



The Journey Toward Ordination in the CRC

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Introduction

In *God's Missionary People*, Charles VanEngen writes, "During the last half century mission theorists, sociologists of religion, ecclesiologists, and mission practitioners have become increasingly aware of the urgent need for a new vision of local congregations as God's missionary people" (27). The Christian Reformed Church is also becoming more keenly aware of its apostolic mission. In 1986, the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church adopted a contemporary testimony called *Our World Belongs to God*. Article 44 professes:

Following the apostles, the church is sent –
sent with the gospel of the kingdom
to make disciples of all nations,
to feed the hungry,
and to proclaim the assurance that in the name of
Christ
there is forgiveness of sin and new life
for all who repent and believe –
to tell the news that our world belongs to God.
In a world estranged from God,
where millions face confusing choices,
this mission is central to our being,
for we announce the one name that saves.
We repent of leaving this work to a few,
we pray for our brothers and sisters
who suffer for the faith,
and we rejoice that the Spirit
is waking us to see
our mission in God's world.

As the world becomes increasingly secular, the importance of the mission God has entrusted to us continues to grow. The 21st century is an exciting time to be serving God in ministry! The needs of the world are great, but God has promised to equip and lead his church as it responds to the Great Commission and extends the gift of God's grace to those who are yet apart from him.

We are grateful to God that he is continually opening new doors of opportunity for us to follow him into mission. If the Christian Reformed Church is to continue to be faithful in responding to those opportunities, we will need a broad range of leaders who belong to many kinds of communities. As the synodical Advisory Committee to Provide Guidelines for Alternate Routes to Ministry noted, we need leaders "...who feel at home on Wall Street, leaders who feel at home on Main Street, and leaders who feel at home on mean streets. We need Korean leaders, Hispanic leaders, African-American leaders, white American leaders, white Canadian leaders, and First Nations leaders....the list is long and, in its very variety, beautiful. Further, the need is not only large but also urgent. Jesus said to his followers, '*The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field*' (Luke 10:2)." [Acts of Synod 2004, Art. 58, (613)].

Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

A variety of acronyms are used throughout this document. We hope this glossary is helpful to you. Please feel free to contact the Candidacy Committee office if you have any questions about the meaning of these terms, or if you need any help finding your way through these pages. Contact Rev. David Koll, Director of Candidacy, at dkoll@crcna.org or call the office at 1-877-279-9994 x0768.

- **CRC:** The Christian Reformed Church in North America. The CRC is a denomination with approximately 300,000 members in 1,000 congregations across the United States and Canada.
- **Synod:** CRC ministries and policy are directed and supervised by an annual gathering of appointed elders and pastors from across the denomination. This gathering is called the "synod".
- **Candidacy Committee:** This denominational committee sets ministry standards and oversees the nurture and training of those preparing for ordained ministry in the CRC under the provisions of Church Order Articles 6, 7, and 8 and 23.
- **Classis:** Local CRC congregations are grouped into regions known as "classis" (pl: "classes"). Each region has 10-20 congregations in it. There are currently 47 classes in the CRC.
- **CMLT:** Classis Ministerial Leadership Team. Within the denominational structure, there are almost 50 groupings or "families" of CRC congregations based on geographical boundaries. Each family of congregations is known as a classis (plural: classes). The CRC Synod has encouraged all classes to establish a CMLT. These CMLT's work closely with individuals preparing for ministry in the CRC by providing support and encouragement. They work in partnership with the Candidacy Committee to ensure that the processes leading toward ordination are performed in a just, equitable, and welcoming manner.
- **CRC Church Order:** The life of congregations and ministries in the CRC is governed by a set of rules and guidelines called the Church Order. This book, and the articles contained in it, describe and state the various commitments we share as we do ministry. A copy of the CRC Church Order is available electronically at www.crcna.org under the "resources" tab, at the bottom of that tab under "synodical resources".
- **CTS:** Calvin Theological Seminary. As the theological school of the CRC, CTS offers a number of degree programs, including the Master of Divinity program which prepares students for the Ministry of the Word in the CRC.
- **M.Div:** Master of Divinity Degree. This degree, obtained at CTS or elsewhere, is the degree required by those who are preparing for the Ministry of the Word in the CRC under the provisions of CO Article 6.
- **Leadership Development Network:** Many local and regional groups have instituted a planned leadership course/curriculum to train church planters and other church leaders. These programs are referred to as "Leadership Development Networks," or LDNs.
- **EPMC:** The Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy. This program, administered by CTS on behalf of the Candidacy Committee, is designed to give those who attend seminaries other than CTS an orientation to the theology and ministry of the CRC. This program is required of all those entering the Ministry of the Word in the CRC directly out of seminary, but who have obtained their M.Div. degree from a seminary other than CTS. The content of the program is included in an M.Div. degree earned at Calvin Theological Seminary.
- **Modified EPMC:** A program similar to the EPMC, but designed to train and assimilate those pastors ordained in denominations other than the CRC who wish to enter the CRC. This program is administered by Calvin Seminary in partnership with the Candidacy Committee. It is one of the possible learning plans available to pastors entering service in the CRC. Other plans are designed at the regional level, and are called "Individualized Learning Plans".
- **Ministry Readiness Profile:** A file of material that documents the progress of a candidate in the journey toward ordination. This file is a progressive document, and will include letters of endorsement, and a variety of other material that testifies to the candidate's qualifications for ministry and fulfillment of denominational requirements.
- **Stated Supply:** When a prospective pastor begins serving in a CRC congregation or ministry before the CRC affiliation process is completed, he/she is serving as a "stated supply". This status is by nature somewhat tentative and limited in time duration. It is hopefully followed by a permanent assignment in ministry at that location or at another location.

