

**STATEMENT OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION
OF THE ASSOCIATE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
AS ADOPTED BY THE GENERAL SYNOD
June 2018**

Introduction

Christian higher education for the service of God in church and society finds its roots in Biblical revelation. **Since 1837**, Christian higher education has been an integral part of the mission of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. Truly, the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, through its institutions of Christian higher education, has a history of distinguished **Christian** service. The value of its mission is immeasurable, for this mission has been an influence for good in the lives of thousands of men and women who have attended Erskine College, Erskine Theological Seminary, or Bryson College. Through many of these men and women, the Church itself has been blessed with strong Christian leadership and dedicated service.

The General Synod believes that there is a continuing need for the **Associate Reformed Presbyterian** Church to express its objectives, to reaffirm its purpose, and to restate its philosophy of Christian higher education, including goals and purposes of Erskine **College and Seminary**.

In the following statement, the General Synod desires to preserve and incorporate all of the redeeming elements of the Church's philosophy that have prevailed at the College and Seminary from their beginning. In this statement the terms "Erskine" and "Erskine College" refer to both the undergraduate school and the Seminary, unless the context indicates otherwise.

I. The Role of the Church in Christian Higher Education

The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church should re-examine on a continuing basis its total program in the use of its resources and in all areas of its mission. To this end the Church should ask itself continually what it is doing and what it ought to be doing in the field of education. It is clear that every Christian denomination should involve itself deeply in Christian education. A parallel question which every Christian denomination should ask is whether it also should be involved in the field of higher education and, if so, at what level and in what way.

We believe in the importance of education, and we believe that education represents a vital part of the mission of the Church. Furthermore, we believe that our denomination has a definite role to play in Christian higher education,

We believe this is so because **Christian higher education** offers the Church a unique opportunity to present Christ **as the Christian's summum bonum, or "highest good."** It is the **Christian worldview, summarized in the biblical narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation, which teaches love for God and for our neighbors as ourselves, and enables young men and women to discover** the value of a life which is lived in right relation to God and man. We believe that only such a life can realize its fullest potential **in service to God, the Church, and the world.**

We believe that the Church has a responsibility not only to initiate the organizational structure for **Christian higher education**, but also to nurture **Erskine College and Erskine Theological Seminary** and to provide theological and philosophical guidance to it.

II. The Biblical Basis for Christian Higher Education

The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church believes: **The Bible alone, being God-breathed, is the Word of God written, infallible in all that it teaches, and inerrant in the original manuscripts.** The Bible reveals God as the source of all truth. Reverence for Him and commitment to Him is the beginning **and essence** of wisdom. Jesus Christ, God's Son, **and the Holy Spirit** came to reveal this truth—truth which has the power to set people free from the bondage of sin. The Holy Spirit comes to make the truth of God's love in Christ real in

our hearts. Therefore, for education to merit the term "Christian," it must be based on belief in God, the Source of truth; be centered in Jesus Christ, the Revealer of truth; and be guided by the Holy Spirit, the Inspirer of truth.

Taking their perspective from the Biblical view of God, man and the world, as expressed in *The Standards of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church* (See Footnote 1), **Erskine College and Erskine Theological Seminary** have a responsibility to stress Christian doctrine as well as Christian ethics; Christian commitment as well as academic excellence. Our calling in Christian higher education is to create an environment that **nurtures the academic community in and by the truth** of God's redemptive love **in Christ** and **to** equip its members for lives of useful service, whether in the full-time ministries of the Church, or in some other worthy calling.

III. Implementation

The carrying out of such a philosophy necessitates careful planning by Erskine College and Erskine Theological Seminary in several areas in accordance with *The Standards of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church* (See Footnote 2) and under the guidance of the principles of this statement. Full development will be achieved as the task is approached with a sense of mission by everyone within the Erskine community.

- a. **The Trustees of Erskine College.** The Board of Trustees of Erskine College is the authority of the **Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church** at Erskine. Representing the Church's presence in its work of Christian higher education, the Trustees are an integral part of the college community. For service in such positions of responsibility, it is incumbent upon the General Synod to select individuals who have a perception of the Church and its work that coincides with that of the Synod and who are kept informed of the Church's policies and purposes. A Trustee is a servant of Christ and His Church in one of the greatest and most sacred endeavors. In this task the Church needs Godly men and women of knowledge, wisdom, and dedication to this work.
- b. **The Administration.** In discharging its responsibility, the Board of Trustees should recognize that the administrators of the College **serve as** stewards for the Church. **They also have additional responsibilities for** meeting the demands of academic standards and accreditation, **building a strong faculty,** and **presenting** a program of studies which attracts students. Executive planning of this complexity requires **deep Christian commitment,** great professional skill, and **committed** dedication. It is imperative first, that the College have in these positions—as president, administrative and academic officers—individuals who have a deep personal commitment to Jesus Christ, **informed and directed by the Holy Spirit through a Reformed theology and the Westminster Confession of Faith,** and are **highly qualified** both in terms of their preparation **for their vocations** and **faithfulness** to the Board of Trustees and to the Church. These officers are charged with continuing commitment to the larger view of the College as a community of Christian scholars. Second, there must be kept open channels of regular communication between the Board of Trustees and the Synod in order **to insure** the most effective implementation of **its educational commitments and goals.**
- c. **The Faculty.** The Board of Trustees, through the Administration, must seek faculty members having **first, a genuine and vibrant relationship with Jesus Christ,** academic **expertise,** and moral **integrity.** Faculty members **should** believe in the **centrality and** enduring relevance of the **Christian faith,** **demonstrate a profound interest in and commitment to faith-learning integration informed by the Reformed theological tradition as expressed in *The Standards of the ARP Church,*** and **facilitate classroom and co-curricular learning that sets it apart from what is found in secular settings.** The instructional focus should be **on the pursuit of excellence in the various academic disciplines, critical thinking,** insight and comprehension, and should **encourage** flexible and innovative approaches to teaching. **Most importantly, faculty members ought to create a classroom experience focused on faith-learning integration.** Freedom of inquiry **guided by** faculty members committed to **the Christian and academic goals of the College should be encouraged.**

