

Report of the Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education

From the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 12b (2022 edition, p. 121):

1. The commission shall monitor, evaluate, and report on the RCA's progress in ministries of education and discipleship with children, youth, adults, and families.
2. The commission shall develop and advocate for strategies for people of all ages to be fully included in the mission and life of the RCA.

The CCDE Stands with CORE

In January of this year, the Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education (CCDE) received a letter from the Commission on Race and Ethnicity (CORE), expressing interest in how the CCDE might collaborate in supporting and promoting the application of the newly adopted antiracism policy. Our commission appreciates CORE reaching out to us and looks forward to working together to educate and support Reformed Church in America (RCA) churches and church members in the implementation of the antiracism policy adopted by the 2022 General Synod. We believe that our call to be disciples of Jesus includes bringing justice to all and working toward reconciliation where there has been division. We believe that racism, both systemic and individual, is antithetical to the way of Jesus Christ, and therefore part of being a disciple of Jesus in our time and place involves fighting racism in all its forms.

Our commission calls on churches to review their education and discipleship programs and see how those programs support our mission in fighting racism in all its forms. In that effort, we encourage churches to utilize the Belhar Confession in their discipleship and education programs. The Belhar Confession is uniquely applicable to our work of antiracism, as it declares, “the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

Our commission also encourages churches to look for other resources to guide them in this work. We particularly recommend the work of two leaders in this field: Dr. Brenda Salter McNeil (saltermcneil.com) and Jemar Tisby (jemartisby.com). The Association of Partners in Christian Education (APCE) annual event also provides numerous resources and workshops on antiracism and bilingual education; for this reason, the CCDE strongly encourages those in who work in Christian education and discipleship to attend APCE's annual event.

Financial Generosity and Stewardship as Aspects of Discipleship

This year, the CCDE had discussions around the importance of viewing financial generosity and stewardship as aspects of discipleship. We believe there is more work to be done to effectively guide our congregations in talking about these subjects in more healthy and helpful ways than some of our old models of conversation. In cooperation with RCA staff, the CCDE encourages congregations to consider participating in a regional learning community called Cultivating Generous Congregations. These learning communities are able to be offered at a low cost to congregations thanks to the support of a Lilly grant. Many churches have already benefited from these learning communities, and new learning communities are already being launched in 2023. More information can be found at www.rca.org/cgc.

From the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 12b (2022 edition, p. 121):

3. The commission shall collaborate with RCA staff, assemblies, agencies, and institutions to promote and strengthen the next generation in discipleship with RCA congregations.

Collaboration with RCA Communication

In August, a member of our commission connected with Christina Tazelaar, RCA chief communication officer, to discuss the idea of members of the CCDE contributing to the RCA's bimonthly news and resources email as well as the Faithward website. We are excited about continued communication and work with RCA staff and being able to share with the RCA and beyond through these avenues.

Thank you, RCA Next Generation Staff!

The commission would like to take this opportunity to affirm and give thanks for all the denominational staff who have been working so hard through the ever-evolving landscape of our denomination. We have been working most closely with Anna Radcliffe, who has affirmed the CCDE's desire to collaborate and has kept us informed regarding what she is working on in the area of next generation discipleship. We look forward to future opportunities to connect.

From the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 12b (2022 edition, p. 121):

4. The commission shall advocate for the ongoing preparation of those who carry out the church's teaching ministry.

Association of Partners in Christian Education (APCE)

The CCDE strongly advocates for professional development as a way to support and encourage Christian educators. The Association of Partners in Christian Education (APCE) is doing this work faithfully and is an excellent source for curriculum and

resources. APCE's annual conference is a useful way for Christian educators, whether they are volunteers or part-time or full-time staff members, to connect with each other, encourage each other, find inspiration and resources, and fellowship together. For example, a workshop at the 2023 annual APCE conference entitled "Opening Doors to Discipleship" unveiled a new training website aimed at faith formation leaders in the Reformed tradition.

The Opening Doors to Discipleship website (<https://odtd.net>) has four main sections: Leadership, Reformed Theology, Educational Practices, and Explore More. The Leadership section includes modules on exploring your call, calling others, equipping others, and a Faith Formation Ministries Path. The Reformed Theology section contains modules on God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Bible and Covenant Community. The Educational Practices modules incorporate defining learning, approaches to learning, teaching methods, designing lesson plans, and evaluating curriculum. Finally, the Explore More modules address various topics, including older adult faith formation, children's ministry, and intergenerational faith formation.

The website also contains helpful information and resources for safety training, which the commission also researched and advocated for in its report to General Synod last year.

The Opening Doors to Discipleship website offers suggestions for a starting place in accessing its content depending on whether the user is a volunteer, an educator, or a church leader. It represents an enormous amount of work and provides a wealth of useful resources to educators of all positions. Instead of spending time and energy trying to duplicate a rich resource like Opening Doors to Discipleship, the commission wants to highlight and share this resource with educators.

This year the commission met in conjunction with the APCE's annual event. Members from our commission were richly blessed by the workshops and encouraged by meeting other Christian educators from all over North America. We will continue to advocate for Christian educators to attend this conference and urge each congregation to show their love and support for Christian education by sending at least one Christian educator to the next annual APCE event, which will take place in St. Louis, Missouri, from January 25-27, 2024 (and supporting their attendance financially).

Christian Educators of the Reformed Church in America (CERCA)

In conjunction with the APCE annual event in January 2023, the Christian Educators of the Reformed Church in America (CERCA) held their 42nd annual meeting. Approximately 40 RCA educators were present, hailing from New Mexico to New York and many places in between. Participants celebrated a new season for the RCA and CERCA. While much angst has been expressed across the RCA from churches leaving, CERCA celebrated the RCA's past and looked excitedly toward a hopeful future.

When contrasted with many of the other partner denominations of APCE, the RCA looks like the Revelation 7:9 future that we have espoused and sought to enact. From RCA staff members present to new CERCA officers blessed by an experienced and faithful past leadership, there was reason for great hope and celebration. In particular, CERCA recognized the service of many RCA individuals, including Willa Brown, Phil and Stephanie Doeschot, Micheal Edwards, Jane Richardson, Jane and Larry Schuyler, and Arlene and Bill Waldorf.

The CCDE also encourages those working in RCA Christian discipleship and education ministries to consider applying for a CERCA scholarship to help defray the cost of an educational opportunity that will provide personal and professional growth. The scholarship application can be downloaded at www.rca.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/CCDE-scholarship-application.pdf.

Respectfully submitted,
Mark Swart, moderator