

As requested in R 17-40, the amount of funds raised for refugee work is posted on the RCA website at www.rca.org/refugees, along with plans for how those funds are spent. In addition, on that webpage, congregations and individuals can find suggestions for ways to learn more about the situation of refugees around the world and get involved with advocating for and helping refugees.

REFERRAL FROM GENERAL SYNOD 2016

Response to *MGS 2016*, R 16-29, pp. 154–155, Pastoral Formation Coordinating Committee

REPORT OF THE PASTORAL FORMATION COORDINATING COMMITTEE

As a response to the recommendations of the Call, Care, and Standards Collaboration Group, the 2016 General Synod adopted R 16-29:

Reconstitute the Call, Care, and Standards Collaborative Group under the new name of Pastoral Formation Coordinating Committee (PFCC). The PFCC will meet for a period of two years, and its funding will come from the General Synod assessment for theological education. At the completion of this two-year period, the PFCC will propose to the General Synod a permanent committee, along with appropriate staffing and budget. The PFCC's responsibilities will include:

1. In consultation with the professorate, coordinate regular review of the standards and propose needed revisions to the General Synod. In conjunction with this process, coordinate the evaluation of overall effectiveness of the certification processes in assisting candidates to meet the standards established by the RCA.
2. Facilitate appropriate resources, support, and sharing of best practices among congregations and classes in their discernment of the call of ministerial candidates and in their care of ministerial candidates in the ordination process.
3. Provide a forum for collaboration among the seminaries and the MFCA regarding ministerial formation as it relates to RCA church order and the mission of the church.
4. Assist the GSC in conducting a triennial review of the overall assessment for theological education, considering both the total amount and its division, in light of RCA church order and the mission of the church.

Therefore, in fulfillment of this recommendation, the PFCC offers this report to the General Synod and offers three recommendations.

RF 18-1

To constitute the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (PFOB). The purpose of the PFOB 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.

The PFOB is to serve 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.

The responsibilities of the PFOB shall be:

1. Coordinate the processes by which all three theological agents implement the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry in partnership with the classes and evaluate the overall effectiveness of the processes.
2. Facilitate appropriate resources, support, and sharing of best practices among congregations and classes in their discernment of the call of ministerial candidates and in their care of ministerial candidates in the ordination process.
3. Provide a forum for collaboration among the seminaries and the MFCA regarding ministerial formation and continuing education as they relate to RCA church order and the mission of the church.
4. Facilitate the exploration of the ever-changing and increasingly diverse North American context and collaborate to form the leaders capable of doing effective ministry in an increasingly multicultural world.
5. Explore collaboration between churches that are deeply committed to forming pastoral leadership within their congregations and the theological agents.
6. Coordinate regular review of the standards and propose needed revisions to the General Synod, in consultation with the General Synod professors (professorate).
7. Facilitate commissioned pastor preparation among classes as together we embrace the mission of the church.
8. Assist the General Synod Council in conducting a triennial review of the overall assessment for theological education and any additional RCA funding to be requested, considering both the total amount and its division, in light of RCA church order and the mission of the church.

The PFOB shall consist of 13 voting members and one ex-officio, non-voting member. The membership of the PFOB shall reflect the diversity of the RCA in terms of age, gender, and ethnicity. At least three members will be currently serving as General Synod professors. Members are to be chosen as follows:

1. The three executives of the RCA's theological agents (WTS, NBTS, MFCA).
2. One additional member designated by each theological agent.
3. One member appointed by the GSC from among the GSC's current members.
4. Six members from the RCA, nominated by the PFOB and appointed by the General Synod, two of whom shall be commissioned pastors. These six people will serve three-year, staggered terms, which will be renewable.
5. The general secretary, ex-officio and without vote.

The PFOB exists to serve classes, candidates, and congregations in the formation of pastoral leadership for the church. It is appointed by and directly accountable to the General Synod and is guided by the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America. The PFOB shall provide an annual report of its actions to the General Synod, to all classes, and to the boards of the three agents.