- d. The Student.** The student attending Erskine College becomes part of a meaningful tradition of Christian leadership **and** education for a life of service and witness. At a Christian college, the uniqueness of each individual is a basic premise, but our human dependence on Jesus Christ as **the revealed Word of God and Savior of the World is of paramount importance.** From these truths it follows that both the individuals comprising the student body and the ethos of a college campus **that** is truly Christian should manifest qualities **distinct** from the secular norm. At Erskine College, students are privileged to belong to a community of genuine concern and conviction, which it is their responsibility to foster and to maintain as they relate its values to the **world around them.** Under the supervision of the Board of Trustees, the administration, and the faculty, the student is expected to cooperate in creating and maintaining an environment that will honor God, promote the Christian goals of the Church and support the moral standards of the College. In the educational process, the student is expected to study and evaluate all knowledge objectively, **while** seeking God's guidance in **biblical** matters of faith, vocational calling and educational preparation.
- e. The Curriculum.** The curriculum for Erskine College at the undergraduate level should **focus on the liberal arts,** with the **Reformed theological narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation** as **the unifying framework** for all of the disciplines. Emphasis should be placed on the arts, sciences, vocations, and our cultural heritage. **Substantial and pervasive** emphasis should be placed on the study of **the Bible, Christian ethics, and Christian apologetics** as requirements for graduation. Along with providing strong majors in different fields, the curriculum should address the development of the whole student. An exposure to specialized areas of social and community service is an appropriate part of the total educational experience. Erskine Theological Seminary, being the professional school of Erskine College, **prepares** students for gospel ministry **and** has a special mission in Christian higher education. Its curriculum must be in harmony with *The Standards of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church,* and designed so that its graduates will be fully prepared to be effective ministers of the Word **in a rapidly changing world.**

IV. Interrelationship of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church and Erskine College

Erskine College represents the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church in higher education. The relationship between the College and the Church is organic; that is, Erskine College is related to the General Synod of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church as the arm of the Church in Christian higher education in carrying out the Biblical mandate to redeem all of life, especially man's moral and intellectual life, under the authority and Lordship of Jesus Christ.

- a. Responsibility of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church to Erskine College.** Inasmuch as Erskine College is a church-owned Christian institution, the Church has ultimate responsibility for the administrative, academic, and moral **integrity** of the College. This responsibility is established and maintained through the Board of Trustees. The Trustees oversee the total administration of the College as a trust of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.

The Church also has a responsibility to support the College financially and to render encouragement and affirmation to the College as it implements the goals and purposes of the Church.

- b. Responsibility of Erskine College to the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.** In order for the goals and purposes of Christian higher education to be realized, Erskine College, through its Board of Trustees, administration, and faculty, must **embrace those** principles and goals **of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.** Within the context of **Christian higher education,** the College has **the** responsibility to **pursue** its theological **positions as a servant** of the Church.

This interrelationship should result in an academic community and educational experience that shapes students, both inside and outside of the classroom. All Erskine sponsored activity, whether curricular, co-curricular or extra-curricular in nature, should contribute positively toward the goals, purposes and standards of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.

V. Erskine's Purpose

The purpose of Erskine College should be to provide sound training in a campus environment where evangelical Christian influence is supreme and pervasive. The role of the church-sponsored **institution** is the distinctive one of **pursuing the integration of Christian faith and learning and responsible citizenship.**

At the same time, **Erskine College, seeking to present the claims of Christ to its students,** should **foster** creative individualism **by providing** intellectual stimulation and by **encouraging** open dialogue. **As a** basic premise, the goals of education **should be** to open the mind and the heart to **God's** truth, to teach one to think Biblically and objectively, and to give direction to daily life. "In Thy light shall we see light." (**Psalm 36:9b.**)

As an arm of the Church, Erskine College exists **for the glory of God, the good of the church and society, and for the education and flourishing of its students.** Their interests must be **valued** and their individual and collective needs a matter of continuing concern. Erskine's goal must be to afford them the opportunity and encouragement to integrate knowledge and **Christian faith** in the development of the highest and best use of their abilities A primary objective of the College should be to guide the student into the development of a mature **Christian** faith that is staunchly resistant to the impersonality and relativism of our time. Erskine's ultimate objective for every student must be the gaining of an understanding of the truth that "man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." (**Shorter Catechism Q/A #1**)

Footnotes:

1. See especially the *Confession of Faith, The Larger Catechism,* and the *Shorter Catechism*
2. *Form of Government,* Chapter XIV, A.4: "Any newly appointed employee of any board, as administrator or teacher, shall give satisfactory evidence of his belief in and adherence to the basic doctrines of evangelical Christianity." See also *Manual of Authorities and Duties,* "Boards," for definition of evangelical.