- **Three Forms of Unity:** This term refers to the doctrinal statements that have played a major part in the history of the reformed churches in general, and the CRC in particular. They include The Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dordt, and the Belgic Confession. Each of these three comes out of the 16th century western European context. When persons become pastors in the CRC they commit themselves to agreement with the teachings in these documents.

I. The Routes to Ordination

The CRC has two offices of ordained pastoral ministry: the office of Minister of the Word and the office of Commissioned Pastor. The routes to Minister of the Word are described in Church Order Articles 6, 7 and 8, cited below, and explained in this document.

Church Order Article 6 addresses those who prepare for the ministry through academic training that leads to a Master of Divinity (M.Div) degree.

Article 6

- a. The completion of a satisfactory theological training shall be required for admission to the ministry of the Word.
- b. Graduates of the theological seminary of the Christian Reformed Church who have been declared candidates for the ministry of the Word by synod shall be eligible for call.
- c. Those who have been trained elsewhere shall not be eligible for call unless they have met the requirements stipulated in the synodical regulations and have been declared by synod to be candidates for the ministry of the Word.

Church Order Article 7 makes provision for those who have not obtained the prescribed theological training but who nevertheless give evidence of exceptional giftedness and a "native ability" to preach the Word.

Article 7

- a. Those who have not received the prescribed theological training but who give evidence that they are singularly gifted as to godliness, humility, spiritual discretion, wisdom, and the native ability to preach the Word, may, by way of exception, be admitted to the ministry of the Word.
- b. Those preparing for the ordained ministry under the provisions of this article are required to complete the Modified Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (MEPMC).

Church Order Article 8 provides a means for ministers who have been ordained in another denomination to enter the Ministry of the Word in the CRC.

Article 8

- a. Ministers of the Christian Reformed Church are eligible for call, with due observance of the relevant rules.
- b. Ministers of the Reformed Church in America are eligible for call to serve in the Christian Reformed Church, with due observance of the relevant rules.
- c. Ministers of other denominations desiring to become ministers in the Christian Reformed Church shall be required to complete the Modified Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (MEPMC).
- d. Ministers of other denominations who have not been declared eligible for a call shall not be called unless all synodical requirements have been met.

The route to Commissioned Pastor is described in **Church Order Article 23**, also cited below. This route is explained later in this document on pages 25-26.

Article 23

- a. Commissioned Pastors shall be acknowledged as elders of their calling churches with corresponding privileges and responsibilities. Normally, their work as elders shall be limited to the ministries in which they serve as Commissioned Pastors.
- b. Ordinarily, the office of Commissioned Pastors who serve in emerging congregations will terminate when a group of believers becomes an organized church. However, upon organization and with the approval of the newly formed council and the classis, Commissioned Pastors may continue to serve the newly organized church until an ordained minister of the Word is installed or until they have served the newly organized church for a reasonable period of transition. Commissioned Pastors who continue to serve a newly organized congregation beyond this reasonable period of transition must seek the permission of classis with the concurrence of the synodical deputies.
- c. Commissioned Pastors may also serve in organized congregations along with a minister of the Word and may serve as chaplains in institutional settings in the community. Commissioned Pastors who have served an organized congregation along with a minister of the Word may, in exceptional circumstances, with the approval of classis and the concurrence of synodical deputies, continue serving that congregation as a solo pastor after the minister of the Word has left.
- d. Commissioned Pastors may be called to serve as solo pastors in organized congregations if the classis, with the concurring advice of synodical deputies, ascertains that such congregations are from a ministry context where the standards for pastoral preparation required by Articles 6, 7, or 8 are not presently practical.
- e. Commissioned Pastors who desire to serve beyond their specific field of labor must secure the approval of their consistories and classes.

II. Partners in the Journey

A. The Candidate

Synod 2000 adopted a number of standards in the areas of *character*, *knowledge*, and *skills* for those entering ministry. In adopting these standards, Synod was guided by the following principles:

- The Reformed confessional heritage should be the basic foundation for all ministry-staff job descriptions. A principle of proportionality should be thoughtfully applied to all persons who fill staff positions in any Christian Reformed church. The degree of understanding and skill required to apply the confessional tradition is proportional to the level of ministry responsibility assigned. As one's sphere of authorized service extends, so should one's capability for understanding, articulating, and discipling others in the Christian faith and Reformed confessional tradition.
- The CRC is committed to a theologically well-trained clergy and to maintaining the expectation that "the completion of a satisfactory theological training shall be required for admission to the Ministry of the Word" (Church Order Article 6-a).
- The church needs to take note of the general scriptural teaching concerning personal qualifications for ministry found in passages such as Matthew 18; 20:20-28; 28:18-20; Acts 6; II Corinthians 4; 5; Ephesians 4; and I and II Timothy.

The next two pages describe the standards for ministry as articulated by Synod 2000. The standards are described here relative to the office of Minister of the Word (Articles 6,7, and 8). The character, knowledge and skill standards for Commissioned Pastor can be found in Church Order Supplement Article 23 (also in the "tool kit" of this document, pp 91-92).

Character Standards

Any person called to serve Christ in a CRC ministry position should be:

- publicly committed to Christ and his church, submitting to its discipline.
- exemplary in piety and holy conduct of life, a humble person of prayer who trusts God's providence.
- of good reputation, emotionally mature, honest, trustworthy, reliable.
- caring and compassionate for the lost and the weak.
- eager to learn and grow in faith, knowledge, and love.
- joyful in affirming the goodness of God's creation and communicating to others a delight in its beauty.
- sensitive to others in all their personal and cultural variety (see also Calvin Theological Seminary's Personal Qualifications for Ministry — Agenda for Synod 2000, (345-50)).

