Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA)

Reformed Candidates’ Supervision & Care (RCSC)

Approved Alternate Route (AAR)

Policies and Procedures Handbook

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Conflict of interest policy for candidates enrolled in the MFCA

The MFCA Board of Trustees decided and recorded in September 2000 the following: “That any classis petitioning the MFCA regarding a candidate must assure the candidate who is the subject of the petition has recused himself or herself from all decisions regarding the petition.”

This decision was made in response to a number of situations that the board interpreted as being inappropriate and a potential “conflict of interest.” A couple of the situations involved a candidate being on the executive committee of a classis. Other scenarios included a candidate who was a stated clerk of classis and one who was serving on the “Student Supervision Committee” of the classis. All of these cases were considered a conflict of interest by the board.

In each case the board required that the candidate either step out of the position with classis and continue in the Certificate of Fitness (CFM) process, or, to make special arrangements in order to reduce culpability until such a time that the conflict was eliminated or resolved.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

The MFCA has certain academic minimum requirements that must normally be met by all candidates. Exceptions to this will be reviewed and considered by the certification committees upon request. Reasons that will be considered may include diagnosed disabilities or where the person’s language is not English and grades do not necessarily reflect learning and competency. Degrees, in order to be recognized for RCA purposes, must show a cumulative GPA of at least 2.5 (Between a C+ and B-).

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is understood to be literary theft of the written work of another by presenting that work as one’s own without properly crediting the source of the information.

When evidence of plagiarism is suspected and identified in a student’s work, the student is to be confronted by the instructor/evaluator and a report submitted to the Executive Director. Upon notice of plagiarism, the Office of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency shall enter a grade of F for the course or examination in which the plagiarism occurred. In consultation with the Executive Director, the faculty member or evaluator who has determined the work was plagiarized will determine whether the student should retake the course/examination or complete a work project to earn the necessary course credit.

If there is a second offense of plagiarism, the Certification Committee may require the candidate’s dismissal from the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process. When plagiarism is suspected the MFCA reserves the right to have the material in question submitted to “turnitin.com” at the candidate’s expense.
Reinstatement After Dismissal From the Certificate of Fitness

When a person has been dismissed from the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process by the RCA, or a similar process in a recognized denomination, at least two years from the date of dismissal must pass before the candidate can re-apply.

Upon re-application, the candidate’s classis must document how the issues for dismissal have been addressed and why the candidate now qualifies for admission. The home classis must present the document with its endorsement to the MFCA at least sixty (60) days prior to the meeting where a decision is to be made.

Policy on Granting the CFM

The MFCA, with Classes, is responsible to oversee the preparation of candidates for ordained ministry in the RCA. In fulfilling its responsibilities, the MFCA takes seriously the General Synod’s Standards on Preparation for Ministry, which we are charged to implement on behalf of the Synod. Among these Standards is the requirement that candidates “demonstrate a thorough understanding of and commitment to Reformed doctrine, government and worship.” Given the MFCA’s responsibility to ensure that persons receiving the CFM both understand and are faithful to the core practices of the RCA (e.g. infant baptism), MFCA may deny the CFM to candidates who expressly indicate that they will not teach, preach and/or engage in practices consistent with the RCA’s confessional standards.
1.0 POLICY AGAINST SEXUAL HARASSMENT.

The Ministerial Formation Certification Agency considers all forms of sexual harassment to be a serious violation of the standards of conduct expected of those involved with the agency and in the ministry of the Church. This policy is an adaptation of the policy at Western Theological Seminary.

It is the right of every person involved with the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency to be free from sexual harassment by any member of the agency or church community. It is the moral responsibility of every person to respect the integrity, dignity, and potential of every other person and to conduct herself/himself according to this policy.

Sexual harassment is unlawful, and offenders may be subject to prosecution under federal or state law. Church members, ordained ministers, or candidates for the ministry may also be accountable to an ecclesiastical body or judicatory. The MFCA policies and procedures regarding sexual harassment do not supersede federal or state laws or ecclesiastical ordinances such as those contained in the Book of Church Order of the Reformed Church in America.

