

## Observations/Questions for Thought and Dialogue

***“Christian education” was often defined very broadly***, sometimes as if it is “everything we do that helps people know God” or “whatever we do to help people become practicing disciples.” The implication (to me) was that CE was defined by some as whatever the church does. Our Primary Task, in its four emphases, is to welcome and receive, relate to God, equip for discipleship, and send forth for ministry.

1. How does a very broad definition of CE fit into the Primary Task?
2. The Primary Task, though having four “movements,” is still one task. If CE is “all that we do” (i.e. fulfills the whole Primary Task), how well do we do with each of those “movements”?
3. Can (or should) all of our classes, groups, experiences, etc. do equally well with “welcome and receive” and “send forth” as they tend to do with “relate” and “equip”?
4. Is CE synonymous with “ministry” without regard to the focus of any particular ministry? If it is a discreet area of ministry, how does it fit into a holistic view of ministry?
5. What would the various ministry areas look and be like if they were all filtered through a lens of Christian education and formation? For example, would the way the church does evangelism be different (better, more effective) if education were in service to evangelism? [That might mean emphasizing who God is, knowing some depth and content about the faith story, learning from biblical figures how to figure out one’s place in the faith story and then applying the process to oneself]
6. To continue, how might we conceptualize the ministry of worship, stewardship, and mission if Christian education is in service to them?
7. What other questions occur to you?

***While all the churches offered a large array of CE-related classes***, groups, experiences, and opportunities, very little was said about a comprehensive ministry plan or system within which any ministry takes place.

8. If the local church were to develop the intentional “flow” of the Primary Task as a way to organize and systematize its CE ministry (and then in context with the entire ministry), with attention to what flows in and what flows out, what would that look like? “Flow in/Flow out” describes the process by which a group or class prepares persons for the next steps in deeper faith development and biblical literacy. An entry level “Beginnings” class could be the first step for adults into the church and/or into the faith. What would be next; that is, Beginnings flows in to something else. A community self-help or interest group might be the experience that flows into the Beginnings class.

Consider this example of how to think about that. (Categories are not absolute.)

Welcome/Receive	Relate	Equip	Send
What classes/groups/experiences are introductory/entry point	What classes/groups/exp. go beyond information about God to cultivate a relationship with God	What classes, etc are geared to intermediate or advanced biblical and faith	What classes, etc. are oriented toward "sending"
To what entry point ministries might a CE component be added	What training is needed for leaders to teach for formation and transformation	How do age-level classes etc recognize that children and youth are at various stages of faith development	How can any class or group include opportunities for action/putting faith to work
What orientation is needed for on-going groups to be welcoming to newcomers	What components, such as teaching and incorporating the means of grace, can/should be added	What classes and groups will always serve a particular level (so people should move "up" from it) and which can keep the same group while continually digging deeper?	What classes, etc. especially help persons think in terms of vocation (professional ministry or profession as ministry), or identify and call forth gifts
What biblical/theological education in radical hospitality is needed and in what venues can it be added	How do we help teachers and leaders to allow actual time to practice (i.e., pray not just learn about prayer)	How do we train teachers to encourage participants to move to the next levels of depths and not stagnate or fixate where they're familiar and comfortable	What preparation for leaders is needed to help them teach/lead both invitationally and missionally

**Every church affirmed that their CE ministry is for everyone**, of every age, even if the congregation was not well represented in a particular age group. Most congregations, though, did not specifically mention CE opportunities for persons outside the congregation or assumed that the community would come to the church rather than the church going into the community.

9. How important it is to have classes and groups for all ages? ("If you have it, they can come" versus "No people, no class")
10. If an age group is part of the membership, but not part of the attending congregation (i.e. homebound members) how is it made possible for them to continue in lifelong learning opportunities?
11. What opportunities might arise in a model of community Christian education and formation? (First Church has a great children's program and Second Church has a great seniors ministry or Wesley Church is a good "seekers" church and Asbury is known for it's DISCIPLE or *Companions in Christ* groups). What implications would shared ministry have on the idea of Flow in/Flow out?
12. Does the church seriously consider the context/culture/congregational identity and make itself accessible to the community?
13. What kinds of intentional "come" opportunities are called forth from such an assessment?
14. What kinds of intentional "go" opportunities could expand the CE ministry?
15. How might satellite groups, an added campus, or virtual groups reach non-attending members, distant members, or non-members?
16. What other alternatives would/could be feasible?
17. What other questions occur to you?

