



North American Council for Assessment of Ministry Preparation in Nonformal Education: *Proposal for Action*¹

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Part 1: A Draft of the Proposal

Not all pastors are prepared for ministry within theological seminaries. Throughout the history of the church, many pastors enter the full-time or bi-vocational service of the ministry of the Gospel after more or less adequate preparations in various combinations of reading theology, self-taught, tutored, individually disciplined processes, and too often, after no preparation at all.

Formal theological education for Christian ministry is a rather recent innovation. Much older and more accessible for many pastors-to-be are various forms of nonformal education which predate the contemporary collegiate environment of formal theological education.

The responsibility for preparing pastors for church ministry has been largely transferred from the churches to the educational institutions; along with this education task the church has, to some extent, delegated the sacred responsibility of determining qualifications for ordination. This state of affairs has been challenged for its contrast with biblical teachings regarding criteria and responsibilities for the selection of clerical and ministerial persons.

The issue is compounded by the fact that educational institutions typically evaluate their students and qualify their graduates in terms of scholarly and academic criteria rather than the matters held in Scripture to be major matters of qualification for ministry. Although the biblical emphasis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the personal-social-spiritual qualifications for ministry, the difficulty of evaluating such matters in the ordinary manner of academic assessment leads educational institutions to qualify their nominees for ordination and ministries in terms of more easily measured characteristics.

Even in churches historically committed to maintaining pastoral care of their ministry students (e.g., “under care of *presbytery*”), often discharge this responsibility in *perfunctory* ways, leaving the substantial matter of overseeing to the educational institutions.

As the power and influence of the accrediting process has increased, most educational networks wherein the definitions and the authority for ‘excellence’ and competency of both the institution and its graduates come more from the institutional network than from the churches served.

In no way does this observation deny the integrity of individual institutions nor the faithfulness of the faculties and administrators who serve within them. The issue may be seen as abstract and theoretical—in terms of the churches delegating their responsibilities to the educational institutions. Or it can be seen as a practical matter in terms of the actual differences between concerns for ministry as held by church leaders in contrast with concerns for academic competencies held by educators.

¹Proposal: The North American Council for Assessment of Ministerial Preparation (NACAMP)

The Quest for Orderly and Responsible Assessment of Nonformal Education for Ministry. NACAMP Meeting, Newark, NJ, March 17, 1987. Ted Ward participated in the drafting of this proposal, though his remarks in Part 2 indicate inherent difficulties and complications in the proposal; and likely contributed to the fact that the project didn’t proceed.

Complicating these issues is the fact that a substantial number of the ministers who are actually serving churches do not have the equivalent of the Master of Divinity or Master of Theology degrees. Some denominations are still licensing and certifying persons for ordination on non-academic criteria because the need for pastors is greater than (and in some cases different from) the availability of ‘trained’ candidates. In some of these situations the assessment process is well-defined.

NACAMP--an acronym for the preliminary name of a proposed solution to the problem. The idea has emerged from the creative thinking of Jeff Reed, Pastor and Executive Director of BILD (Biblical Institute for Leadership Development), in Ames, Iowa. As a person educated and prepared for ministry in largely self-taught and community-tutored ways, Pastor Reed has sought help in his quest for responsible pre-ordination assessment processes. NACAMP is an adaptation of the widely heralded CAEL process. CAEL (Council for Assessment of Experiential Learning) has provided a means for determining the academic equivalency of experience in trades, professions, and life itself, for the benefit of persons returning to higher education after being out of school or college for a number of years. Similarly, NACAMP has arisen from the quest for responsible ways to conduct evaluative assessment in nonformal ministerial preparation. The increasing number of nonformal education programs of ministerial preparation has revealed a common need: since the burden of pre-ordination credentialing has fallen largely to the responsibility of educational institutions, the sorts of evaluative procedures available are mostly geared to the academic accomplishments of students in such institutions. Further, despite the efforts of the Association of Theological Schools to urge its constituent institutions to move in the direction of assessment of “readiness for ministry,” the institutions persist in the use of evaluations of their graduates in academic and cognitive emphases,

What NACAMP is—

- An orderly and responsible procedure for the assessment of readiness for ministry.
- Primarily for those whose preparation for ministry had been outside the ordinary processes of formal education.
- A church-based council for determining policy and standards of performance assessment, in terms of the actual needs of churches for effective ministry.
- An executive board and staff charged with the responsibility of establishing and maintaining an effective assessment procedure for the examination of people who see themselves as having been adequately prepared for ministry.
- A set of evaluative instruments focused on the standards of effective ministry established by the churches of the NACAMP Council; the instruments range from objective tests of knowledge and information through various forms of self-assessment, each of which is coordinated with an ‘external assessment’ procedure involving people with whom the candidate has ministered and learned during preparation.
- A certification based upon the assessment which the candidate presents to the church or denominational *body* concerned with examination for ordination.

