

Final Report
of the
Diversity Task Force

Submitted to
The APCE Coordinating Council
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Introduction

From the addition of multi-cultural representatives to its Cabinet in the mid 1990s to the formation of the Diversity Task Force in 2019, APCE has been concerned about diversity and representation. The task force has been charged with gathering information, conducting a self-study, emphasizing the importance of and encouraging learning, and promoting prayer and reflection. This work led us to propose the adoption of the following statement:

*We, the **Association of Partners in Christian Education**, value faith formation for all ages, stages, and walks of life. As we continue to learn and grow as baptized people, we acknowledge a lack of diversity in our organization. As followers of Jesus Christ, we admit we fall short in acting upon what we hear, not listening to all voices at the table. We acknowledge that our actions, both implicit and explicit, have stifled these voices long silenced. Jesus calls us to inclusiveness, which we seek to embody as we wrestle with how to achieve diversity, equity, and justice.*

- *We define **diversity** as creating and preserving a place at the table for all of God's children regardless of color and its racialization, gender and/or sexual identity, ability, denomination, economic circumstance, culture, nationality, or other barriers to participation.*
- *We define **equity** as the good fruits of God's intention, striving to bring special attention to those who have traditionally been treated unequally and unjustly.*
- *We define **justice** as giving support and comfort to the "least of these" – the outsiders, the powerless, and the voiceless.*

The eight members of the task force are from four of APCE's partner denominations; they are men and women, of many colors and ethnic origins, represent a wide range of ages, gifts and abilities.

As our work comes to a close we offer our observations about the culture, structure, and practices of the organization. We also share our reflections on what we have learned and experienced and offer our recommendations on how APCE can, indeed should, continue the work of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice. Our recommendations are rooted in our conviction that God is calling us as individuals and as an organization to embody God's love for all people.

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:8 (NRSV)

Executive Summary

In recent years APCE has taken steps to become a more diverse, equitable, inclusive and just organization. After the establishment of the Diversity Task Force and at its urging, the organization adopted a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ) Statement. Living into the statement has been difficult, because to do so is to constantly be swimming against the current of the white supremacy, exclusivity, and patriarchy so deeply rooted in North American society. Following its mandate to observe APCE's culture, examine its practices, evaluate its structure, and listen to its leaders and members, the task force has discerned that living fully into the intentions so clearly laid out in the statement will require an intentional long-term effort and commitment to the hard work required.

In carrying out its work, the task force has observed that APCE's culture is insular in nature and avoids engagement with new voices and communities, is focused more on programming than on building relationships, and can be receptive to new ideas, but not to their implementation. In practice APCE centers the affluent, educated, employed, white, cis-gendered, and straight, honors productivity at

the expense of reflection and rest, and relies on people of color and other marginalized communities to take the lead and be the spokespeople for issues of diversity, equity, inclusion and justice. APCE's structure reinforces the concentration of power, which can lead to hoarding while also limiting conversation and neglecting to provide opportunities for deeper engagement and relationship building. In listening to leaders and members we sense an openness to new ideas and a willingness to do the work of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice, but a lack of understanding of the depth and breadth of the work and the time and effort required to do it well. Overall APCE serves its present constituency well, but lacks the imagination to envision how it might welcome, serve, and learn from those who are not yet here.

The members of the task force believe that APCE must acknowledge and confess its complicity in systems of exclusivity, exclusion, oppression, and injustice before it can make recommendations or attempt reconciliation, and articulate a vision for its diversity, equity, inclusion and justice work lifting up the future it wants to see.

We recommend that APCE form a permanent Diversity Equity Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ) entity to hold the organization accountable to its articulated vision of being a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and just organization, fund DEIJ efforts from its annual budget and also empower the DEIJ entity to seek grants and/or outside funding for its work, require DEIJ training for all new Leadership Council members and ongoing training for all continuing Leadership Council members, practice Sabbath, invest in communities of color and other oppressed communities, and make space for and genuinely welcome those who are not yet here.

Longtime APCE Leader Michael Edwards writes: "As Christian Educators, we are always reminded that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is for everyone. Therefore, events such as APCE's core gathering or other educational opportunities should not intentionally or unintentionally exclude anyone from hearing the Good News of God's Love and developing new and better ways of sharing God's Love with everyone." As members of Christ's Church called to create disciples through Christian Formation, it is the Diversity Task Force's prayerful hope that APCE will consider and act to live out this Gospel Call in innovative and intentional ways to the glory of God.