**All congregations desired outcomes related to disciple making and lives formed in the image of Christ.** The responses blended together practical, philosophical, and existential goals. I had the sense on occasion that the responses were more stock replies (of what we know we're supposed to want and work for) than outcomes that had been thoughtfully considered by an education committee or church council and that also had a coherent strategy behind them. I did not check that impression, nor if those desired outcomes were known or expected by the participants themselves.

18. How intentional is your church about setting goals for its CE ministries?
19. How does the setting, communication of, and assent to goals get passed up and down the church hierarchy? In other words, if the church council discusses and sets goals, how does that "flow down" to the education committee and then to teachers and group leaders?
20. Do those goals also "flow up" for consideration and approval at charge conference, for example?
21. If "making disciples" is the generally accepted goal, how does that actually get applied to the classes, groups, and experiences within the CE ministry?
22. Once goals are set, are they ever communicated to the subject of those goals (the participants)? What opportunity do participants have in determining their own learning and faith formation goals?
23. If those goals start with the participants, how are teachers helped to lead classes so that those goals are met? How do all "stakeholders" buy in?
24. What added training, if any, might teachers and leaders need to be proactive and to help group members be proactive in taking responsibility for their own growth? What would this look like with young adults, youth, older children, and younger children?
25. What role does the congregation as a whole play in helping each other set and reach their faith formation goals?
26. Are specific plans examined in light of how they will help accomplish those goals?
27. How do you help hold each other accountable for those goals?
28. What other questions occur to you?

**Matthew 28: 19-20 (Go, make, teach disciples)** and the example of Jesus as a master teacher/storyteller were frequently cited as major biblical/theological "marching orders." Respondents had no trouble adding Scripture references and biblical understandings to the list. I suspect that many of them were more accurately Scripture references from which the respondent took inspiration than references to teach, per se, but I doubt that it matters.

29. If the Bible is the source book for our lives as Christian people of faith, how much does it matter what particular passage might be used as the foundation for CE ministry?
30. Have you (as teacher/group leader or as education leader) taken time to discern for yourself or with CE partners just how God is guiding you? Have you ever had the sense that there is a particular mandate within this ministry towards which God is leading you?
31. If you have taken time for this discernment and have a consensus among education leaders about the biblical/theological foundations for teaching/formation ministry, how is it communicated to participants?

32. Are they encouraged to formulate their own biblical/theological understanding of why and how they participate?
33. GBOD, as mandated by General Conference, has provided *Foundations: Shaping the Ministry of Christian Education in Your Congregation* (Discipleship Resources). Have you ever read it? Used it? Shared it with others?
34. What other help or resource might teachers/group leaders need in order to assist their group members to identify or formulate their biblical/theological foundations?
35. If you do have a recognized biblical/theological mandate, do you use it as a lens for all the classes, groups, and experiences to ensure that they are consistent with the mandate?
36. What other questions occur to you?

**Respondents generally agreed that biblical literacy is, or should be, a value for the congregation,** though both the value and the competency is spotty within the congregation.

37. If it can be said that people participate in what they value, how can deep knowledge of the content and import of the Bible be taken more seriously?
38. How can the benefits be framed in a way that is both urgent and compelling?
39. What sort of orientation or other resources might prompt the congregation as a whole to expect of themselves and each other that they will be biblically astute?
40. How might sharing personal faith stories, which include some benefit of knowing/recalling Scripture, be transformational?
41. One congregation could date their experience (In 1991....). What if, throughout the church council, classes, groups, and worship experiences, you initiated a church-wide challenge to engage in Bible study? What would it be?
42. How might such a challenge be received and what would you need to do to initiate and sustain it?
43. What sort of training, if any, might group leaders and teachers need?
44. What other questions occur to you?

**Survey respondents affirmed that there is an inextricable link between CE and making disciples,** even, in some cases, regarding them as synonymous or nearly so.

45. What is the perception in your congregation of CE? Is it seen as only Sunday school? as outdated and ineffectual? as a vital link in disciple making? as something only for children? as a valuable means of grace? as a way to grow as a child of God? as a time to be bored? as a means to discerning God's will and direction for life?
46. If the perception is poor, inadequate, or inaccurate, how can you reframe the perception (including using different language) so that it becomes a dynamic, transforming Christian practice?
47. Survey respondents told poignant, encouraging, and hopeful stories of their own early experiences. How might you harness the powerful and compelling stories in your congregation?
48. If the CE/disciple making link is "vital, non-negotiable, and necessary," do you evaluate all your CE offerings and experiences in terms of their impact on disciple making?
49. What other questions occur to you?