What NACAMP is not—

- A certification or accreditation of educational institutions.
- A procedure for measuring, assessing, or evaluating educational experience, academic credits, or the worth of given degrees.
- An alternative to the process of degree-granting and pre-ordination certification of people whose preparations for ministry has been in a formal theological seminary.

If the NACAMP process is to become available to those who seek alternative assessment, much cooperation is needed:

1. A variety of individual churches will be needed to constitute the first NACAMP Council.
2. Funds will be needed to develop the executive staff, the assessment instruments, and the data-handling capabilities.
3. Two or more church assemblies or denominations will be needed as the first clients of the new assessment process.
4. Five to ten nonformal education programs will be needed as initial subscribers to NACAMP, in order to provide at least fifteen nominees per year for NACAMP assessment.

Part 2: Ted Ward's Response to the Proposal²

[Initial positive remarks about the proposal and affirmation of its need in the current climate of ministry education. He reminds that the proposal was development for nonformal ministry education contexts.]

NACAMP criterion setting originates with the local church. We visualize the local church as being surveyed periodically for the purposes of developing what you might call grassroots quality statements about what is needful in effective ministry. It seems to me that NACAMP is not an organization of institutions or programs—at least in the present paper, NACAMP is a semi-autonomous organization that serves primarily non-formal education processes—but provides assessment procedure(s) that is available to anyone wishing to assess. The North American Council for Assessment of Ministerial Preparation, in fact, would argue that the programs of schools don't control it, but the churches control it. Therefore, it's not an association of the programs for the schools; it is a council that taps from the churches criteria, values, and guidelines. A consumer-protection agency is probably a relevant metaphor.

We're not prepared to organize a controlling board because we feel it more prudent to get functional operations defined. There would necessarily be an executive in the sense of some kind of a secretariat that actually does the work (e.g., the survey of the churches). My image is of a set of about twenty U.S. and Canadian churches that would periodically be assessed by instruments developed in the secretariat of this operation that would require anywhere from twenty minutes to a half hour of the parishioners' time once or twice a year. Churches would remain the NACAMP for about 3-5 years in a rotation—to allow other churches to be represented so that it doesn't become an ingrown network.

But, the executive committee is by no means an elite group. They create instrumentation and then process the surveying of the churches into appropriately formatted procedures for assessing the candidate or the subject of the assessment. It is possible, for example, to imagine a small booklet that represents the NACAMP assessment of a given individual. The booklet contains material from that individual's self-evaluation, arranged topically, along with the critique evaluations on those same topics. The critique evaluations comprise particular character, characteristics, or competency from those who have observed the person in action and have worked with him or her in ministry.

This semi-autonomous entity called NACAMP would be affiliated with member or partner institutions. We would seek funding for 3-5 years of start up time to build instruments, to find instruments. The NACAMP task can be done in terms of originating some things, but also in terms of adapting, borrowing, and buying some things. To be faithful to the idea of evaluation, and because we don't know yet what we should be looking for, some periodicity rather than a once-only approach to surveying is indicated. This whole process has to be done in terms of a scaling up of sophistication

²From a transcript of his remarks at the NACAMP meeting in Newark, NJ, March 17, 1987.

over time. While the instruments are not as elegant as they could be at the beginning, they would be nonetheless workable and useful.

However, many of the churches involved in active programs of church-based leadership development have already developed some competency in criterion building. Generally speaking, people in congregations can tell you what they like and what they don't like in terms of the pastoring they've known. But how do we tap those observations in a responsible manner—not presume that we establish the criteria of ministerial effectiveness *for* churches. Is this the right time for NACAMP? Are we ready to move on this or will it take some more maturing time? One of the things required to make this move is a critical mass of readiness on the part of the churches and/or denominations; a network that can knowledgeably stand together.

One of the hopes I have is that this may represent one way to encourage seminaries to look at more than they're looking at now. It doesn't follow that what they're doing is irrelevant. It's just inadequate. I hope that this vision could stimulate seminaries that are willing to get back to a church-effectiveness model in ministry preparation.

Frankly, if I were asked today to nominate a bunch of churches, I would look for those that are actively involved in ministry as a congregation; and serious about ministry education—of professional and lay ministers. Complicating the matter of criterion setting is the fact that different groups are concerned about different things. Second, in terms of types of ministries, or ministry roles, there are different kinds of experiences; even different theological perspectives on ministry will complicate instrument building. The answer might lie in terms of creating an open-ended instrumentation that deals with the peculiarity or the particulars of a person's ministry and theological framework. The commonalities would serve as a core. It is possible to define that center core and still allow people to be particular. Similarly, I think it's possible to define the center core and still allow people to be particular in terms of roles. In other words, is it feasible to create core criteria asserting of competency while allowing for peculiarities; or must it inherently, inevitably be done denomination by denomination, and role by role.

