



The remit of the Candidates and Credentials Committee of the IPC is to oversee the application, assessment, examination and preparation for ordination or transfer of Teaching and Ruling Elders.

A major area of assessment is credentials for ministry in the IPC. These are wide-ranging (theological to personal) and involve all the complexities of varieties in personality, experience, background and gifts which God has given. The C&C Committee always seeks to consider the individual circumstances of each applicant.

The complexity of ministry credentials does not, however, leave us with only subjective considerations. There are three premises which guide our thinking.

1. Presbytery is responsible for preparing men for ministry

We do not view Presbytery as primarily a bureaucratic or administrative court of the church. First and foremost it is a fellowship of teaching and ruling elders committed to overseeing the church's spiritual mission. Elders gather together in Presbytery to do the work of Christ's church: to extend gospel ministry through the work of prayer, oversight and discipline under Christ's rule.

By charging the C&C Committee with the work of credentialing new ministers, Presbytery shares in that particular work and assumes overall responsibility. Presbytery is responsible for admitting men to the ministry, planting new churches within its bounds, as well as maintaining the peace, purity and unity of the church.

This means that when we talk of 'training for the ministry' we are describing something under the oversight of Presbytery. Within an IPC congregation, from the start of a man's potential interest in ministry through to his ordination and call from a local congregation, Presbytery is responsible for each step along the way. It is the concern of Presbytery to give men their entire training for ministry.

A number of things are required of Presbytery to be able to operate in this way. It needs to see itself as a pastoral fellowship with a developed system of Under Care procedures to begin the process of nurturing those considering ministry. It needs to use various instruments in the right way, in the right order, and at the right time in the training of young men for the ministry. It needs to have a clear idea of what is necessary in effective ministerial training and how it plans to meet those requirements for its candidates. B. B. Warfield says, 'no other organization can supersede the Presbytery in this business.'¹

What instruments does the Presbytery use in the work of training?

¹ B. B. Warfield, 'The Purpose of the Seminary', in *Collected Shorter Writings*, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: P&R Publishing, 1970), 374.

2. A theological college education is not sufficient for ministry

We do not send men to college to train them for ministry. Four years of classroom study is not ministry, and there is only so much about the practice of ministry which can be taught theoretically.

A primary instrument used by Presbytery is the local church whose elders form a part of its fellowship. The local church performs several aspects of training better than a college. In large measure it is the experience of ministry that trains a man for ministry. The church is where men who appear to be faithful, capable and able are likely to first be identified. Through its internships and apprentice programmes, as well as assistant or associate pastor roles, the local church receives an important charge from Presbytery to care for the moral, spiritual and practical development of its potential ministry candidates. Good practices of Under Care can allow a local church great freedom in its training of younger men while allowing Presbytery to guide and take overall responsibility for the process.

Outside of the college, Presbytery can use several other instruments such as guided reading, or courses which focus especially on preaching (Cornhill Training Course).

3. A theological college education is necessary for ministry

None of this renders college superfluous. Rather, it is one more necessary instrument in the overall aim of comprehensive training and Presbytery neglects it at our peril. College performs several aspects of training better than a church.

Warfield argues that our conception of what the ministry is determines the kind of preparation we seek to provide. In the evangelical and Reformed view, the minister is the mouth-piece of God. His work is instructional not inspirational; it is theological not sociological. 'He needs to know the gospel: to know it at first hand, and to know it through and through.' Preaching 'the simple gospel' will, of course be valuable. But 'the foolishness of preaching is one thing; foolish preaching is another.'²

To work to this end, we advocate a rigorous education in the languages in which the gospel was written (exegetical theology); in the skills of deriving the meaning of words, phrases, thought patterns and whole books of the Bible (biblical theology); in the process of doctrinal formulation through the centuries in order to be able to understand the biblicism of heresy (historical theology); in the heads of doctrine and their relationships to each other (systematic theology); in the creeds, confessions and catechisms of the church and the Reformed faith (confessional theology).

Warfield points out that man is a composite being made up of body and soul, set in a social organism, and dependent on a physical environment. This makes the ministry one of the 'learned professions' which divide between the expert care of man. So science mediates between him and nature; law deals with his social relations; medicine cares for his body; the minister cares for spiritual things.³ We presume the highest standards of education in the other spheres; why not in the ministry?

² Ibid., 378.

³ Ibid., 376.

Not all within the IPC have had the benefit of a good theological college or seminary education. The issue is not what we have each experienced or not experienced, however, but rather ensuring that the next generation of younger ministers who follow us in the IPC receive the best training possible. There are, of course, a range of exceptional circumstances which might be relevant (older men transferring who are already active in ministry and for whom circumstances mean further education would be impossible). But the ideal and the norm must be a high level of theological training.

With the possibility of exceptional circumstances in mind, the C&C Committee operates on the premise that young men seeking ordination in the IPC must have a minimum of three years college education, and preferably four years (although some MDiv degrees can be completed in three years). Although not always the case, ideally this process is guided from start to end through Presbytery's Under Care procedures, and candidates are encouraged to study at institutions with a clearly Reformed and confessional basis and which are likely to develop and deepen Presbyterian theological convictions.

An ideal process might be: church internship/apprentice programme with some kind of theological input (Cornhill); followed by college; followed by a position in ministry. Following seminary and then ordination, assistant minister positions should be encouraged for several years before either progressing to church planting or senior minister positions. This is one of the best instruments of training available.