2.0 A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON HUMAN RELATIONS.

At its root, sexual harassment involves the abuse of power or privilege which threatens a person's education, employment, sense of safety, or dignity. Sexual harassment is reprehensible in any situation but it is particularly damaging in a learning community which is shaped, informed, and guided by the Lord's command to love God with one's whole being and one's neighbor with the same love ordinarily reserved for oneself.

3.0 DEFINITION AND CONTEXT.

3.1 Any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favor, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitutes sexual harassment when any one of the following criteria are met:

(1) Submission to such conduct is made either implicitly or explicitly a term or condition of academic advancement or certification.

(2) Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for certification decisions affecting such individual.
(3) Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with the individual's certification progress or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive academic or living environment.

3.2 Sexual harassment may take the form of verbal or written comment, visual media, gesture, or physical contact. It may consist of generalized sexist remarks or behavior, of verbal or nonverbal insults, of unwelcome sexual advances (with or without promise of reward or threat of punishment), or of criminal sexual conduct ranging from sexual assault to acquaintance rape or forcible rape.

3.3 Acquaintance, position, threat, physical force, or emotional manipulation may be used to sexually harass another. In acquaintance rape, which can involve a close friend or someone known only slightly, manipulation is a key factor. Trust based on acquaintance is used to take advantage of another's vulnerability. Trust based on a person's position, usually one of authority and power, may also be abused.

4.0 PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING HARASSMENT COMPLAINTS.

4.1 **Complaint.** If you believe you have been subjected to sexual harassment as part of your involvement in the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency, you should write down what happened. Include the date, time, and location of the incident; the names of the person(s) involved and of any witness(es) to the incident; and an account of any efforts you made to discourage the harassing behavior. Give this report to the person noted below in paragraphs 4.4.2 through 4.4.5, as applicable.

4.2 **Non-retaliation.** No person may be retaliated against for making a sexual harassment complaint. Any such retaliation should be reported immediately to the Executive Director or the moderator of the MFCA Board of Trustees.

4.3 **Informal Procedure.** Often a person who has been sexually harassed will confide in a trusted friend, colleague, elder, pastor, or professor before making a formal complaint. This person becomes an important advocate, providing emotional support and offering counsel. Sometimes, with the aid of such an advocate, the offender may be confronted informally, and the issue can be resolved without resorting to a formal grievance process.

4.4 **Formal Procedure.**

4.4 1) **Formal Complaint.** When an informal approach is either inappropriate or unsuccessful, a person who believes she/he has been sexually harassed should file a formal written complaint to initiate the formal grievance procedure set forth below. If the person who is believed to have been sexually harassed chooses not to file a formal written complaint, an appropriate administrative officer shall have discretionary authority to decide what further action, if any, should be taken; and such officer may, in such cases, initiate this formal procedure without a formal written complaint from the person believed to have been sexually harassed.
4.4 2) **Candidates.** Incidents of perceived or actual sexual harassment involving only candidates should be directed in writing to the Executive Director. The Executive Director will initiate the formal grievance procedure. A two-person review panel, composed of the Executive Director and one Certification Committee member will be convened to act on the complaint. To help prevent gender bias, the review panel will be composed of one male and one female.

4.4 3) **Executive Director.** Incidents of perceived or actual sexual harassment involving the Executive Director should be directed in writing to the moderator of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency Board of Trustees. A two-person review panel, composed of the moderator and one other board member will be convened to act on the complaint. To help prevent gender bias, the review panel will be composed of one male and one female. If a candidate is involved in the incident, the panel will also have two (2) candidates as members.

4.4 4) **Moderator of the Board of Trustees.** Incidents of perceived or actual sexual harassment involving the moderator should be directed in writing to the Director of Congregational Mission. A two-person review panel, composed of the director and one other member of the board, will be convened to act on the complaint. To help prevent gender bias, the review panel will be composed of one male and one female. If a candidate is involved in the incident, the panel will also have two (2) candidates as members.

