

“Pathways to Learning and Leadership”

CRE and Church Member Education at Union Presbyterian Seminary

Background

A meeting was held at the Leadership Institute, the non-degree programming department of Union Presbyterian Seminary, on February 18, 2016, to discuss the educational needs of those seeking to become Commissioned Ruling Elders (CREs). Representatives from all of the presbyteries in the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic were invited. Those present were:

- Roy Martin, Shenandoah Presbytery
- Malcolm Brownlee, Shenandoah Presbytery
- Bob Osborne, Shenandoah Presbytery
- Bill Reinhold, Coastal Carolina Presbytery
- Liza Hendricks, Eastern Virginia Presbytery
- Carson Rhyne, Presbytery of the James
- Steve Earl, Presbytery of the Peaks
- Lynn Stall, New Hope Presbytery
- Cindy Kissel-Ito, Union Presbyterian Seminary
- Ken McFayden, Union Presbyterian Seminary
- Marilyn Johns, Union Presbyterian Seminary

In addition, presbyters from Western North Carolina, Charlotte, and Abingdon Presbytery were interested but could not attend.

Purpose and Proposal

A need in the church has been identified by a number of presbyteries in the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic and beyond for help in preparing people to become CREs. While presbyteries want to be able to mentor and nurture those seeking to lead congregations in this way, they would like some assistance in the educational preparation of potential CREs. At the same time, congregations have expressed a need for quality adult education programs and ways for church members to have access to learning that goes beyond the local church. The Leadership Institute at Union Presbyterian Seminary desires to be a resource to the church, both in the Richmond and Charlotte communities, but also to the church in the world. We have come to believe that both of these needs might be addressed in one educational program.

The areas of education for addressing these needs are very similar for both groups of learners. Both groups need a foundation in reading and interpreting the Bible, Reformed theology and church history, the Christian life, and the mission of the church in the world. CRE students require more depth in these areas than lay people may desire, and lay people may want to

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explore more topical learning than is helpful in a CRE education program, but the foundations are the same.

At the same time the desire for such education exists, there is also the reality that many people are not able to spend great amounts of time and money traveling to the seminary for this type of education. By nature, CREs will serve mostly in small congregations, and are in many cases non-stipendiary. Members of churches often have employment that would preclude them from attending a course or workshop that meets during the day on weekdays on a regular, continuing basis.

The Leadership Institute has developed an online education program that will meet both the needs of presbyteries and other middle governing bodies who want high-quality education for CRE candidates, and congregations and church members who desire new opportunities for education for discipleship.

Combining the two groups in education can be fruitful for both. For church members, understanding the process for interpreting scripture with an eye toward preaching and teaching, for example, will be instructive, and may encourage those lay leaders to preach and teach in their churches. CRE candidates will also benefit from interacting with a variety of church leaders and settings. Instructors will develop assignments for those who might be leading a church and those who are leaders in the church.

Courses will be taught by seminary faculty, local practitioners, or faculty from other schools. They will be recruited and paid by the Leadership Institute.

Two Programs of Study

For **CRE education**, in order to meet the educational requirements of the presbytery or other middle governing body, students must take all four courses in Phase I and all five courses in Phase II-a, a total of nine courses.

For a **Certificate of Completion** for church members, they must take all four courses in Phase I, plus two additional courses, either in Phase II-a or II-b, for a total of six courses.

Others interested in education for discipleship are welcome in any/all of the courses offered.

Phase I, II-a, and II-b courses are described below.

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Phase I – Foundations (year 1) – required for both programs

This phase is open to anyone, CRE students and those seeking a certificate as well as church members who just want to take a class or two but are not seeking a certificate of completion. These four courses are foundational for both the CRE and Lay Education programs and required for both to successfully complete the course. Courses are taught completely online, with real-time contact with the instructor, interaction with other students online, and independent work. Each class includes 10 hours of instruction, 10 hours of peer interaction, and approximately 10 hours of reading/writing/other assignments.

The tuition for each five-week course is \$100, or \$400 for Phase I, and students will purchase (or borrow from a library) one or two books for each course. Instructors will report whether or not each student did the required work, but will not assign a grade or write an assessment. Presbyteries or other middle governing bodies may do some sort of assessment if they wish, to make sure the student gained the knowledge and content desired.

For the CRE program, it is strongly recommended that a mentor be assigned by the presbytery or middle governing body, who also takes the courses along with the CRE student. This will help the presbytery to assess student work and their fitness for CRE work. Mentors may also monitor the peer interaction assignments, perhaps on a rotating basis, for each week of the course.

All courses include practical reflection and application (case studies, projects, etc.) in relation to academic content. The four courses in Phase I are:

- Biblical Interpretation, with some Bible content, but primarily focused on how to interpret the Bible
- Reformed Theology and Church History
- Christian Life – worship, spiritual practices, ethics
- The Mission of the Church in the World – evangelism, mission

After taking these courses, presbyteries consult with CRE students who show promise to see if they are interested in continuing the process toward CRE. They would then take the next five courses. Because the courses in Phase I are foundational, they must be taken before Phase II courses.