Knowledge Standards

A. Biblical Foundations

Any person called to serve Christ in a CRC ministry position should:

- know the content of the Old and New Testaments.
- know and be able to explain the basic structure and flow of biblical redemptive covenantal history centered in Christ (promise and fulfillment).
- be able to identify the main themes (covenant, kingdom of God, holiness) of Scripture as well as the large divisions (law, prophets, writings) and specific types of biblical literature.
- be able to articulate the significance of the various sections, books, or types of biblical literature to contemporary issues and questions.

B. Theological Foundations

Any person called to serve Christ in a CRC ministry position should:

- know and be able to explain the basic teachings of the universal Christian tradition concerning God, humanity, the person and work of Christ, salvation, the church, and the last things.
- know, be able to explain, and be ready and willing to defend the three forms of unity and a Reformed confessional stance on key doctrines such as predestination, unity of the covenant, infant and adult baptism, millennialism, and the cosmic scope of the Reformed worldview.
- have a rudimentary knowledge of and ability to respond to the key challenges posed to the Christian and Reformed faith in North America by the major world religions, the major cults, and the various forms of New Age spirituality.
- know the key concepts of CRC church polity.

C. Skill Standards

Any person called to serve Christ in a CRC ministry position should:

- be prepared to “give an answer to everyone who asks [you] to give the reason for the hope [you] have” (I Peter 3:15).
- be able and willing to make a clear presentation of the gospel to an unbeliever.
- be able to teach and disciple persons to deeper faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ.
- be able to prepare and deliver short Biblically based messages for public occasions (i.e. nursing homes, prisons, civic occasions).
- be capable of effectively leading a group in various tasks, including Bible studies, task completion, and resolving conflict.

B. The Council

The local congregation is often the context in which people first hear the call to a life of vocational ministry. It is through the local congregation where people are nurtured in the faith and encouraged to a life of service. A congregation and its leadership are therefore often in an ideal position to identify the requisite gifts for ministry and to give individuals the opportunity to test those gifts in real ministry settings. As a result, local congregations and councils are indispensable partners in a candidate's journey towards ordination.

Councils fulfill at least six different responsibilities in the candidacy process. *Councils work with the classis in fulfilling these responsibilities.* These responsibilities include the following:

1. **To identify** persons who show natural ability and/or spiritual giftedness for ministry through consultation with pastoral staff, ministry leaders, and youth leaders. Some qualities to consider include spiritual maturity, emotional stability, leadership ability, relational skills, and intellectual capacities. As councils identify some of these qualities, they may also want to seek feedback and affirmation from the individual, his or her family members, and others.
2. **To encourage** such individuals to seriously consider whether God is calling them to ministry in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) through, for instance, mentoring or providing appropriate ministry opportunities.
3. **To supply** interested individuals with materials that will assist them in understanding the process of becoming a minister in the CRC.
4. **To endorse** an individual's application to begin preparing for ministry in the CRC, forwarding it to the Classis Ministerial Leadership Team (CMLT). Before recommending a candidate the council should identify and ascertain, if possible, how the applicant's gifts have been demonstrated in the context of the congregation.
5. **To provide support and accountability.** Where possible, the council should encourage the student in the journey toward vocational ministry by:
 - a. Providing support and accountability throughout the preparatory process including, for instance, mentoring, interviews, conversations, written reports, communications of encouragement, financial assistance etc.
 - b. Maintaining contact and showing active and ongoing interest in the student's progress throughout the entire candidacy process.
 - c. Ensuring (where contact is not practical) that the student is an active member of a congregation and is receiving spiritual support.
 - d. Offering ministry opportunities (where possible), including opportunities to exhort once the individual has been granted licensure.
6. **To provide an endorsement** for the individual as they are nearing the completion of their preparatory process. In some cases, the final endorsement will not come from the individual's "home" council, but rather from the council where the individual was most recently worshiping and/or engaged in ministry.

C. The Classis

As another important partner in the candidacy process, classes play a significant role in the preparation of men and women for ordination. Classes (1) advise their member congregations with regards to candidacy policies and procedures; (2) collaborate with Article 6 students and Article 7 and 8 applicants in the preparation of their file, sometimes called a **Ministry Readiness Profiles**; (3) guide ministries through the processes involved in Article 23 ordination and (4) provide the Candidacy Committee with endorsements and other necessary information.

In order to facilitate classes' role in the candidacy process, Synod 2004 urged all classes to appoint a Classis Ministerial Leadership Team (CMLT) which reflects the classis' own particular character and geographic realities. While the name, membership and exact mandate of CMLTs is left to the discretion of individual classes, the "CMLT function" needs to be performed in each classis. This work should be done by people who have a passion for the church's ministry, who are knowledgeable about ordination issues, and who reflect the diversity of classis. Normally, the work should be shared by lay members and Ministers of the Word in the CRCNA. In some cases, classes may find it appropriate to appoint a Regional CMLT that serves more than one classis.

Classis Ministerial Leadership Team Mandate:

The following guidelines are offered as a picture of what a CMLT can do. This list can help classes in determining a specific mandate for their local CMLTs:

- a. **Consultation:** The CMLT can be a consultation and advisory resource to the member congregations of its classis, classis itself, and other interested parties (for instance, Leadership Development Networks) regarding matters related to ministerial candidacy in the CRC.
- b. **Information:** The CMLT can provide information and advice to the member congregations of its classis, classis itself, and other interested parties (for instance, Leadership Development Networks) concerning the candidacy process.
- c. **Encouragement:** The CMLT can encourage the member congregations of its classis to be pro-active in identifying possible candidates for ministry in the CRC and offer resources to help people discern their calling.
- d. **Ministry Readiness Profile:** The CMLT can provide counsel that will help councils, classis, and those preparing for the ministry in the completion of the individual's Ministry Readiness Profile.
- e. **Finance:** The CMLT can recommend to classis and administer the distribution of appropriate financial resources to assist those preparing for ministry (see Church Order Art. 21).
- f. **Endorsement:** Upon receiving a positive recommendation to enter the candidacy process from an individual's council, the CMLT can interview the individual and work with them to prepare a Financial Plan, as well as a Study Plan or Learning Covenant. In the case of individuals entering the candidacy or affiliation process through Article 7 or 8, the CMLT plays a key role in providing the Candidacy Committee with required information.
- g. **Celebration:** The CMLT can assist the church and classis that initiated the study/candidacy process in appropriately celebrating the progress of those preparing for the ministry under its care, giving thanks to God for his provision of faithful and gifted leadership for his church.

