

Minister of Religion Permission

A programme leading to the grant of Immigration Permission to

Ministers of Religion who wish to work in Ireland

1. A new *preclearance procedure* to facilitate and streamline entry to the State of Ministers of Religion from non-EEA states applies from 30 April 2018. The procedure applies to both visa and non-visa required non-EEA nationals. It will be reviewed after three years' operation. A separate procedure applies to persons who wish to serve as religious volunteers, under a new *Volunteering in Ireland Programme*.
2. Under the *Minister of Religion Permission*, qualifying religious personnel will be permitted to enter and remain in the State for up to three years, where there is a demonstrated need for their services and subject to compliance with all other immigration requirements that apply in individual cases.
3. All non-EEA nationals who have been offered a job with a religious body or faith community as a Minister of Religion in Ireland must seek prior approval to work in that capacity from the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of the Department of Justice and Equality, before travelling to the State.

What is a Minister of Religion?

4. For the purposes of this immigration procedure "Minister of Religion" means a person who is a:
 - 4.1 qualified, ordained or professed member* of a religious or faith community already established in the State, and has at least three verifiable years' previous service as a Minister of Religion (evidence will be sought) (*A professed member is a baptized person who has taken vows declaring the Christian faith. Professing members include all people who have come into membership by profession of faith.) and
 - 4.2 where the work for which the person is seeking permission to enter the State includes all or most of the following:

- 4.2.1 conducting spiritual worship and or ceremonies to an established congregation in Ireland;
- 4.2.2 giving pastoral care to members of an established congregation or faith community through preaching;
- 4.2.3 conducting classes based on a religious ethos, supervising prayer meetings, etc.;
- 4.2.4 providing spiritual leadership to an established faith community in Ireland; an established church is defined as a church supported by the government as a national institution;
- 4.2.5 ministering to the spiritual needs of an congregation;
- 4.2.6 pastoral visitation;
- 4.2.7 providing senior administration support of a substantially full-time nature to a religious institution / order / church where the work would not qualify for an employment permit issued by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation;
- 4.2.8 being a member of a religious community that takes public vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

4.3 A person entering a “closed” religious order may be admitted under this procedure without meeting the requirements at 4.2 above, apart from 4.2.8.

Who Can Apply?

5. You can apply for permission to enter and remain in the State as a Minister of Religion if:
 - (a) you have been sponsored for the position by a religious body or faith community already established in Ireland,
 - (b) you are from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland,
 - (c) you satisfy the definition of ‘*What is a Minister of Religion*’ in section 4 above.

Who can sponsor a Minister of Religion?

6. A Minister of Religion can only be sponsored by an eligible body, which must be a religious body or faith community already established in Ireland and having an active membership and congregation in the State, including serving full-time Ministers of Religion, and *dedicated premises serving that religious body or faith community and whose annual audited accounts are available as required by the immigration authorities. A sponsor must be a body, it cannot be an individual.

*Dedicated Premises means a premises that is set aside for the purpose of religious observation

What does Sponsorship mean?

7. Sponsorship means that the application made by a Minister of Religion under this Programme arises from an invitation from the sponsor in Ireland to the applicant to serve as a Minister of Religion.
8. Sponsorship also means that the sponsor cooperates with State authorities to ensure that the Minister of Religion leaves the State on the expiry of his or her permission, or if directed to do so by those authorities. Failure to cooperate with State authorities in this regard will impact on future sponsorship by that religious body or faith community.

What must the sponsor do?

9. The sponsor must confirm in writing that:
- i. there is a verifiable need for the person applying under this Programme;
 - ii. the applicant is suitably qualified to discharge the duties and responsibilities of the position;
 - iii. the applicant has a clean police record (documentary evidence, including a current - not more than 3 months old - criminal records check and police clearance certificate, or certified English language translation of a criminal records check and police clearance certificate, will be required of the applicant);
 - iv. child protection policies and procedures in line with the [Children First Guidance](#) are in place in the religious body or faith community;
 - v. the applicant is cleared to work with children and vulnerable adults (verification will be required. This must be sourced locally in Ireland from An Garda

- Síochána by the sponsor, the person must not be permitted to work with children and vulnerable adults until such clearance is received;
- vi. the applicant (and his or her immediate family) will be supported through the provision from the sponsor of funds and/or accommodation that are sufficient to maintain the applicant throughout the period of his or her permission to remain in the State, under the Programme. (Evidence of finance/accommodation, for example, the address where the applicant will reside, bank statements of both parties i.e., the sponsor and applicant must be provided with the application.) This can be achieved through the provision of a traditional salary, a stipend combined with board and lodgings or a combination of these means.

