

Report of the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board

The Pastoral Formation Oversight Board's role is to "coordinate, evaluate, innovate, strategically anticipate, and collaboratively shape theological education that will form pastoral leadership for the RCA that is rooted in the Reformed faith and tradition while engaging in the present and emerging future" (*MGS 2018*, RF 18-1, p. 86). As part of that same action, the 2018 General Synod described one of the purposes of the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (PFOB) as "serv[ing] the RCA by coordinating the three theological agents of the RCA as they work collaboratively, actively anticipating the needs of the church in an ever-changing world and collaborating to form the pastoral leadership that the world and the church needs."

Assessment for Theological Education

In order to fulfill our mandate to assist the General Synod Council (GSC) in setting the budget and division of the assessment for theological education, the PFOB has recommended the following to the GSC:

To set the General Synod assessment for theological education to \$6.12 per confessing member for Fiscal Year 2020, to be allocated in the following manner:

- An initial \$75,000 given to the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA) to cover expenses and to account for their lack of ability to raise funds compared to an educational institution.
- 75 percent of the remaining funds are to be split evenly among the three agents for theological education (Western Theological Seminary [WTS], New Brunswick Theological Seminary [NBTS], and the MFCA).
- 20 percent distributed per capita of students within each agency who are formally in the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process.
- 5 percent to cover the cost of the meeting of the PFOB, the General Synod professors, and collaborative efforts among the respective agents.

This represents no change to the current division of the assessment for theological education. All of the agents agree that the current formula is working.

Introduction to the Group

Since this was the first gathering of the PFOB, the group spent significant time introducing the members to the roles and responsibilities of the PFOB as well as receiving updates from the three agents (MFCA, NBTS, and WTS) on issues such as educational opportunities and initiatives, current challenges, and issues surrounding the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry (CFM) process. Discussion was also had on the history, joys, challenges, and current state of various commissioned pastor educational models across the denomination. Common to all was the commitment to discern and implement educational models that effectively engage and train men and women for ministry in our current and ever changing world. More information on these topics can be found in the respective agent reports.

Standards of Preparation for Ministry and Commissioned Pastor Ministry Competencies

The PFOB reviewed the eight standards for theological education. The group discussed both the history of the standards as well as recent steps the Pastoral Formation Coordinating

Committee (PFCC, predecessor to the PFOB) had taken to examine the standards in regard to their content and effectiveness. Discussion also centered around the relationship between the theological agents and the classes in helping RCA candidates for minister of Word and sacrament meet these standards. The PFOB continues to evaluate whether and where these standards should be included in the *BCO*. The PFOB also reviewed the ten competencies for commissioned pastors.

The Certificate of Fitness for Ministry

The PFOB reviewed the *BCO* regarding the CFM, paying particular attention to Chapter 1, Part II, Articles 11 and 12. The group paid particular attention to the roles of consistories, classes, and the theological agents in awarding the CFM. The role of the PFOB is to determine the best practices for each of these bodies and how to implement them.

Questions have arisen regarding the role of the agents in awarding the CFM. Recent controversies on awarding or not awarding certificates to LGBTQ candidates have highlighted the need for a more uniform understanding among the agents and classes regarding their roles in examining for and awarding the CFM. While each agent and classis can determine how it might go about the CFM, more continuity regarding the standard for examination and awarding would be helpful. The PFOB will continue to discern best practices, including research into how other denominations supervise their candidates for ministry. The PFOB will offer suggested changes to the *BCO* if needed in the future.

Specifically, the PFOB is discerning the role and nature of psychological testing and mental health in the CFM process. Each agent reviewed and shared its own current practice. The PFOB will continue to explore best practices in this area and will bring a recommendation to the General Synod if warranted.

Candidate Care Best Practices

The PFOB continues to encourage classis clerks and classis candidate care chairpersons to utilize www.candidate-care.org for information on classis best practices regarding the care and examining of candidates for ministers of Word and sacrament.

Collaborative Education

The presidents of the seminaries and the executive director of the MFCA, as well as their respective academic deans or equivalents, met in October to discuss the current state of theological education in the RCA. They also continue to engage ways in which they can better collaborate to provide formative educational opportunities across the wide spectrum of the RCA for ministry preparation in an ever-changing world.

Respectfully submitted,

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