4.4 5) **Investigation.** Upon the formal filing of a complaint of sexual harassment, the panel shall conduct an immediate and thorough investigation of the complaint. The panel shall confront the alleged offender (respondent) with a copy of the written complaint. The respondent shall have an opportunity to answer the complaint orally and in writing. The respondent may have an advocate present for the confrontation and answer but shall have no right to have legal counsel present for the confrontation and answer.

4.4 6) **Hearing.** Within twenty-one (21) days of receiving the written complaint, the panel shall convene and conduct a formal hearing to determine the validity of the complaint and the panel's recommendation for disciplinary action. The panel shall consider all evidence and information presented to it at the hearing and may solicit such other information as it deems appropriate to render a decision. Both the complainant and the respondent may have an advocate present during the hearing, but neither the complainant nor the respondent, nor the panel, have a right to have legal counsel present during the hearing.

4.4 7) **Determination.** The panel shall make its determination as to the validity of the complaint (either dismissing or upholding the complaint), setting forth immediately and in writing both its findings and its recommendation for appropriate disciplinary action, if any. The panel shall make its determination based upon what it finds more probably than not happened at the time of the alleged complaint. The range of disciplinary actions available is described under Consequences.

4.4 8) **Disciplinary Action Taken.** The recommended disciplinary action, if any, shall be implemented at the discretion of the appropriate authority. That authority shall inform the complainant, the respondent, and the panel of the disciplinary action taken.
4.5 **Confidentiality.** The right to confidentiality of all Ministerial Formation Certification Agency community members shall be respected insofar as possible under the circumstances of each case.

4.6 **Written Record.** A written record of all informal and formal sexual harassment complaints based on a signed written complaint, and their final resolution, shall be maintained by the appropriate administrative officer.

5.0 **CONSEQUENCES.**

5.1 **Dismissal of the Charge.** Dismissal is indicated where the charge is found to be without sufficient ground. The complaint will be dismissed, and no record will be kept in the files of the complainant or the respondent.

5.2 **Admonishment.** Admonishment of the offender is indicated where the offender is unaware of the offensive character of the behavior and its effect on others, and where the offender has no previous record of sexually harassing others. At this level, the agency response is one of education and admonishment. The offense and admonishment shall be noted in the offender's record.

If, after twelve months, no further instances of sexual harassment by the offender have been reported, this notation shall be removed from the offender's record. If the admonished offender's behavior continues, the offender shall be subject to probation or suspension.

5.3 **Reprimand.** Reprimand is indicated where the offender accepts responsibility for the behavior. The offender shall be reprimanded and required to seek appropriate professional help in correcting the offensive behavior. The offense and reprimand will be noted in the offender's record.

If the reprimanded offender's behavior continues, the offender shall be subject to suspension or dismissal.

5.4 **Probation.** Probation is indicated where the offender's behavior must be monitored and modified to ensure the education, employment, sense of safety, or dignity of members of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency community. The offender shall be required to seek appropriate professional help in addressing and correcting the offensive behavior. The probationary period shall be for twelve (12) months.

At the end of the probationary period, the same panel shall conduct a review of the offender's probation. If no further instances of sexual harassment by the offender have been reported, and/or upon receipt of a satisfactory report from an approved therapist or treatment center, probation may be lifted. The offense and probation shall be noted in the offender's record. If the probationary offender's behavior continues, the offender shall be subject to suspension or dismissal.
If the offender is an ordained minister or candidate for ministry, the appropriate ecclesiastical judicatory will be notified. Upon receipt of a satisfactory report from an approved therapist or treatment center and the lifting of probation, the record will be updated and the appropriate ecclesiastical judicatory notified.