At the end of each course, students completing the assignments will receive 3.0 CEUs (12.0 for all of the courses in Phase I).

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Phase II-a – A Deeper Look (year 2) – required for CRE students, open to lay education students as electives

In this phase, a hybrid format will be used. This will be accomplished in one of two ways. Ordinarily, students will complete 18 hours of work online with peers and independently, and 12 hours (two full days) on the campus of Union Presbyterian Seminary, with some of the in-class courses on the Richmond campus and some on the Charlotte campus, where students can practice what they have learned. In special cases where travel and time to the seminary are prohibitive, and where a presbytery mentor is available, the face-to-face time may be accomplished meeting with the mentor, who will work closely with the seminary in planning those meetings.

The tuition for each class is \$125 (which includes two lunches and refreshments), or a total of \$625 for Phase II-a. Instructors will affirm that a student completed all assignments and was present for online and in-class learning. Presbyteries take care of assessing the readiness of the student to move on to being assigned as a CRE.

Classes in Phase II-a are:

- Preaching the Bible
- Teaching the Bible
- Pastoral Care – Care of persons
- Administration – Care of Systems: leadership, polity, stewardship, redevelopment
- Worship and Sacraments

At the end of each course, students completing the assignments will receive 3.0 CEUs (15.0 for all of the courses in Phase II-a).

Phase II-b – A Wider Look (year 2) – open to lay education students as electives and CREs as continuing education

The courses in Phase II-b are offered completely online, with the same format as Phase I – ten hours of instruction, ten hours of peer interaction, and ten hours of independent work per course. The two courses offered each year in Phase II-b are topically based, and would change every year. These courses are electives for church members seeking a certificate of completion, but are also open for continuing education for CREs and any other interested people.

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The cost of tuition in Phase II-b is \$100 per course.

Topics in Phase II-b will be areas of interest chosen by the instructors with the requirement that they fall within one or more of the nine categories in Phase I and Phase II-a. At the end of each course, students completing the assignments will receive 3.0 CEUs.

Scheduling

The program will begin in September of 2016 with Phase I, the foundational courses. The schedule for courses in 2016/17 is:

- Biblical Interpretation: live instruction Tuesdays, September 6, 13, 20, 27, and October 4, 2016
- Reformed Theology and Church History: : live instruction Tuesdays, October 18, 25, November 1, 8, and 15, 2016
- Christian Life: live instruction Tuesdays, January 10, 17, 24, 31, and February 7, 2017
- The Mission of the Church in the World: : live instruction Tuesdays, February 21, 28, March 7, 14, and 21, 2017

Live instruction is via *Zoom*, an easy-to-use online meeting program. Each of the four foundational courses includes five weekly live two-hour online segments with the instructor, two hours per week of interaction with peers online, and two hours per week of reading/writing/and other assignments.

The second year of the program would include both Phase I, with the same basic schedule, and Phases II-a and II-b. Phase II-a courses are required for those in the CRE program, but may also be taken by others, and include two courses in the fall and three in the winter/spring, adding a fifth segment to the Phase I schedule after Easter. Phase II-b courses will be held in the late spring and summer.

Phase I courses are be offered on Tuesdays, and Phase II-a courses are be offered on Thursdays, so that a new class can be admitted each year.

Anyone desiring to complete CRE education, or desiring to obtain a certificate of can complete all coursework in two years.

For the first year of the program, 2016-17, only Phase I will be offered (four courses for the year). For the second year and subsequent years, Phase I and Phase II-a and II-b will be offered

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(11 courses). Instructors will be drawn from our faculty, local practitioners, and faculty from other schools. The phases are sequential – Phase I must be taken before either Phase II-a or II-b.

Technical Requirements of Students

- An internet connection – broadband wired or wireless (3G or 4G/LTE)
- Speakers and a microphone – built-in or USB plug-in or wireless Bluetooth
- A webcam or HD webcam - built-in or USB plug-in
- Or, a HD cam or HD camcorder with video capture card

For CRE candidates:

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Year 1

Phase I – four courses:

Biblical Interpretation
Reformed Theology/Church History
Christian Life
Mission of the Church in the world

Year 2

Phase II-a – five courses:

Preaching the Bible
Teaching the Bible
Pastoral Care – Care of persons
Administration – Care of Systems
Worship and Sacraments

Subsequent Years for Continuing Ed

Phase II-b – two courses (different offerings each year):

Elective
Elective

And for those church members seeking a **certificate of completion**:

Year 1

Phase I – four courses:

Biblical Interpretation
Reformed Theology/Church History
Christian Life
Mission of the Church in the world

Year 2 – any two courses

Phase II-b

Elective
Elective

OR

Phase II-a

Preaching the Bible
Teaching the Bible
Pastoral Care – Care of persons
Administration – Care of Systems
Worship and Sacraments