

Given a task to reflect on training and educational formation for ministry for service with Christ's church, our group of theological reflectors in the Re-forming ministry faculty initiative, have come together three different times, twice in Davidson, NC, on the campus of Davidson College; and once in Decatur, GA, on the campus of Columbia Seminary. We seem to have been charged with the task of reflecting theologically about the nature of Christ's church and a life of service within it, particularly with a focus upon the training or education for a life lived out in the vocation of pastoral ministry.

In the gospel of Matthew, in the midst of post-resurrection doubt and worship, the sending words of our Savior were, "All authority in heaven and in earth has been given to me. Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

These words of Christ, chosen by the leadership of Columbia Seminary, opened our graduation service. After three short years of study for a Masters of Divinity degree, we were sent to be preaching and teaching elders, or leaders, in the church of Jesus Christ. Despite the distractions of graduation celebrations, saying good-bye to faculty, administration and fellow students, a permeable sense of doubt existed even in the midst of celebratory worship.

However, for me, wrapped up in the midst of the doubt and the celebration, the Lord's questions to Hagar in the wilderness fell fresh on my ears, 'Where have you come from and where are you going?' I came to seminary from a life of service in the context of Christ's one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, discerning a call 'to learn the Bible better' not necessarily discerning a call to ministry of Word and Sacrament. I actually traveled through childhood, adolescence and early adulthood, as a baptized and confirmed member of Christ's church without using my Bible for much more than a coaster beside my bed.

It was in the context of the community of higher theological education at Columbia Theological Seminary where I processed copious amounts of information and participated fully in that community that my calling to ministry of Word and Sacrament unfolded. Open to God's Spirit my call emerged in both the academic work with intense information processing and in formation within the seminary community.

After graduation, in the fellowship hall of Peachtree Presbyterian Church, I wanted to trust in the wilderness of a vocational frontier and that angels would be waiting when I surfaced out of the institution of higher learning. I wanted to believe that I was going where God was sending me to both earn a Ph.D. in Education *and* pastor a small Alabama church, to further the educational ministry of Christ's church in the PC(USA).

I recognize now, only upon reflection, that my identity transformed significantly during my three-year period of intense study especially because of the intentional community and intimacy that existed in the learning environment.

Called into the faculty initiative of the Re-forming Ministry Group of the PC(USA) I'm compelled to suggest that our group, working with a well defined ecclesiology, might offer a word back to faculty regarding instructional practice and theory especially those that shape community and make room for intimacy. When it came time to share our thoughts with our Re-F group, my thoughts were brooding out of study in developmental and educational psychology and I felt like I was speaking a

foreign language, though it was just knowledge and vocabulary from a different academic discipline.

Our group includes pastors, middle governing body leaders and faculty members from colleges, universities and theological higher educational institutions. Few of us have formal training in Education. Vacant from our discussions are the practicalities in Education such as instructional theory and design; aspects of information processing; learning theory; learning environments or contexts. My curiosity wonders if forming pastors for a life of service as teaching and preaching elders would be enhanced with some cross discipline instruction between Education and Theological Education.

Personal experiences of being held accountable to high academic expectations in seminary while gathering and processing information; and the awakening to an intimacy revealed through a theological lens, formed through the intentional community of the Columbia was critical to my education as a pastor. Certain aspects of social learning theory made their way into the curriculum at Columbia Seminary and those classes have emerged as the most influential in my work in ordained ministry. With that intuition, and knowledge about how these educational experiences transformed my preparation for ministry, I claim there is an urgency surrounding recovery of the teaching office of the church.

As a graduate I was sent with Christ's sending from the gospel of Matthew – after a few five years in ordained leadership, the part of leadership with which I continue to wrestle is the teaching part. The 'teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded' component haunts my memory as I lie down and when I rise up. These words of teaching toward Christ-like obedience push at the boundaries of my understanding of service with Christ, of the practical aspects of being a servant of God's mysteries, of traveling along the pastoral way - for the sake of God's good world.

Edward Farley, a theologian, in *Practicing Gospel*, reflects on the narrowing of theology from a *habitus*, or wisdom that attends to a life of faith, to a distant practice reserved for a few and well studied elite academicians. Borne of this narrowing of theology is the disconnection that I encounter as a pastor living and serving in the church wrestling with what it means to teach Christ-like obedience. Recovery of theology as a *habitus* – as an on-going interpretive task, a task that I sense could be aided with an intentional focus on instructional theory, especially social learning theories of instruction.

