

The Shape of Training in the CRCA

What Churches and Leaders are Telling us

A CRCA Training Survey was conducted through the Ministry Formation website (www.ministryformation.com.au). Church leaders from across the Christian Reformed Churches in Australia (CRCA) were invited to fill out this online survey. The goal was to research what ministry training is currently being done among the CRCA churches and respective church leaders. The survey results provided additional information to the Training Workgroup as they seek to implement the objectives of Task 3: *multiply the number of well trained persons* in the CRCA. Here is a summary of the results of this survey.



Christ is not an option for churches, according to the respondents. When asked, "Does your church continually encourage all members to reach people for Christ?," everyone either responded "often" or "all the time." Another question had a more mixed response. When

asked, "Does your church encourage Christian parents to see full time Christian ministry as a marvellous opportunity for their children?" 21% indicated "not at all", while the rest said either "somewhat" (42%) or "often" (37%). No one indicated "all the time."

Spiritual Gifts

Churches value the discovery, development, and deployment of their member's spiritual gifts. Only 5% indicated that they do not encourage their members to discover their spiritual gifts. Over 63% make spiritual gift discovery a top priority. Just over 29% use the CRC North America resource, *Discover Your Gifts*, to assist their members to discover their gifts. 50% use the *Network* material (Willow Creek) while a growing number use online surveys (21%). More than 3/4 of the churches provide training so that members develop their spiritual gifts. And just about all the churches help members find ministries where they can use their spiritual gifts (95%).

CRCA Vision and Fourfold Task

The vast majority of the respondents (84%) could recall the CRCA vision statement: *"To be a church reforming to reach the lost for Christ."* Most were familiar with the fourfold task (FFT) adopted by the CRCA (74%) and were able to list each one of the four tasks. Overall the FFT is not frequently promoted within the churches, with only 26% promoting the FFT more than 5 times in the past year. The lack of promotion does not indicate a lack of passion, with 72% indicating being either passionate or very passionate about the CRCA Vision and FFT. Reaching the lost for

Discipleship

Discipleship is a core value with most churches. While 21% do not have a clearly defined discipleship pathway for their members, another 21% do. About 50% of the churches are actually working on defining what that pathway would look like.

Discipling takes a number of different shapes in the churches. The most common discipleship activity is small groups (21%) while an almost equal amount do discipling by one-to-one discipling (15%), personally mentoring (15%), and Sunday School classes (19%). Churches also engage in peer-group discipling (10%), spiritual coaching (7%), and adult education classes (8%).

A vast majority of the churches (89%) encourage their members to attend courses and conferences. Of all the courses or conferences attended by members in the past twelve months, the Reformed Theological College (RTC) Preaching Conference is the most well attended (12%). Other conferences with almost equal importance are the RTC Fan the Flame, Katoomba Convention, and the CRCA Ministry Conference (total of 30%). Most of the churches budget between \$1000-2000 so that their members can attend courses or conferences for training purposes (29%), with 18% budgeting more than \$2000. 18% of the churches also budgeted zero dollars for ongoing training.

Apprenticeships

More than half of the churches encourage their youth to use their gap year to explore ministry training or follow a Cert IV program at a Bible College (52%). Yet an almost equal number do not (37%). When asked "how many training

workers or apprentices has your church deployed in the last three years?" 32% of the churches indicated zero, while 68% reported having 1 (22%), 2 (21%), 3 (5%), 4 (5%), or 5 (16%). While Ministry Training Strategy (MTS) still retains its

popularity as a training resource for apprentices (30%), an equal amount are using Task 3 BILD material (30%). The resource *Leadership Essentials* is also used by a growing number of churches (13%) while the CRCA Resource Center is the least used (4%). Five of the churches reported that they used training resources other than the four suggested.

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Missions

The majority of churches do not encourage their full-time ministry workers to be involved in an annual mission to proclaim and introduce Jesus to the lost (57%). Of the 43% who did, they have been involved in missions such as Solomons (35%), Burma (10%), HOPE Builders (10%), and a variety of others.

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Leadership Development

Task 3 Training at RTC is a key training resource for leadership development in the CRCA. A good number of those churches who filled out

the survey indicated that their minister did attend Task 3 Training at RTC (43%) while the majority did not (55%). While there are more and more ministers taking the Task 3 training at RTC, most churches reported to have zero people receiving Task 3 training in the past two years (67%). One church reported having 5-7 people having received this training, while another church reported having 7 or more.

