

PROCESS GUIDE FOR CERTIFICATE OF FITNESS FOR MINISTRY

REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

A MANUAL FOR CANDIDATES AND CLASSIS COMMITTEES

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Forms for use in the process are available from the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency.

Form I	<i>Registration of Interest in Ministry/ Application to Be Taken under Care of Classis</i>
Form II	<i>Consistory Evaluation/Recommendation Regarding Classis Care</i>
Form III	<i>Application for Alternate Means</i>
Form IV	<i>Petition Regarding the Twenty-Four Month Requirement</i>
Form V	<i>Petition for a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry</i>
Form Va	<i>Petition for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry by Means of the Approved Alternate Route</i>
Form VI	<i>Liturgy for Receiving a Candidate under Care of Classis</i>

Also Available:

Procedure for Admission to the Classis of a Licensed Candidate from another Denomination

2001 Criteria for Evaluating Preparation of Candidates for Ministry

Resources for Candidates with Specific Concerns

PREFACE

Throughout its history the Reformed Church in America (RCA) has valued an educated clergy. Initially, those called to the ministry of Word and sacrament returned to the Netherlands for theological training. Then, in 1784, the General Synod appointed John Henry Livingston professor of theology and charged him with the responsibility of preparing men for the ministry of Word and sacrament. For a time, he instructed candidates for the ministry from his study in New York. Eventually, Livingston moved to Queen's College in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Here New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS)—America's oldest seminary—was established. Later, the RCA would establish a second seminary—Western Theological Seminary (WTS)—in Holland, Michigan.

For many years, these two seminaries provided theological education for the ministers and missionaries serving the denomination. Eventually, amid societal shifts and cultural changes, the RCA established the Theological Education Agency (TEA) to supervise the theological education of a growing number of candidates preparing for the ministry of Word and sacrament at non-RCA seminaries. In 1999, TEA was incorporated into the Ministerial Formation Coordination Agency (MFCA), a broader denominational agency for establishing standards for theological education. In 2007 the MFCA was redefined and named the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA).

Preparing men and women for ministry involves, of course, more than theological seminaries and academic preparation. There is also the formation for ministry that begins with membership and nurture in a congregation. Living, learning, worshiping, working, witnessing, and serving with other Christians provides an essential foundation and can serve to confirm a person's gifts.

There is still another element in the process leading to ordination as a minister of Word and sacrament in the RCA. A church assembly, called a "classis," is responsible for supervising and examining candidates for ordination. This manual describes that process of care and supervision.

While it is true that candidates seeking ordination in the RCA will normally have both an undergraduate degree from an accredited college or university and a Master of Divinity degree from an accredited seminary or theological school, the General Synod has also recognized that in certain special instances a candidate may need to follow an approved alternate route. This manual addresses that process as well (See "The Approved Alternate Route Process," p. 21).

INTRODUCTION

This manual has been written with several readers in mind:

- Those who think they might be called by God to the ministry of Word and sacrament in the Reformed Church in America;
- Pastors and consistories of those potential candidates for ministry; and
- Classis committees charged with the care and supervision of candidates until they obtain ordination to the office of minister of Word and sacrament.

The manual describes the process by which a person who feels called by God can respond appropriately and receive the necessary care and supervision of the church.

Part one addresses each person or group involved in the process of becoming a candidate for ordination in the RCA. Together, these sections provide an overview of the process. You may wish to read all the sections, or only that section that specifically applies to your role in the process.

Part two details the procedure that leads to the granting of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. These procedures, set forth step by step and as completely as possible, are intended to shape a helpful process for the care and supervision of candidates for the ministry of Word and sacrament in the Reformed Church in America.

Part three covers exceptions to this process—candidates who request an alternate means for achieving the certificate or who wish to pursue the Approved Alternate Route to certification.