The GSC, functioning as the Executive Committee of the General Synod, in consultation with the PFOB, shall designate and fund appropriate staff support for the PFOB. Apart from costs for staff, which will be part of the GSC assessment budget, the expenses related to the PFOB shall be covered through the assessment for theological education.

The General Synod Council and the PFOB, in consultation with the Commission on Church Order, shall work together to bring an official governing document for the PFOB to General Synod 2019 for approval.

RF 18-2

To set the General Synod assessment for theological education to \$829,000 for Fiscal Year 2019, to be allocated in the following manner:

- 1. An initial \$75,000 given to the MFCA to cover expenses and to account for its lack of ability to raise funds compared to an educational institution.**
- 2. 75 percent of the remaining funds are to be split evenly among the three agents for theological education (WTS, NBTS, and MFCA).**
- 3. 20 percent distributed per capita according to the number of students within each agency who are formally in the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process.**
- 4. 5 percent to cover the cost of the meetings of the PFOB, the General Synod professors, and collaborative efforts among the respective agents.**

This represents an assessment increase of 2.5 percent per confessing member. However, given the decreasing membership of the RCA, this actually decreases the amount of funding for the three agents. The PFCC had requested an increase to \$875,000 given that the overall amount of the General Synod assessment for theological education has not changed in nine years. This increase was meant to meet the realistic demands of both of the seminaries as well as the allowing the MFCA to continue to educate candidates and grant Certificates of Fitness for Ministry while keeping costs manageable for the candidates. However, it is the authority of the GSC to determine the actual assessment amount as set forth above.

The PFCC is also proposing an amendment to the *Book of Church Order* to insert the Eight Standards for Theological Education.

RF 18-3

To adopt the following amendments to the *Book of Church Order* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined):

Sec. 6. The agents of the General Synod shall be guided by the following criteria in granting the Certificate of Fitness of Ministry:

- a. **Personal faith and evangelism: Demonstrate a mature personal faith in Jesus Christ and commitment and skill in nurturing others to embrace that faith.**
- b. **Call: Demonstrate a life worthy of the gospel, a sense of call to the office of minister of Word and sacrament, an understanding of that office in the Reformed tradition, and a commitment to its responsibilities.**
- c. **Scripture: Demonstrate a thorough understanding of the Scripture (with sufficient Greek and Hebrew to understand nuances of the biblical text), commitment to its authority as Word of God, and insight in its interpretation.**
- d. **History and theology: Demonstrate a thorough understanding of the history and teachings of the Christian church and insight in their interpretation.**
- e. **Reformed tradition: Demonstrate a thorough knowledge of and commitment to Reformed doctrine, government, and worship.**
- f. **Leadership: Demonstrate the skill and understanding required to lead the people of God in faithfulness to their mission.**
- g. **Pastoral care: Demonstrate skill, understanding, and compassion in caring for persons and congregations.**
- h. **Worship and preaching: Demonstrate skill and understanding to lead worship, preach the gospel, and administer the sacraments.**

[Subsequent sections renumbered.]

First, while the three agents are entrusted with granting the CFM, there is no definition as to what constitutes “fitness.” The eight standards listed above represent the many years of discussion by the General Synod professors as well as the General Synod, most recently in a discussion on the standards for theological education at General Synod 2016. Thus, they provide the most thought-out definition of fitness for our ministerial candidates that the agents of the RCA may use in determining fitness for ministry.

Second, a similar category for the standards for education and competency for commissioned pastors is found in the *BCO*. The inclusion of the standards for ministers of Word and sacrament brings consistency in the nature of our standards.

The Certificate of Fitness for Ministry

While the PFCC is not bringing a formal recommendation regarding the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, the committee has discussed it at length and offers this discussion to the General Synod.