The training of elders occurs more frequently than the training of deacons. Most churches (75%) either provide training for their elders either annually, bi-annually, or monthly. A couple of churches reported doing this elder training fortnightly. Compare these results to the training of deacons. Half of the churches reported doing no training for their deacons. Of those who do offer training for their deacons, the most do it monthly (20%). One church reported that they offer deacon training fortnightly. The two most popular resources for elder or deacon training are *The Elders Handbook*(23%) and *The Deacons Handbook*(17%). Other most used resources are BILD/ Task 3 materials (10%), Ministry Formation Online Resources (7%) and *Leadership Essentials* (7%). Most churches (59%) do some sort of performance evaluations of their elders and deacons. It was surprising, however, to note that 41% of those reporting indicated that their elders and deacons received no performance evaluations.

Most churches strongly encourage their hired ministry workers to engage in ongoing ministry training (50%). 10% require it, another 20% report that these hired ministry workers do not

receive ongoing training, and still another 20% leave it up to their workers. The vast majority of the churches do budget so that their ministry workers can attend courses or conferences for training purposes. The most common budgeted amount is \$1000-2000. It appears that the performance evaluations of hired ministry workers was more important than the evaluation of elders and deacons. Only 29% did no evaluation at all, while 71% did. The majority (52%) did those evaluations annually.

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A lesser number of churches require that their ministers engage in ongoing ministry training (45%) compared to hired ministry workers (50%). The churches seem to leave it up to their minister when he engages in ongoing training or not (40%). The most common amount budgeted so that ministers could attend courses or conferences was between \$500 and \$1000. Most ministers undergo performance evaluations (67%) with annual evaluations done being the most common (52%). Again, it is surprising that a third of the churches reported that their minister received no performance evaluation (33%).

Training Workgroup

The survey asked for suggestions as to what the Training Workgroup should focus on in the next two years. A number of suggestions were given, including,

- Strengthening our understanding of the tasks of elders from the Pastoral Epistles
- Making Disciples
- Church Council Evaluation

- How to actually organise ministry time to do training amidst all the other responsibilities
- Raising, equipping & reproducing leaders - use RTC to help in this
- Training in Community Outreach
- Provide some guidelines for Elders to evaluate their Pastor
- Have Ministry Training Coordinator spend a weekend at our church and evaluate how we are doing as church (This should be based not on an invitation by a local church but by "I am coming to your church" to spend the weekend to see what's 'ticking' in your church)
- Help in focussing our training pathways and putting in place a better structure for identifying and developing the gifts of people
- A CRCA recommended list of training modules i.e., Spiritual gifts, elders, deacons, youth ministry, membership, discipleship, etc.
- Mobilise/amalgamate Resource Centre & RTC

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towards the larger churches who are developing their training. The data reveals a denomination that is beginning to take seriously the need for discipleship and the training of its leaders. This is encouraging. Churches are looking for assistance in defining the pathway for discipleship for their members, ministry workers, and office bearers. The Training Workgroup (TWG), in cooperation with the Resource Centre, ought to focus on assisting churches to develop an integrated discipleship pathway.

The Resource Centre and individual Classes appear to be underutilised assets in the CRCA for intentional ministry formation and training. The CRCA ought to leverage the Resource Centre and individual Classes as tools for intentional ministry formation and leadership training. While a number of churches are coming on stream with Task 3/BILD training, the TWG should, in cooperation with the RTC, multiply the number of people receiving this training. While elders are receiving more training than deacons, the TWG could assist local churches in developing training programs for all office bearers. All of this demonstrates the real need for the mandate assigned to the TWG and its sub groups, especially that of the Leadership Development team.

The survey also clearly indicated that few churches encourage their full-time ministry workers to be involved in an annual mission to proclaim and introduce Jesus to the lost. The TWG, in cooperation with the mission platforms in the CRCA and the Pastor Church Relations Committee, could assist churches and ministers in discovering opportunities for full-time ministry workers to be involved in an annual mission. All in all, this survey data will be useful for the TWG as it continues to oversee and coordinate the training conducted in our denomination.

Conclusions

The 22 respondents provide the survey with a good sample, representing about a third of the churches in the CRCA. The respondents were a good cross section of the various types of churches in our denomination with a slight bias