

Report of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency

General Synod, for years, has exercised oversight of ministerial formation through its two seminaries and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA). Like the Reformed Church in America (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 25 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 Readiness for Examination to specific groups of candidates and working cooperatively with partners inside and outside the RCA to broaden opportunities for diverse ministerial formation.

Given the authority delegated to it by General Synod, the MFCA Board, its Certification Committee members, and its staff continue to accomplish this mission by:

- Awarding the Certificate of Readiness for Examination (CRE) to RCA candidates graduating from non-RCA seminaries via Reformed Candidates Supervision and Care (RCSC), or pursuing an approved alternate route (AAR).
- Through the certification committee and staff, evaluating the progress of candidates and their continuation in and completion of the process leading to the CRE, as their achievements dictate.
- Periodically ensuring that the RCA Standards for Preparation for Ministry are upheld in the oversight of the CRE and are reviewed, with recommendations made to the appropriate RCA body if the MFCA Board believes changes would be appropriate.
- Collaborating with the RCA seminaries to offer graduate-level courses designed to meet the standards for the CRE.
- Collaborating with and providing counsel to congregations and classes in the care and nurture of candidates for the ministry who are seeking the CRE through the MFCA.
- Interpreting and advocating for the work of the MFCA to the larger church.

The MFCA has evolved from its predecessor, the Theological Education Agency (TEA), which was established as an RCA institution to serve the then-growing Regional Synod of the Far West, with the largest number of its candidates, almost all of whom were white and male, attending Fuller Theological Seminary.

As of March 2024, there were 35 candidates enrolled in the Certificate of Readiness for Examination process; four (9 percent) of these are pursuing the CRE through the AAR, which did not exist until the MFCA was officially established in 1999.

Over 28 percent (28.6 percent) of the candidates are female, with one enrolled in the AAR and nine enrolled in the RCSC.

Forty-three percent (42.9 percent) of the total candidates represent racial and ethnic minorities.

Given the continuing significant changes in the RCA and the current church climate, the MFCA will continue to adapt and broaden its methods of accomplishing this mission and will seek to work with the partners God provides to accomplish this work, with special emphasis on the following:

- Adapting its operations and programs as necessary to embrace a multiracial future freed of racism.
- As appropriate, given our polity, working with the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (PFOB), classes, and institutions to enhance educational opportunities for commissioned pastors and others and to encourage a seamless transition to study for the ministry of Word and sacrament where possible.
- Wherever possible, ensure that the Certificate of Readiness for Examination and ordination process is equitable across languages and cultures.
- Ensure the diversity of the MFCA Board of Trustees and Certification Committee.

How the MFCA Board Operates

By permission and approval of the General Synod Council (GSC), the MFCA Board of Trustees operates under Policy Governance. In accordance with the tenets of Policy Governance, the board intentionally focuses on visioning and policy development. It sets clear goals for the agency by delegating the means of achieving them to the executive director and staff, subject only to explicit executive limitations. The board stays abreast of the MFCA program through the monitoring reports of the director.

With the role of the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (PFOB), the visioning and policy development may no longer be a main responsibility of the MFCA Board, as most policy and direction will come from PFOB. The board's experience has caused the board to revisit how it operates. The initial consensus regarding its role is that the main purpose is to award the Certificate of Readiness for Examination (CRE) and oversee the program through its supervision of the director. The RCA chief financial officer (CFO) is the CFO of the MFCA. The director creates the initial budget each year and once the CFO approves it, the director manages the budget. There is little involvement in terms of budgets and finances on the part of the board.

The board is considering one of two things. The first consideration is to review the Policy Governance document and modify it in order to reflect current changes. The second is to move away from policy governance totally and to revisit the bylaws and adjust them to the matters that are important to the operation of the MFCA.

Budgets and Finances

The MFCA finances have been under strain for a number of years and the agency continues to draw from reserves on an annual basis. The MFCA receives minimal support from congregations and has no capacity to raise funds. The average candidate will invest approximately \$2,000, over and above regular education costs, in order to complete the requirements for the CRE.

The CFO of the denomination also serves in that capacity for the MFCA. Budgets, and particularly the reserves, are closely monitored by the CFO. The CFO reported that we ended the year with a loss, but it was less than originally budgeted. The budget for 2024 is set and there is a deficit expected. There remains enough money in the MFCA reserves to continue with similar deficits for approximately two or three more years.

Covenant shares became effective in 2024. One of the recommendations expected to be presented by the restructuring team to the General Synod in 2024 will be to cap the covenant shares at 2 percent.

Seventy-nine percent (79 percent) of the MFCA budget comes from the theological education assessment. The remainder comes from user fees and investment income. The MFCA Board of Trustees is grateful for the generous support of the churches by way of the General Synod assessments. The agency would not exist if it was not for the theological education assessment income.

The MFCA staff have continued to operate at a reduced budget.

Partnership with the RCA Seminaries

The MFCA no longer contracts with professors to teach courses to meet the RCA ordination requirements, but now has an agreement with both RCA seminaries so MFCA candidates can meet their course requirements for the Certificate of Readiness for Examination. Candidates still register through the MFCA office.

In the fall of 2023, MFCA registered five students to take courses at New Brunswick Theological Seminary and six students to take courses at Western Theological Seminary. In the spring semester, the MFCA registered seven students at New Brunswick Theological Seminary and ten at Western Theological Seminary.

This transition has gone well, and the MFCA is grateful to the seminaries for working with the MFCA and its candidates.

Certificates of Fitness for Ministry/Certificates of Readiness for Examination Awarded

The Board of Trustees awarded six Certificates of Fitness for Ministry/Certificates of Readiness for Examination since the last report in June 2023, one through the AAR and five through the RCSC process. Four candidates were awarded the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry and two candidates were awarded the Certificate of Readiness for Examination.

Approved Alternate Route (AAR)

Jonathan Michael Craig	Classis of Central Iowa
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Reformed Candidates Supervision and Care (RCSC)

Jeffrey Brian Chu	Classis of Rockland-Westchester
Cecilia Go	Classis of Greater Palisades
Savitri D. Mark	Classis of Columbia-Greene
Peter K. Min	Classis of Queens
Narayana Das Rendla	Classis of Nassau-Suffolk

Alternate Means Petitions

The committee reviewed the following alternate means petitions and approved both:

The committee discussed the petition for Robert Janke to waive the 24-month requirement and recommended that this petition be accepted due to his history of beginning the process in the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

The committee understood that Das Rendla intends to take the language tools courses and agreed that this would be an adequate substitute for the language requirement. The committee was also comfortable with relaxing the 24-month requirement.