call*. If it has been subscribed by a *large number*¹ of communicants on the roll in proportion to the whole number, and if there be no dissents given in the Presbytery sustain the Call in ordinary cases. If there be dissents implying a serious division in the congregation the call cannot be sustained unless signed by a *majority of the whole communicants on the roll present or absent* and even then, the Presbytery may find it necessary to refer the matter to the Superior

¹ Sir Henry Moncrieff does not say a majority as is required when the call is opposed.

Courts. *Dissents Against a Call.* Dissents against a call can be received only when they are tendered or given in *immediately after the call has been attested* by the Moderator. The fullest opportunity must be given to communicants for stating their objections and it is the Presbytery's duty to deal with the objections tendered. If these dissents are numerous or the objections serious the Presbytery may decline to sustain the call and if there is no complaint nor appeal to the superior court against their decision the call falls to the ground. When the ordination or induction takes place the Moderator of Presbytery (not the interim-moderator of the congregation as some seem to think) presides and carries through the services. It has become customary with us for the moderator to delegate some of his duties to his brethren.