

Report of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency

General Synod, in recent years has exercised oversight of ministerial formation through its two seminaries and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA). Like the RCA seminaries, the MFCA has possessed a deep commitment to developing faithful, educated, and Reformed leaders. Its purpose is the preparation of men and women for the ministries of Christ and his church, most specifically those called to the office of minister of Word and sacrament.

From its inception 22 years ago, the MFCA has been tasked with and has embraced a mandate to expand opportunities for RCA ordination to groups not previously served. This is clearly stated in the MFCA Board of Trustees' mission statement:

The Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA) exists to strengthen the ministry of Word and sacrament in the Reformed Church in America by awarding Certificates of Fitness for Ministry to specific groups of candidates and working cooperatively with partners inside and outside the RCA to broaden opportunities for diverse ministerial formation.

As of March 2020, there were 89 candidates enrolled in the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process; 22 (24.7%) of these are pursuing the Certificate of Fitness through the Approved Alternate Route (AAR), which did not exist until MFCA was officially established in 1999.

Enrollment in the MFCA continues to cluster in the Eastern half of the USA. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of the candidates reside east of the Rocky Mountains. Sixty percent (60%) are east of the Mississippi.

Just over 22 percent (22.4%) of the candidates are female. This statistic has decreased significantly over time (28% in early 2018).

Thirty-six percent (36.4%) of the AAR candidates represent a racial-ethnic minority group. In excess of 33 percent (33.7%) of the total candidates represent racial-ethnic minorities. These numbers have increased by approximately three percent this past year. Almost 20 percent (19.6%) of the candidates are Asian. Our Hispanic population is down (10%), as is our African American (2.2%).

General Synod Council (GSC) Proposes Dissolution of MFCA

In March, the MFCA Board of Trustees was informed that the General Synod Council (GSC), in deliberating the budgets for 2021, decided to propose dissolving the agency to General Synod and eliminate MFCA and cease its assessment funding for 2021. The GSC did not propose any solutions for the candidates enrolled presently, or in the future, but did express a desire to have the RCA seminaries take a major role in owning responsibility for candidates who do not attend an RCA seminary. The general secretary commissioned a task force for the purpose of developing a process to replace what the agency has done for the past 35 years. This group will ultimately bring recommendations to the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board, which will bring them to General Synod.

The MFCA Board of Trustees expressed its grave disappointment to the general secretary and requested it be allowed to operate as long as possible from the reserves it has built up over the years, so current candidates could complete the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry (CFM) process.

In cooperation with the chief financial officer (CFO), it was determined that the agency, with a part-time interim director in place, could reasonably operate until March 2022. The board accepted the offer and intends to have the agency continue until funds are depleted. There also remains the possibility that General Synod 2021 will not approve the elimination of the agency. This could result in new funds to be assigned to the operation of MFCA and allow it to continue to operate.

Other Transitions

Before learning of the GSC decision to dissolve the agency, the executive director, Cornelis Kors, submitted his resignation in order to retire. The board accepted his resignation and celebrates his 29 years of service. The board declared Kors “Executive Director Emeritus.” This will take effect at his retirement.

The board decided to seek an interim director in order to assist in the transition of the agency’s leadership. This decision was affirmed upon learning that the agency would be dissolved and only continue operation for a couple more years. A search committee has been named and efforts to name an interim director have commenced.

Collaborative Efforts

Pine Rest Christian Hospital

The MFCA has continued to participate in several cooperative efforts. One such effort is with Pine Rest Hospital and the DeVos Family Foundation. Along with Calvin Theological Seminary, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, and Western Theological Seminary, the MFCA is assisting in the development of parish-based clinical pastoral education (CPE) programs throughout North America. Participants from the Christian Reformed Church in North America and the Reformed Church in America engage CPE at various locations in North America. Rev. Karl Van Harn of Pine Rest is the facilitator of the program. Programs have been completed in New Jersey; Vancouver, British Columbia; Southern California; Sioux Falls, South Dakota; and Hamilton, Ontario, while the Chicago cohort should be complete June 2020.

The steering committee is planning to offer a North America–wide distance unit where the retreats will occur in a central location while the weekly sessions will occur online.

MFCA, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, and Western Theological Seminary Collaboration

The Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (PFOB) has encouraged and funded the annual collaborative meeting of the RCA seminary presidents, deans, and the MFCA executive director—the leadership of the RCA theological “agents” (MFCA, NBTS, WTS). The group met in October 2019 in Chicago. In attendance were Kristen Johnson, Cornelis Kors, Micah McCreary, Beth Tanner, and Felix Theonugraha.

At the meeting, the participants agreed to work toward collaborative efforts in cross-registration for students between the institutions, mutual efforts in offering quality Spanish education, faculty/student exchanges, and a review of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry (CFM) and how it is administered by each agent.

The group took note of data and matters that are influencing the operations at MFCA, NBTS, and WTS. Observations included: a) fewer General Synod professors, presently only one at

New Brunswick; b) the CFM is difficult to oversee and implement properly when there is minimal RCA representation, in particular General Synod professors; and c) there is confusion regarding the role of the agent versus the classis; who is responsible for what?

These concerns have been brought to the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (PFOB), which met in Grand Rapids in January 2020. The PFOB is taking these matters into consideration and hopes to review options that might align with leadership needs and potential structural changes in the RCA.

Certificates of Fitness Awarded

The Board of Trustees awarded fourteen Certificates of Fitness for Ministry, ten through the RCSC process and four through the AAR process.

Reformed Candidates Supervision and Care (RCSC)

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| Tim David Grade | Classis of Rocky Mountains |
| Shawn R. Johnson | Classis of Southwest Michigan |
| James R. Daniel Kirk | Classis of the City |
| Benjamin J. Martin | Classis of Delaware-Raritan |
| Susan Avery Mulholland | Classis of New Brunswick |
| Carl Joseph Pascual | Classis of the City |
| Christopher David Thompson | Classis of Great Lakes City |
| Donald Patrick Van Antwerpen | Classis of New Brunswick |
| Laura Kay Wessels | Classis of Illinois |
| Mark Richard Westerfield | Classis of Passaic Valley |

Approved Alternate Route (AAR)

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| Richard Alejandro Caballero | Classis of Southwest |
| Anthony Joseph Ciaccio | Classis of Orange |
| Susan Lynn Rand Grade | Classis of Rocky Mountains |
| Brandon James Morrow | Classis of East Sioux |

Alternate Means and Petitions

Reduction in Twenty-four Month Requirement

The Classis of New Brunswick request, on behalf of Donald Patrick Van Antwerpen, to reduce the length of enrollment was approved by the MFCA Board of Trustees at its June 2019 meeting. The board was able to identify a sufficient period of supervised ministry experience to substitute for deficiencies, thus determining the candidate is qualified to earn the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry (BCO Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Section 3 [2019 ed., p. 45]).