D. The Candidacy Committee

The Candidacy Committee, on behalf of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) Synod, is the final partner in the process of candidacy preparation. Because the denomination has such a vital interest in the formation of ministers of the Word, Synod in 2004 established the SMCC (now called the "Candidacy Committee") to retain, direct, and enhance the denomination's role in the process of equipping and forming its future leaders. Through this committee the denomination is able to oversee the nurture and training of those preparing for ordained ministry through Church Order Articles 6, 7, and 8. Synod 2006 also mandated the committee with the task of encouraging and equipping classes relative to ordination through Church Order Article 23.

The Candidacy Committee serves in the following capacities:

Advisory: The Candidacy Committee functions in an advisory capacity to classes as they develop a Classis Ministerial Leadership Team (CMLT)

Consultation: The Candidacy Committee serves as a consultation and advisory resource to classical CMLTs once established.

Financial Support: the Candidacy Committee, in consultation with CMLT's, works to ensure equity in student financial assistance among the classes of the denomination.

Oversight of the Article 6 candidacy process and the Article 7 and 8 ordination process in the CRC.

Oversight of the denominational licensure process.

Recommend Persons for Candidacy to the Synod of the CRC.

The committee's official mandate, developed and adopted by the denominational Board of Trustees, approved by Synod, and updated most recently by Synod 2008, is as follows:

Candidacy Committee Mandate

The Candidacy Committee shall:

- Foster the development of pastoral leadership in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), helping and encouraging the classes and councils to identify potential new leaders whom they can assist on their various journeys to pastoral office.
- Establish with the approval of synod standards that will result in consistency, fairness, and justice in applying the denomination's requirements for each person who desires to become a Minister of the Word in the CRC, whether applying under Article 6, 7, or 8 of the Church Order, or who desires to be a Commissioned Pastor applying under Article 23.
- Maintain, clarify, and periodically review these standards.
- Assist the classes in the development of Classis Ministerial Leadership Teams (CMLT) by providing them with information, counsel, and resources as they encourage individuals to seek the ministry as a vocation and as they support and make decisions regarding those who are preparing for or are applying to become a Minister of the Word in the CRC.
- Implement and maintain regular contact with the classes to determine who from their churches are preparing for ministry and assist them in developing a Ministry Readiness Profile.
- Recommend candidates to the synod of the CRC upon the individual's completion of the Ministry Readiness Profile.
- Grant denominational licensure to exhort to students studying for the ordained ministry in the CRC.
- Provide support and accountability throughout the preparatory process for women whose council or classis does not support women in ordained ministry.

- Provide resources to equip classes for the examinations required in the ordination process so that there is consistency throughout the denomination.
- Provide an annual report to synod and regular reports to the Board of Trustees for information.

The membership of Candidacy Committee is listed in the *Yearbook of the Christian Reformed Church* under synodical committees. (Page 730 of the 2012 edition). The current committee members are also introduced on the Candidacy Committee web site. As with all denominational committees in the Christian Reformed Church, members serve three year terms, and are eligible for two terms.

III. Paths in the Journey

A. Master of Divinity Degree (Church Order Article 6)

Article 6 of the CRC Church Order describes the route or ordination as a Minister of the Word that involves attending seminary and earning a Master of Divinity Degree. The following section describes some of the steps that may occur in the process leading up to enrolling in seminary. *Note that some of these steps are recommended, but not currently required.* The basic formal requirement for entry into ordained ministry in the CRC is earning a Master of Divinity degree (and completing the CRC EPMC program if the degree is earned at a seminary other than Calvin Theological Seminary) and then following the candidacy application process as directed by Calvin Theological Seminary.

Below you will see a description of the process leading to seminary and enrollment in the CRC candidacy program, followed by a summary "Flow Chart" and a "Ministry Readiness Profile" Check-list for Article 6 candidates. The profile offers concrete steps that may be taken coordinate with earning the Master of Divinity degree. Some classes and individuals have begun to make use of this process and are hopefully finding it helpful in establishing a meaningful relationship between the student and the church. (Note that as of 2012 the roles of the CMLT and local church councils are still evolving into the ideal described below)

1. *Calling*

- The individual experiences a sense of internal calling from the Lord to serve in vocational ministry. This calling is informally confirmed by others, likely including the individual's pastor, council, and family. As the individual anticipates beginning his or her seminary studies, the council directs the individual to make inquiry to the CMLT and/or the Candidacy Committee concerning the process of ministry formation and preparation.

2. *Inquiry Stage*

- The CMLT and the Candidacy Committee offer the interested individual encouragement, answer their questions, and outline the necessary steps for pursuing ministry under the provisions of Church Order Article 6. They also ensure the individual has access to all the necessary documents to welcome and orient the potential student to the process of ministry preparation.

3. *Affirmation and Support of Council*

- The individual completes a Candidate's Application to Council Form, and then approaches his or her council to seek their official affirmation to begin preparing for the office of Minister of the Word.
- Council interviews the individual, completes a Council Recommendation Form, and forwards the form to the Classis Ministerial Leadership Team (CMLT). Along with their recommendation, they also forward to the CMLT the individual's Application to Council (including his or her Autobiography and Personal Statement of Faith).