Our goal in providing this manual is to work with you in the important task of preparing candidates for the ministry of Word and sacrament. If you have questions that are not answered in this manual, please contact the Director of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency, or one of the seminary presidents.

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PART ONE:
TO THE PARTIES INVOLVED—AN OVERVIEW

To the Applicant

God calls men and women to the ministry of Word and sacrament. This call is often experienced first as the affirmation of a person's gifts for ministry by the church. An inward sense of God's call usually accompanies such an affirmation. These two aspects of a call emerge in a conversational way, as the outer call confirms and deepens the inner call. If you are reading this manual because you have felt God calling you to the ministry of Word and sacrament, you are already aware of the deeply personal and inward character of such a call. Some people describe it as a yearning or longing that they can't quite put into words. Others point to a specific experience that led them to believe that God wanted them to serve in this way. For still others, someone else first suggested the idea of becoming a minister of Word and sacrament, and only then did an inner sense of call begin to emerge.

However you have experienced God's call, there needs to be some public confirmation that you have gifts for the ministry of Word and sacrament, or an affirmation that this possibility is worth exploring. When one's sense of God's call is not confirmed by the encouragement or support of others, it is a good idea to try to discern whether it was a call to the ministry of Word and sacrament or to some other form of Christian service that was being heard.

At some point in the process of prayer, reflection, and conversation, it is important that you seek the counsel of others, including your pastor and church leaders. They will be able to help you in the discernment process. If the outcome of your praying and talking together over time points you toward answering God's call through seminary training, the church leaders will hopefully play an important role as mentor and advocate.

One of the first formal steps in the process leading toward ordination as a minister of Word and sacrament in the RCA is to receive the recommendation of the consistory of the church of which you are a member. When you and your advisors decide that it is time for this step, the consistory will interview you regarding your call. *Form I may be useful to you as you think about your sense of call. It can also be used as a tool to provide members of your consistory with background information for their meeting with you. Complete the form and ask your pastor to sign it. (Form I, along with the other forms cited in this manual is available from the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency or by going to mfca.rca.org.)* It should be noted that the 2016 General Synod has recommended a change to our order that would permit a classis to function in place of a consistory where local church membership is not feasible.

The members of the consistory or classis will want to know about your faith journey. They will seek the opinion of others about your promise and prospects for service as a minister of Word and sacrament. They will want to hear how you have already demonstrated the gifts and abilities required for that ministry, and they will be interested in your initial thoughts about your future direction in ministry. They will seek to discern God's will as they consider their recommendation. *Form II, Consistory Evaluation and Recommendation, will guide the members of the consistory and your pastor in the interview and will be forwarded to the appropriate committee of classis with their recommendation and your biographical information (Form I).*

If these steps confirm your calling to the ministry of Word and sacrament, your next step will be meeting with the committee of classis charged with the care and supervision of candidates, whose members will want to confirm for themselves the information in the recommendation provided by the consistory.

When the classis committee is satisfied that your call is genuine, that you have promise and potential for the ministry of Word and sacrament, you will be taken under the care of the classis as a candidate (until now you have been only an *applicant*). *Form V, Petition for a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, must be completed by the classis and submitted to New Brunswick Theological Seminary, Western Theological Seminary, or to the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency, depending on where the candidate is attending seminary.*

To the Applicant's Pastors and Supporting Individuals

A minister of Word and sacrament or leader yourself, you play a pivotal role in a person's process of discerning whether or not she or he has a valid call to the ministry of Word and sacrament in the Reformed Church in America. A member of the congregation you serve may feel called to serve God as an ordained pastor. You may be among the first people she speaks to about these inner stirrings of God's Spirit or the more external influences leading her to explore this possibility.

When you explore these feelings and experiences with a church member, you may experience a sense of congruence between his sense of call and your own perceptions about his gifts. In that case, you will want to encourage the potential applicant. This may involve providing opportunities for him to lead and serve the congregation in new and different capacities. Yours is the rich opportunity to mentor a person who is discovering a call to ministry.

