Christian education and discipleship

The Assembly of God Executive Presbytery unanimously selected Deborah M. Gill as the national director of the Division of Christian Education and commissioner for the Commission on Discipleship. An ordained Assembly of God minister, Gill has served as senior pastor of Living Hope (A/G) in North Oaks, Minn., for the past four years. She has taught as a professor for 20 years in New Testament, Greek, homiletics and music. She previously served in missions, teaching at Asia Pacific Theological Seminary. Gill spoke recently with Scott Harrup, associate editor.

EVANGEL: Your office encourages churches to pursue excellence in Christian education and discipleship. What is the connection?

GILL: Christian education deals with acquisition of information; discipleship deals with character transformation. Sunday school is in about 94 percent of A/G churches. Many have excellent programs, but it's imperative that we breathe new life and energy into it wherever possible and encourage fresh delivery systems that meet today's discipleship needs.

Building on the content of the classroom, discipleship applies those lessons in the context of relationships, small groups, cells or one-on-one.

EVANGEL: What role can our colleges and universities take in Christian education?

GILL: Professors at our assemblies of God colleges and universities are a treasure trove of educational resources. Many of these instructors are involved not only with their full-time ministry on campus, but serve in their local churches as well. Older believers have a lot to learn from the young disciples in our Masters Commissions and in Chi Alpha groups on secular campuses. I would love to respond to the deep desire for meaningful mentoring relationships expressed by the 15,000 students studying in our colleges.

EVANGEL: How can the traditional Sunday school adapt to meet Christian education needs in the 21st century?

GILL: Sunday school teachers need to be effective and engaging. We need teachers who prepare, and then present great content — but they've also got to be good group facilitators. The best Bible studies offer students opportunities to make biblical application to their own lives. I'd also like to bring to greater visibility in the Fellowship the role of models and mentors. A movement of discipleship will never happen until we have a groundswell of dedicated disciples determined to invest themselves intentionally in a lifelong lifestyle. I pray that the Commission on Discipleship will be a hub on the wheel, networking to respond to the needs of our Fellowship. Not only may we be known for collecting and developing resources on discipleship, but even more may each of its members model personally a lifestyle that reproduces and reproduces friends and followers of Jesus Christ.