

Special Committee to Study the Reformed Perspective of  
Christian Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Recommendations:

The General Assembly's Special Committee to Study the Reformed Perspective of Christian Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century recommends the 223<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly (2018) do the following:

1. **Encourage the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA) to adjust to a shift in Christian Education paradigms and practices over the last several decades and therefore;**
  - a. **support the restructuring, resourcing, and staffing of the ministry area of Christian Formation, working to de-emphasize age and stage Christian Education, and instead focus on lifelong Christian Education and Faith Formation, especially intergenerational ministry.**
  - b. **Encourage the newly structured ministry area of Christian Formation to dedicate resources to be focused on supporting local congregations (facilitating the networking, coaching, and training of local leaders).**
2. **Direct that curriculum and/or resources produced by the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation and Congregational Ministries Publishing shall be in consultation and collaboration with the ministry area of Christian Formation of the Presbyterian Mission Agency.**
3. **Direct the General Assembly to adapt the Session Annual Statistical Report to collect disaggregated data on certified Christian educators and non-certified Christian educators (employed or volunteer who are functioning as staff).**
4. **Direct the Office of the General Assembly to encourage the Educator Certification Committee (ECC) to expand and promote the level of Christian Education Associate (CEA), making it more accessible and emphasizing the diverse needs of committed Christian Education and Faith Formation leaders.**
5. **Advise the Committee on Theological Education (COTE) to encourage Presbyterian seminaries to offer some Christian Education and Faith Formation courses that specifically address intergenerational ministry.**
6. **Authorize that the Special Committee's work be extended by the General Assembly for two years to report back at the 224<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2020):**
  - a. **for further study of the certified Christian educator process and recommendations for its future**
  - b. **for further study of Christian Education and Faith Formation in racial/ethnic minority congregations and small congregations**
  - c. **for the membership of this Special Committee to be expanded to 11 total members, at least 4 of whom are racial/ethnic minorities or serving in racial/ethnic minority congregations and/or ministries.**

Rationale:

The Reformed faith is a faith that, in the footsteps of St. Augustine, seeks understanding. Five-hundred years ago, the Protestant Reformation began as Scripture and worship were made accessible in the vernacular, inviting and calling the laypeople to know their faith. We are their descendants.

In February 2018, the Rev. J Herbert Nelson, Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (USA), stated:

"If we don't learn to teach again as we have done historically, and as we are known for — theology, education, and how-to—if we don't begin to learn how to do this today, we will probably be no more than a remnant going into the middle of the 21st century...we must teach what it means to love the Lord God with all our hearts, souls and minds."

The role of such Christian Education is not just about knowing about God, but knowing God, not just about knowing a doctrine of grace, but of knowing grace and experiencing it in one's own soul. We learn who and whose we are. That identity shapes our faith and sends us out in ministry and mission.

Given Jesus' invitation to love the Lord God with all our hearts, souls, and minds," we offer the use of the term Christian Education and Faith Formation as a central part of the church's mission in which we seek to integrate our ways of knowing God. It is not through Christian Education and Faith Formation by which we are saved, but it is through Christian Education and Faith Formation that we deepen in our relationship with the Triune God, the one who offers us grace and salvation.

As our special committee began our work we quickly noticed shifts in traditional understandings of Christian Education, from the basic language churches are using to talk about education and formation, to how such ministry is being adapted in light of changing understandings of human spiritual development, learning styles, and cultural dynamics. Our recommendations just scratch the surface of these changes. We hope they reflect the beginnings of our work, and not the culmination of it.

On Recommendation 1—supporting changes to the structure and emphasis of the PMA in the area of Christian Formation;

- Our study showed that intergenerational ministry is an area of congregational life that is thriving in diverse settings. Many pastors, educators, and volunteers leaders are looking towards this model of ministry in the future church. Current research trends also emphasize holistic understanding of life-long faith formation and spiritual practice, noting the limits of only age-segregated, classroom style education.
- Intergenerational ministry can thrive in congregations regardless of membership size or financial resources. With majority of PC(USA) churches categorized as small churches, intergenerational ministries and lifelong Christian education across all areas of congregational life will best serve across multiple contexts, lifting up a sustainable model of ministry with Christian education and faith formation at the core. We believe our national office resources are best utilized supporting this model of ministry.
- Communication with leaders across the denomination connected to educational ministries led us to infer us that connections between local congregations could be improved upon in order to strengthen ministry overall. We also note the reemphasis on the work and ministry of the local church and the decentralization of institutions in the culture overall.
- Local practitioners best know the needs and challenges of their context. It is networks of local congregations that will be the ones adapting resources and supporting one another in much of the church's efforts to serve their communities. Investing in those natural networks will benefit congregations and the denomination.

