



Center *for* Excellence in Christian Education

A NEXUS OF CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION
in Educational Leadership, Research, and Practice

FOUNDATION PAPER

The Foundation Paper for The Center for Excellence in Christian Education has six sections:

1. History and Legacy of the Center
 2. Mission of the Center
 - a. Need
 - b. Purpose
 - c. Practices
 3. Governance of the Center
-

01 HISTORY AND LEGACY OF THE CENTER

The intentional work of forming the identity of God's people has clear roots in the Hebrew scriptures. The Shema in Deuteronomy 6:1-9 articulates the commandment to teach the faith so that all generations may know who God is and how to live faithfully together as God's own people. The Christian scriptures reflect an emphasis on teaching, beginning with Jesus and carrying through with the Epistle writers. More than preaching and miracles combined, Jesus spent his time teaching those who would follow him. The sacred texts of our Judeo-Christian tradition emphasize the need for and the practice of teaching as a means for spreading the good news, nurturing faith, and building up the body of Christ.

Practices of teaching and learning are deeply embedded in faith communities throughout history. The Reformation returned the Church to its emphasis on education for all, as a means of studying scripture for faithful living. Martin Luther and John Calvin not only encouraged but were proponents of compulsory public education for all children and worked to establish and expand access to schools for all children regardless of a family's social or economic status in the community. Their commitment set the stage for education to be considered as a fundamental human right around the globe.

Public education and religious education were integrally related until the mid-twentieth century. Christian primers, catechetical memorization, and religious instruction were included in most if not all curricula in Europe and the new world. The establishment of Sabbath or Sunday schools emerged during the industrial revolution when parents and children worked long hours on other days of the week. These basic models and contexts for teaching were a means for transmitting morals and behaviors deemed necessary for a civilized society as well as conveying the content of faith and the skills for reading, writing, and arithmetic.

The field of Christian education was established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in response to developments in secular education and research in human development.

Most mainline Protestant denominations, as well as Roman Catholic and Jewish groups, supported schools of religious education where congregational leaders were trained in religious educational philosophy and methods. Developments in pedagogical theories and strategies provided significant areas of innovation in the field of religious education.

In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its predecessor denominations, support for Christian education in congregations, governing bodies, and seminaries has been strong. The denomination established schools, colleges, and seminaries to provide for educating people from the cradle to the grave. Professional educational staff at all levels of the church has been the norm.

The Training School for Lay Workers was established in 1914. Its name was changed to the Presbyterian School of Christian Education in 1959 and was widely identified as a strong, dynamic, and creative institution of higher education. In its statement of values, PSCE explicitly named as its guiding principles: "attending to the whole person;" a balance between "learning and teaching . . . among students and faculty members;" a value for "flexibility and innovation;" and its intention to be "a genuinely ecumenical, interracial, and international community." In living out these values, PSCE affirmed "the importance of making actual a caring community continuously reshaped by the good news that the worth of each member is more determined by being loved, than by what one does."

As the broader field of practical theology emerged, many of the denominational schools of religious education were closed or absorbed into larger theological educational institutions. The innovations and new methods built on the early foundations throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries became diffuse. Downsizing of national denominations and middle governing bodies further limited an intentional focus on the work and support of Christian education. The systematic lack of institutional support for Christian education made it difficult, often impossible, to incorporate pedagogical and technological innovations into a narrowing Christian education curriculum. Most educators and ministers completed seminary training with only a superficial exposure to the field of Christian Education.

Contextually and historically, the need for a Center for Excellence in Christian Education comes from the focus and emphasis the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has placed on education. Unique to Union Presbyterian Seminary is its relationship to the former Presbyterian School of Christian Education, making it especially appropriate to establish the Center for Excellence in Christian Education at Union Presbyterian Seminary. It is the intention of the Center to continue the legacy of PSCE.

02

MISSION OF THE CENTER

Continuing the legacy of the Presbyterian School of Christian Education and facing an increasingly complex world, the Center for Excellence in Christian Education

- A. cultivates and curates relevant and dynamic resources for forming an engaging faith in a changing Church and complex world;
 - B. provides a nexus of creativity and innovation in educational leadership and the integration of theory and practice;
 - C. engenders opportunities for substantive exploration and conversations that foster new pedagogical understandings.
-

a. **NEED: Education for a Changing Church and Complex World**

The Good News of Jesus Christ and its distinctive expression through the Reformed and Presbyterian theological tradition is still as necessary and compelling as it was in its original contexts. We live in an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous landscape of Church and world. The Center for Excellence in Christian Education is intended to resource leaders, whatever their role, by meeting volatility with vision, uncertainty with understanding, complexity with creativity, and ambiguity with agility.¹ A commitment of the Center is to continue to nurture dynamic and relevant faith that sustains faithful living throughout the lifespan. Such faith shapes the ways we understand and engage the world and requires the development of new educational theories and approaches. These theories and approaches in turn reorient perspectives from describing the landscape to leading in the midst of complexity into an exhilarating time of thriving. The Center will intentionally generate time and space for practitioners, scholars, students, and explorers to wrestle with matters of faith and faithfulness in the midst of acknowledged complexity. The Center will cultivate pedagogical practices that foster creativity, imagination, and risk in order to boldly meet the challenges and prepare those called and committed to the ministries of teaching and learning for the 21st century.