Observations

In the 3.5 years of its existence the Diversity Task Force has interacted with APCE leaders and members at all levels of involvement. Those interactions have been in person, over Zoom, via email and other electronic media. The Task Force has experienced first-hand the structure, practices, traditions, and the default settings and assumptions that govern the organization's decision-making and determine its priorities. These interactions and experiences have led to the following observations.

Regarding the Culture

APCE's culture...

- is distinct and venerated, insular in nature and avoids engagement with new voices and communities.
- is rigid, inward-focused, rewards efficiency, and is resistant to change.
- is focused more on programmatic outcomes than on building relationships.
- honors productivity at the expense of reflection and rest.
- defaults to one-size-fits-all solutions and the way it has always done things, particularly in planning and producing the Annual Event.
- provides an inadequate range of programming, both in content and how and where it is presented.

- can be receptive to new ideas, but not to their implementation.
- welcomes performative but not substantive change.
- struggles to recognize or even to imagine how to make space for those who are not already here.
- relies on people of color and other marginalized communities to take the lead and be the spokespeople for issues of diversity, equity, inclusion and justice (DEIJ),
- acknowledges the need to do the work of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice, but does not recognize the depth and breadth of DEIJ work and the time and effort required to do it well.
- has been formed by the cultures, practices, structures, and attitudes of its denominational partners.
- lacks sufficient institutional memory due to rotating leadership.

APCE Reaches:

APCE membership consists of...

- those who can afford membership fees and Annual Event registration, travel, and lodging.
- educated, cisgender, straight, urban, and suburban residents from well-funded congregations or middle-governing bodies.
- ordained clergy or professional church educators.
- seminary students who are encouraged and supported by professors/staff.
- people who have a clear, direct connection or relationship with their APCE-connected denominational and/or middle governing body.
- those who resonate with its mission, message, and programming.
- those who are comfortable with Annual Event locations and themes.
- those who look like we do.

APCE Is Not Reaching

APCE's membership does not include

- those who do not resonate with our mission, message, and programming.
- those whose needs we are not addressing.
- those who do not look like we look.
- those who find the Annual Event locations painful or triggering.
- the unfunded and/or underfunded.
- persons who are not connected to their denominational or middle governing bodies or other places of regional or local connection.
- those disconnected from our online presence.
- persons who know who we are and have experienced our gatherings or programs, but have been ignored, unseen, unwelcomed, hurt, and/or offended.

Regarding Its Stated Intentions

APCE is meeting its intentions as stated in the ***Diversity Equity and Justice Statement*** by...

- featuring a wider range of voices in Annual Event leadership both on stage and in workshops.
- including a justice component and providing places to engage with and discuss diversity, equity, and justice issues at recent Annual Events.
- offering diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) educational opportunities to APCE leaders and members.
- becoming a safe place for conversations with colleagues, encouraging networking and fostering relationships that go beyond the Annual Event.

- providing space and opportunities, both in person and virtually, to be engaged in equity education.
- equipping a core team in awareness of white supremacy culture and becoming more diverse, equitable, inclusive and just through workshops, webinars, and cohorts.

APCE Has Fallen Short in meeting its stated intentions by...

- hoarding power and protecting the status quo.
- giving lip service to being inclusive, but not actively recruiting and welcoming new voices to the table.
- lacking trust that new and little known colleagues are capable of sharing the load.
- fearing the new, the innovative, change.
- being performative: setting a short range goal, then declaring ourselves done.
- engaging in tokenism, especially at the Annual Event.
- limiting conversation and neglecting to provide opportunities for deeper engagement and building relationships in response to keynote addresses and sermons.
- not recognizing the depth and breadth of diversity, equity, inclusion and justice work and the time and effort required to do it well.
- functioning with a scarcity rather than an abundance mindset.
- doing too much, spreading ourselves too thin, expecting more than individuals, churches, and denominations have the capacity to give.
- not living into its new name, **Association of PARTNERS in Christian Education**, as it is still dominated by PCUSA voices and priorities.

Discernment

Our observations have called us into a process of discernment. Upon careful reflection we are convinced of the following. APCE must...

- acknowledge and confess its complicity in systems of exclusivity, exclusion, oppression, and injustice before it can make recommendations or attempt remediation/reconciliation.
- articulate a vision for its diversity, equity, inclusion and justice (DEIJ) work, lifting up the future it wants to see.
- dare to ask who's not here and what we have to learn from them.
- think deeply about and make a commitment to live into diversity.
- recognize that we are a organization, blessed with **abundant** capital - most especially **gifted** people.
- recognize that we will be wealthier when we welcome, include, listen to, learn from, and implement the ideas and priorities of those who are not yet here.
- realize we are a work in progress, that we need to live into our vision, that this is not the end, it is the BEGINNING.