At other times, the absence of needed gifts, experience, or Christian maturity may lead you to gently dissuade a potential applicant from proceeding with this process. Since this person is a member of the congregation, speaking the truth in love about a lack of gifts or potential for serving as an ordained pastor may be difficult. But if you advocate for a person whose gifts and personal qualities are marginal or inappropriate for the ministry of Word and sacrament, it will be very difficult for others—consistory and classis—to reject the application and to counsel the person to move in another direction.

You will want to read this manual carefully in order to provide helpful advice to anyone who may approach you with an interest in exploring the vocation of minister of Word and sacrament. Step 1 in this manual (p. 12) describes your role as a leader in the local congregation in which the person has experienced their call.

To the Consistory

Your role in the process that leads to the ordination of a minister of Word and sacrament in the Reformed Church in America is an important one. A member of the congregation you serve may feel an inward calling or may receive encouragement from others to think about serving God as an ordained pastor. Your pastor or other leaders may bring such a person to you to discuss these stirrings of God's Spirit.

Some things to look for as you talk together include the person's spiritual maturity, emotional stability, biblical knowledge, leadership ability, relational skills, intellectual capacities, and relationship to the church (for example, the length of time she has been actively engaged in the life of this congregation). You will also want to know whether she has the affirmation and support of others in pursuing this direction.

Some questions to ask include: Has the person exhibited desirable personal qualities and Christian behaviors consistently over a period of time within the life of this congregation? What evidence is there that he has the necessary spiritual gifts for the ministry of Word and sacrament? How do others perceive his leadership ability? Does he manifest any undesirable personality traits? How well does the person interact with others? Does the person have sufficient physical stamina and emotional health to meet the demands of the ministry of Word and sacrament? How solid is his grounding (i.e., knowledge and belief) in the Christian faith?

Step 2 (p. 13) of this manual describes the consistory's role in this process.

To the Classis Candidate Care Committee

The Reformed Church in America assigns to the classis a significant role in the preparation of men and women for ordination as ministers of Word and sacrament. The classis must determine whether or not a person who has been recommended by a consistory should come under the care and supervision of the classis. The classis must then petition New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS), Western Theological Seminary (WTS), or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA) for a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. The classis must also exercise care and supervision of the candidate and examine him or her in the areas prescribed by the *Book of Church Order*. In the end, the classis will need to determine whether or not the candidate meets the criteria for ordination in the Reformed Church in America.

Step 3 (pp. 14-15) in this process manual describes the role of the assigned classis committee in assessing an applicant's qualifications for coming under the care and supervision of the classis as a candidate for ordination as a minister of Word and sacrament in the Reformed Church in America.

PART TWO:
PREPARATION FOR THE MINISTRY
OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

This part of the manual is a guide for the classis and the candidate in the process introduced above. The process begins when a person indicates interest in being trained for ministry, and it ends when the candidate receives the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. The classis and its Candidate Care Committee are expected to walk with the candidate through the care process as outlined in this manual.

NBTS, WTS, or MFCA guides the candidate's education, in conjunction with the classis, until the certification process is completed, focusing on the following five areas:

1. Academic preparation—successful completion of the fields of study as required by the *Book of Church Order* (Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 6, a and b), normally fulfilled through the attainment of a Master of Divinity degree at an accredited seminary.
2. Spiritual formation—manifest progress in the candidate's faith journey as a disciple of Jesus Christ.
3. Ministry development—affirmation of gifts and calling, development of competencies for ministry in such areas as preaching, teaching, congregational care, evangelism, administration, and equipping church members for ministry.
4. Personal wholeness—pursuit of reasonable health in all the significant aspects of life, including the physical, psychological, and social.
5. Denominational identity—knowledge of the history, mission, worship, polity, and confessional statements of the RCA, as well as demonstrated loyalty to the denomination and its program.