5.5 **Suspension.** Suspension is indicated where temporary removal of the offender from the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency community and therapy or other treatment are required to prevent further sexual harassment or the potential for such behavior. At this level, the institutional response is designed to ensure the education, employment, sense of safety, or dignity of members of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency community and to assist the offender in addressing and correcting the offensive behavior. The offender shall be suspended until the panel determines that the suspension may be lifted. The offense and suspension shall be noted in the offender's record. A satisfactory report from an approved therapist or treatment center will be among the criteria the panel may use in reviewing the offender's suspension.

5.6 **Dismissal of the Offender.** Dismissal is indicated where the offender's continued study would make it impossible for the agency to ensure the education, sense of safety, or dignity of members of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency community. The offender's certification process shall be terminated. The offense and dismissal shall be noted in the offender's record.

Dismissal of a candidate is governed by provisions of the policy statement on Termination of Student Tenure adopted by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) in 1974.

In those instances where the offender is an ordained minister or candidate for ministry, the appropriate ecclesiastical judicatory will be notified.

6.0 **APPEALS**

6.1 **Appeal.** Should either the complainant or offender feel the outcome of this grievance process was unfair or unsatisfactory; either may appeal to the moderator of Ministerial Formation Certification Agency who will convene an appeal panel.

6.2 **Appeal Panel.** The appeal panel shall consist of: one female and one male member of the Board of Trustees, each of whom have not been participants in this grievance process prior to the appeal, and the Moderator of Ministerial Formation Certification Agency.

6.3 **Statement of Appeal.** The appeal must be made in writing within two (2) weeks of receiving a written statement of the outcome of the original grievance process.

7.0 **RESOURCES.**

7.1 Guidelines for appropriate conduct of members of the *Book of Church Order* may also apply in some instances.
7.2 Members of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency community who have experienced perceived or actual sexual harassment are encouraged to utilize the resources of the community. These include support, counseling, referral, and this grievance procedure.

7.3 A trusted friend, colleague, elder, pastor, or professor may be able to provide helpful support as the person who has been sexually harassed seeks to understand the experience and evaluate options for responding to it.

7.4 The contracted psychologist is available to meet with any member of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency community who seeks counsel on any perceived or actual harassment. When appropriate, other counseling resources may be used.

7.56 The Executive Director and a Certification Committee member (and two candidates and a staff member when their participation is indicated) to serve as resources when the formal grievance process initiated.

7.6 When the normal grievance process fails to yield satisfactory results, the Moderator of Ministerial Formation Certification Agency and the Moderator of the trustees of Ministerial Formation Certification Agency Executive Committee may become resources through the appeal process.

7.7 Public laws, ecclesiastical ordinances, and the Association of Theological Schools' policies may also be resources in addressing matters of sexual harassment in the context of theological education.

8.0 Approval of Policy. This policy has been approved by the trustees as policy and procedure for Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (February 2005).
STATEMENT OF POLICY REGARDING CANDIDATE RECORDS

I. General Guidelines Governing Keeping of Candidate Records

Candidate records are kept at the main MFCA Office in the interest of its candidates and alumni/ae, to enable the Agency effectively to fulfill its mission to candidates, alumni/ae, and the Church of Jesus Christ. It is the intention of the MFCA that the data entered and the documents kept in each individual’s file, as well as any subsequent release of information contained within it, should be determined by what is in the best interest of Christ's church, the candidate, and the Agency. The MFCA determines to reflect this attitude in its records-keeping policies and consequently has adopted the following guidelines for creating and maintaining candidate records in its offices:

1. The MFCA supports the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, and this statement of policy incorporates the rights accorded and the privacy guaranteed the individual by this Act.

2. Candidate records information is classified in two categories, public and confidential. Public or directory information includes the following data: name, candidate number, date and place of birth, MFCA enrolled, dates of attendance, high school attended, previous college attended, teacher certification, degrees and dates of degrees, awards and honors received. Unless the candidate requests in writing that such information be withheld, public/directory information is available to anyone. It should be noted however, that the MFCA does try to exercise some restraint in the release of public information and tries to ensure that such information is not released indiscriminately, without regard for a person's welfare. All other information is considered to be confidential. The confidentiality of this information is guaranteed to the candidate and will be released only upon written consent of the candidate, except as provided for in sections II.C.1-3.

