

Appendix 3: FRCA Vicariate Guidelines

The vicariate is considered a useful (albeit voluntary) part of our theological training. At this time, our students study at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS). Upon completion of the Master of Divinity program at CRTS, students originating from the FRCA will be offered the opportunity to further their training with a vicariate.

All correspondence concerning the vicariate shall in the first place be addressed to the Deputies for Training for the Ministry of the FRCA (DTM).

Definitions

Vicar – a man who has completed his seminary training, is not yet ordained, and who is taken on by a church for a period of further practical ministry training and development.

Vicariate – a supervised program of practical ministry training and development.

A. Form of Subscription

Vicars are required to sign the Form of Subscription prior to the commencement of their duties. This shall be done at the consistory of the church providing the vicariate training.

B. Duration of Vicariate

The vicariate training shall take place over a period of up to twelve months.

C. Deputies

The DTM shall have the right to approach a church which they believe could provide suitable vicariate training.

D. Guidelines for Vicariate Training

1. Principles Regarding Vicariates

- a. Each year, the DTM shall offer fourth year students originating from the FRCA the opportunity to return to Australia to receive the vicariate training. All the churches shall then be informed of potential candidates for vicariates. The churches shall be invited to submit applications.
- b. The purpose of a vicariate is to provide training for a vicar. Except in exceptional circumstances vicars should not be placed in vacant congregations or in isolated settings where they cannot be properly supervised and trained.
- c. A vicariate can be an important part of preparation for the ministry. A local church may benefit greatly from a vicar's work, but this should be seen as a 'fringe benefit' to the vicariate; the main purpose is to train the vicar.
- d. This training ought to be provided by experienced and able ministers. Some ministers have more experience and/or ability to train a vicar than others. The DTM ought to consider the suitability of the supervising minister in the placement of vicars and the DTM may approach churches

and ministers with a request to take a vicar. Supervising ministers ought to be aware that training a vicar will take a significant amount of time; time saved in a reduced preaching load will need to be spent in evaluating the vicar's sermons and supervising other areas of his ministry.

- e. A vicar will need adequate time to prepare for his candidacy (preparatory) exam. Consistories should discuss this with the vicar so that he has time during his vicariate and as his exam approaches. The exam should ordinarily take place towards the end of the vicariate period.
- f. The Supervising Minister
 - 1) The minister may expect to spend between two to four hours per week with the vicar, excluding consistory meetings, joint visits, etc. This time would be spent in sermon evaluation, planning and reporting on pastoral visitation, advice and guidance on the work of the ministry, e.g. devotions and prayer, church polity and the functioning of the consistory and classis, time management, general organisation, the spiritual growth and development of the vicar, etc.
 - 2) Vicars need to be encouraged in a regular program of reading and study. The supervising minister and vicar should agree on a program, perhaps in an area of interest or weakness.
 - 3) The vicar's work should be closely supervised, especially in the early part of the vicariate. As time goes on he should be given increasing freedom to work on his own and be given more responsibility in certain areas.
- g. The Supervising Consistory
 - 1) It may be helpful to have the vicar meet regularly (perhaps once a month) with an experienced and able elder who can give him some advice and input.
 - 2) The consistory should also evaluate the vicar's sermons and development in the ministry. Both the minister and the consistory should make a careful evaluation of the vicar's progress. Honest advice, encouragement, and criticism ought to be given in a sensitive manner. Time should be set aside for this at a consistory meeting not less than once every three months.
 - 3) The consistory should take account of helpful feedback from the congregation and may seek this using sermon evaluation forms.

2. Elements of Vicariate Training

a. Preaching

This is obviously a crucial area of his training and much time needs to be spent here. A vicar will be expected to preach once per Sunday through his vicariate and twice per Sunday towards the end of it. The supervising minister should ensure that he has experience in preaching Catechism sermons, as well as sermons based on a single Bible text. Vicars may find it helpful to follow the discipline of preaching through a book of the Bible. It would be good experience for the vicar to preach in some of the other churches of the classical region and to have experience at preaching on special occasions where possible, e.g. a funeral, wedding, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Sermons and their supporting exegesis are to be closely evaluated primarily by the minister, but also by the consistory, with input from members of the congregation via evaluation forms. Vicars may find it helpful to have a sermon workshop with other ministers (and vicars) of the classical region.

Sermon content is to be evaluated on the basis of the following:

- Is the exegesis accurate?
- Is the sermon well-structured and easy to follow for listeners?
- Is the theme drawn from the text and developed in a coherent and logical manner?
- Is the context (including the place of the passage in redemptive history) taken into account?
- Does the sermon preach Jesus Christ and the good news of salvation in him?
- Is the sermon doctrinally sound?
- Is the application in the sermon drawn from the text?

The delivery of the sermon is to be evaluated for evidence of gifts of communication and contribution to edifying worship.

b. Pastoral Work

- 1) Visitation with the minister: In the early part of the vicariate a vicar will find it helpful to visit members of the congregation with the minister. As time goes on, however, the vicar will be able to visit on his own.
- 2) Visitation with elders: A vicar will gain much experience by participating in home visits with the elders, especially if he can visit with a number of elders and be exposed to various styles and approaches.
- 3) Counselling: Training and practice at counselling will be valuable for a vicar. Much can be learned from watching and listening to an experienced minister helping people through their problems and struggles (if a congregational member is agreeable to the vicar listening in). Depending on their experience and maturity, vicars may be asked to counsel members on their own.

c. **Consistory and Classis**

Vicars are expected to attend all consistory and classis meetings. They should be prepared to take assigned responsibilities as deemed helpful (chairman, clerk, etc.). It would also be profitable for vicars to attend deacons meetings.

3. Wife and Family

Where a vicar is married it would be helpful for the vicar and his wife to meet with the supervising minister and his wife on a regular basis for encouragement, fellowship, and advice. It would also be helpful for the vicar's wife to meet with the wives of elders (Titus 2:3-5). She should be encouraged to take an active part in the life of the congregation, as family responsibilities permit.

4. Other Activities

- a. Catechism: Part of the training will involve teaching at least one weekly catechism class; this is to be evaluated by the minister or the elder supervising the catechism classes.
- b. Bible studies: Bible study groups are an important part of congregational life and the vicar ought to attend these groups on a regular basis and take a turn at leading them.
- c. Evangelism: The vicar will find it helpful to learn from the insights of the supervising minister regarding the work of evangelism and to participate in such work as he has opportunity. He may be able to train a group in evangelism.
- d. Youth work: The minister and consistory may want to encourage the vicar to attend or be involved in the youth work of the congregation as part of his training.
- e. Other activities outside of the church may include a ministerial and useful conferences.

E. The Financial Support of Vicars

1. Support

A vicar is to receive the equivalent of what a student receives for the PTP.

2. Travel and Accommodation

Travel Expenses and accommodation are the responsibility of the church concerned.

3. Federational support

- a. If required, the DTM will assess the churches for the vicariate program through a separate levy.
- b. If needed churches can apply for support from the Deputies for Training of the Ministry.

4. Relocation

If a vicar wishes to relocate to where he came from, the DTM will provide him with sufficient funds to do so after the completion of his vicariate.