Note: For a council to endorse an individual to prepare for ministry under the provisions of Church Order Article 6, the individual has to have been a member of the CRC for a minimum of one year and had opportunity to demonstrate his or her giftedness for ministry.

- The council inquires about the student's financial needs and considers ways the congregation may be able to assist.

4. CMLT Interview and the Preparation of Study and Financial Plans

- The individual appears before the Classis Ministerial Leadership Team (CMLT), or its designated committee, for a personal interview.
- If, as a result of this interview the individual is endorsed, then the individual will draft a Study Plan which he or she will review with the CMLT. This plan will indicate where the individual intends to study and how long they intend to take to complete their degree.
- The individual will also draft a Financial Plan indicating how he or she intends to finance their education. This plan, also to be reviewed with the CMLT, will likely include several sources of funding, including: prior savings, part-time work, loans, grants, family assistance, spousal income, classical or congregational aid, scholarships, and bursaries.
- The CMLT completes a Classis Recommendation Form and forwards this form, along with the Study and Financial Plans, the CMLT Recommendation, and the individual's Application to Council (including his or her Autobiography and Personal Statement of Faith) to the Candidacy Committee.

5. Admission to the Candidacy Process

- The Candidacy Committee reviews all documents, and endorses the individual's Study and Financial Plans. The Candidacy Committee may suggest additional changes to the plans before they provide their endorsement. Once the plans are endorsed, the Candidacy Committee admits the individual to the candidacy process and communicates their decision in writing to both the individual and the CMLT.
- The Candidacy Committee, CMLT, and Church Council encourage the prospective student to enroll in seminary, and in the EPMC if the student attends a seminary other than CTS.

Note: Those who study at other seminaries are encouraged to enroll in the EPMC as soon as possible after beginning an M. Div program, preferably after their first semester in seminary.

6. The Ministry Preparation Phase

- The CMLT, in consultation with the individual, ensures that individuals enrolled in seminaries other than CTS have a suitable mentor (students at CTS are assigned a mentor as part of their program). It is recommended and preferred that this mentoring relationship be with a CRC pastor, although in certain circumstances it may be appropriate to establish this relationship with someone else.
- As the individual's studies begin, his or her council will maintain contact and show active and ongoing interest in the student's progress throughout the entire ministry preparation process. This may involve written communication and (where possible) personal contacts. The council should also provide ministry opportunities for the student within the congregation, including the opportunity to exhort once the student is licensed (where feasible).
- The CMLT will also maintain contact with the student throughout their studies, showing an active and ongoing interest in the student's development. The CMLT provides financial assistance, encouragement, guidance, and accountability, also ensuring that the student is a member of a congregation where they are receiving spiritual support.

The CMLT also assists students with the preparation of their Ministry Readiness Profile and tracks the student's progress toward meeting the requirements inherent in the profile. In the case of students attending Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS), and for those pre-enrolled in the Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (EPMC), the CTS staff and faculty will also assist in ensuring the Ministry Readiness Profile requirements are completed at the appropriate times. At set points throughout the student's preparation, an evaluated psychological report will be completed, and a criminal background check conducted. The individual will also be asked to make full disclosure of any acts of official discipline, criminal charges, or ecclesiastical complaint.

- After having received a recommendation from the CTS faculty committee, the Candidacy Committee will grant the student licensure to exhort.
- Where there are changes to the student's Financial Plan or Study Plan, the CMLT endorses these changes and notifies the Candidacy Committee. The Candidacy Committee may also initiate suggested changes to the original plan. The Candidacy Committee, the CMLT, and the student should communicate in writing to one another any plan revisions.

- For students studying at seminaries other than CTS, completion of the EPMC program is required. This program provides an introduction to Reformed hermeneutics, CRC Church Polity, CRC Church History, and other courses that may not be available elsewhere. Students should enroll in the EPMC program as early as possible in their seminary studies.
- At fitting points in the student's academic journey, the individual's classis finds appropriate means for celebrating and giving thanks to God for his provision of faithful and gifted leadership for his church.

7. The Candidacy Stage

- At the conclusion of the M. Div program and the completion of the EPMC, the Candidacy Committee interviews the individual and recommends him/her to synod as a candidate for Minister of the Word in the CRC.
- Before being approved as a candidate by synod, conversations between potential candidates and calling churches are normal and expected. However, written promises regarding either intents to call or intents to accept calls are unwise and premature. No commitments are to be finalized prior to declaration of candidacy by synod. Persons on the list of potential candidates are not eligible for call until synod declares them to be candidates in June. Up to that time they may be in discussion with churches and search committees, they may visit and preach at inquiring churches and ministries, and they may even serve as short term supply. They may not, however, make any commitment to accept a call from a ministry until synod declares them eligible for call and until they have completed all the requirements for candidacy. Any request for an exception to this policy should be addressed to the denominational candidacy committee.
- Synod declares individuals as candidate for the Minister of the Word in the CRC each June. Such students are then eligible for calls.
- Upon receiving and accepting a call for ministry in the CRC, the student will be examined by the classis in which the call has been given, according to the regulations of CRC Church Order Article 10.

Note: Where necessary, a CMLT may make arrangements with other classes or congregations nearer to the school the student attends to fulfill some or all of their above mentioned responsibilities.