My family of origin would quickly reveal that I am a child of educators. I know the value of an education, the necessity for continuing education and the deep calling of educators who seek in their vocation the common good of all creation. I am also a child of the Presbyterian Church, USA; baptized in the Northern strand in Pittsburgh, PA, at Pleasant Hills Community Church; confirmed in the Southern strand in Memphis, TN, at Balmoral Church. If anything, I know with deep confidence the strength of God's gathered people in community.

However, as a pastor, called and ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament, as a teaching and preaching elder, I continue to wrestle with what it means practically to teach Christ-like obedience in the church. What does it mean to obey in Christ-like ways? What does it mean to remember that Christ is with us always, until the end of the world, as we know it? What does this teaching and learning look like in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church of Jesus Christ?

I know that Christ-like obedience does not look like an exhausted, angry pastor who walks out in the middle of worship muttering, 'I quit.' It does not look like a lonely, dissatisfied pastor who turns to addiction to numb the pain of not living genuinely into a God given call as a prophet. It does not look like a sick pastor who says, "I can't do it anymore. But situations like these happen regularly in ministry – as a COM Moderator, I received the phone calls, all too often.

I'm learning early in ministry that many pastors live weeks at a time without opening a bible, except for sermon preparation because they are 'too busy' rushing from task to task. Teaching Christ like obedience is not about performance of tasks at a break-neck speed – or inappropriate modeling.

I labor in a Presbytery where groups of pastors, and I don't exclude myself, huddle in like-minded gatherings, furthering division by positioning arguments saying, "We have to ready ourselves for what is to come." In discernment, the subject of 'what is to come' in these huddles is not eschatological, though distinctly ecclesiological. Teaching and living Christ-like obedience is swaddled in deep trust in God's abundance and these like-minded gatherings don't swaddle much of anything but anger and fear of the other.

I know that Christ-like obedience does not look like a Sunday School class coordinator who says, "We don't want dialogue, we want expert information. Pastor, provide us with a lecture, you tell us what we want to hear."

I'm pretty confident that Christ-like obedience does not flow freely from a church that puts more emphasis and energy into gathering furniture for youth ministry than in creating gospel community formed in the Word and high expectations for study, fellowship and service together with her adolescents.

I know that Christ-like obedience does not look like a church with a large underused campus, afraid of those who are different, who says to a minority congregation looking for worship space, "Sorry, we just can't work it out. Why don't you call the Methodists?" And it doesn't look like the church who decides to cancel a Sunday school class because it only has four people attending, one of which is homeless, and a church member says, "the hell with the homeless, they disrupt my worship."

I believe that teaching and living in Christ-like obedience - that the pastoral life lived in a whole way, begins and needs a consistent reminder of a humble memory of where authority rests.

All authority, not just some authority, has been given to Christ, in heaven and on earth. God's promises are God's promises, not one person or several people's manipulation of self-interest disguised as God's fully disclosed will. We know God's promises through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, made known in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus who is Lord and Savior. There is One Triune God who ushers in gospel life and reconciles peace – in earth shattering ways and we especially know God's promises at work in covenant community.

Pastors wrestle with their waning earthly authority while attempting to be messengers of the gospel. Wrestle might be the wrong word. On one hand, the status of clergy has disappeared from the ranks of import and lies buried in the graveyard of irrelevance. The irrelevance assumes a loss of worldly authority. On the other hand, the freedom experienced in forgiveness of sin and the assurance of the gift of God's grace upon a repentant life is sometimes lost in the excesses of the psychologist, psychiatrist,

and pharmacist's bills. That particular loss undercuts authority that comes from the institution of the church to pastor a people.

It is hard and humbling work to receive, accept and lead God's people - to translate the gospel good news together with God's people. Often, the unbelievable liberating gifts of God's grace and mercy known in Christ suffocate under the energy surrounding a more compelling vision of who will be the next iconic American idol, or who will untangle the details of yet another, grim and gory crime scene. When the dominant energy in a Sunday school classroom is about reality television, it makes me wonder where we have gone awry in teaching the faith, the biblical faith – the story that has ultimate authority.

