December 2023

Dear Minister,

Greetings in the Lord from the Committee on Ministerial Care! As a committee we pray for you both as you serve in ministry and are thankful to the Lord for the servants he provides to his church.

For the last two years, we have been able to offer retreats to ministers and their wives, due to the generous provisions of a donor. A total of 177 different ministers from all 17 presbyteries of the OPC have received retreat grants, and 93% of them included their wives. We continue to receive extremely positive feedback about the retreat grant program, and we are thankful it has served so well for many couples in ministry.

Looking forward to 2024, we plan to continue the retreat program with funds coming both from a donor and from a portion of our budget. Our intention is to give first opportunity to those ministers and wives who have not yet received a retreat grant. However, we would strongly encourage such couples to apply early and plan accordingly, as by February 15 we will also begin to accept applications from those who took retreats two years ago in 2022. As you might surmise from what was just said, our committee’s intention is to move to eligibility for a retreat grant every other year (biannual).

Please be advised that funds are limited, and we will approve grants on a first-come, first-serve basis. As a result, we suggest planning your retreat and applying as early in the year as possible. We cannot guarantee approval if you take the retreat first and then apply for grant funds after the fact.

Having reviewed two years of retreat grant applications, CMC would like to emphasize its perspective that a retreat differs from a family vacation or visiting relatives. It does not include bringing along children. It is more than just a time of leisure, and we are not looking for retreat grants to fund vacation plans. Instead, we view effective retreats as ones that maintain an emphasis on an intentional effort to step away for a time of prayerful reflection and rest from everyday ministry. For ministers who are married, CMC sees these times of prayer and rest done well when couples retreat together. In some cases, however, it might be a better fit for a minister to retreat by himself, or attend a conference.

CMC’s goal is not to be overly restrictive with the type of retreat that will be funded by a grant. Something as simple as a few days at a campsite or hotel might be the right fit for you. Something more elaborate is fine as well, but we plan to cap retreat grants to $1400 per couple and $800 per individual minister. Whatever the location, you will note in the grant application that we are asking you to integrate rest and prayer as a component of the retreat.

On a related topic, we view a sabbatical of at least three months after a number of years of service in ministry as a highly effective tool for a long and sustained ministerial career without burnout, even more effective than a few days away. A sabbatical requires more planning and a partnership with your local church, but we also want to remind you that grant funds remain available for sabbaticals as well.

With gratitude for your labors in gospel ministry,

A picture containing game

Description automatically generated

John Fikkert

*Director of Ministerial Care* Enclosed: 2023 Retreat Grant Application