¹ VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity) emerged at the end of the Cold War in the United States Military leadership schools as a way of talking about the shifting landscape of warfare. It has since been adopted by a variety of business and leadership theories.

b. PURPOSE: A Nexus of Creativity and Innovation in Educational Leadership and the Integration of Theory and Practice

The Center for Excellence in Christian Education is a nexus for interconnectivity that engenders substantive and collaborative work and enlivens educational research and ministries in diverse contexts. It inhabits the intersection of the academy and the congregation, scholars and practitioners, theory and practice.

The convergence of biblical, theological, and theoretical traditions and fields of study shape the foundations of the field of Christian education. Given the complexity of our current context, critical evaluation of these foundations is necessary. The Center affirms that faith is a gift of God and is formed by the Spirit's working in and through creative minds and processes. In the Reformed tradition God is the Lord of all creation and, as such, insights, wisdom and ideas emerge in a wide variety of perspectives. Thus, the Center claims its historic commitment to ecumenical partnerships that promote mutuality in community and fosters the best in collaborative work. Additionally, the life of the mind in service to God is necessary for critical thinking about and the development of substantive contributions to Christian education for theory, practice, and leadership. Pedagogy is the embodiment of theory and theology. Likewise, academic research, theology, and theory inform and shape educational practice.

The Center for Excellence in Christian Education has as its primary goals:

1. to strengthen the field of Christian education both in the seminary and in the broader church through an array of innovative programs and models designed to provide foundations in excellent pedagogical practice,
2. to engage a variety of pedagogies as a mode of critical insight into the church's relationship to contemporary concerns, and
3. to be fluent with innovative technological methods and resources appropriate to Christian education.

c. PRACTICES: Engendering Opportunities for Substantive Exploration and Conversations that Foster New Pedagogical Understandings

The Center for Excellence in Christian Education intentionally promotes the convergence of faculty, students, and practitioners in the areas of leadership, practice, and research.

Leadership

As Dr. Sara P. Little has said, “Everything the church does teaches.” Therefore, teaching and learning are crucial aspects of any leadership position in church, seminary, nonprofit organization, or validated ministry. A significant aspect of the Center’s program is to sustain and equip all those who educate, whatever their level of theological education or vocational experience. The Center is committed to nurturing and sustaining educational leadership by:

- Creating and hosting occasions that cultivate leadership skills
- Curating and developing curriculum and resources,
- Connecting conversation partners,
- Encouraging learning communities, and
- Fostering creativity and incubation time

Practice

The Center demonstrates its commitment to the practice of educational ministry by providing resources, seminars, cohorts, clinics, and a biannual national conference on topics related to Christian education. The Center is committed to offering current and advanced pedagogical strategies for teaching in diverse contexts of ministry. These commitments promote and encourage educators, pastors, congregational leaders, and community leaders to explore, deepen, and retool their gifts for ministry. The Center provides faculty, students, and practitioners with the information, familiarity, and skills they need for imaginative and creative use of educational technology, hybrid teaching, and in-person teaching. In these ways the Center seeks to meet the challenges of our changed and changing world through these and other practices:

- The Arts
- Educational Technology
- Story Path
- Curriculum Project
- Just Teach Partnership
- Teaching Clinics

Research

Practice which is grounded in research leads to deeper learning and faithful service. The Center seeks to create space and opportunities for faculty and practitioners to engage in critical conversations that develop innovative, effective, and imaginative theories, models, and methods. The Center convenes and facilitates conversations between researchers, professors, practitioners, and students. These dialogues shape and equip educational ministry in classrooms and beyond. Their combined voices, insights, and contributions are critical for strengthening and advancing the work of Christian education. The collective goal is to generate new educational theories and pedagogical practices for congregations, the academy, and communities through:

- Collaborative Conversations
- Research Roundtables
- Stipends for Innovative Research
- Promotion of Publications

03 GOVERNANCE OF THE CENTER

A. The Center for Excellence in Christian Education is a ministry of Union Presbyterian Seminary, Richmond, VA, and Charlotte, NC. Its intention is to continue the legacy of the Presbyterian School of Christian Education which became part of Union Seminary in 1997. As such, The Center is part of the Seminary's 501(c)(3) IRS status.

B. The Center shall have a Director appointed by the President of the Seminary and additional support staff as necessary. Ordinarily, the Director is to be a faculty member of the Seminary. The goal is to have a Director and a full time Administrative and Program Associate when The Center opens. Available funding will determine that goal.

C. All staff of the Center shall be under the jurisdiction of the Seminary's personnel policies and procedures. The Director and Staff of the Center shall report to the seminary President and/or Academic Dean as designated in the seminary organizational chart and in accordance with the other seminary Centers.

D. An advisory council of persons from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and other appropriate entities shall meet twice annually to provide direction, feedback, and encouragement to The Center. This Council membership shall be subject to concurrence from the Seminary President and the Center Director and shall be self-perpetuating. Membership is for a three-year term with a maximum of six years' service before being required to take a one-year absence from the council. Ordinarily, the council shall consist of 12 members. The Advisory Council shall include a member of the Christian education faculty from each campus, with the Director serving in one of those positions and shall include a current M.A.C.E. or Dual Degree student from each campus.

E. The Center shall have the authority to seek grants and contributions to the Center endowment upon consultation with the Seminary Relations Department. It is the goal that The Center would have an endowment of a minimum of \$5,000,000.00 for its work. The Center shall abide by the Seminary's fiscal policies. The annual budget shall be developed by the Center's leadership and submitted in accordance with financial requirements of the Seminary. Funds from the Center's Endowment annual draw will be used only for the programs and staff of the Center.