The role of pastoral authority and what it means to be forming pastors in educational institutions is like traveling as a thread woven within the historical Bayeux Tapestry, a 270 feet long and 20-inch wide linen embroidery. Forming pastors is an enormous topic; it is a story within a story; a story with many functions; and in need of constant attention and consideration. Commissioned by the church, the tapestry tells a story of the Norman conquest of England in 1066. It was most likely woven by churchwomen's fingers; almost lost in the French Revolution as it was used as an idle cover for a wagon protecting food goods, yet was saved, shielded in an air shelter in World War II and now hangs on display in a museum in Normandy, as a reliable lasting source of history.

It strikes me that this is a time in the church where we as a group, the Re-Forming Ministry faculty initiative have been commissioned to reflect upon a historical construct of the teaching office of the church. A history that is relevant and lasting, not about conquest, but about a recovery, reimagination and an interpretative task which will have an impact for the Christian practices in the life of the church of Jesus Christ as we know it in the PC(USA).

In the contemporary musical, *Rent*, the narrator Mark says, "And Roger will attempt to write us a bittersweet and evocative song." The song once written eventually frames one fringe community's understanding of the power of love to transform despair. My hope, in humility, with this reflection is that among the imbedded and bittersweet history of the teaching office of the church, that we as a Reforming Ministry group might work together in love to evoke a spirit of reformation within the PC(USA) especially as it relates to vocational calling and the training of pastors for parish ministry. Paul Hooker has given us a good start and a well-defined ecclesiology in his paper, *Nurturing the New Reality*.

"Where Have You Come From? Motivation and Authority"

On a seminary campus, three primary groups form the learning environment: faculty, students and administration. Each one of these groups is differently motivated. If Christ's authority rests in the Triune God's reconciling work for the 'mending of the whole creation,'¹ then it can be both challenge and risk to uncover and to balance the gift of human authority.

Human authority is deeply rooted in motivation. Motivation refers to a person's desire to pursue a goal or perform a task. Motivation influences learning and

¹ Stendahl, Krister. (1990). *Energy for Life*. Geneva, WCC Publications.

performance. We draw towards (or distance ourselves) from instruments that help us to define motivation and the ways in which we will interface with the world such as the Meyers Briggs or the Enneagram. “I’m an ENTJ, what are you?” “I knew you were an “I” the minute you walked into the room.” “Get out of my way, said the “8” – I know where I’m going.”

Faculty, students and institutional administrators located in the place where instruction and learning for a life of ministry unfolds are differently motivated. Motivation is often a catalyst for assuming authority and when one’s self-motivation moves to the top of the agenda – self-aggrandizement can veil discernment of Christ’s authority.

Students perhaps see themselves motivated to gain information, to form their ability to serve the pastoral model that was most influential in shaping their call. If a youth pastor pointed an individual to seminary, then perhaps the motivation for coming to seminary is to acquire the information to be the best youth pastor possible. If an experience of social justice formed one’s faith, then perhaps the motivation is to secure the strongest foundation to share the Word on the street, in compelling and prophetic ways.² If an affirmation came early about one’s gifts for academia, perhaps the motivation for coming to seminary is to begin the work of eventually contributing to the Academy.

Researching by mining student’s motivation for applying to seminary could be an important aspect of the admissions component of theological education, and a continued aspect of sustaining pastors for ministry at a presbytery level. It would be intriguing to develop an instrument that would identify and validate motivational issues that bring God’s people into theological higher education then to compare those motivational results against the perceived satisfaction with a life lived out in pastoral ministry. What benefit might be realized by holding God’s motivating question to Hagar, “Where have you come from?” constantly before incoming students, middlers and seniors as well as alumni at certain points post graduation?

Faculty members must contribute regularly to the life of the Academy, especially in research and in writing while also balancing the work of forming differently motivated students, in different and varying models and stages of human development. I imagine that it is hard to find balance while both performing for the Academy, especially if not tenured, while also forming future pastors with multi-disciplinary information.

I remember an instance of an attempted conflict resolution between faculty of a team-taught core class and the students over the content and scope of a Mid-term exam. In the middle of the protest, one student decried the uncompassionate response of the faculty, and one professor sniped back, “This is not a church and I am not your pastor.” The dichotomy revealed for me in this particular conflict was that the faculty member’s motivation as faculty did not meet up with the genuine expectations and motivations of the particular student. The disappointment for me in this encounter was that in the decrying student and the sniping professor, Christ-like obedience and or reconciliation was not modeled in any Godly form.

² Saunders, Stanley P and Charles L Campbell. (2000). *The Word on the Street*. Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans.