The General Synod of 2006 adopted the following eight criteria as the standards for preparing individuals for the ordained ministry. NBTS, WTS, and MFCA each design a curriculum and program that uniquely qualifies the candidate for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry according to these criteria:

#1 (Personal Faith and Evangelism)

Demonstrate a mature personal faith in Jesus Christ and commitment and skill in nurturing others to embrace that faith.

#2 (Call)

Demonstrate a life worthy of the gospel, a sense of call to the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament, an understanding of that office in the Reformed tradition, and a commitment to its responsibilities.

#3 (Scripture)

Demonstrate a thorough understanding of the Scripture (with sufficient Greek and Hebrew to understand nuances of the biblical text), commitment to its authority as Word of God, and insight in its interpretation.

#4 (History and Theology)

Demonstrate a thorough understanding of the history and teachings of the Christian church, and insight in their interpretation.

#5 (Reformed Tradition)

Demonstrate a thorough knowledge of and commitment to Reformed doctrine, government, and worship.

#6 (Leadership)

Demonstrate the skill and understanding required to lead the people of God in faithfulness to their mission.

#7 (Pastoral Care)

Demonstrate skill, understanding, and compassion in caring for persons and congregations.

#8 (Worship and Preaching)

Demonstrate skill and understanding to lead worship, preach the gospel, and administer the sacraments.

Step 1

THE REGISTRATION OF INTEREST IN THE MINISTRY OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

This step is not required constitutionally, but it is recommended as a way to help a potential candidate for the ministry of Word and sacrament reach an informed decision to come under the care and supervision of the classis. It is also a means whereby the local church becomes intentional in providing opportunities for the potential candidate to be involved in ministry activities. A year or two of ministry in the local church prior to seeking the endorsement of the consistory is recommended.

- A. The pastor and/or members of the congregation who discern potential gifts for the ministry of Word and sacrament encourage the applicant.
- B. The applicant registers her interest with her consistory. Form I may be used to facilitate this process (see explanatory note 1 on p. 23 of this manual).
- C. The registered applicant, after a reasonable period of time in consultation with the church leadership, decides whether or not to apply for classis care. It is not necessary at this point for the applicant to determine whether or not ordination will be sought. There are many ways Christians can answer God's call to service, and ordination to the ministry of Word and sacrament is only one way. Some applicants may be inclined toward areas of ministry that do not require ordination but for which seminary training is highly desirable. However, if an applicant decides to proceed toward ordination, she should follow the rest of the process outlined in this manual.

Step 2

THE APPLICATION TO CONSISTORY TO BE TAKEN UNDER THE CARE OF THE CLASSIS

- A. The applicant informs the consistory of the church in which his membership is held that he wishes to come under care of the classis. This step should preferably be taken during the year prior to the applicant's contemplated entrance into seminary (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 1).
- B. The consistory (or the elders) interview the applicant. Form I may be used to facilitate this process (see explanatory note 1 on p. 23). If the 2017 General Synod approves the recommended changes, the role of consistory can also be performed by the classis committee.
- C. The consistory recommends one of the following:
 - 1. That the applicant be taken under the care and supervision of classis as a candidate for ordination in the RCA.
 - 2. That action on the application be postponed.
 - 3. That the applicant not be endorsed as a candidate.
- D. Having recommended that the applicant come under the care and supervision of classis, the consistory submits the completed Forms I and II, or other relevant background material, to the stated clerk of the classis for referral to the appropriate committee.

