

Goals and Expectations for a Vicariate

in the
Christian Reformed Churches of Australia

(Adopted by Synod 1994, Art 38.2)

The following are some general principles to govern the vicariate.

1. The vicariate is an essential part of the vicar's training for the ministry.

Although the local church may benefit from the vicar's work, the vicariate should be seen primarily and most importantly, as a part of the vicar's training for the ministry. The expectations and goals for the vicar should be seen in this light and the vicariate should be planned so as to aim at maximum benefit for the vicar.

2. The vicar should gain experience in many different aspects of the ministry.

In order to obtain a good understanding of the ministry, the vicar should gain some experience in a broad variety of ministry related tasks. For example, the vicar should not only attend session meetings but also chair some of them. Therefore, the session should plan to involve the vicar in a variety of tasks related to the ministry.

The vicar's workload may vary as the vicariate progresses. For example, the vicar should only prepare one sermon a week in the beginning of his vicariate but may prepare two sermons a week towards the end of the vicariate in order to appreciate the workload and pressure involved in doing so.

3. The vicar should be supervised.

Supervision simply means that the vicar should, as much as possible, work closely with another experienced person. The vicar should be supervised, at least initially, in everything he does. Supervision is important for the following reasons.

- a. Modelling is a powerful learning tool. Vicars will learn a great deal through watching others model ministry.
- b. Sessions should not presume that the vicar is experienced or competent to work by himself. For example, the vicar may have absolutely no experience in Catechism teaching. It is both unfair and unhelpful to 'throw him in at the deep end and see whether he sinks or swims.' It may also be disastrous for those to whom he ministers. Session should plan close supervision of the vicar, at least initially, in all he does.
- c. Sensitive yet honest encouragement, criticism and advice are extremely helpful for the vicar, but can only be given when the vicar has been watched and supervised.

The level of supervision can be scaled down as the vicariate progresses. Initially the vicar should be closely supervised. However, as the vicariate progresses, the vicar may be given more and more freedom to work on his own, till, towards the end of the vicariate, he may be almost entirely working on his own (see the accompanying model, below, as an example). The session may meet with the vicar first to assess what experience he has had and in what areas he may be competent to work with less supervision.

While the minister plays an important part in supervision, the minister should not do all the supervising. Experienced elders and gifted members of the congregation can also be involved.

Supervision should be planned in advance. The session should work out in detail and delegate in advance who will oversee and work with the vicar in the various activities he will undertake.

4. The vicar should receive oversight from an experienced minister.

Synod 1973, Art 89.3 states: *“That the vicar preferably serve in a congregation where he is under the constant supervision of an experienced minister.”* The minister should work closely with the vicar throughout the vicariate and give special attention to areas such as personal growth, preaching and pastoral visiting. Sessions should be aware that having a vicar ADDS to the workload and doesn't REDUCE it.

5. The vicar should receive helpful feedback and evaluation.

This is a vital part of the vicar's training. In order to really help the vicar, he should receive some form of feedback, evaluation and encouragement. This may be done in the following ways:

- a. A weekly discussion with the minister at which particular attention is given to sermon preparation, preaching, time management and pastoral visiting. The minister should give detailed attention to the preparation of particular sermons in the course of the vicariate.
- b. Preaching evaluation forms of the kind used by College students may be distributed among the congregation and used as a basis for preaching evaluation by the minister and session.
- c. The session may meet with leaders of groups of which the vicar is a part, e.g., the catechism teacher supervising the vicar. The session may even seek some form of written summary of the vicar's performance. The session should devise some precise questions about the vicar's performance that will aid discussion and encouragement. Examples of questions to a supervising catechism teacher may be:
 1. Does the vicar show the ability to teach catechism in an interesting and meaningful way?
 2. Does he show a good rapport with members of the class?
 3. Can he keep control of the class?
 4. Can he formulate good questions?
 5. What do you see as his main strengths in teaching?
 6. What is a weakness he may need to work on?

Similar questions may be given to each person who supervises the vicar's work.

- d. Feedback and evaluation of the vicar's work should be made a regular item on the session agenda. Towards the end of the vicariate the session should spend some time discussing and affirming the vicar's gifts for the ministry.

- e. A vicar support group can be established to meet at least twice during the vicariate. The group may comprise the minister and members of the congregation who have worked with the vicar, such as his supervising catechism teacher, a member of session, a leader of a Bible study group in which he took part or the leader of an outreach team in which he participated. The group can take time with the vicar to discuss his work, feelings about the ministry and affirm his calling. The group may also sensitively touch on areas of weakness and suggest ways the vicar could improve his gifts. Session should take care to place sensitive, able and concerned people in the group.