In my opinion, the source of the conflict was that there were not clear learning outcomes or educational objectives for the course and the evaluative exam became the catalyst for the frustration about muddled course objectives.

The institution itself, as a learning context, competes for prestige, or is motivated to have the most published faculty, the best physical plant supported by the deepest pockets of endowments, not to mention having the most ‘called and installed’ graduates. Across the educational process and the educational context landscape, I would suggest these motivational differences often work themselves out in rushed and hurried ways for how information is presented and processed and how formation for ministry transpires.

The rushed and hurried ways of students, faculty and administrators do not lead to life lived under the authority of Christ, but more so to a fractured, unrepentant life with folks fighting to control certain turfs, promote certain agendas and further individual dominions. The rushed and hurried ways do not lead to modeling or observing teaching eldership that prioritizes a life of Christ-like obedience lived before God. It does not lead to a life where one might engage, in a brooding manner, and be still and know God, and self.

Remembering Christ’s authority turns God’s people away from covertly aggressive self-motivation, away from overtly rushed and hurried vocational lives, to an acknowledgement of destructive self-motivation that could potentially distract from gospel service. A vocational calling is of God, whether lived out in the Academy, in pastoral ministry, or in institutional life. How can we hold one another accountable to be turned to Christ’s authority and not our own aggrandizing motivations?

So, again, how is it that seminary faculty, students and institutions participate, although differently motivated, yet cognizant of a call to be God’s agents of instruction teaching Christ-like obedience in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church of Jesus Christ?

In one part, teaching Christ-like obedience is an act of repentance; remembering Christ’s authority over all things in heaven and on earth. It is a kenotic act in that the act of repentance requires self-emptying of consuming self-interests to be turned before and back to God. Teaching Christ-like obedience takes hearing God’s voice cry out, when in the wilderness of service in the church, as faculty, student, pastor or administrator - “Where have you come from and where are you going?”

Such repentance requires deep and humble listening for covert self-absorbed motivation that distracts and consumes one from genuine service with Christ for the sake of the world.

In another part, teaching Christ-like obedience is an act of civil disobedience. In these days of modernity – post-modernity (however you define the now) it takes a bold imagination to sit down with and settle into listening to biblical texts. Listening for God’s strong and sure call, which is disobedient to the voice of the rushed ways of the world is not an easy task. Teaching Christ-like obedience turns a covenant community into a deep listening group. As a pastor, I intimately know my consistent ability to forget Christ’s authority over all creation. I know the sin of separation that comes in the rush of living out a pastoral vocation.

In heeding the imperative to go, motivated to perform, to make and to baptize, I have rushed headlong into service without remembering Christ’s authority or listening for a sustaining presence. Not to be commended, but one Pentecost morning, I preached,

baptized two teenagers and led the congregation in confirming promises initially taken in baptism; and had even gotten up early to make a batch of chili for the celebratory confirmation luncheon. Maybe it doesn't seem excessive, until I reveal that it was five days after our third child was born.

The obedience I was teaching that particular Pentecost morn was born out of my fear of not being enough and of my service to a Pharaonic church³. I was living out the lie of scarcity, enraptured by self-motivation and my own authority. I served a church as a pastor enticed by worldly ways of producing bricks, in the form of programs. I was working to build a larger building, a bigger church with new members. At the time, I did not know or recognize the danger of the shadows and places for deep pools of unhealthy doubt and fear that emerge while working to build such an edifice.

Instead of leaning into God's freedom freely offered in my vocational calling which is full of grace, mercy and forgiveness, I pushed ahead producing, not listening. Together we were a church and a pastor, not willing to risk vulnerability, who hid behind tall self-constructed walls attempting to redirect the strong winds of the Spirit of a living God who transforms through Word, Sacrament and discipline. With a certain sense of regularity, I had not heeded the command to rest or heard the call to be still and know the Lord in the midst of a vocational life.

With intentional and disciplined prayer and Bible study, over time and in reflection I began to understand the unhealthy nature and how my motivation was driving my vocational life as a producer of bricks for Pharaoh's church. I was fighting for a place at the church's table. Listening deeply in scripture, in community, and with an acknowledgement of healthy humility and theological reflection upon deep repentance has been liberating – actually salvific, for my pastoral vocation.

