



In response to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights report for the March 2015 session of the Human Rights Council on the theme, "Towards a better investment in the rights of the child". The Presbyterian Church (USA) submits the following information on the main challenges related to the mobilization, allocation and spending of resources for children.

For 177 years, the Presbyterian Church (USA) has served as one of the greatest forces for education in the world, helping hundreds of thousands of children to learn to read and write, to think critically, and to understand their work as their Christian vocation. Our church's core belief that every child is created in the image of God motivated our early mission workers to reach out to new communities with the offer of a quality education. In hundreds of communities, Presbyterians were the first to open up opportunities for formal education for girls. Fatma Hamza said, "Ramses College opened its doors for Egyptian girls in 1908 and broadened their hopes of further education at a time when public education was only the privilege of boys. Therefore the college has always been keen on developing its curricula and activities, not only to meet the educational needs of its students, but also to prepare them for a life ahead so that they may become active and productive citizens of the community in which they live."

The Presbyterian Church has a deep rich commitment to providing access to education as a part of its core Missional identity. Our church is a church of educators, school administrators, parent teacher association members, school board members, and school volunteers; we believe God is calling our church to collectively impact the quality of education for children in this country and around the world.

The World Bank and other international organizations have shown that primary education for young children reduces poverty, improves health, and improves the distribution of income. Globally, the Millennium Development Goals have helped many communities in the Global South to bring previously uneducated children into the classroom. However, the sad reality is that in South Sudan, Guatemala, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Bangladesh, and many other countries, the combination of overcrowded classrooms, poorly trained teachers, and inadequate infrastructure prevent students from receiving the quality education they need.

Education is a hallmark of the Reformed tradition. From John Calvin's Geneva to John Knox's dictum of "a school in every parish" of Scotland to America and all parts

of the world, education has been and continues to be a central feature of Presbyterian/ Reformed ministry.”¹

Free public education for all was instituted in Geneva as part of the overall reformation of society that was to accompany the reformation of the church. The spread of the Reformed tradition was influenced by the capacity of the church to produce educated ministers and members; the creation of many colleges and universities followed the growth of literacy at more primary levels, and with education came advances in many fields.

The Presbyterian Church’s Congo mission network reports, “the 7,011 teachers in the 979 Presbyterian Primary and Secondary Schools of the Democratic Republic of the Congo have dedicated themselves to teaching some of the poorest children in the world. There are more than 245,000 children enrolled in these schools. The government pays the teachers only \$45 to \$60 a month to teach 50 - 100 students in two shifts each day. The teachers have few teaching resources for either themselves or their students. Most teachers have only a high school diploma but are eager for additional education. They want to be the best teachers they can, and develop capable students. They need our support.”²

Duncan Ferguson published on Presbyterian beliefs around education, saying, “Presbyterian/Reformed Christians take educational mission seriously. We value informational education, learning about the world and how it functions. We value vocational education, developing God-given talents in order to fulfill the vocation to which we have been called. And fundamentally we value transformational education, as the Brief Statement of Faith says: ‘The Spirit gives us courage . . . to witness to Christ as Lord and Savior, to unmask idolatries in church and culture, to hear the voices of people long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.’”³

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) has consistently called the church and Presbyterians to support public education. In 1987, the assembly adopted *A Call to Church Involvement in the Renewal of Public Education* calling Presbyterians

- To join others in their communities- to provide public schools that will secure for all children an education that develops their capacities to serve as creative and responsible person in the common life and
- To mobilize the resources available in each community- home, church, community organization (both public and private) that will support public

¹ <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/today/education/>

² Congo Mission Network, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

³ Presbyterian Mission Agency,

<http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/today/education/>

schools and share in achieving the necessary education of children and youth.

In 1992, the Presbyterian Church (USA) General Assembly reaffirmed its commitment to public education for all, not just for an elite few and its “vigorous support of, and commitment to, the American system of public education available to all children.” Three years later the assembly underscored our historic commitment as articulated in *A Call to Church Involvement in the Renewal of Public Education*, reaffirming “the church’s position to support a public education of high quality for all children.”

The Presbyterian Church (USA) dedicated the year 1998 as “The Year of Emphasis on Education,” and called for a broad range of initiatives and actions related to several forms of education, including public education.

In 2004 and 2008, the Presbyterian Church (USA) General Assembly again took action in support of high quality public education, including confronting disparities based on economic realities and race.

Most recently, the 221st General Assembly (2014) of the Presbyterian Church (USA) acted to:

- Acknowledge and celebrate the deep and rich history of Presbyterian Church’s role in transforming society by providing access to quality education for children in this country and around the world.
- Recommit itself to education as a core focus of mission in this nation and with our global partners.
- Launch a church-wide initiative that will inspire, equip, and connect our congregations, church governing councils, and the Presbyterian Mission Agency to improve the quality of education for 1,000,000 children in the U.S. and globally over the next four years.
- Encourage and support global partners and leaders here in the United States who have made a vocational commitment to provide a quality education to children in their communities.
- In all of these efforts, place particular emphasis on children in poverty or otherwise at risk.
- Direct the Presbyterian Mission Agency to shape and guide this initiative, developing tangible metrics to determine success and impact, and to report back to the 222nd General Assembly (2016), sharing progress made and identifying strategies for deeper engagement in 2016-2018.
- Urge those developing this initiative and its metrics to build upon values, traditions, and analysis embodied in previous [Presbyterian Church (USA)] General Assembly policy on public education and the impacts of poverty, and to consider ways this initiative continues the work of child advocacy approved by previous assemblies.

The assembly affirmed that all the plans and actions of the church related to education will uphold Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 29, paragraph 1, with respect to the right to education. This will be in keeping with the foundational rights as expressed in Articles 2, 3(1), 6 & 12.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) and its predecessor denominations have been at the forefront of advocating for high-quality, free, public education for children around the world. Our work continues to support this history and the Presbyterian Church (USA) encourages all governments to continue to make efforts to improving public education and in so doing, help to break down cycles of poverty that persist in the global north and the global south.

The Presbyterian Mission Agency's Mission Work Plan identifies "addressing the root causes of poverty, particularly as they impact women and children" as a priority focus of its work. The intersection of this critical need for children around the world today and our church's commitment to education constitutes a clear calling to challenge the church to engage in mission together.

This initiative will support Presbyterian Church (USA) global partners and leaders in education in the United States as they address persistent poverty through critical investments in quality education of young children. The goal is to educate one million children in the next four years by inspiring, equipping, and connecting hundreds of congregations and church governing councils to focus a portion of their mission efforts in support of the following activities:

- Train teachers, develop curricula, and help partners adopt "best practices" in education;
- Help global partners build or refurbish school buildings;
- Financially support mission co-workers working in education and specific education projects;
- Advocate for better funding in public education in the U.S., particularly for children at risk;
- Pray for educators, students and administrators, as well as this education initiative;
- Participate in "Adopt a School" programs, and other programs supporting local schools with a focus on children at risk; and,
- Open the doors of the church during the week to offer afterschool programs that include tutoring, mentoring, and other enrichment opportunities.

Working together with our global partners, church governing councils, congregations, and other leaders in education, the Presbyterian Church (USA) will continue to transform the world, one child, one educator, one school at a time, collectively impacting more than one million children over the next four years. The Presbyterian Church calls on the international community to join our work for universal education.