On Recommendation 2—directing Presbyterian Publishing to collaborate with the PMA ministry area of Christian Formation;

- We discovered there is little collaboration between the Presbyterian publishing entities and the PMA. There are exciting opportunities for them to be more aligned and mutually supportive. The PMA ministry area of Christian Formation offices also work closely with covenant partners, which expands the number of people available to collaborate on the resources and make training available based on them.

On Recommendation 3—including Christian Educators on annual statistical reports;

- During our research to find the current trends and employment for Christian educators and certified Christian educators, we discovered that there is no statistical documentation in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) of Christian educators, currently employed, retired or deceased. We do not know who they are, where they carry out their ministry, or how they are active in the denomination. Updating the statistical report could:
  - a) Identify Christian educators in the PCUSA,
  - b) Assist the Board of Pensions in their recommendations/changes, and presbyteries in writing compensation guidelines in implementing benefits,
  - c) Aid the Educator Certification Committee in identifying educators to encourage to enter the certification process,
  - d) Aid mid councils in identifying educators to serve on committees and as resources

On Recommendation 4—encouraging the ECC to expand the Christian Education Associate level (the level not requiring a BA/BS);

- Currently, the ECC sets the standards for the process of certification for all certified Christian educators, which includes Certified Christian Educators (CCE) and Christian Education Associates (CEA).

- In our research we found that, for a variety of reasons, those serving in the role of Church educators, employed or volunteer, do not know about or have access to the CEA level of certification. The CEA is under-utilized, and ripe for adaptation especially for smaller congregations and Racial/Ethnic congregations who have volunteer or part-time educators. Additionally, there are opportunities to shape the education and training for specific ministry contexts and functions. In promoting and increasing awareness for the CEA, collaboration with partnering organizations would be mutually beneficial.

On Recommendation 5—asking COTE to encourage seminaries to add more courses in Faith Formation/ Intergenerational ministry;

- Pastors are, by nature of their role as preachers and teachers, Christian educators. In many congregations the pastor is the only person employed to carry out the function of teaching. As moderators of session and strategic leaders, pastors often have great say in what is emphasized and prioritized in ministry and mission. It is essential they are given the skills in seminary to keep up with new understandings of Christian spiritual formation and educational processes.

On Recommendation 6—extending the Special Committee for continued work;

- This Special Committee was formed in April of 2017 and began work in May of 2017. Therefore, the Special Committee had only 9 months to complete its work, which was not enough time to complete the full scope of the charge.
- Given the reality of evolving demographics and the Presbyterian church of the future will not look the same as it does now, and given that one of our charges is to study racial/ ethnic minority congregations, the Special Committee feels it needs more diverse experience, voice, and representation on the Committee to faithfully live out that charge.
- Through the study of Christian Education and Faith Formation, as well as the role of the Christian educator, the Committee has come to understand that the role of educational ministries in the church has a connection to congregational vitality. Further study will allow the Committee to offer crucial recommendations regarding the training of those providing lifelong Christian Education and Faith Formation in local congregations.
- Through the study of Christian education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and how the educator can be a resource to the denomination the Committee has learned that those providing for educational ministries in our churches is an expanding role. Further study will allow for recommendations about equipping and identifying these leaders and how they can shape faith formation in our churches in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### Closing Statement:

Jesus invited his disciples to follow him; later he asked them “who do you say that I am?” The Special Committee proposes that Christian Education and Faith Formation has as much to do with discipleship as it does with learning doctrine. Christian Education and Faith Formation is thus a lifelong, on-going, iterative process in which we follow Jesus, in so doing learn about him and get to know him, and offer our confession of faith. This whole process is Christian Education and Faith Formation. It is what Jesus did with his disciples. It is what we are called to now.

To this end, The Special Committee encourages congregations to continue to move toward an intergenerational model of Christian Education and Faith Formation that involves the teaching and learning of Scripture just as much as it involves discipleship in the world combined with reflection and prayer.