6. The vicar should practice appropriate time management.

Time management is important for self discipline and motivation. Sessions are encouraged to study the Appendix to the PCRC report titled, “Minister’s Working conditions and Morale” tabled at the 1991 synod. Time management should be discussed and implemented on a weekly basis with the minister.

The following is a suggested illustration of a vicar’s weekly workload with a week divided into 21 blocks. Under the supervision of the minister the particulars of the separate blocks should be filled in. As a general rule the vicar should spend more evenings per week with his family than in ‘church work’. He should schedule in adequate time for recreation and family activities.

A weekly time table could look as follows:

	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Morning	work	–	work	work	work	work	work
Afternoon	work	–	work	work	work	work	work
Evening	–	–	work	work	work	–	–

Related to advance planning is the practice of recording the work accomplished during the day. Some ministers have special sheets designed for this purpose. The minister could review this with the vicar.

7. The vicar needs time to prepare for Classis Examinations.

The vicar should be given adequate time to prepare for Classis examinations. He should be encouraged to sit for his Classis examination as soon as possible.

8. The vicar has the status of ‘Assistant Minister’.

The congregation should be clear about the expectations and status of the vicar. Synod 1967, Art 20.2 states, “*Synod has given to such vicars the status of assistant ministers...*” This entire statement should be studied and made known to the congregation before the vicar takes up his work in the congregation.

Since the vicar has the status of assistant minister, he should not be installed as an elder.

9. Sessions should plan ahead for the vicariate.

‘To fail to plan is to plan to fail.’ A successful vicariate will depend on detailed and thorough planning. Pre-planning should give attention to the precise details of who will supervise the vicar’s work and how evaluation will take place.

A PLAN FOR A VICARIATE

The following plan is a suggested guideline for a vicariate that includes detailed expectations and goals along with suggestions as to supervision and evaluation. The plan is for a one year vicariate, divided into four quarters. It seeks to ensure that three main goals are achieved:

1. the vicar obtains experience in a broad range of ministerial activities;
2. the vicar is adequately supervised;
3. the vicar is beneficially evaluated.

Ministerial Task	First Quarter	Second Quarter	Third Quarter	Fourth Quarter	Person Supervising	Suggested Evaluation
Catechism. No more than one or two classes. (The quarterly timetable will depend on previous experience.)	Participate but not lead.	Lead some classes under supervision.	Lead most classes with some supervision.	Lead all classes with no supervision.	Teacher leading catechism classes	Written or verbal report to Session. Person can be part of a 'vicar support group'.
Sermon preparation and preaching.	Prepare one sermon per week and preach at least once per week. However, the vicar may lead as many services as required.			Prepare two sermons per week.	Session and minister.	Weekly discussions with minister. Minister to oversee, in detail, at least one sermon per month. Preaching evaluation forms given to the congregation and discussed with the minister and/or a vicar support group.
Session meetings.	Attend all Session meetings			Chair the meetings.	Session.	Session.
Classis/Synod.	Attend at least one Classis meeting, and Synod if being held.				Session.	
Pastoral visiting.	All visits supervised and accompanied by minister.	Most supervised. But select visits on his own.	Increasing number of visits on his own.		Minister.	Weekly feedback and instruction from minister. Discussion at Session meeting.
Evangelism.	Participate in group evangelising.		Initiate and lead evangelism mission.		Leader of group.	Written or verbal reports. Person may be part of a 'vicar support group'.
Home visits.	All visits led by an elder.	Vicar to increasingly lead home visits.			Elders.	Feedback from elders at Session meetings.
Bible study / fellowship group.	Participate but not lead.	Participate and lead, if required.			Leader of Bible study group.	Written or verbal report. Member of group may be part of the 'vicar support group'.
Personal development – reading.	Fill out PCRC profile form.	Read selected books and other material.			Session and Minister.	Discussion with minister or written book reports.
Minister's fraternal; other training.	Attend a minister's fraternal, if possible. Attend other training opportunities where appropriate.				Minister.	Discussion with minister.
Work in other groups – e.g., youth group.	As deemed appropriate by Session. However, the vicar should not be expected to immediately form and lead such a group on his own.				Leader of group.	Written or verbal reports. Leader of group may be part of the 'vicar support group'.
Counselling.	Involvement in supervised counselling where possible and appropriate, e.g., pre-marriage counselling.				Minister or counsellor	Discussion with minister.