You might have an assessment procedure that has some blanks in it where an individual has no data on a certain category of work. That would be inevitable, for example, if you're looking broadly at ministries with different types of people groups within the church. I could conceive of an instrument that includes perspective on ministry gifts—in the self-perception of the candidate. You might have some items that are blank on the right hand side of the page because nobody has actually seen that person in ministry. But he or she still has some self-perceptions that ought to be heard. The perceptions, of course, would be compared; but it would have to be a comparison with some supporting evidence so that it isn't just one person's perspective over against another. Further, there is danger of confusing personal, vocational/professional, and spiritual progress. Not to mention consideration of the growth that has been achieved in a person in contrast with growth that is seen over a period of time.

For example, I have chaired the NAE Task Force on the Family since it was first organized about five years ago, and within that context, we have really discovered serious issues related to ministerial families—including people in high places in denominational offices. To overlook family, and other, relationships in our endeavor would be a mistake. My hunch is that between a quarter and one-third of ministry families are in grave difficulties in their marital and family relationships; and our work suggests that most of this breakdown is apparent by the time they get out of seminary. So in other words, they're carrying it into ministry with them. Therefore, it has to become a focal point in the NACAMP assessment. As a result, the NACAMP assessment could have a potentiality deleterious effect upon a person who otherwise might be seen as totally qualified in areas outside his or her personal relationships.

To what extent should you invite a person to submit to an evaluative process and then force them to accept the consequences of it. I'm of the opinion right now that one of the things we will probably have to do with NACAMP assessment, if it comes into reality and if it is as effective as I think it can be, is to allow people the freedom of not using their NACAMP assessment in presenting themselves. In other words, I think the NACAMP assessment ought to be left in the hands of the individual to use or not to use. However, a problem would emerge if a denomination asks NACAMP for the assessment results. Do we preserve confidentiality—as in the case of a counselor?

The IBM group once designed a test to assess leadership decisiveness—along an ineffective to effective, immature to mature continuum. I don't know whether or not that kind of thing could be done. You could have a showing in one area of very effective—say in the ministry aspect—and the character area might have a showing of some deficiencies expressed as ready and not yet ready.

But perhaps we could devise two “goods” and include an “improvement desirable” category. It is very difficult to get into some of the more important areas with any kind of reliability and validity in the instrument. For all of the problems associated with self-description, you never want to underestimate the importance of self-description—but incorporate corroborating evidence. One of our tasks should be the examination of any number of objective measures that show promise of having relevant information. Even if it takes the candidate many hours to go through a battery of material for NACAMP assessment, I think that's just part of the process. I would make no apology in asking for 4-6 hours of client time to get the raw material. But we can't demand that kind of time investment from the ancillary or the corroborative evidence sources. We will have to become more clever in order to elicit corroborative evidence.

Consider 1 Thessalonians 2:19. It is a so much finer grid, and it's rather startling to realize that is exactly what this [NACAMP] group is trying to do. It's trying to find a grid to show that men and women are approved by God to be trusted with the Gospel. And those 19 factors in 1 Thessalonians chapter two are most remarkable when examined carefully.

We are not concerned with assessments of programs. We're not concerned with entertaining at some higher level the question of whether or not it makes sense to go for accreditation. We intend to subscribe jointly to a process whereby we look at factors that are important. There is commitment to a process of investigation where in due time we will identify a body of specifics to assess.

I could hope that those institutions that for various reasons are not seeking traditional accreditation, would find in NACAMP the credibility that in fact is what the accrediting associations have created out of history. NACAMP, in relatively short-order, could become part of the answer to the questions, “You're not accredited? Who else thinks what you're doing is worthwhile?” One answer to that is “Our students are assessed in the NACAMP process, in common with many other institutions and programs and activities in the USA and Canada.

We need a development committee, that will take the basic proposal, develop it toward the next move, remain in some contact with those present here, start putting together a network, and then, in maybe three months, organize a three-day conference where the core people are together for a major working session.

Summary of the Core Concept

NACAMP is not an institution; it is a function of a network of churches. Schools can't presume to subscribe all their students or graduates because we have asserted that ministry training is a church function. Theologically, ministers aren't owned by schools or churches. NACAMP is simply a tool used by churches to assist in the development of its ministers.

For this reason, it is more appropriate for denominations to say, “As part of our ordination process, we'd like all of our seminary's graduates to be assessed by NACAMP.” Then it's in the hands of the church or the association of churches—not the seminaries.

To come back to this important point. If a theological school uses a measurement or assessment procedure of its students as part of the educational package, it is doing so because it is entrusted with a certain kind of responsibility. That responsibility would not be restricted away from insisting that those students are also assessed through NACAMP. In other words, NACAMP is not entitled to require or insist that students be assessed through its instrumentation. Fundamentally, the question to be asked is, “Are there users of the process?” If the question is answered positively enough to interest churches to participate, then we will have a better basis from which to see funding. In other words, NACAMP has to be seen as useful, if not necessary; and significant funds have to become available in order for this project to become a reality.