***The expectations of teachers and group leaders ranged from practical to personal character to “second mile” behaviors.*** The range indicated more “Do No Harm” characteristics than “Do all the good that you can.”

50. It is possible, even probable, that those who tended to gloss over “fine Christian character” expectations just assumed it to be a given. When you think about the qualifications and expectations of your teachers, what is most important to you?
51. If “be prepared and be on time” are the first thoughts, is teacher recruitment oriented more toward the “warm body in the classroom” than to the teacher as model, mentor, and educator?
52. Nearly every church offered training events and expected teachers and group leaders to come to them. Do those events include how to teach for transformation, personal enrichment, and practical skill issues?
53. If any of those elements are missing (over the course of the training offerings), what might the teaching ministry look like if they were all included?
54. If attending training is a requirement and teachers don’t come, are there any consequences? If so, what are the consequences? If attendance is mandatory, but not done, do you release teachers and recruit new ones?
55. If there are no consequences, how do you communicate the importance and value of the training sessions?
56. Are training sessions placed in the whole context of ministry and framed in terms of the outcomes (raising up faithful disciples)? If not, how might they be different with such a contextualization?
57. What is the “safe church” policy in your congregation? [If you don’t have one, formulate, approve, implement, and circulate one now!] Does it account for all vulnerable persons—minors, persons with disabilities, frail older adults, others?
58. Is it broad enough and enforceable for the whole church and its participants at all times?
59. What might your teaching ministry look like if all potential teachers had to apply or be recommended, be interviewed, and then sign a covenant agreement? What might your teaching ministry look like if all teachers were required to submit for approval their class goals and personal enrichment/continuing education goals? (Having high expectations is often more motivating than having low expectations. If expectations are low enough to suit the “lowest common denominator,” are those the teachers you really want?)
60. The expectations least often said include attending worship each week, tithing, praying daily for students, and evaluating regularly (see page 6). Do you expect these things? Desire them? If you have never asked these things of your teachers and group leaders, why not?
61. You may be concerned about creating such a demanding or stringent list of expectations that teachers are overwhelmed. Yet, ostensibly, we want the very best qualified persons as the ones who do so much to shape the faith life and character of others. How might your teaching ministry be different if you created a graduated system of standards toward which your teachers will commit themselves?

62. GBOD has a Comprehensive Plan for Teacher Development, sometimes called our “continuum,” which includes a listing of what every teacher needs to know and to do. It is graduated between John Wesley’s first General Rule (Do no harm) and the second (Do all the good that you can). Have you seen and used this as a guide for your teachers? (<http://www.gbod.org/education/CP021009.pdf>; available also in Spanish and Portuguese).
63. There are five self-guided teaching resources based on the What Every Teacher Needs to Know segment. How might either or both of these resources help you develop a growth/enrichment plan with your teachers and group leaders? ([http://www.gbod.org/education/wetntk\\_default.html](http://www.gbod.org/education/wetntk_default.html)).

***The most common venues for communicating expectations of teachers*** are speaking directly, in training, and in written job descriptions (but most often only for teachers of children). Many used the recruiting process to filter candidates.

64. What are the most common assumptions you make about communicating your expectations?
65. What is it that “everybody knows” that you don’t remember or don’t feel you need to bring up?
66. People who are new to a church or new to a class or group do not always know the unwritten culture. What are the rules of your CE culture that are not mentioned but that everyone is expected to know and observe?
67. Are your expectations written somewhere and published publicly so that parents can see them?
68. If you have written job descriptions or other list of expectations for teacher/leaders with children, but not for those who work with youth or adults, what does that communicate to the parents of youth? With adult class or group members?
69. Many churches have job descriptions. How might the teachers’ impressions of themselves as teachers and the students/parents’ impressions change if teaching were always described as a ministry of Christian formation rather than a “job”?
70. What other questions occur to you?

***Accountability was the weakest link in the teacher recruitment/preparation process***, though most indicated that feedback was readily available, either to the teachers themselves or to CE leaders.

71. The *Book of Discipline* tells us that “support without accountability promotes moral weakness; accountability without support is a form of cruelty” (§101, page 49, 2008). How does your CE ministry intentionally support and hold accountable its teachers and leaders?
72. If there are written expectations and/or conversations about expectations, is any mention given to an accountability process? Should an accountability process for all teachers be included with other policies, such as a Safe Sanctuary plan?
73. If there is no accountability process, what does that say about attention to the disciple making process?

