

# Introduction

## **The Handbook**

This handbook has been developed primarily for the use of Educator Certification Advisors as they work with persons seeking to be Certified Christian Educators, Certified Associate Christian Educators or those seeking to be enrolled as Educational Assistants. A print version of these materials can be placed in a binder and kept for use when helping an educator who asks about certification or when someone is identified for whom the certification process would seem appropriate. Other helpful materials can also be added to enhance the work of educators in the Presbytery. All of this content can be found online at [www.pcusa.org/christianeducators](http://www.pcusa.org/christianeducators). This website can be a helpful source when looking for a particular form or specific information related to educator certification.

Although the Educator Certification Council has made every attempt to work out the details of the process, we recognize that there may be omissions or errors in the handbook. Further, it would surprise no one, we are sure, if changes in the process become necessary. From time to time, you may receive notifications about revisions to the handbook. The most recent version will always be available on the website.

## **Why Certification?**

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, continuing development in the field of Christian education brought about the emergence of professionally trained leaders whose focus in ministry was on the nurture and education of persons in their faith. Some were ministers in the church, but many were skilled and dedicated persons who felt a call to ministry, but not to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Over the ensuing decades, their gifts and services as "educators" in the church have enriched the lives of countless numbers of people and contributed to the formation of a rich history of professional leadership by church educators. In recognition of that history and because of the importance of Christian Education to the total ministry of the church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has sought to recognize and to enhance the ministries of persons employed as professional Christian educators by certifying them as Certified Christian Educators or Certified Associate Christian Educators, or by enrolling them as Enrolled Educational Assistants. Certification is granted at the end of an intensive process of preparation, study, service, and examination.

### **The Purpose of this process is:**

1. To set standards for the preparation and performance of professional Christian educators.
2. To acknowledge and clarify the mutual accountability between the denomination's governing bodies and the professional Christian educator.
3. To set specific achievable goals for the professional development of church-employed educators and to foster support for them as they pursue these goals.
4. To lift up the need for continuing education for Christian educators so that employing bodies may provide time and money.
5. To provide several levels of professional leadership that will assist employing bodies in defining their own needs and in determining a just salary, commensurate with the level of their need.

Ordinarily,

- **A Certified Christian Educator:** holds a master's degree in Christian education or a master of divinity degree that includes course work in Christian education
- **A Certified Associate Christian Educator:** holds a bachelor's degree
- **An Enrolled Educational Assistant:** holds no degree, but has entered the process of formal preparation for certification by successfully completing a number of basic requirements

In recognition of the fact that many qualified persons have entered the field in "nontraditional" ways, i.e., through volunteer service and part-time employment in the field, the church has made it possible for persons who do not hold a degree in Christian education to become certified. In fact, it is possible for a person who does not hold any baccalaureate degree to become certified. To do so, one must complete rigorous programs of continuing education, years of experience, and multiple-step examination processes designed to ensure that the persons who complete this "non-traditional" process are equivalent in training and skill to those who hold the traditional degrees.

Both formal and informal academic preparations are considered in the certification process. In addition, significant emphasis is placed upon competent performance, exhibited by experience. The process is designed to be a means of growth for the Educator; not only measuring the Educator's competence but also helping the Educator define needs for additional education. In all cases and at all levels, an Educator who is certified, enrolled, or otherwise engaged in the process of preparation for certification is a person who has submitted his or her professional credentials to a third party, in this case, to the Educator Certification Council through the Associate for Certification (AC) for an independent, peer review of his or her gifts for this ministry.