Report of the Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education

Continuing Education for Church Educators

The Commission on Christian Discipleship is tasked with advocating for the ongoing preparation of those who carry out the church’s teaching ministry. While we as a commission leaned into this work, we asked if there was any such standard that provided for continuing education for those who carry out the teaching ministry of the church across the denomination and then surveyed each of the eight regional synods and 46 classes. From our survey, we found that only one of our regional synods has such standards in place. The Regional Synod of the Great Lakes and the classes within its boundaries have a policy for the compensation for church staff, which was created in response to a recommendation approved at the 2002 meeting of General Synod (MGS 2002, R-45, p. 211). That recommendation requested that regional synods “develop compensation guidelines for all types of church employees, e.g., educators, musicians, secretaries, youth workers, administrators, parish nurses, and custodians.” It is the norm across classes and regional synods to have in place compensation guidelines that allow for continuing education for ministers of Word and sacrament serving in local congregations, so in order to more fully support the teaching ministry of the church, the Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education makes the following recommendation:

DE 18-1
To request regional synods, as part of their general superintendence of classes, to develop compensation guidelines that include continuing education allowance of time and money for non-ordained church employees who serve in the teaching ministry of the church, e.g., youth workers and Christian educators. (ADOPTED)

As a part of the Reformed theological tradition, our church places great value on learning and having educated leaders. Not having an expectation that those who serve to educate our members of all ages will receive education for their particular ministry fails to reflect this value. Allowing for continuing education for those who lead in these ministries helps to model that life-long learning in the Christian faith is a part of ongoing discipleship in the church.

In addition, to aid the commission in this work of advocacy, we make the following recommendation:

DE 18-2
To direct the General Synod Council to add a question to the annual consistorial report form asking how those who serve within the spiritual formation or teaching arena of the congregation have received ongoing or continuing education that year. The responses gathered shall be shared with the Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education. (ADOPTED)

Such information will aid the commission in its work of advocacy for the ongoing preparation of those in the teaching ministry of the church by giving awareness to the involvement of our church educators in ongoing education and preparation. This information will also help the commission to connect educators to opportunities of ongoing
COMMISSIONS

preparation. It will also help the commission to better understand where the commission might provide further support in ongoing preparation for those who serve the teaching ministry of the church.

Directory of Christian Educators

The commission is also tasked with the work of overseeing the RCA’s progress in the ministry of discipleship. As the commission has taken on this work, we have realized the importance of the connections and the relationships that we have with others who serve in the teaching ministry of the church. Much of this type of work is completed relationally by having conversations and meeting with those who serve the teaching ministry of the church. In our conversations about how to complete this work, we have discovered that a valuable tool for us would be to have a directory of those serving the educational ministries of the church. Such data is already collected in part through the annual consistorial reports, as contact information for a youth ministry contact for each congregation is gathered. The commission would benefit from having such a directory so that members of the commission could work on developing relationships with church educators throughout the RCA. Therefore, we make the following recommendation:

DE 18-3
To direct the General Synod Council to add a question to the annual Consistorial Report Form that will collect information for those who serve in the spiritual formation, discipleship, and/or teaching ministries of the congregation, in the same manner as information regarding youth ministry leaders is collected (current children’s ministry coordinator/director, adult ministry coordinator/director, etc.); and further,

To make the data available to the Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education for its work of advocating for and monitoring discipleship ministry throughout the Reformed Church in America.

A motion was made and supported to refer DE 18-3 back to the commission.

VOTED: To refer DE 18-3 to the Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education for further work.

RCA and CERCA

In June 2005, the General Synod, meeting at Union College in Schenectady, New York, recognized the faithful service to the church provided by the Children and Worship program (celebrating its 20th anniversary) and CERCA (Christian Educators, Reformed Church in America—celebrating its 25th anniversary). In conveying the Synod’s gratitude for CERCA’s 25 years of faithful service to Christ and his church, the general secretary was to “communicate the synod’s encouragement for their continuing service in the years that lie ahead” (MGS 2005, R-38, pp. 133–134).

This past February, more than 30 CERCA members gathered at the Association of Presbyterian Church Educators’ (APCE) annual event in Louisville, Kentucky. The RCA and CERCA have maintained an affiliate relationship with APCE since 1983. At this year’s annual event, four RCA members provided presentations. Terry De Young and Paul Smith offered workshops and Carol Jones and Ellen Vellenga gave the mini-plenary,
“Sharing God’s Hospitality with Children.” The late George Brown, Jr. was remembered as the 2012 APCE Educator of the Year during the In Memoriam report. Eight RCA first-timers (five from Mescalero Reformed Church) received assistance from the Supporting and Equipping Educators’ Development (SEED) fund. During CERCA’s annual meeting at the event, Jill Ver Steeg, the RCA’s director of transformational engagement, member of APCE’s Coordinating Council, and ex-officio member of CERCA’s leadership team, provided an update on RCA discipleship ministries. CERCA members also enjoyed an evening of fellowship at The Old Spaghetti Factory during the free evening. All commission members except one were able to attend these events and meet with local church educators.

As a result, the commission makes the following recommendations to support the ongoing work of CERCA:

**DE 18-4**
To direct the General Synod Council to create a $5,000 fund for CERCA, to be used at the rate of $500 per year in order to provide for professional and personal growth of RCA educators and youth workers (continuing education scholarships, expenses related to continuing education events, expenses in conjunction with CERCA and APCE meetings, etc.).

A motion was made and supported to refer DE 18-4 back to the commission.

**VOTED:** To refer DE 18-4 to the Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education for further work.

**DE 18-5**
To instruct the General Synod Council to provide webpages for CERCA on the RCA website for the purpose of promoting opportunities for improvement of discipleship skills, supporting personal enrichment, advocating for church education, and recognizing the achievements and innovative contributions of church educators. (ADOPTED)

**Historical Publication**

As a result of our studies last year, the CCDE recognizes the importance of telling the stories of God at work in the people of God as an essential tool and effective strategy for people of all ages to be fully included in the mission and life of the RCA. Thus, the CCDE is endeavoring to tell one such story as lived in the life of Frances Beardslee. The commission’s work on this has led to collaboration with the Commission on Theology, the Commission for Women, and the Commission on History on a forthcoming historical publication with the Historical Series. It is the hope of the CCDE that this story will be the first in a collection of children’s books or an anthology of stories aimed at children yet teaching the whole church and celebrating the work of God through the lives of faithful disciples.

Respectfully submitted,

Lindsey DeKruif, moderator