Understanding the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry

The Certificate of Fitness for Ministry (CFM) represents a judgment that incorporates a perspective shaped by the denomination, specifically as found in the Constitution of the RCA, which all candidates for ordination pledge to uphold. The CFM is enacted by the agents of the General Synod (the RCA seminaries and MFCA), and the agents are accountable to the General Synod for their work. However, the CFM is described in the *Book of Church Order* in the section that addresses the classis. It is not mentioned under the General Synod. One must trust that this is intentional and strategic.

The simple explanation for this is that “the CFM is a component of a larger, complex process.” The classis is ultimately responsible for the process in its entirety, from the initial point of entry to the final licensing and ordination as a minister of Word and sacrament at completion. The CFM is a component of the classis process, not vice versa. It allows the classis to perform due diligence, utilizing the expertise of the “agents” in caring for and preparing candidates. Let it be noted that the CFM is not insignificant or irrelevant; it is important and serves a crucial role, without which a candidate cannot be deemed competent and qualified to be ordained as a minister of Word and sacrament.

The classis discerns the call of a candidate, enrolls the candidate, nurtures the candidate, evaluates the candidate, examines the candidate, and ultimately ordains the candidate. The CFM functions as a contributing part of this process. It is embedded in the classis process while operating in its own and unique sphere. Its ecclesiastical function is to declare a candidate prepared to take the classis examinations for licensure and ordination.

The agents play a specific role in the classis process. The classis has an ecclesiastical role as bishop, and the agents do not claim similar authority. The classis as bishop is responsible for final decisions that include the more subjective and deeper issues where pastoral discernment is required, including the contextual nuances and relevant scriptural understandings represented by the ministries of the classis. The present CFM certifies a readiness according to the standards for the preparation for ministry on the part of the candidate to sit for final classis examinations for ordination; it does not anticipate or direct the results of those examinations, the responsibility of the classis.

In fulfillment of R 17-22 (*MGS 2017*, p. 146), past president Dan Gillett and Mike Hayes joined the PFCC and were included in the significant discussion concerning the CFM. Cora Taitt, a member of both GSC and the PFCC, also participated in the discussion.

R 17-22

To direct the General Synod Council to send two of its members as well as two additional RCA members to meet with the Pastoral Formation Coordinating Committee (PFCC) at one of the PFCC’s stated meetings to discuss and clarify the potential migration and redefinition of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry to a certificate of academic readiness, and to report back to General Synod 2018.

The PFCC thanks the General Synod for allowing us to engage in these important conversations, and we look forward, if desired, to continuing our work together.

Respectfully submitted,
Chad Pierce, moderator

On behalf of the PFCC:

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REFERRAL FROM GENERAL SYNOD 2015

Response to *MGS 2015*, R-39, p. 181, Task Force on Interreligious Understanding

REPORT OF THE INTERRELIGIOUS TASK FORCE

R-39

To instruct the general secretary, in consultation with the Commission on Christian Unity, to establish, for a period of three years, a General Synod task force on interreligious understanding and relations, in order to explore the challenges and opportunities of relationships and evangelism between Christians and people and groups of other religions, with the understanding that this task force should work closely with the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee of the Christian Reformed Church and other ecumenical partners already involved in interfaith discussions and work, both in North America and globally; and further,

to include in the mandate of this task force the need to make recommendations to the General Synod regarding where and how this work should be permanently lodged within the RCA structure and staffing; and further,

to ask the task force to report annually to the General Synod for the duration of its work.

Introduction

The Interreligious Task Force met five times during the past three years. This was done in a cooperative relationship with the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC) of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, with the chair of the EIRC serving on the task force, as well as in conversation with “other ecumenical partners already involved in interfaith discussions and work” with the aim of presenting to this year’s synod a report and recommendation as to “the challenges and opportunities” of interfaith relations and “where and how this work should be permanently lodged within the RCA structure and staffing.” What follows is a reflection on the deliberations of the task force, establishing the rationale for equipping our congregations for missional engagement with and among our neighbors from