

Appendix 7 Proposed Regulations for Financial Aid for Theological Students & Forms

Regulations for the Financial Aid of Theological students

BACKGROUND

The foremost directive for the financial assistance for theological students is given in the Australian Church Order, Article 18, quoted below.

Article 18 – Students of Theology

The churches shall strive to ensure that there are students of theology, extending financial aid where necessary.

The implications of this directive from the Church Order is that young men are encouraged by the local congregations to seriously consider studying for the ministry and to also ensure that, where there is genuine need amongst these students, they are adequately supported during their periods of study.

Since 1992 the FRCA have decided to provide this financial support for theological students via the Deputies for Training for the Ministry by levying the churches a small amount per communicant member.

Regulations were first established at Synod 1992 (Article 50) and further amended by subsequent synods, Synod 1994 (Article 56) and Synod 2000 (Article 42).

The regulations also eventually included a set of *Rules for the Fund for the support of Needy Students*.

Since 2000 the deputies have developed guidelines entitled *Financial Assistance for Theology Students from Deputies*. Although this document is separate from the rules and regulations, its aim was to summarise the main processes and highlight pertinent aspects of the regulations for the students.

Consequently, there have existed multiple documents relating to the financial aid for theological students, with much duplicity and somewhat conflicting information.

The intent of this updated document is to combine the existing regulations, rules and guidelines into one coherent document, which completely captures all aspects associated with the financial support of theological students.

Deputies for Training for Ministry

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ELIGIBILITY

Article 1 Eligibility

Financial aid will be provided only to students who satisfy all the eligibility criteria as outlined in Article 2 of these regulations.

Article 2 Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible for financial aid, the student must:

1. originally be a confessing member of one of the churches of FRCA;
2. have the intention of becoming a minister within the FRCA or within a sister federation or within a sister church of the Canadian Reformed Churches;
3. have made satisfactory progress in their undergraduate courses (usually a Bachelor of Arts degree);
4. be accepted and enrolled in an approved theological college or seminary;
5. be committed to undertake full-time studies at the approved college or seminary;
6. demonstrate a genuine financial need. See Article 5 for further information.

FINANCIAL AID

Article 3 Support from Deputies for Training for Ministry

Students who apply for financial aid for their theological studies may be supported by the Needy Students Fund (NSF) operated by the deputies for Training for the Ministry, mandated by the FRCA.

Article 4 Typical Expenses

The NSF provides financial aid for (but not limited to) the following typical expenses:

1. tuition fees;
2. study books;
3. living expenses;
4. clothing;
5. fares;
6. health insurance;
7. incidental expenses;
8. other on-going expenses.

Article 5 Potential Sources of Funding

In order to assist deputies in determining whether a student has a genuine financial need, it is important that the student explore, in this order, the following potential sources of funding before applying for financial aid from the deputies:

1. the student themselves (e.g. savings).

2. the student's family (e.g. parents, in-laws, siblings and others). While the student's family ought not to be placed under undue pressure, they should be given the opportunity and privilege of supporting the student.
3. the student's church (e.g. an annual contribution).

The above potential sources of funding should be explored in the order given above; namely student first, student's family second and the students church third.

If any of these three funding sources are enough to meet a student's annual expenses, then the deputies would not be called upon to provide financial aid.

However, if there is a significant shortfall from these first three funding sources, then financial aid can be sought from the deputies.

Article 6 Seeking Financial Aid

Once the student has decided that financial aid is required from the deputies the student must complete an Application Form for Financial Assistance.

As part of this application, the student must:

1. procure agreement documents from relevant parties (e.g. family, consistory) indicating the agreed level of financial aid from sources other than deputies;
2. present to their local consistory for approval, a projected annual expense budget;
3. request their local consistory to approve, co-sign and forward to deputies the Application Form for Financial Assistance.

Agreement documents need to clearly state the amount of financial aid committed and should be signed and dated by the relevant parties.

Article 7 Determination of Financial Aid

Once the deputies receive this application (as per Article 6), the deputies will then determine the final amount of financial aid.

As part of this determination, the deputies should consider the income of financial support from all other sources and may also consult with the approved college or seminary.

The deputies will then enter into an official Agreement with the student. For further details about this Agreement, see Terms of Agreement (Article 11 – 13).

Article 8 Form of Financial Aid

The financial aid will be provided in the form of interest-free loans for the purpose of meeting the costs associated with studying at the approved college or seminary.

Article 9 Payment of Financial Aid

The deputies will come to an agreement with the student as to the most convenient mode and frequency of payment. The details of the payment schedule will be part of the Agreement.

Article 10 Exemption from NSF Levy

The deputies, when assessing the churches, must consider the financial commitment which the local churches have assumed with respect to the support of needy students.

In such cases, churches that have assumed a financial commitment for a needy student will be exempt from the annual NSF levy.