Step 3

THE PERSONAL CONFERENCE AND EVALUATION BY THE CLASSIS CANDIDATE CARE COMMITTEE

The Candidate Care Committee (see explanatory note 3 on p. 23) is encouraged to provide guidance to all candidates, those attending a theological seminary in preparation for ministry or those seeking the Approved Alternate Route (AAR), whether or not they seek licensure and ordination. However, the committee gives specific attention to candidates who seek ordination as ministers of Word and sacrament, as follows:

- A. The committee inquires into the applicant's character and behavior; physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and educational qualifications; and the applicant's motives for seeking the ministry as a vocation. Form I may be used to facilitate this process (see explanatory note 1 on p. 23).
- B. The committee determines whether the use of psychological and vocational assessments would be helpful in its evaluation. The RCA seminaries and the MFCA can assist the classis in obtaining these assessments.
- C. The committee gives guidance in the choice of a seminary or developing a program of study. Applicants should be encouraged to consider the advantages of preparation for ministry at the RCA seminaries, NBTS or WTS. The RCA seminaries are uniquely equipped to prepare a student for ministry in the RCA. When enrollment in a non-RCA seminary is anticipated, the action of the 1990 General Synod is to be followed:

To urge the classis to require that candidates who cannot attend an RCA seminary, choose a seminary that provides the following essential components of an adequate theological education for RCA ministry:

1. Academic Accreditation. The non-RCA seminary must be accredited by the Association of Theological Schools (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 9, Section 2b).
2. Compatible Theology. The non-RCA seminary should provide instruction that is demonstrably compatible with Reformed theology as expressed in the three RCA doctrinal standards.
3. Denominational Identity. The non-RCA seminary selected should be located near RCA congregations that provide opportunities for regular participation, leading to the creation and growth of RCA identity, loyalty, and collegiality.
4. Comprehensive Supervision. The non-RCA seminary should be able to provide diverse field-education assignments in RCA churches under the supervision of RCA ministers.

The 1998 General Synod added three more guidelines (*The Acts and Proceedings of the 184th Regular Session of the General Synod*, p. 261):

5. Ministerial Formation. The non-RCA seminary must have a high commitment to pastoral ministry.
6. Clinical Pastoral Education. The non-RCA seminary must make available within its curriculum at least one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) and a program of spiritual direction.
7. Doctrinal Friendliness. The non-RCA seminary must be willing to recognize the Standards of Unity as a valid statement of Christian faith for members of the RCA, and it must not require RCA candidates to assent to additional doctrinal standards or statements.

- D. The committee recommends one of the following:
 1. That the applicant be taken under care.
 2. That action on the application be postponed.
 3. That the applicant not be taken under care.

- E. The committee transmits the completed application Form I to the stated clerk of classis.

Step 4

THE REPORT TO THE CLASSIS, THE APPEARANCE BEFORE THE CLASSIS, AND THE FOLLOW-UP

- A. The applicant appears before classis to give a personal statement of faith and reasons for seeking ordination as minister of Word and sacrament (see explanatory note 4 on p. 23).
- B. The Candidate Care Committee makes its recommendation to the classis regarding the applicant.
- C. The classis takes action on the applicant's candidacy.
- D. If classis approves the candidacy, it then moves to receive the applicant under its care and supervision.
- E. The classis may choose to conduct a brief worship service in recognition of the occasion. The *Liturgy for Receiving a Candidate under Care of Classis* (Form No. VI) may be used for this purpose.
- F. The enrolled candidate immediately contacts the MFCA office for enrollment requirements (see explanatory note 5 on p. 23).
- G. If the enrolled candidate chooses to attend NBTS or WTS, the stated clerk immediately sends a Petition for Certificate of Fitness for Ministry (Form V) to NBTS or WTS, respectively, on behalf of the candidate. Form V must be received a minimum of twenty-four months prior to the time it is to be given final disposition by the General Synod through its agent.

If the enrolled candidate anticipates attending a non-RCA seminary and the seminary has been approved by the classis, the stated clerk immediately sends a Petition for a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry (Form V) to the MFCA on behalf of the candidate.

- H. The seminary in which a candidate is enrolled must normally be near RCA congregations for the purpose of worship attendance, and so that an RCA clergy person can be available to serve as a pastor-sponsor. Final approval of enrollment in a non-RCA seminary is made by the Certification Committee and the MFCA.