I often wonder if the competitive nature of being a student at seminary fed my unhealthy motivation and settling into my own authority to lead in the church. One critical discipline of formation I learned in seminary was intentional and regular study and prayer in the scriptures and confessions in a small accountability group, first known as "Excellence from the Start" now as "Company of Pastors." These disciplines, when practiced, free me most days from my self-consuming motivation that prompts me to fight for a place in the church instead of listening for where God is calling me to serve in the church, in a particular place and time, teaching and living in Christ-like obedience.

"Where are You Going? Rooted in Christ's Authority"

Social Learning Theory

With a strong foundation of service with a Triune God as the ultimate authority, I believe that attention to an understanding of human development from a social learning instructional theory might help to shape how pastors are formed to serve, for the sake of the world; with the God given gifts, they have been given. An instructional theory seeks to describe the conditions under which one can intentionally arrange for the learning of specific performance outcomes. If the mission of a seminary is to train people to be pastors then faculty members in each discipline ought to be able to identify the expectations or learning outcomes expected for students in each class offered. The

³ Brueggemann, Walter. (2005) National Pastor's Sabbath Lecture, Snowbird, Utah.

learning outcomes would correlate to the expectations for a life lived out in pastoral ministry.

Social Learning Theory is a form of constructivism. This theory is often labeled as ‘observational’ learning. From a constructivist viewpoint, the seminarian would seek to construct an understanding of the information or knowledge presented by a faculty member. Instead of depending on faculty to pour information in to a ‘sawed open head’ to be memorized and regurgitated at some later point, the hope of a constructivist-learning environment is that a seminarian will use higher level thinking skills to interpret the information provided in the required disciplines of study for use in the life of the church. Knowledge gained in the course of study would be used in translating a life of faith for oneself and for God’s people for the sake of the world.

Social Learning theory attributes changes in behavior to learning through observation, imitation and modeling. The research of Bandura, in the United States, and Vygotsky, in Russia, informed this theoretical underpinning that collaborative learning in an instructional setting increases higher-level thinking and enables problem solving at different levels. Vygotsky’s work responded to Piaget, a behaviorist, who suggested that human development occurred in rigid developmental stages and that development must precede learning. Unlike early behavioral psychologists, Vygotsky’s “Social Learning” theory suggested that the developmental process of an individual will most likely lag behind the actual learning process. The ability of one to develop into a well-formed pastor is a process that continues past the master’s level degree required for ordination. A question we might ask ourselves is how do we continue to form pastors through continuing education events?

Bandura (1977) states: ‘Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions, this coded information serves as a guide for action (p.22).’⁴

Traditional didactic models of instruction where an instructor lectures without room for interaction or feedback from students probably isn’t well rooted in instructional theory, and most likely limits the power for instruction to be far lasting and impacting.

“Where are We Going? Rooted in Christ’s Authority”

Social Learning Theory: A Four-fold Framework

The following four-fold framework suggests a framework for constructivism and social learning theory. First, new learning builds on prior learning. Like a scaffold built upon background knowledge and current understanding, information is processed and builds upon itself.

On the surface, seminary curriculum is structured with scaffolding in mind. A language is learned, then exegetical method is scaffolded on to the basics of language. Scaffolding at another level would suggest that in classes such as Old Testament or New Testament Survey, an initial evaluation of each student’s current understanding of the subject matter would be the beginning point of classroom instruction. A faculty member

⁴ Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: W.H. Freeman.

might be better able to guide the learning process if they grasped the prior knowledge of the learners. The Bible Content Exam is the evaluative measure which validates Biblical knowledge required for an ordination candidate in the PC(USA). What would it look like if a minimal score was required on the Bible Content Exam before enrolling in the survey courses or even seminary admittance? A minimal score would indicate for faculty core knowledge and a starting point for designing educational objectives. This is an oversimplified example that rests too much validity on the current examination process, but seeks to suggest a critique and a new way to bring students into a learning environment with intentionality.

Secondly, social interaction creates ‘communities of learners’ (Eggen & Kauchak). The reality is that each classroom, whether gathered to learn Hebrew, to survey the New Testament, or study a particular theologian, is a unique community of learners. What dynamics will emerge in the ‘community’ that will enable learning with and from one another? This aspect has important implications for modeling of instruction in the church. Valuing each member, and his or her potential contribution to the community, creates a unique learning environment. It is an important process for shaping the learning environment. How might faculty be equipped to be attentive and to utilize the ‘community of learners?’

Thirdly, students must be encouraged to take responsibility for their learning. Enabling student responsibility occurs when faculty develop and design instruction by setting measurable and realistic learning objectives that match learner outcomes; design instruction around those objectives; instruct around those objectives and evaluate course content consistently against the course objectives.