Recommendations: The Way Forward

In light of all we have observed and experienced, it is clear that APCE has a long way to go in living into its stated commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice, therefore, we respectfully recommend that APCE...

- form a permanent Diversity Equity Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ) entity to hold the organization accountable to its articulated vision of being a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and just organization. This entity...
 - will be comprised of individuals trained in DEIJ values, who are committed to continue learning about how to live into those values.
 - will monitor all levels of the organization's progress in working towards becoming more diverse, equitable, inclusive and just and gently warn where we are falling short and celebrate where we are making progress.
 - will have no term limits.
 - will have representation on the Coordinating Council or its successors with voice and vote.
- establish an ongoing study group to develop expertise on anti-racism/DEIJ issues.
 - this group will be open to all who are interested and
 - will provide people to act as the conscience of the organization regarding the commitment to DEIJ.
- fund DEIJ efforts from its annual budget and also empower the DEIJ entity to seek grants and /or outside funding for its work.
- engage in a transparent budgeting process.
- move from being an either/or to becoming a both/and organization.
- require DEIJ training for all new Leadership Council members and ongoing training for all continuing Leadership Council members.
- include the question "are you committed to DEIJ work?" on all Ministry Team applications.
- curate and encourage use of anti-oppression resources, cohort groups, classes, and trainings. commit to developing new ways to educate educators on anti-racism and DEIJ efforts.
- become less hierarchical and more organic.
- intentionally and systematically engage with the *White Supremacy Culture Values* document to aid Ministry Teams in thinking deeply about how these values invade their work and how APCE embodies these values. This work is to be completed in 2023.
- assess annually where APCE resides on the *Continuum: On Becoming an Antiracist Multicultural Institution*.
- invest in communities of color and other oppressed communities. Make space for and genuinely welcome those who are not yet here.
- provide ongoing training/education to members, so people who come on to the Leadership Council are already on board.
- practice Sabbath. Step away from the busyness. Make time to discern who God is calling us to be. Stop doing - so we can listen, learn, be in relationship with one another, and cultivate relationships with those who are not yet here.

Conclusions: Hope for the Future

In our three years together the members of the Diversity Task Force have identified much in APCE's culture, structure and practice that inhibits our becoming the diverse, equitable, Inclusive, and just organization we have proclaimed ourselves to be. The good news is we have also found many colleagues who are up to the challenge of becoming all that we say we want to be.

We all want to believe that we are "good people" and we are – good people who have been acculturated into systems that privilege some and oppress others. Opening our eyes and our hearts to and confronting this truth enables us to acknowledge where and how we have fallen short and empowers us for the hard work of becoming the people and the organization God calls us to be.

Scripture teaches us that Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ) are at the core of our faith. We are all guilty of being most comfortable with people who think, speak, act, and look like we do. We

might even be tempted to throw our hands up in the air and say, "APCE is so far from being diverse, there's nothing we can do!" However, if we commit ourselves to be the change we want to see, we can and we will. It is that simple and that hard.

Nothing APCE does should intentionally or unintentionally exclude anyone from hearing the Good News of God's love and learning new and better ways of sharing that love with the church and the world. In Revelation 7:9-10 we are reminded of the beautiful, redeemed people of God gathered around the throne of God in worship and praise. These redeemed people are described as a "great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb." (NRSV) If this is what APCE will be in eternity, surely we can strive to be an earthly example here and now.

The recommendations offered in this report are rooted in our conviction that God is calling us as individuals and as an organization to embody God's love for all people. APCE's mission to "*connect, enrich, empower, and sustain all persons serving in educational ministries in the Reformed family of churches*" can point the way. When we....

... CONNECT we bring new people into the conversation via mentoring, training, and coaching, embedding DEIJ content in our professional development offerings, and providing resources that build a Kin-dom of God mindset.

... EMPOWER we seek out and respect one another's stories and experiences allowing this diversity of knowledge and knowing to strengthen the ways we support faith formation in Christ's Church.

... ENRICH we bring scriptural values into all of our deliberations and decisions, build up relationships and networks, and deepen our commitment to hasten the Kin-dom of God.

... SUSTAIN we interrogate whether we are continuing to make progress in living into our stated values and intentions, if we are allowing what we are learning to change us, if we are sharing power and welcoming all God's beloved children into full participation, and whether our mission, structure, policies and practices reflect the Kin-dom of God.

We are convinced that if we cultivate practices and create structures that hold us accountable, we can be individuals and an organization that embodies God's love for all people.

With God's help we can and we will.

Respectfully Submitted:

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