TERMS OF AGREEMENT

Article 11 Commencement of Agreement

Once an Application Form for Financial Aid has been lodged and the Agreement Form has been duly completed, the agreement is in effect.

This agreement is made between the Deputies for Training for Ministry and the student requesting financial aid.

Article 12 Cessation of Agreement

If the student in good faith pursues theological training with the intention of entering the ministry of the gospel, he will not be required to repay the loans.¹

The Agreement ceases and the student will not receive any more funds when any of the following occurs:

1. the student terminates their studies before completion;
2. the student decides not to become a minister;
3. the student does not, within two years of completing his studies, make himself available for call by one of the churches mentioned in Article 1;
4. the student has not received a call after a period of twelve months has lapsed after their preparatory examination;
5. the student does not accept a call extended to him;
6. the student, having accepted a call, withdraws and does not accept another call;
7. the student ceases to be a member either by their withdrawal or excommunication.

If at any point it becomes evident that the student is not acting in good faith, he may be required to repay any provided loans or any outstanding amount thereof and the Agreement will cease.

Article 13 Terms of the Agreement

The terms of the Agreement are:

1. financial aid will be given only for the duration of the theological course;
2. details of payments and a payment schedule will be included in the Agreement;
3. the student agrees to adhere to their obligations as outlined in Article 14
4. the deputies agree to adhere to their obligations as outlined in Article 16
5. that upon the request of the student the deputies shall annually assess if an interest free loan can be made available to assist in financing the student;
6. financial aid will end at the time when the student has completed their studies and ecclesiastical examinations and becomes the responsibility of a church;
7. that financial aid will end if, after twelve months after his preparatory examination, the student has not received a call from a church;

¹ To act in good faith is honest intent to act without taking an unfair advantage.

8. the student declares himself to be in dept for the interest free loans provided by the deputies administering the NSF on behalf of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia;
9. the student is bound by the stipulations of Article 12;
10. repayment of the loans provided will be waived, and the Agreement dissolved once the student is ordained as minister of one of the churches mentioned in Article 1, at the rate of two years of financial aid for every year of ministry;
11. in the case of financial hardship when immediate repayment in full would be too difficult, deputies may consider a request for repayment in instalments.

OBLIGATIONS

Article 14 Obligations of the Student

For the duration of the Agreement, the student is obliged to:

1. annually submit a budget of expenditure outlining and substantiating the financial aid required for the next year;
2. at any time, inform deputies of any substantial changes in their financial position in either income or assets, as this may affect the amount of financial aid given in subsequent years;
3. keep the deputies informed about his study progress at the college or seminary;
4. inform the deputies as soon as possible if, for whatever reason, the student desires to end their studies;

Article 15 Obligations of the Supporting Church

Once a supporting church has ascertained that the student wishes to pursue theological studies, the supporting church is obliged to:

1. help the student in determining an annual projected expense budget, especially in relation to possible sources of funding (see Article 5);
2. approve the annual projected expense budget;
3. aid the student in completing the Application Form for Financial Assistance and forwarding relevant material to the deputies as part of this application;
4. honour any financial commitment under the Agreement, if applicable;
5. maintain good contact with the student, once studies have commenced.

Article 16 Obligations of Deputies

During the period leading up to the student applying for financial aid as well as for duration of the Agreement, the deputies are obliged to:

6. ensure that the student is given the *Rules and Regulations for Financial Aid for Theological Students* including, at the appropriate time, the *Application Form for Financial Assistance* and the *Agreement Form*;
7. ensure that the student understands the contents of these documents;
8. keep good contact with the student during the student's study at the college or seminary;
9. report to the next synod financial aid being given;

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Article 17 Exceptional and Special Circumstances

During the Agreement there may arise exceptional or special circumstances.

By their very nature, these circumstances are unpredictable. Thus, while not every circumstance can be covered, some of the known exceptional and/or special circumstances which may occur and the action that applies are as follows:

1. students who are not eligible for government support for tertiary education may receive financial aid only in exceptional circumstances;
2. students who need to complete extra studies, after having obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree at an Australian university and before being admitted to the college or seminary, may be financially supported by the deputies for that time of study;
3. If the student fails to make satisfactory progress, and desires to continue with his studies, the student may request a continuation of financial aid, if required. The deputies will consider this request only if the college or seminary senate support the continuation of the student's studies;
4. any request for a continuation of financial aid, following further failures to make satisfactory progress, can only be considered by the deputies if it can be ascertained that the failure was due to exceptional circumstances;
5. in the unusual situation where it is clear that too high a level of financial aid was given in the past, then the total sum of excess money must be repaid in full;
6. the obligation to repay loans may be waived in cases of sickness, death or other exceptional circumstances.

AUTHORITY

Article 18 Lack of Provision

In any case where these Regulations do not make provision, deputies have the authority to decide.

Article 19 Disputes

In cases of disputes, the home church's classis shall adjudicate.