What can the Minister of Religion do and not do while in the State?

10. As a Minister of Religion, you may:

- i. work for your sponsor in the job described in your application;
- ii. do additional voluntary work, as long as it does not interfere with your primary purpose for being in the State;
- iii. study as long as it does not interfere with your primary purpose for being in the State;
- iv. travel abroad for short periods (e.g. holidays and attending conferences) and return to Ireland, subject to any re-entry visa requirements;
- v. bring immediate family members (dependants) with you, meaning in this case spouse and minor children under 18 years of age. The permission granted to the spouse/partner under this Programme will be dependent on the continued residence status of the Minister of Religion. In cases where the Minister of Religion leaves the country, the accompanying spouse/partner and dependants, if applicable must also depart.

11. As a Minister of Religion you may not:

- i. change sponsors while in the State under this Programme – you must be outside the State to apply to change your sponsor;
- ii. engage in any paid work in any capacity while in the State other than in the capacity for which you were originally allowed entry, that is, to exercise your functions as a Minister of Religion;
- iii. claim any State benefits, or rely on public funds for services, including health, or other state supports, for yourself or your dependants;
- iv. bring any other family members, apart from those referred to above, with you;
- v. apply to change your immigration status while in the State.

Other important conditions:

12. The following conditions must also be observed:

- i. You and any permitted family member(s) must be covered by private medical insurance, from a company authorised by the Health Insurance Authority for the duration of your time in the State. This could be as part of the group medical scheme of your sponsor. In addition, it is advisable that applicants have insurance to cover repatriation in the event of serious illness or unforeseen events.
- ii. Travel insurance may suffice but only during the first year of the applicants stay, provided that the insurance provides coverage:
 - a) for the full period before you arrange medical insurance,
 - b) at a minimum of €25,000 for accident and €25,000 for illness or disease, and
 - c) for any period of hospitalisation.
- iii. The minimum permitted period of residence under this Programme is one (1) year and the maximum is three (3) years. This means that any period up to one year will reckon as a full year for the purpose of the Programme. You may spend three full consecutive years in Ireland (renewable annually) or break the period into separate lots of one or two years, provided the overall period does not exceed three years.
- iv. In the normal course, as a Minister of Religion you may be eligible for **one** extension of this three-year

period of a further three years. This application for an extension must be made before your current permission expires. It can only be for service with your then current sponsor and will be considered only if your sponsor can demonstrate a genuine need. A non-refundable fee of €50 applies to an application for an extension.

- v. You may not, having spent a period in the State as a Minister of Religion, subsequently, avail of the *Volunteering in Ireland Programme*.
- vi. A non-refundable fee of €100 applies to this application, and must be paid at time of application. Other fees, including a fee in respect of a visa if applicable to you, and a [registration](#) fee will also apply.
- vii. If it is your first time applying for immigration permission to work as a Minister of Religion in Ireland, you must make your application from outside the State.
- viii. A letter of approval under this Programme will remain valid for six months after the date of issue. If not used within that time a fresh application will be required.
- ix. You can only apply for this Programme if not currently in Ireland as a Minister of Religion. If currently in the State as a Minister of Religion, transitional arrangements will apply.

Change of Sponsor application

13. If you wish to make a permitted change of sponsor, please note:

- i. A change of sponsor (in respect of the initial three years only), is permitted, but only if a separate application is made under the Programme from outside the State
- ii. A change of sponsor, if accepted, does not alter the overall maximum period of time for which permission under the Programme is given.
- iii. A non-refundable fee of €50 applies to an application for change of sponsor.