The Journey to Ordination: Article Six (Flow Chart)

CALLING

INQUIRY STAGE: Candidacy Committee and CMLT

AFFIRMATION AND SUPPORT OF COUNCIL

CMLT INTERVIEW

AND THE PREPARATION OF STUDY AND FINANCIAL PLANS

ADMISSION TO THE CANDIDACY PROCESS

MINISTRY PREPARATION PHASE

THE CANDIDACY STAGE

B. Exceptional Giftedness (Church Order Article 7)

Church Order Article 7 was originally included in the CRC Church Order as an exceptional route into ordained ministry. In the ten years leading up to 2007 this article was being used more often, and less carefully. Thus, Synod 2007 decided to “return to the use of Article 7 in line with its centuries-long use by the CRC and its predecessors in the Netherlands. It will be used exactly as the Church Order requires—in highly exceptional circumstances.” (Acts of Synod 2007 (652)). (For a description of the historical use of Article 7, see the document under “tools” that describes the “History of Article 7.”) In this context, Article 7 will be used rarely. Please contact the Director of Candidacy in any questions regarding the ongoing use of Article 7.

A. Calling

- The individual experiences a sense of internal calling from the Lord to serve in vocational ministry. This calling is informally confirmed by others, likely including the individual’s pastor, council, family, and perhaps even the local CMLT. The first formal step in the process is then taken as the individual is directed to make inquiry to the Candidacy Committee of the CRC.

B. Inquiry Stage

- The Candidacy Committee of the CRC offers the interested individual encouragement, answers their questions, and determines which Church Order Article would be the most appropriate one for the individual to prepare for the ministry. If it is determined by the Candidacy Committee that the provisions of Church Order Article 7 apply, the Candidacy Committee will outline the necessary steps for pursuing ministry under the provisions of this article. It should be noted that the Candidacy Committee must give this initial determination at this point in the process in order for the individual to proceed with the next steps.

C. Affirmation and Support of Council

- The individual completes a Candidate’s Application to Council Form and then approaches his or her council to seek their official affirmation to begin preparing for the office of Minister of the Word under the provisions of Church Order Article 7.
- Council interviews the individual, completes a Council Recommendation Form, and forwards the form to the Classis Ministerial Leadership Team (CMLT). Along with their recommendation, they also forward the individual’s Application to Council (including his or her Autobiography and Personal Faith Statement).

Note: For a Council to endorse an individual to prepare for ministry under the provisions of Church Order Art. 7, the individual has to have been a member of the CRC for a minimum of three years and had opportunity to demonstrate his or her exceptional giftedness for ministry.

- The council inquires about the individual’s financial needs and considers ways the congregation may be able to assist through the ministry preparation phase.

D. CMLT Interview and the Preparation of a Learning Covenant and Financial Plan

- The individual then appears before the Classis Ministerial Leadership Team (CMLT), or its designated committee, for a personal interview.
- If, the CMLT endorses the individual as a result of this interview, the CMLT and the individual will work together to prepare the next set of documents in the Ministry Readiness Profile, as specified below.
- The individual will draft a Learning Covenant which he or she will review with the CMLT. This covenant will indicate what areas of study (Biblical, Theological, Practical) the individual will be pursuing, and how these objectives will be met (potentially through a combination of academic study at a University or Seminary, on-line learning, mentoring, and/or independent study). The covenant will also include participation in the Modified Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (MEPMC) or an approved contextually shaped alternative to the MEPMC. Based on the individual’s ministry experience, the Covenant will also specify what type of additional ministry opportunities will be sought.

- The individual will also draft a Financial Plan indicating how they intend to finance their preparation for ministry. This plan, also to be reviewed with the CMLT, may include several sources of funding, including: prior savings, part-time work, loans, spousal income, classical or congregational aid, and/or other means.
- The CMLT completes a Classis Recommendation Form and forwards this form, along with the other elements of the Ministry Readiness Profile gathered to this point (the Learning Covenant, Financial Plan, the CMLT recommendation, and the individual's application to Council, the Autobiography and Personal Statement of Faith, etc.) to the Candidacy Committee.

E. Admission to the Candidacy Process

- The Candidacy Committee reviews all the initial documents, and endorses the individual's Learning Covenant and Financial Plan. The Candidacy Committee may suggest changes to the Learning Covenant or Financial Plan before they provide their endorsement. Once the plans are endorsed, the Candidacy Committee gives permission to continue under the provisions of Church Order Article 7 and communicates their decision in writing to both the individual and the CMLT.
- The Classis will then do a preliminary interview for licensure under Article 7. With the approval of classis, the concurrence of the synodical deputies, and the endorsement of the Candidacy Committee, the person may begin a period of exhorting within the bounds of classis.

F. The Ministry Preparation Phase

- The individual will work to complete the program laid out in the Learning Covenant, in consultation with the CMLT.
- The individual works in coordination with the CMLT to gather the other documents required in the process (see checklist on p. 24) and submits them to the CMLT and the Candidacy Committee.
- The CMLT, in consultation with the individual, ensures that the individual has a suitable mentor. It is recommended and preferred that this mentoring relationship be with a CRC pastor, although in certain circumstances it may be appropriate to establish this relationship with someone else.
- Throughout the ministry preparation process, the individual's council will maintain contact with them, showing active and ongoing interest in their progress. This may involve written communication and (where possible) personal contacts. The council should also provide ministry opportunities for the individual within the congregation, including the opportunity to exhort once the individual has been licensed (where feasible).
- The CMLT also maintains contact with the individual throughout their candidacy preparation, showing an active and ongoing interest in their development. The CMLT will provide encouragement, guidance, and accountability, also ensuring that the individual is a member of a congregation where they are receiving spiritual support. The CMLT may also find it appropriate for the classis to provide the individual some financial assistance.
- Where there are changes to the individual's Learning Covenant or Financial Plan, the CMLT endorses these changes and notifies the Candidacy Committee. The Candidacy Committee may also initiate suggested changes to the original plan. When any revisions of a plan occurs, the Candidacy Committee, the CMLT and the individual communicate such in writing to one another.
- At fitting points in the individual's preparation process, the individual's classis will find appropriate means for celebrating and giving thanks to God for his provision of faithful and gifted leadership for his church.