Lastly, meaningful learning occurs when students face authentic learning tasks in which they actively participate by trying to make sense, or interpret or facilitate interpretation of the information to be processed. This focus upon authenticity helps to create a relevance to the information exchanged. Instruction that leaves room for small group work with high expectations and intentional time for reflection and shared learning in genuine situations creates deeper learning opportunities. How are we open or willing to learn something new in a spirit of humility?

Pastoral care was one of my least favorite classes. A ritual I unknowingly observed while a seminary student was the art of visitation. As a Parish Associate, for weeks during Lent one year, I would go regularly to the ICU at a local hospital where one of our church members was living out his last days. Each day before I left the ICU, I would repeat Psalm 121, and pray with him and his wife. In one moment of prayer, as I repeated, “I lift my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come?” I realized that this man had not been able to lift his eyes to the window, to see the daily unraveling of winter into spring. I made a decision to create a ritual where I told him what sort of day it was outside after I read the Psalm. I’d say, “When I lifted my eyes today, this is what I saw ...” I told him about the varying yellows in the jonquils and the harsh white of the clouds in the blue spring sky. I’d read all sorts of books and theological articles about the revelation of God and about the power of ritual to be transformative but here, in the simple discipline of regular prayer, I was continuing to be instructed by God.

I had ‘practiced’ visitation in a hospital setting for a prescribed time. However, in that one bedside moment, years after seminary instruction had passed, in the context of one of many pastoral care visits, in this one particular act of ritual prayer through God’s

Word, my development as a pastoral care giver evolved and changed. My pastoral care-giving ability increased infinitely for two reasons. Within the seminary, I had been given high expectations. The pastoral care faculty determined our initial understanding of pastoral care. Communities of learning were formed around particular hospitals where we experienced contextual learning. As students we were reading and writing (information processing) while at the same time engaged in a practicum at a local hospital with regular case study/verbatim responses times. (community formation). In this classroom work in pastoral care, we were formed to pay attention and listen for God in all things, even those rote hospital visits.

I had read about and written about ritual. I also knew the importance of prayer and scripture at a patient's bedside. But, I also had an advantage, though I did not view it as such in the moments of contextual learning. In my supervised ministry experience, for ten hours a week, I traveled with the Parish Associate, an 88-year-old retired minister whose primary responsibility was to weekly and systematically visit shut ins.

Dr. "Mac" modeled a form of pastoral care, which included reading scripture and asking and making time for prayer in each visit. Monthly we would deliver the sacrament as an extension of the table. This interactive experience consistently modeled relevant concepts from theology, polity, bible and pastoral care. I was able to learn from Dr. Mac in our time traveling from one location to another, but also in the way he interacted with the shut in members of the covenant community. He listened and took time to validate what he heard, whether sheer loneliness or pain from illness or joy about a pets lasting love, and then theologically interpret his listening into his prayers.

In the Lenten context and my regular visitation of a church member who was living and dying, I translated what I had learned in a year's worth of classroom experience and in six weeks of a supervised ministry well into a life of pastoral ministry. My development as a pastor expanded when the dying church member's wife said to me, "You're the only one who gets his eyes to open ..." My development expanded and I knew it wasn't about me, it was about Christ's authority modeled by an 88 year old Parish Associate still translating through the power of the Spirit and social learning.

Collaborative Learning takes place in what is called the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky describes the zone as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978).⁵ In other words, a student can perform a task with guidance and with peer collaboration that could not be achieved alone. The Zone of Proximal Development bridges that gap between what is known and what can be known. Vygotsky claimed that lasting learning occurred in this developmental zone.

At the church where I currently serve, we have a ministry called MAD which stands for 'Make a Difference.' It was developed by a missional minded church member who realized that the Vacation Bible School opportunities for rising fifth and sixth graders were not meeting the academic and stretching needs of these particular children. She created a social learning educational environment in which the children would worship regularly, using the bible school texts, and then compelled by the text, go out

⁵ Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind and society: The development of higher mental processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

from the church to make a difference in the name of Jesus, serving with Christ in the greater community. The rising fifth and sixth graders identified widows whom they would serve and went with church elders to a local nursing facility. They led worship and delivered communion, extending the table to shut in members of the covenant community in the name of the ‘good shepherd.’