The Application Process

14. An application under this scheme must be made from *outside* the State unless you are seeking an extension to an existing permission *with the same sponsor*. For those who currently have permission as a Minister of Religion under the previous scheme and wish to seek an extension to that permission please see the transitional arrangements below.
15. Applications must be made online. You need to click the application link on the INIS website and then fill in the Minister of Religion application form.
16. Applicants must provide a valid email address with their application as all communications with regard to the application will be by email. Applicants should monitor their email account as this is the email address to which all updates are sent. You will receive a decision on your application via your account.

Non-EEA nationals requiring an Entry Visa

17. If you are a non-EEA national requiring an entry visa you must have prior approval from the Department of Justice and Equality, Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) under this Programme before making an online visa application seeking entry to the State as a Minister of Religion.
18. You must include in your supporting documentation the letter of approval under the Programme, quoting the application approval number.
19. Travel to the State as a Minister of Religion may only be undertaken when an entry visa stating this reason for seeking entry has been entered into your passport. You will not be allowed entry to the State as a Minister of Religion if you do not have such prior approval. Visa required persons approved for the Programme must apply for and have been granted a “D” reside (long stay) entry visa before entering the State.

Non-EEA nationals not requiring an Entry Visa

20. Non-EEA nationals not requiring an entry visa must have prior approval from the Department of Justice and Equality, Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) under this procedure to enter the State as a Minister of Religion.

21. If your application is successful, you will be granted a letter of approval. This letter of approval must be presented to the Immigration Officer at the port of entry on arrival in the State, who will verify its contents by reference to the applications system. You will not be permitted entry to the State for the purpose of working as a Minister of Religion and/or will not be registered by INIS/GNIB as a Minister of Religion, without prior approval obtained under this procedure before travel to the State.
22. Your application under this Programme must be made from outside the State unless you are seeking an extension to an existing permission *with the same sponsor*. For those who currently have permission as a Minister of Religion under the previous scheme and wish to seek an extension to that permission please see the transitional arrangements below.

Registration in Ireland

Registration with the INIS Registration Office /Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) (applies to both visa required and non visa required nationals)

23. All non EEA nationals remaining in the State for more than 90 *consecutive days* must register with **INIS Registration Office or /GNIB** and be issued with a Certificate of Registration (IRP card). Please note an annual registration fee applies.
24. A Certificate of Registration (IRP card) will be granted for an initial 12-month period. A Minister of Religion may seek further yearly permission(s) without further reference to this office, by applying for further permission from the Registration authorities (GNIB/INIS Registration Office as applicable) up to a maximum of three (3) years in total, subject to the person meeting all the necessary qualifying criteria under this procedure.

The Unsuccessful Applicant

25. If an applicant is unhappy with the outcome of his or her application, an appeal may be submitted at no additional cost within 6 weeks from the date of refusal letter, addressing the specific grounds on which the initial application was refused.

No further correspondence will be entered into in respect of an application.

Data Protection

26. “How we use information and the Legal Basis

1. The Department of Justice & Equality, INIS, treats personal information provided by applicants carefully and will not disclose personal data to third parties except in accordance with the law.
2. Therefore, the processing of personal information provided by you in this application will be carried out in compliance with the law on data protection and under the executive power of the Government.
3. In furtherance of an application under this immigration procedure we will take into account all known information and relevant factors including your previous immigration history, and may;
 - 3.1. request further information or documentation, from you or from third parties as evidence of the bona fides of your particular case;
 - 3.2. disclose personal information provided by you in your application to third parties for the purpose of establishing your bona fides in connection with your application; and
 - 3.3. use information provided by third parties in arriving at a decision on your application.
4. Such third parties would include; other Government Departments, An Garda Síochána (the Irish national police force), UK immigration authorities, your sponsor (or previous sponsors if applicable) and other organisations or persons referenced by you in your application.

Transition Arrangements

27. These arrangements apply to persons who have served as a Minister of Religion in Ireland in the past, or who are currently working in that capacity in the State, and have not spent in the aggregate more than 3 years in the State in that capacity.

28. If you are currently active in the State as a Minister of Religion under the previous Minister of Religion Programme and your aggregate time in the State at the expiry of your current registration is less than three years, you may be granted a further year, if your application is successful under this procedure. Applications should be made to Unit 2 Residency, INIS, Burgh Quay, Dublin 2”.

The Department of Justice and Equality reserves the right to amend or suspend this Programme at any stage.