G. The Candidacy Stage

- As the individual nears completion of his or her Learning Covenant, the church council best able to make an assessment gives its endorsement to the Candidacy Committee for the individual to seek candidacy.
- Candidacy Committee ensures that the Learning Covenant and Ministry Readiness Profile have both been satisfactorily completed and that a favorable endorsement has been received from the appropriate council and classis/CMLT. Once the Candidacy Committee is satisfied that that all requirements for candidacy have been met, Candidacy Committee gives classis permission to proceed with a classical examination.
- Upon receiving permission from the Candidacy Committee, classis then conducts a thorough classical examination in the presence of synodical deputies. Upon a positive recommendation by the classis, and the concurrence of the synodical deputies, the individual is declared a candidate for the Minister of the Word in the CRC and is eligible for call.
- Upon receiving and accepting a call for ministry in the CRC, the individual will be examined in the classis in which the call has been given, according to the regulations of CRC Church Order Article 10.

The Journey to Ordination: Article Seven (Flow Chart)

CALLING

INQUIRY STAGE

AFFIRMATION AND SUPPORT OF COUNCIL

CMLT INTERVIEW AND THE PREPARATION OF

LEARNING COVENANT AND FINANCIAL PLANS

ADMISSION TO THE CANDIDACY PROCESS

MINISTRY PREPARATION PHASE

THE CANDIDACY STAGE

C. Already Ordained in Another Denomination (Church Order Article 8)

A. Expression of Interest

- If a minister from another denomination expresses interest in entering the ordained ministry in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), he or she will contact the Candidacy Committee (see Church Order Supplement Article 8.E.1). Alternatively, after a period of sustained effort to call a minister from within the CRC, a council may express a desire to call a pastor from another denomination. When this is the case, the council needs to contact the Candidacy Committee (see Church Order Supplement Article 8.E.2). Whatever the origin of the contact, the Candidacy Committee will direct all parties to the procedures described in Church Order Article 8 (see especially the discussion of “need” in Supplement Article 8 E.4).

B. Inquiry Stage

- The Candidacy Committee offers the interested individual (or council) encouragement, answers their questions, and determines whether Article 8 is the appropriate Church Order Article for this pastor or council. The Candidacy Committee then outlines the affiliation process to enter ministry in the CRC, in consultation with the appropriate CMLT.

- Note from Candidacy Committee Guidelines in evaluating appropriateness of Article 8 and the related learning covenant:

“The person shall be duly ordained, recommended by an appropriate ecclesiastical authority, and theologically trained. “Theological training” will ordinarily include a documentable program of training that covers the knowledge, character and skills standards for ministry in the CRC”

(This guideline calls for the Candidacy Committee, local councils, and CMLTs to evaluate potential candidate’s ordination and theological training. While that evaluation must be made on a case by case basis, it is safe to say that in the case of Article 8 applications, we are looking for ordination and theological training that is roughly equivalent to the CRC’s practices and standards, as expressed through the Church Order Article 6 process.)

C. Affirmation of Gifts and Character

- The CMLT and minister gather the other initial documents required in the “Ministry Readiness Profile”, including an Autobiography, Personal Statement of Faith, and application from a local CRC Council.
- Where possible, the minister’s former council (or other appropriate local governing body) submits a reference to the Classis Ministerial Leadership Team (CMLT) testifying to the minister’s character, knowledge, and skills.
- Where possible, the minister’s former classis (or other regional body) also submits a reference to the CMLT testifying to the minister’s character, knowledge, and skills.

D. CMLT Interview

- The minister then appears before the CMLT or its designated committee, for a personal interview.
- If, as a result of this interview the minister is endorsed by the CMLT, the CMLT completes a Classis Endorsement Form and forwards this form, along with the other initial documents to the Candidacy Committee for initial endorsement and for licensure to preach in the CRC.

E. Admission to the Affiliation Process

- The Candidacy Committee reviews the initial documents in the Ministry Readiness Profile and, as appropriate, gives initial endorsement to the affiliation process under the provisions of Church Order Article 8. At this point in the process the Candidacy Committee: a) grants licensure to preach in the CRC, and b) grants “Declaration of Need” under Church Order Supplement Article 8.F. The local classis is free to decide whether or not a classis interview is needed at this point.

F. The Preparation and Stated Supply Phase

- To advance in the affiliation process, a period of stated supply is served for a period of at least six months. In some cases, the CMLT may need to provide assistance in finding an appropriate ministry setting.
- Upon endorsement into the affiliation process, the CMLT and the minister together will develop a Learning Covenant. The Covenant will indicate what areas of study (if any) the individual needs to pursue, and how the identified objectives will be met (potentially through a combination of academic study at a University or Seminary, on-line learning, mentoring, and/or independent study). The covenant will also include participation in the Modified Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (MEPMC) or an approved contextually shaped, individualized, alternative learning plan. Based on the minister's experience, the Covenant will also specify what type of stated supply position will be sought and the duration of the position (ordinarily six months).
- In addition to the Learning Covenant, the minister, council and CMLT will also draft a Financial Plan indicating how they intend to finance the affiliation period with the CRC. This plan may include several sources of funding including: prior savings, loans, and spousal income. One of the primary sources of funding is likely to be the income received through a stated supply position.
- The Learning Covenant and the Financial Plan will be forwarded to the Candidacy Committee for their endorsement. The Candidacy Committee may suggest changes to the Learning Covenant or Financial Plan before they provide their endorsement. Once the Candidacy Committee, the CMLT, and the minister are agreed upon the Learning Covenant and Financial Plan, the minister will work with the CMLT to complete the program laid out in the Learning Covenant.
- During this phase the CMLT and minister gather the other documents required in the "Ministry Readiness Profile", including a copy of ministerial credentials, a copy of their academic degrees, a criminal background check, and an evaluated psychological report. The individual also makes full disclosure of any acts of official discipline, criminal charges, or ecclesiastical complaint. This material is forwarded to the Candidacy Committee.
- The CMLT, in consultation with the minister, ensures that he or she has established a mentoring relationship with a CRC pastor.
- The CMLT maintains contact with the minister throughout the affiliation process, showing an active and ongoing interest in the individual's progress toward the goals identified in the Learning Covenant.
- Where there are changes to the minister's Financial Plan or Learning Covenant, the CMLT endorses these changes and notifies the Candidacy Committee. The Candidacy Committee may also suggest additional changes to the plans during this period. The Candidacy Committee, the CMLT, the council and the individual communicate any revisions to one another in writing.
- At fitting points in the minister's affiliation process, the classis will find appropriate means for celebrating and giving thanks to God for his provision of faithful and gifted leadership for his church.