3. The MFCA wishes to eliminate any aura of secrecy and mystery about a candidate's record. Faculty and MFCA personnel are encouraged to be open and forthright with candidates and therefore are urged to share with the candidate all evaluative statements entered in a candidate's file.

A. Content of Academic Records

Public Information:

Name of the candidate
Home address at time of admission (legal address)
Date and place of birth
Date of admission to MFCA
Dates of enrollment
Previous college, university, or seminary attended
Degree program candidate is enrolled in
Religious affiliation(s)
Degrees and dates of degrees

Confidential Information:

Grades
Semester and cumulative grade point average
Pertinent data regarding admissions:
a. application
b. letters of reference
c. recommendation from institutions attended
d. college and other MFCA transcripts
e. letter of acceptance, any pertinent correspondence or other information kept in the file

Candidate's discipline record and correspondence:
a. placed at the request of a faculty member or administrator, and/or
b. placed at the request of the candidate. Other official correspondence between the MFCA and the candidate

B. Access to Academic Records

1. Access to candidate academic records is given to the faculty and administrative staff to assist them in the discharge of their respective responsibilities.
2. Access is given to the candidate.
4. Access is given to others, whether this access be in person or transcript form, only upon the written consent of the candidate.
5. A record of access to a candidate's academic record will be kept by the MFCA office and will be filed in the candidate's personal file.

C. Release of Academic Records Information

1. Unless a written request to the office of the Executive Director is received that directory information not be released, directory information is available upon request.
2. Confidential information is released only upon the written authorization of the candidate, except as provided for in Section II.C.1-3.
3. When a candidate is under pastoral supervision of a classis or other ecclesiastical body, the MFCA will request from the candidate written permission to release information to that ecclesiastical body. Upon receiving approval for the release of information, the MFCA will regularly send a summary of the candidate's progress to that body. It will also inform that body of any disciplinary actions and official complaints registered against the candidate.
4. Transcripts of a candidate's academic record are not released unless the candidate authorizes such a release. Grade reports are withheld at the request of the business manager if a candidate has not met his/her financial obligations to the MFCA. If a candidate requests the sending of a transcript to an institution accredited by the Association of Theological Schools, the Executive Director is free to communicate any
disciplinary actions taken against the candidate.

**D. Storage of Records**
The complete academic record of each candidate will be permanently stored by the MFCA in secured facilities.

**II. Candidate Financial Aid Records**

A. Each year MFCA candidates in need of financial assistance may apply for aid. A file is created for each applicant and contains the following:

B. Access to the Candidate Financial Aid file is limited to the following:
   1. the candidate,
   2. the business manager and the head accountant,
   3. the auditors who perform the annual audit of all the financial books and records of the MFCA, and
   4. anyone whom the candidate allows by written consent.

C. Information in the candidate's file is strictly confidential and release of any of its contents is limited to the following:

   1. those personnel of the MFCA who are directly involved in the financial aid decision,
   2. other persons only upon the written authorization of the candidate,
   3. personnel involved with administering scholarships.

D. This file will be retained for seven years after all of the candidate's financial indebtedness to the MFCA has been repaid in full, after which the file will be destroyed.

**III. Formation for Ministry**

A. Definition
Candidate Formation for Ministry files are maintained by the MFCA Office and contain those documents related to the formation for ministry experiences of the candidate. Materials in the candidate's file include biographical data submitted on a profile file form by the candidate, contracts between the candidate and the supervised ministry sites, correspondence related to such placement, and evaluation statements regarding the candidate’s learning and ministry. The evaluation form will be submitted by the field supervisor (usually a pastor), the lay supervision committee, the candidate, and the Executive Director. Preaching evaluations submitted by lay persons responsible for that activity shall be included in the file only after having been reviewed by the candidate. The Formation for Ministry files are the property of the MFCA and are treated as confidential.