Step 5

THE CARE AND SUPERVISION PROCESS LEADING TO CERTIFICATION OF FITNESS FOR MINISTRY

Three caring and supervisory relationships are provided for the candidate during this period. They link the candidate to

- the home church;
- the classis and its Candidate Care Committee; and
- the RCA institution or agency of theological education in which the candidate is enrolled.

It is the responsibility of the candidate to keep each of these three entities informed of her current mailing address, study plans, concerns, and needs.

- A. The home church continues to maintain a caring and supportive role with the candidate, who remains subject to the ecclesiastical discipline of the board of elders.
- B. The classis supervises the candidate in the following ways:
 1. Examination of the candidate in the appropriate disciplines at the conclusion of each year of seminary training.
 2. Granting of a provisional license to preach after each year of study and, prior to the final year, the right to receive a promise of a call.
 3. Provision of continual guidance and care until the candidate is ordained or otherwise terminates the care relationship.
- C. NBTS, WTS, or the MFCA supervises the candidate in the following ways:
 1. Superintendence of the candidate's academic curriculum. The RCA has designated the following studies as indispensable for the proper exercise of the ministerial office of the church: RCA confessional statements, history, missions, polity, and worship.
 2. Superintendence of the candidate's supervised ministry.
 3. Guidance in areas of spiritual formation.
 4. Guidance in personal growth. This may include the use of psychological and/or vocational assessments.
 5. Encouragement in matters that relate to denominational identity.

Step 6

THE GRANTING OF THE CERTIFICATE OF FITNESS FOR MINISTRY

A. For candidates enrolled at New Brunswick Theological Seminary and Western Theological Seminary:

A candidate who meets the prescribed requirements and who has been certified by the faculty to be prepared to take the licensure and ordination examinations, is recommended to the seminary's Board of Trustees as a candidate qualified to receive the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. The Board of Trustees of the seminary acts as the General Synod's agent on the recommendation of the faculty and grants the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, which, along with the Master of Divinity degree, entitles the candidate to an examination by the classis for licensure and ordination.

B. For candidates enrolled at non-RCA seminaries through the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency:

The candidate is to follow the certification procedures as outlined in the *Candidate Handbook*. Materials such as those listed below are to be submitted to the MFCA office according to the time schedule given in the *Candidate Handbook*:

1. A transcript of the candidate's seminary academic record at the close of each school year.
2. Records of supervised ministry, internship, and/or Clinical Pastoral Education, with a written evaluation by the supervisor, at the close of each school year.
3. Records of designated psychological and/or vocational assessments and the criminal background check.
4. Evidence of successful completion of the RCA prescribed courses of study, including studies in RCA confessional statements, history, missions, polity, and worship.
5. An autobiographical statement describing the candidate's spiritual and vocational pilgrimage.
6. A credo paper stating the candidate's personal beliefs regarding all the main areas of Christian theology.
7. Evidence of having earned a Master of Divinity degree or its equivalent from an accredited seminary.

A candidate who successfully completes the prescribed training requirements, including the annual standardized exam, and is judged by the Certification Committee to be a qualified candidate for the ministry of Word and sacrament, is recommended to the MFCA Board of Trustees for receiving the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. The MFCA Board of Trustees acts on the recommendation of the MFCA Certification Committee as the General Synod's agent and grants the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, which, along with the Master of Divinity degree, entitles the candidate to an examination by the classis for licensure and ordination.

PART THREE:

ALTERNATE MEANS AND AN APPROVED ALTERNATE ROUTE

Two options are open to those who seek ordination as ministers of Word and sacrament but who, for a variety of reasons, are not able to complete the requirements outlined above. Those options are

1. an alternate means to—a dispensation from—specific M.Div. requirements in the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry; and
2. the Approved Alternate Route to certification.

