

Overture from the Reformed Church of Palmerston North

Re: Who May Preach

The Session of the Reformed Church of Palmerston North respectfully overtures Synod 2008:

To appoint a study committee to consider the biblical concept of preaching and the relationship between preaching and commissioning by the Church with a view to providing guidance and recommendations on the following:

1. Ministers of the Word who are released from service to a congregation under Article 16b of the Church Order, but who, on not receiving a call for two years, are declared released from the ministerial office in accordance with the decision of Synod 2005, Article 99.5c. Are there any circumstances in which they can be invited by a session to lead an occasional worship service and preach a sermon of their own making or does their release from the ministerial office mean that they are no longer able biblically to do this?
2. Ministers who have served for a number of years, but who are now retired. According to Church Order Art. 17, they “retain the honour and title of a Minister”, but on what basis biblically can they continue to preach their own sermons when a minister who is released from local service under Article 16b and then two years later is released from ministerial office may not be able to do this?
3. Ministers who retire from the ministry in order to pursue another calling or kingdom service, such as theological teaching. On what basis *biblically* can they continue to preach in the churches, when they are no longer called as ministers of the Word and sacraments?
4. Candidates for the ministry who have been able to lead worship services and preach their own sermons in accordance with Church Order Article 20, and who have been declared by a Presbytery eligible for call, but who have not received a call for a period of two years. Does their ability to lead worship services and preach sermons of their own making cease after a two year period?
5. Persons who may have the necessary gifts for preaching but who have not received a call to the ministry and are not intending to pursue the ministry. If there is need in the churches, can they be authorized to preach for a period, upon passing an examination by a Presbytery, or is this not possible biblically on the grounds that preaching in Scripture is always to be associated with calling and commissioning by the churches, i.e. ordination to office?

Grounds

1. Romans 10:14ff suggests that in order to preach the Word of God, one should be commissioned (ordained) and sent by the churches. However, there are number of verbs used in the New Testament for preaching the gospel including: *keryssein*, *euangelizesthai*, *martyrein*, *didaskein*, *propheteuein* and *parakalein*. Are these terms always and only to be applied to the ordained preaching and teaching ministry, or are there situations and circumstances in which a person can proclaim the gospel from the pulpit and yet not be ordained as a minister of the Word and sacraments?
2. The decision of Synod 2005, in relation to ministers being eligible for call for a period of two years and then being released from the ministerial office, was taken without giving consideration to these issues. It is now necessary to study this matter and provide guidance and recommendations to the churches.
3. The decision of Synod 2005 is likely also to have bearing on candidates for the ministry who have not received a call during a two year period. Again, this was not a situation considered by Synod 2005, but it is something that does require clarification.

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4. The Wellington Presbytery, on request from a local session, decided to grant a preaching licence for one year for a brother who was released from the ministerial office. However, subsequent consideration led to an overture by another session to rescind that decision. In the ensuing discussion, it became clear that there are weighty issues involved here that require study by the churches. In connection with this, it was also brought to the attention of the presbytery that:
5. There are anomalies in some of our regulations regarding students for the ministry. Church Order Article 20 says: “Only students who are licensed according to Synodical regulations shall be permitted to exhort in the public worship services.” But the following questions have arisen:
 - a. What are the “Synodical regulations” for this “licence”?
 - b. What is the “licence” itself? Is this something granted officially by the churches or does it come automatically? How would it be granted in the case of a student not pursuing the regular course of study at the RTC? Is it possible to have a “licence to exhort” and yet not be a student in training for the ministry?
 - c. What does it mean biblically for a student to “exhort”? Is this preaching, or not? If not, in what sense is *exhortation* different from the biblical concept of preaching and how does this term relate to the different terms for preaching in the NT?
 - d. If there *is* a difference in substance between exhortation and preaching, why does the Office Bearers’ Handbook (p. 3-6) state that “all students who have completed the first year of their B.D. studies, and who are members of the Reformed Churches are allowed to *preach* in the Reformed Churches”?

These matters require study and clarification.