B. Access to the Formation for Ministry File
1. Access to the Formation for Ministry file is given to the staff of the MFCA.

2. Access is given to the candidate in consultation with the Executive Director &
Certification who will assist the candidate during the process of deciding on the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. The Executive Director may be consulted in order to assist the Certification Committee in interpreting and understanding the data.

C. Release of Formation for Ministry Information

1. The candidate has the right to have information from his/her formation or ministry file released to potential placements, or those designated by the candidate, only after an authorization for the release of information form has been submitted to the Office of Formation for Ministry. On this form the candidate will indicate what he/she wants released and to whom.

2. The candidate can request in writing that certain committees not have access to the file, but in no circumstance will the Executive Director be prohibited from access.

IV. Personality/Vocational Testing

A. Definition:

Files containing results of psychological testing are maintained by the Executive Director and professional staff reporting directly to him as they consult with candidates. Materials in these files include the results of any psychological testing conducted by the MFCA, as well as those results which have been released to the MFCA by the candidate from testing carried out by other professionals.

B. Access to the psychological testing file

1. Access to the psychological testing file is given only to the Executive Director and the qualified staff (Example: Ph.D. Psychologist or accredited CPE supervisor.) All others, both within and outside of the MFCA, have access to this file only with the written permission of the candidate.

2. The candidate has access to this file through the professional interpretation of the Executive Director or other licensed professional.

3. The Certification Committee members only see a summary statement to assist in their interpretive work.

C. Release of information

Release of information in this file is only with the written permission of the candidate.

D. All psychological testing files are stored and disposed of in a manner that assumes security and confidentiality. Psychological testing records are disposed of three years after the candidate leaves the MFCA.
PLACEMENT SERVICES IN THE RCA

According to both tradition and practice, the major responsibility for assisting a seminary senior in the search for placement rests with the seminary placement office, and, in the case of the MFCA, the Agency placement services. At New Brunswick Theological Seminary and Western Theological Seminary, this system works quite well for most students. The seminaries know the students. Churches which are open to the possibility of being served by a new graduate readily approach the RCA seminaries to meet with students and to let them know what the range of opportunities may be at the moment. The Office of Ministry Services shares listings of churches that are searching for pastors with those responsible for placement at the seminaries.

An advantage which a seminary senior has when compared to a minister who is already serving in the church is that it is perfectly appropriate for a seminary senior to preach as a candidate in a church which is looking for a pastor. In most parts of the Reformed Church in America, experienced pastors do not have that same privilege but need to be heard in their own setting or in a “neutral” pulpit. Regional Synod Executives and/or the seminaries sometimes arrange for seminarians to meet with several church search committees in a kind of “job fair” to which several congregations are invited. Your resume or profile form is usually one which is adapted for the limited experience which most seminarians can offer. It can serve well to introduce you to a church which needs a pastor or new staff member.

For those who are preparing for ministry under the auspices of the MFCA, the task may be a bit more complex. The seminary you attend may have an effective placement office which is prepared to work with appropriate Reformed Church structures. On the other hand, they may not be able to introduce you as readily to RCA congregations as is possible at either of the RCA seminaries. In the case of MFCA students, the Executive Director is the person for you, as is the chairperson of the student care committee of your classis. While some classes do a better job of caring for their students than others, you may expect to be encouraged and even significantly helped by the classis which has you under its care. The MFCA does its best to offer placement services. Church profiles are “on file” at the office and new opportunities are listed in the monthly newsletter.
THE OFFICE OF CONGREGATIONAL MISSION

The RCA’s Office of Congregational Mission stands ready to assist its seminary graduates if they have not succeeded in finding placement after several months of exploring other resources. We generally say that we will serve you as best we can if you have not found a place of service within six months after graduation. If you find yourself in such a situation, by all means call us at 1-800-722-9977 ext. 2958 to let us know of your plight. We will try to meet you in person and will share information as to what may be available to you.

