

CRTS Supplemental Report to Synod Aldergrove 2025

February 21, 2025

Dear delegates,

Thank you for allowing us to submit this supplemental report. As mentioned in our main report from CRTS, submitted November 4, 2024, there was one significant matter that we were not able to complete in time, in part because it involved first receiving input from the churches via a survey that we had sent out. This matter concerns the possibility of setting up a bursary fund for those pursuing advanced studies to assist, in some small way, advanced theological studies so that our seminary can be well-supplied with professors for the future. This proposal is found below in section 3. There are also two other minor matters that we would ask you to include within your work at Synod.

Also, please note that the nominations for new governors to serve on the Finance and Property Committee, along with their CVs, will be submitted several weeks before General Synod convenes, as is the regular practice in the past.

Section 1 – Correction of Annual Assessment

In our original report to General Synod, in the 2024 Report of the Finance and Property Committee on page 24, it states that the 2025 assessment was set at \$100 per communicant member. Since the time the 2024 F&P report was written, the Board decided to increase the assessment by \$1 for 2025 to cover some additional expenses. The churches were notified of the assessment of \$101 per communicant member for the 2025 fiscal year in October 2024 when the 2023 financial statements and 2025 budget were sent to the churches.

Section 2 - Two Additional Bylaw Changes

In our original report to General Synod, we asked General Synod to approve Bylaw 13, which was the result of an extensive review of the existing bylaws. As we continued to work with our governing documents and the CRTS Handbook in the months following the submission of our report to General Synod, we discovered two additional required bylaw updates. Therefore, we request that General Synod approve the two bylaw changes below:

1. Bylaw 13 section 1.01 defines an Adjunct Professor as “someone who holds a doctorate degree, is a professor at another institution of learning, and who instructs a course or courses.” The Board proposes to change this definition of an Adjunct Professor to “someone who holds a doctorate degree **or an appropriate master’s degree**, is a professor at another institution of learning, and who instructs a course or courses.” This brings the minimum qualification of an adjunct professor in line with that of a full-time professor.

2. Bylaw 13 section 14.06c currently states: “Credits obtained in any course leading to a diploma or a degree should only remain valid for a period of five (5) years unless the diploma or degree is obtained, or an extension has been granted by the Senate.” Upon further review, the Board proposes to change this to: “The maximum time limit to complete a diploma or degree is seven years (including any leave of absence or withdrawal period) unless an extension has been granted by Senate.” This new formulation is in line with commonly accepted academic standards.

Section 3 - Bursary Fund for Advanced Theological Studies

Introduction and Context

In recent years the matter of faculty succession has had the attention of the Board of Governors (BoG) of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS). This is an important matter that must have the attention of the federation since three of our five professors will retire within a few years of each other (around the year 2035). In our main Report to Synod Aldergrove 2025, the BoG outlined various courses of action they have taken to bring this matter to the attention of the churches and to keep this matter as a living issue at the BoG level. In the Synod 2025 Report, the BoG also stated that it would deliver a supplemental report on the matter of a bursary fund that could be established to help those who pursue advanced studies.

After receiving feedback from the churches via a survey to the church councils, at its meeting on Jan 9, 2025, the BoG considered the matter of a bursary fund for those who pursue advanced studies beyond the MDiv degree. Generally speaking, those who pursue advanced studies fall into one of two categories:

1. Students who pursue advanced studies immediately after the completion of their studies at CRTS and *before* becoming eligible for call.
2. Ministers who pursue advanced studies after some time in the ministry while continuing to hold their office as Minister of the Word.

The BoG would like to propose a bursary fund *for those students who fall into the first category*, namely those who have not been declared eligible for call but rather pursue advanced studies first. For these students, there is no financial support currently. The Needy Students Fund (NSF) does not continue to support them after they have completed their CRTS studies and while they may earn small amounts of money here and there with preaching or other jobs, it is difficult to earn enough to support themselves while studying at an advanced level, especially if they are married and have been blessed with children.

Bursary Proposal for Graduating Students Pursuing Advanced Studies

1. Graduating students from CRTS who show a clear and strong potential to succeed in their advanced studies and have the potential one day to be a faculty member at CRTS should be eligible to receive a set amount of financial support from the churches for this purpose.

Eligibility will be determined by the Academic Committee (AC), based on clear criteria,¹ with input from Senate, and including the results of an interview with the applicant (either in person or through videoconferencing).

2. This support would be given in the form of an Advanced Theological Studies Assistance Bursary. This bursary would be a set amount, with the possibility of reapplying in following years, so long as the student continues in advanced studies. To be clear, this financial support is an *assistance* bursary and will *not* cover all the living expenses of a graduate student. In this respect, it works differently than the financial support given through NSF for current students of CRTS. The amount of the ATSA bursary will be set at \$15,000 and reviewed by the Finance & Property Committee (F&P) every three years.
3. The bursary funds would be collected and distributed by the already existing Needy Students Fund (NSF) so that an additional fund and assessment structure would not need to be established, only for the disbursement of a set amount from time to time to a very small number of individuals. In short, it reduces the logistics significantly. The NSF may need to increase their assessment by a small amount to establish this fund. *Note: the NSF Committee has reviewed this proposal and confirmed that they have no objections to it, should Synod decide to proceed with this proposal. If the decision is to proceed, Synod's mandate to the NSF Committee should be adjusted accordingly.*
4. An application form would be developed in which the applicant supplies information about his intended course of study and financial need. Concerning financial need, the NSF already has an application form in place that could repurposed and, if necessary, altered.
5. The students re-applying for support in following years must go through the application process again, giving an update on their academic progress and their current financial situation. Additional support would be considered for the length of the academic program up to a maximum of 2 years for MTh and 5 years for a PhD.

Summary Steps of ATSA Bursary Process

1. A graduating CRTS student, capable of and committed to advanced studies, submits an application form to the Academic Committee of the Board and sends a carbon copy to the Senate.
2. Based on the adopted criteria, the AC, with input from Senate, decides whether the applicant is eligible for the bursary. The AC formulates its recommendation in writing.
3. If the bursary is awarded, the applicant will forward his application form, along with the written recommendation from the AC, to the NSF, who will then distribute the set amount of the Advanced Theological Studies Bursary to the student in one lump-sum payment. If the Bursary is to be awarded to the same individual again, he must start with Step 1 for the following year.

¹ Precise wording of criteria would be established by Senate and the Academic Committee if General Synod adopts this proposal but would include matters such as 1) exceptionally strong academic performance; 2) strong work ethic and time management, particularly demonstrating the ability to stay focussed on large projects; 3) evident spiritual maturity and a disposition to work well with others; 4) financial need of the applicant; 5) the long-term needs of the seminary, looking toward potential future professors for each department.

Considerations for Ordained Ministers Pursuing Advanced Studies

Concerning those who fall into the second category outlined above, they already have the financial support of their congregation and for them, the biggest issue is the matter of *time* to pursue advanced studies. We would suggest that the local church, with the assistance of the classis, if necessary, would have the means to support those already in the ministry who pursue advanced studies. This support would need to consider any extra financial help that may be necessary, as well as considering workload relief from the regular pastoral duties so that there is time and bandwidth to pursue advanced studies without placing undue stress on the minister and his family.

Conclusion

In conclusion, thank you, brothers, for your attention to these three matters and for allowing us to submit them as a supplementary report. May the Lord grant you all the wisdom you need as you consider them.

With brotherly greetings and on behalf of the Board,

John Louwerse
Chairman