74. Giving feedback is not the same as holding to account, though it's an element of accountability. How is feedback turned into a useful accountability tool?
75. What training or coaching might teachers/leaders need to feel comfortable with an accountability process?
76. How might the ministry of teaching improve if there is a clear accountability process? What is, or might be, lost if there is no accountability?
77. What other questions occur to you?

***Evaluation and accountability go hand in hand.*** If teachers and leaders are held accountable for fulfilling expectations, there must be some measures in place to indicate effectiveness and an intentional evaluation process.

78. How might your CE ministry be different if the first evaluative question is “Have our students/participants grown in discipleship?” (qualitative) rather than “Did that work?” (technical/mechanical) or “How many people did we have?” (quantitative).
79. A “measure” is a real measure if it answers the “how do you know” question. Having 20 participants rather than 10 may indicate something good, but neither number gives any evidence at all that anything has actually happened to the participant. Twenty years of experience may be twenty years of growth and depth or it could be two years of experience repeated nine times—and in neither case does the number indicate what the experience has yielded. “Changed lives” can be a measure if there are also some specific indicators of just what the change is, with specific and consistent evidence behind it. As you examine the outcomes you desire, what are the indicators for each that would provide evidence that the goals have been achieved? (Challenge yourself for each quantitative measure to add one qualitative measure.)
80. What are your measures for “changed lives”?
81. How does your biblical/theological foundation relate to those measures?
82. If the goal is to “make disciples” have you described and defined what a “disciple” is and how you know when you have made one?
83. What training or coaching might your teachers and leaders need in order to do meaningful evaluations?
84. How can participants, including children, be included in the evaluation process?
85. When evaluating the mechanical aspects of your CE ministry (Did this work?), what measures will tell you what you need to know?
86. How do you measure if certain segments of the congregation (according to age, spiritual maturity, biblical literacy, and so on) are not being served well or are underserved?
87. What other questions occur to you?

***When the results achieved are not the results intended, the easy approach is a technical fix rather than an adaptive change.*** Knowing when the fix is appropriate and when adaptation is necessary is both a skill and an art.

88. What role do discerning prayer and Christian conferencing play in your evaluation process?

89. Asking “Five Whys” is sometimes helpful in getting to the bottom of problems rather than accepting the first idea or reason that pops to mind (and keeps you from throwing out the curriculum or the teacher until you know just what’s going on!). When you don’t get the results you want, how do you go about deciding what to do?
90. Is there any strategy in the church council and/or education ministry team for evaluating and making changes when necessary?
91. If the teachers or education ministry team have an over all plan with goals, strategies, and measures in place, the first level of support is to see that everyone working the plan has the personal support, training, and supervision to succeed. Does your church have a master plan, and who has given it a blessing? Is the infrastructure in place to help people succeed?
92. If people are working the master plan as agreed upon and the plan is not yielding the results you want, the next step is to examine the plan, rather than criticize people (volunteers) who are working faithfully as agreed upon. What is the culture of the church/education team/teaching team regarding blame?
93. What are the consequences of assigning blame?
94. If a teacher or other education ministry worker needs to be redirected to a different area of ministry, what can be done to honor his or her contribution and achieve a better match of gifts with service?
95. What training or coaching might your education leaders need to work with grace with volunteers who need help?
96. If the CE plan/class/group/event is not going as you would like, what are the potential benefits and pitfalls of borrowing or copying a successful venture from another church?
97. How well do you assess the success factors (what made it work, rather than specifically what was done) of your own fruitful classes/groups/events/experiences so that those success factors can be replicated elsewhere?
98. What other questions occur to you?

***When congregations do get the results they want, many of them celebrate!*** Most celebrate or acknowledge the leaders/teachers.

99. How many ways do you celebrate the fruits of your CE ministry? How many more ways can you add?
100. Acknowledging in worship the contributions and celebrations of the teachers, leaders, and participants is a significant source of support from the pastor. In what other ways can the pastor(s) support the CE ministry?
101. *Christian Education Week*, a free annual resource from GBOD, includes a short litany for consecrating teachers and leaders in worship. (for the entire archive, <http://www.gbod.org/education/resources.asp?page=1>). Are you familiar with this? Have you used it?
102. One congregation was very intentional about helping teachers affirm the children they work with (100 ways to say “good job!”). This mentoring and support is very important for young people, especially in high risk areas. What are the 100 ways you can say, “good job” to your children, youth, and adults?
103. One congregation mentioned sharing “God sightings.” How can looking for and sharing “God sightings” support your CE ministry?