So you may have some sense of how the “system” works for ministers who are already ordained, it may be useful to know that as a small denomination, in which there is a limited number of more-or-less intimately connected people who serve professionally, the Reformed Church in America has both formal and informal procedures which are perfectly honorable and ethical. All of these should be utilized by persons wishing to find or change their locus of employment. The most formal part of the system is the Office of Ministry profile system, in which the profiles or resumes of ministers serving within the RCA are maintained in a file in the office. These profiles are computerized and accessible to staff when churches notify the office of their needs for ministers or other staff. Typically, a pastoral search committee will work closely with the Office of Ministry during their search process. In response to the Church Profile form or a position description, the Office of Ministry supplies a limited number of profiles of those who might be good possibilities for the church. The responsibility and initiative from that point on, however, rests with the search committee and it is up to them to make contact with those persons in whom they have an interest.

The Church Profile form is often also shared with the Regional Synod Executive who has responsibility for assisting churches in their leadership needs. Synod Executives may know of ministers who are interested in a particular situation, they also have a concern to get the best possible leadership they can for the churches for which they have particular responsibility. They work closely with the Office of Ministry in making recommendations, but may also make recommendations directly to search committees, which then request those specific profiles.
NETWORKING

Another more venerable system which is very much in operation is the “who do you know” network. Supervisors of churches which are searching for pastors, or senior pastors who are looking for staff members, know other Reformed Church clergy who may be in a position to make recommendations from among those they believe would understand their needs. This kind of networking is time-tested and perfectly ethical, and is frankly an important part of the process by which churches find staff and clergy find positions. All correspondence with a particular church should be addressed to the “Supervisor” or “Chairperson of the Pastoral Search Committee.”

Accusations are sometimes made that all of these systems have a “political” dimension to them. If by “political” one means the influence which one person has to affect another’s career, there is probably some truth in that, but the goal is to have a system which is sufficiently open to input from a variety of sources so that a congregation does indeed have a wide variety of persons from which to choose and persons who are candidates have access to those churches where they would wish to be considered.

THE MINISTER’S PROFILE FORM

A commitment to an open system perhaps needs some additional explanation so that it is clear what is permissible and appropriate. Ministers’ profiles are the responsibility of the ministers themselves and should be kept up to date. Search committees feel uncertain about a profile which is older than two years, so when there is a definite interest in relocation, it is wise to bring the profile up to date. It is appropriate to let the Office of Ministry know that you are open to relocation and to keep staff informed as to the type of ministry which is most appealing. The Office of Ministry regularly publishes lists of churches which are looking for pastors and other staff, and includes when available the name of the classis supervisor of each listed congregation. It is always appropriate to call the classis supervisor to discuss a particular congregation, and to talk about whether or not what the congregation needs and is looking for is a good match for your interests and gifts. A minister may also request the Office of Ministry to send his or her profile to a specific church, and unless there is some unusual reason not to do that (in which case you will be told) the profile will be sent as requested. The Office of Ministry does not notify a minister when a profile is sent to a search committee, since there really is no viable candidacy until the search committee decides that this is
someone who should be investigated further and makes its own direct contact. In most cases, a “serious candidate” is invited for an interview with the search committee, and possibly visited by members of the search committee in a worship setting where they can hear the minister preach and participate in the worship experience under his or her leadership, or otherwise experience the candidate’s ministry.

A frequent difficulty which occurs much too often in the process happens when search committees do not adequately inform those whom they have been considering that they are no longer under consideration. There appears to be no absolute way to rectify this problem, and it simply calls for a fair amount of grace and maturity on the part of the minister who finds out by some other way that an interested church is no longer a viable possibility. A telephone call to a congregation’s supervisor is always appropriate as a means of determining one’s status as a candidate.

