

Wanted: You at Seminary...!?

By Dr. Gerhard H. Visscher

So do we need more ministerial students, or not? When one knows that six CRTS graduates were considered ready for call this spring, that there are two more who are eligible, plus two more who have graduated and will likely present themselves later, and about seventeen seminarians at CRTS as of this fall, one might get the *impression* that the need for more ministers is over. And hence, that the need for more seminary students is reduced, and, even more, that the need for *you* to consider seminary is negligible. I mean...why prepare for something for all those years only to find out later that there is no place for you in that profession? With this article, I would like to suggest that this conclusion is far from true.

The truth is that when we count every ministerial vacancy in the federations we service in Canada, USA, and Australia, including every mission church and mission post that is intent on calling a missionary or (second) pastor, as of June 2016, there are **26 vacancies**. And if we add South Africa to the equation, as they begin to look to us for assistance, the number is actually **29**. Doubt the accuracy of that? Here's the breakdown:

	Canada/USA	Australia	South Africa	
Ministerial vacancies	13	3	3	
2 nd pastors sought	4	0	?	
Mission vacancies	5	1	?	
	22	4	3	29

These numbers are really quite alarming. One should realize as well that at CRTS, we have no CanRC students expected to graduate in 2017, and only two in 2018. Besides these factors, the fact is that there are many more ministers getting closer to retirement age, and churches are constantly creating new openings for new positions. In short, ***there is an urgent need for many more young men to consider entering the ministry.*** *Seminary enrollment really needs to double in the coming years.* Unless we consider this matter carefully, prayerfully, and do whatever is in our power as a federation, we will face a severe shortage of ministers in the decades to come.

What needs to happen? We need to take action at many different levels. We really need a **recruitment campaign** in the federation.

Ministers need to consider whether they have been adequately on the alert for young, gifted men who are suitable for ministry.

Elders need to do the same with respect to their ward. Are there young men who are outstanding in terms of commitment to the Gospel, to holy, Christian living with an ability to communicate and care?

Parents need to consider whether their sons are suited for such a vocation. No, parents should not be too pushy. But gentle encouragement can go a long way. There are many in the ministry today because from an early age parents spoke of ministry as a dear and necessary calling.

As **families** too we need to consider carefully how we speak about our officebearers. If you perchance have “roast pastor” for lunch every other Sunday, don’t be surprised when your young men give no thought to ministry...small wonder that’s the last occupation they will consider! Young people also draw conclusions from what is implicit in our actions and speech.

As **congregations**, we need to consider whether we hold our ministers high because of their work, and speak of them with appreciation. Is your congregation a place of harmony and peace where young men can actually see themselves working fruitfully and joyfully? Or is it rife with controversy, strife, and division?

As **professors** at the seminary, we are doing what we can to encourage young men also by profiling the seminary to the churches. Every year one of us tours the Western provinces. We have started a campaign to visit all the Ontario churches within three years, and have already visited half of them in one year. On these trips we are always willing to sit down with possible future students. We are attempting to visit high schools throughout the land as well. But our main task of course lies elsewhere – we provide all the instruction and guidance that we can to help seminarians become the best possible pastors, under God’s blessings. Our intent is to form young men into the kind of delightful sincere Christian men whom we all want to have as pastors of our churches.

Most importantly

Young men, *should you not be considering this?* While ministry is certainly not the only way to serve the Lord, I do believe that *every* suitably gifted young man in our federation needs to give this careful and prayerful consideration. God gifts every one of his children, no doubt, and we never want to be in a profession for which he has not given us the appropriate gifts. But those with gifts suitable for ministry certainly need to wrestle out with God whether they should be heading in this direction.

How will you know whether you should enter the ministry? Ask yourself these questions:

- Do I have a love for the Lord and the Gospel of life in Christ?
- Do I care for people, and want to see them do well, not just for this life but also for the life to come?
- Do I have an interest and an ability to study?
- Do I particularly have an interest in studying the Word of God?
- Do I have some leadership qualities and a willingness to develop them?
- Have there been people who have told me that I should consider becoming a minister of the Word?
- Am I willing to use all the gifts, that God has given, for God and for the “benefit and well-being of other members” of the church (LD 21,a.55)?

- And most importantly, do I believe that God would be pleased with my attempts to explore the possibility of entering the ministry?

It's on that last question that I'd like yet to comment. Sometimes people begin to look for voices and "calls" from God, and they consider seminary because they've had some such experience, or they stay away because they have not. We believe however that one cannot wait upon signs or expect some obvious indication from God. "Calls" from God, we teach young men, come when a congregation actually extends a call; think of the Form for the Ordination of Ministers which asks of the new minister "Do you feel in your heart that God himself, *through his congregation*, has called you to this holy ministry?" Up until that point, young men may have honorable desires and wonderful intentions that they and those around them want to bring to realization. But we don't expect you to come with a "calling" – just a godly desire that we might be able to help you develop in such a way that a church might have confidence in really "calling" you as their minister of the Word.

Yes, the task is demanding and difficult at times. But I would not know of any federation in the world that looks after its ministers and missionaries more lovingly and caringly than ours. This extends even to students and their families upon admission to seminary. Others envy how our federation even supports students, financially and otherwise, during the years they are in seminary.

Want to explore this? Feel free to call one of us at CRTS, or email us so that we can have someone call you for a chat. Check out the Prospective Student section of our website (www.canadianreformedseminary.ca). Drop a note to Leanne (lkuizenga@crtsc.ca) and she'll be happy to send you the newsletter designed for future students. She'll also tell you about the two days scheduled for next year when it's possible to attend lectures and get a taste of what CRTS is all about.

In another article, I plan to write about what has happened to our seminary over the last ten years. But it should be realized that at seminary today you will be challenged not just with respect to your intellectual abilities; the intent is to help you to be – also with respect to your character, disposition, and every part of your being - the best kind of person you can be. Alongside of lectures and seminars, for example, every semester there are even personal sessions with a mentor, one of the professors who wants to assist you to be that person. At CRTS, that's our passion: to develop young men into the kind of men who can preach God's Word, minister, lead, and love God's people both collectively and individually. For God and His people.

Think about it. Pray about it. Talk to others about it. Should *you* be at seminary?



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