

**Ministerial Vocation  
Committee**  
Report to the 38th General Assembly



Michael Flake  
*Chair*

**Summary of Work, 2017-2018:**

1. Revamped Teaching Elder Annual Report to include components of clergy wellbeing (e.g. use of 4 vacation weeks, 2 study leave weeks, participation in wellness program).
2. Twice gathered the Chairs of the Presbyteries' Ministerial and Candidates Committees for mutual encouragement and sharing of best practices
3. Revised the Polity Exam, in addition to providing careful oversight of the new Original Language Exam
4. Interviewed Candidates John Wilcox, Doug Hull, and Luke Potter as part of CEEP (Candidates Education Equivalency Program) and made appropriate recommendations to their respective Presbyteries
5. Oversaw the distribution of funds to assist with pastor coaching (through PastorServe) and wellbeing (through Quiet Waters), with particular focus on helping smaller churches access these resources

**Recommendations to the 2018 General Assembly:**

1. **RECOMMENDATION 38-04**  
That the Assembly adopt the proposal by ICME (Interim Committee on Ministerial Education) to expand the allowable uses of the Commissioned Pastor designation. In our estimation, this proposal is a targeted way to affirm the calling of specific individuals in a way that could serve a variety of EPC churches and potentially certain populations currently underserved by the EPC.

## **Work of the Committee in 2017-2018:**

The Ministerial Vocation Committee (MVC) undertook important work on several fronts since the 37<sup>th</sup> General Assembly:

**Clergy Wellbeing:** We want healthy and vibrant churches, which typically start with healthy and vibrant ministers. I continue to encourage Sessions to ask your pastor(s) “Did you take all of your annual vacation and study leave allowance?” (Teaching Elders get 4 weeks of the first and 2 weeks of the second each year.)

Our committee worked with Presbyteries’ Ministerial Committees to revamp the Teaching Elder Annual Report Form to ask for honest reflection on self-care questions. We are not trying to be “Big Brother,” but we do want our Teaching Elders to know that their long-term wellbeing in ministry matters to the EPC.

We have also partnered with pastors and churches to share the costs associated with coaching and soul care and strengthening pastors’ marriages. We are finding this cost sharing to be especially beneficial for smaller churches, for whom cost is the main hurdle. (Typically, the MVC pays 1/3, the pastor pays 1/3, and the church pays the final 1/3.) We work closely with partner agencies including Quiet Waters, Pastors in Residence, and PastorServe to help our pastors grow professionally and personally. (The full list of partners is available on the MVC resource page of the EPC’s website).

**Presbytery Collaboration:** In the past 12 months, we have twice gathered the Chairs of the Presbyteries’ Ministerial and Candidates Committees. These two-day gathers are a time of great camaraderie, mutual encouragement, and sharing of best practices. Our most recent gathering was described by one Chairman as “the most productive one yet.” At that same gathering, we also heard multiple Presbyteries share that they have perhaps the best group of candidates they have ever had. This is a very encouraging report, especially with all of the changes we see in our culture generally and seminary education specifically. It appears that the sky is not falling after all.

Based on feedback from these gatherings, the MVC closed a loophole that was allowing some churches to post Teaching Elder vacancies on the Ministry Staff Opportunities page without first notifying their Presbyteries of the opening. Now, Teaching Elder opportunities can only be posted to that page with the approval of the church’s Presbytery.

**CEEP:** Over the past 12 months, we have interviewed 3 candidates (John Wilcox, Doug Hull, and Luke Potter) as part of CEEP (Candidates Education Equivalency Program), wherein the MVC recommends a course of study for those candidates who do not have an M.Div. These recommendations are given to the Presbytery which, as the ordaining body, is free to amend them and oversees their completion. All 3 candidates demonstrated great promise for ordained ministry, and the MVC made appropriate recommendations to their respective Presbyteries.

**Important Changes:** Over the past five years, the General Assembly has approved a number of important ministerial-related changes. Many of them are in response to the changing landscape of seminary education (ATS changing the required hours for an M.Div., concerns about student debt, etc.). The MVC takes seriously its responsibility to oversee the proper implementation of these changes and to guard against any previously-unforeseen negative consequences.

We are very pleased at the response to the new Original Language Exam as being rigorous, fair, and obvious in how it relates to the pastoral office. Our candidates are demonstrating a robust ability to use Greek and Hebrew effectively. We have also recently revised the Polity Exam to align it with the current Book of Order and to add questions which require candidates to relate polity to pastoral situations.

We are providing encouragement and accountability to Kent Matthews as he leads our Mentored Apprenticeship Program (MAP), as the professor of record for these part-classroom, part-apprenticeship seminary courses. There has been a great response to these classes, both in terms of signups and in post-course evaluation.

The MVC is also working to compile different resources by which people could receive training as a Transitional Pastor. Many Presbyteries are devising their own methods of such training, and we couldn't be happier about this development. We are also excited to see the GO Center offering this training during the Monday and Tuesday of General Assembly.

Perhaps the most exciting change for the MVC is that I will be passing leadership of the committee to someone else. I have enjoyed serving in this role for the past few years and will stay on the committee for one more year to complete my second term. TE Brad Strait will do a great job in leading the MVC forward, in part because he will be compared to his predecessor.

I am grateful to each member of our committee and to the staff members who serve our committee (Zenaida Bermudez and Jerry Iamurri) for their hard work and friendship.

### **Recommendations to the 2018 General Assembly:**

#### **RECOMMENDATION 38-04**

That the Assembly adopt the proposal by ICME to expand the allowable uses of the Commissioned Pastor designation.

#### **ICME:**

*Book of Government* 9-11 – The Ruling Elder as a Commissioned Pastor

Additional Provisions Affected by Proposed Amendment to 9-11:

G 10-7 Temporary Pastoral Relationships

BOG 18-3 Authority and Responsibilities of the Session

**Committee Members:**

TE Michael Flake (Chair), Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic  
RE Neal McAtee, Presbytery of the Central South  
RE Frank Rotella, Presbytery of the East  
TE Brad Strait, Presbytery of the West  
RE Phil Stump, Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic  
RE Caroline Tromble, Presbytery of the Rivers and Lakes

**Committee Meeting Dates:**

October 16-18, 2017 – Orlando, FL  
(including a gathering of the Chairs of Presbytery Ministerial and Candidates Committees)

November 6 and 11 and 18, 2017 – Electronically

March 14, 2018 – Orlando, FL  
(preceded by a gathering of the  
Chairs of Presbytery Ministerial and Candidates Committees)

Respectfully submitted,



Michael Flake

Chair

June 2018