Alternate Means

“A candidate for the ministry who is a student enrolled in a Master of Divinity degree program at a theological seminary, but because of age, lack of necessary academic preparation, or other sufficient reason, finds it too difficult to meet the full requirements for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, shall make application to the classis for an alternate means (dispensation).

- a. If the classis finds the reason sufficient, it shall petition the appropriate board on behalf of the applicant by recommending an alternate means to meet the seminary’s academic requirements (Chapter 1, Part II, Article 9, Section 3b). The petition with the reasons for seeking alternate means shall be made three months prior to the meeting of the board of trustees of the MFCA, NBTS, or WTS.
- b. The board of trustees of an RCA seminary or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency, shall inquire carefully into the reasons submitted by the classis as to why the applicant is unable to meet the full constitutional requirements for a candidate’s preparation.
- c. Upon recommendation of the faculty of an RCA seminary or the Certification Committee of the MFCA, the appropriate board may grant the requested alternate means” (*Book of Church Order*, 1, II, 9, 3b).

The Approved Alternate Route (AAR) Process

A member of the church who has demonstrated gifts for the office of minister of Word and sacrament but who is unable to earn a Master of Divinity degree or its equivalent from a seminary accredited by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), and take the regular course of seminary instruction because of age, academic preparation, language differences, or other sufficient reason, may seek an approved alternate route in order to be awarded the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry (see *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 9, Section 4).

The classis initiates the Approved Alternate Route (AAR) process by contacting the MFCA in writing through the clerk of classis. (Classes are encouraged to determine, in cooperation with the MFCA, whether a person is eligible for the AAR process.) The classis provides all the applicable information on the candidate—educational transcripts, a resume of employment, and a statement giving the rationale for choosing the AAR. A detailed description of the program and supervised ministry is mutually developed by classis and MFCA upon acceptance into the program. As part of the application to the MFCA, the classis shall verify that the following criteria are met:

- The classis shall determine: (1) the candidate has at least five years’ ministry experience that prepares the candidate for leadership as a minister of Word and sacrament; (2) the candidate gives evidence of the call, gifts, and experience for the ministry of Word and sacrament; and (3) the candidate, for compelling practical reasons, cannot complete a master of divinity degree at an accredited seminary.

The AAR Certification Committee may require a personal meeting with the candidate and classis representatives. If the committee rejects the application, it shall state its reasons clearly. The classis may then revise the application and reapply. A program is established by the AAR Certification Committee and it normally includes graduate level courses, RCA specific courses, Clinical Pastoral Education and a credo.

Once a candidate has completed the prescribed program, the AAR Certification Committee of the MFCA will satisfy itself that the candidate has successfully proven that they meet the standards for preparation for ministry. A standardized examination is normally administered at the end of the candidate's time in the process. Methods used to evaluate the candidate shall be culturally and linguistically appropriate. When the candidate has fulfilled the program requirements and has passed the standardized examination, the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry is awarded. Any appeals in the process must be directed to the MFCA Board of Trustees.

APPENDIX

Explanatory Notes

1. Form I is recommended for use but is not required if a more desirable procedure is already practiced. A written instrument, however, is strongly urged.
2. Form II is recommended for use but is not required if a more desirable procedure is already practiced. A written instrument, however, is strongly urged.
3. Classis as a whole, or a designated committee of classis, takes responsibility for examining the candidate. The *Process Guide* uses the term “Candidate Care Committee” in keeping with the *BCO*’s designation of the applicant as a candidate. The terminology may vary from classis to classis.
4. The candidate’s appearance before the classis and the inclusion of an appropriate worship service, while not specified by the *BCO*, are highly recommended as a proper way to give due significance to this step.
5. The candidate having signed the release (see Form I), the stated clerk sends the candidate’s college transcript(s) along with the completed Form V or 5A to the RCA seminary or MFCA. The candidate contacts NBTS, WTS, or the MFCA for other specific required materials. When all these materials are received and approved, enrollment is accomplished.