CALL PROCEDURES

Before a call is issued by a consistory to a prospective minister, that call must be approved by the classis to which the church belongs. The supervisor whom the classis has appointed and the Pastoral Relations Committee are responsible to make sure that the terms of the call meet the classis minimum requirements; under no circumstances should any final plans be completed until classis has approved the call. This is particularly true with regard to making arrangements for movement into parsonages, purchase of minister’s housing, or other financial arrangements which obligate either the minister or the church. Nothing of a final nature should take place until approval of the call has been officially granted by the classis.

Classis minimum requirements as far as salary, insurance benefits, annuity fund payments, car allowance, and other benefits are established for very sound reasons and for the protection of both the minister and the church. Under no circumstances should a candidate negotiate terms which fall below those minimum requirements. If there are special circumstances in which a contractual arrangement with the church is made for a specific period of time, this too must be done with the approval of classis and should be worked out in careful consultation with the classis supervisor of the congregation.
Resources for Candidates with Specific Concerns

Women in Ministry:

Office for Women’s Ministries
475 Riverside Drive, 18th Floor
New York, NY 10115
(800) 722-9977, ext. 3233
creid@rca.org

Commission for Women
475 Riverside Drive., 18th Floor
New York, NY 10115
(800) 722-9977 ext. 2958

There are a number of items that female candidates need to be aware of: 1) Annually there is a grant awarded through the Beth Marcus Fund for female candidates in seminary; and 2) Bi-annually there is a “Women in Ministry” event sponsored by the Office for Women – candidates are invited and scholarships are available to cover travel costs, etc.

Racial Ethnic Councils

Pacific and Asian Ministries
475 Riverside Dr., 18th Floor
New York, NY 10115
(800) 722-9977 ext. 2279
EYKim@rca.org

African – American Ministries
475 Riverside Dr., 18th Floor
New York, NY 10115
(800) 722-9977 ext. 2538

Hispanic Ministries
475 Riverside Dr. 18th Floor
New York, NY 10115
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Disabled and Personnel Concerns

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RE: Anti-racism

The Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA) has attempted to be intentional about anti-racism and increasing awareness and sensitivity through its structure, resources and planning.

1) The challenge facing the MFCA is that it is nearly impossible to offer anti-racism training directly to our 100 candidates. The few times that we do gather people together, we not only have limited time, but we gather in small numbers ranging from 10 – 30 in various locations with multiple tasks to accomplish. It is also our understanding that under the direction of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), the candidates receive anti-racism training at their respective seminaries.

The MFCA is in the process of conducting a survey of its RCSC candidates to determine that seminaries are actually providing anti-racism training and we are asking about the form of that training.

2) The MFCA Board of Trustees, with the help of the Commission on Nominations, has made sure the board and the certification committees represent diversity. The board has intentionally developed its Teaching Church Scholarship program to give priority of opportunity to females, the disabled, and ethnic / racial minorities.

The MFCA has also been intentional about its cooperation with the Ethnic and Racial Councils by making summer intensive courses available to African American pastors transferring into the RCA, dialoging with non-ATS accredited institutions on behalf of Latino candidates, bringing together Asian American individuals to study the impact of program requirements such as Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) for candidates in Asian ministries, and sending the director to meet with individuals at Vancouver School of Theology to research better means of serving Native individuals.

The MFCA, especially through the Approved Alternate Route (AAR) process, has gone to great expense to allow candidates to complete requirements such as the credo and case study exams in their mother language, facilitating and underwriting translation of the written examinations. Translators have been invited and reimbursed for the purpose of assisting candidates in the oral interviews.

3) The participation of ethnic and racial minorities in our program has been evident in the statistics. At present, one-third of our candidates represent various ethnic and minority groups – all four represented by our councils (African American, Asian, Hispanic and native American). Even in the past, the average summer intensive class was made up of at least 20 - 25% ethnic and racial minorities. The interaction in the classes has always been positive, each group being sensitive to the other and learning from each other. In all the years there has never been a flagrant racial discriminatory issue raised.