G. The Candidacy Stage

- As the minister nears the end of his or her affiliation process, the council of the congregation where the stated supply was served will provide a final endorsement to the CMLT and the Candidacy Committee for the minister to seek candidacy.
- The CMLT reviews the progress of the minister, and at the appropriate time offers its final endorsement. The CMLT also seeks from the designated mentor a statement of endorsement.
- The Candidacy Committee ensures that the Learning Covenant and Ministry Readiness Profile have both been satisfactorily completed and that a favorable endorsement has been received from the appropriate parties. Once the Candidacy Committee is satisfied that that all requirements have been met, the Candidacy Committee gives classis permission to proceed with a doctrinal conversation.
- Upon receiving permission from the Candidacy Committee, classis then conducts a doctrinal conversation in the presence of synodical deputies. Upon a positive recommendation by the classis, and the concurrence of the synodical deputies, the individual may now be called or is declared eligible for call, as the case may be. No further examination will be required.

The Journey of Affiliation: Article Eight (Flow Chart)

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

INQUIRY STAGE

AFFIRMATION OF GIFTS AND CHARACTER

CMLT INTERVIEW

ADMISSION TO THE AFFILIATION PROCESS

PREPARATION AND STATED SUPPLY PHASE

THE CANDIDACY STAGE

D. Commissioned Pastor (Church Order Article 23)

The office of Commissioned Pastor is recognized in the Christian Reformed Church as a flexible, very localized alternate ordination into ministry. Commissioned Pastor is an “umbrella term” for a variety of ministry positions where this ordination may occur: Evangelist, Chaplain, Minister of Outreach, Youth Pastor, Minister of Congregational Life, and many more. As the Church Order Supplement to Article 23-a says, “The office of Commissioned Pastor is applicable to a variety of ministries, provided these ministries fit the guidelines adopted by Synod 2001 and that the other Church order and synodical regulations for the office of Commissioned Pastor are observed. These include ministries such as education, evangelism, pastoral care, music, ministries to children, youth, adults and others within or outside of the congregation.”

Ordination to the office of Commissioned Pastor arises out of a local ministry context. That ministry will document the job description showing the need for such ordained leadership. The job description will then be considered by the classis in consultation with representatives from three neighboring classes (i.e. the synodical deputies). Once all are agreed that the ministry as described in the job description fits the intention of Article 23 (as described by the guidelines adopted by Synod 2001), the process toward ordination can continue. This process involves verifying relevant ministry skills, designing and engaging in a learning plan where appropriate, gathering appropriate documents, preparing a sermon to be critiqued (if preaching is part of the job description), and preparing for an oral exam at the classis level.

This process is described in greater detail in the CRC Church Order Supplement 23-a. In this material you will also find an extensive description of qualifications for Commissioned Pastors relative to character, knowledge and skill. As had been said in section II A of this book, these guidelines in fact apply to those who serve in any ordained ministry capacity.

It is noteworthy that up to this point very little has been said about the individual to be ordained. There is an underlying assumption that an individual will emerge that can fit the ministry position being created or recognized. All parties concerned need to be in prayer that such a “match” will occur and be affirmed through this process of discernment. Thus, persons seeking to be ordained as a Commissioned Pastor should pray that God will lead them to a ministry need more than they pray to be led to an ordained position. And ministries seeking a leader for a ministry should pray that God will send the right leader more than they pray that “the right job description” will be created.

If your local ministry is doing a work that would be well served by the ordained leadership of a Commissioned Pastor, you are encouraged to speak to the classis leadership in your area. If you are an individual who wishes to be used in ministry as an ordained Commissioned Pastor, talk to your local church or classis leaders. Seek out especially the members of an area CMLT. Together as a church we are actively praying to the Lord of Harvest, that workers will be sent into his harvest field. (c.f. Luke 10:2)

Note that the denominational Candidacy Committee has also prepared a “Commissioned Pastor Handbook” for use in the administration of the office of Commissioned Pastor. This resource presents all the church order and synodical statements about Commissioned Pastor and also provides a number of tools and resources that a local ministry and classis may find useful. To find the handbook, go to the Candidacy Committee web site under the “Commissioned Pastor” section. (www.crcna.org/candidacy)

The Journey to Ordination: Article 23 (Summary)

RECOGNITION OF A MINISTRY NEED FOR ORDAINED LEADERSHIP

DEVELOPMENT OF A JOB DESCRIPTION

APPROVAL OF A JOB DESCRIPTION

PREPARATION FOR ORDINATION

EXAMINATION BY CLASSIS

IV. Invitation to the “Tools” Section

The Candidacy Committee website of the Christian Reformed Church (www.crcna.org/candidacy) offers a variety of tools and resources related to the contents you have just read. These include forms and instructions for the various routes to ordination. Please contact the Director of Candidacy, Rev. David Koll, (dkoll@crcna.org) if you need any help finding your way to these resources, or if you have any questions regarding pastoral ordination.