While delivering communion in this environment, the children asked the elder, what do we do when the person’s door is shut? The elder responded, “Well, I knock loudly, wait a minute, listen and say, Mrs. Jones, It’s me, I’m here from church, might I come in and visit?” At the next closed door, the children rushed the door to knock, said their names in a chaotic chorus, and steadfastly delivered the joyful meal of our Lord and Savior. The elder participated in collaborative learning with the rising fifth and sixth graders, but was also transformed and instructed by their enthusiasm. At one open door, they saw the member sound asleep in a wheelchair. One child suggested, “Let’s sing the song we learned as a prayer for her. She might not know that we were here, and she won’t get the bread and grape juice, but God will give her the song.” The children sang from the hallway a gentle chorus of ‘God is so Good.’

The children grew their learning of delivering the Lord’s Supper in a local nursing facility to delivering meals in an urban environment, in one of the poorest neighborhoods in the United States. Boldly they went to doors, knocked, and said, “Mrs. Jones ... We’re here from church with Meals on Wheels, here to make a difference in the name of Jesus. We have your lunch! ”

Creating lasting learning happens through setting and communicating high academic expectations. “Student effort is important to classroom teachers. ... A major determinant of student effort and achievement is a students’ own perception of their own abilities to meet those standards. Student expectations affect student involvement in classroom learning or the effort that students apply to studying and thus, ultimately affect achievement.”⁶

Social learning theory, as any educational psychology, expects faculty to set high expectations and to hold students accountable to such. Students who become pastors can take this learning to the church. The rising fifth and sixth graders are a prime example. It’s a daring question, but what would happen if pastors set such expectations for new member classes in the church?

The communal aspect of learning and valuing community in the classroom is the unique feature of this theory. Academic work with a strong sense of accountability from the classroom community will not only inform, but also transform, a broad understanding of vocation, which in my humble opinion has the potential to reform ministry. It seeks to blend intense information processing with community formation.

“Where are We Going? Rooted in Christ’s Authority” Information Processing

If we take seriously the communal responsibility of higher theological education, then we realize that it is no longer listening alone in the wilderness for God’s voice, but listening together for God’s voice to ask, where are you all going? How are you all going to be agents of my instruction, teaching Christ-like obedience, for the sake of the world?

⁶ Brookhart, Susan M. Determinants of Student Effort on Schoolwork and School-Based Achievement. *Journal of Educational Research*, March/April 1998 [Vol.91(No.4)].

Briefly, by information processing I mean the following. Each religious institution has a prescribed curriculum with a set standard of courses to prepare seminarians to proceed into a pastoral vocation. Each course should have learner outcomes and educational objectives designed to elicit such outcomes. Each course in the curriculum has a certain level of information that a student must come to wrestle and build upon to best serve as a pastor. Metacognition, self-regulation and chunking are important concepts in information processing.

Metacognition, or the learner's knowledge of individual learning strengths and weaknesses, *and* the ability to navigate through such in the classroom and educational process is an important part of information processing. If you don't know where your gifts are as a student, you might flounder around frustrated by the instructional process unable to settle into the content of the course work.

In addition, self-regulation, which is the ability of the learner to orchestrate learning; planning, monitoring and correcting as instruction unfolds shapes the confidence of a learner and ability to navigate the copious amounts of information to be consumed in the academic career of a seminarian. Self-regulation should be a strong emphasis in the advising process especially when faculty members help students identify elective course selections.

One while I was sitting in an exegesis classroom, the instructor began to write all over a transparency, in random order, with multiple colored markers, making connections to repeated verb forms and their movement within the biblical text. He called his methodology 'charting.' Later that same day, while studying in a small group, the topic of this particular professors 'scribble' became a topic of our conversation.

For me, the 'charting' example had worked as I identified with the seemingly random 'scribble' or non-linear thinking and I had a new sense of confidence about the methodology with which I would undertake in exegesis. The instructor modeled an instructional method that matched up with my elementary skills as an exegete and provided a form for me to settle in to the exploration of exegesis. For others, this methodology was considered a waste of time, and no connection was regulated. In order to process information, it is important for a learner to be able to identify what works and what does not and learn skills for navigating especially through weaknesses.

Another strategy in information processing is 'chunking.' Based on research by Miller there is a limit to tasks and information that can be processed by the human brain at one time. The maximum amount to be processed is seven tasks or informational units. Therefore, in developing and delivering instruction 'chunking' information in no more than seven units can help set realistic educational objectives. In addition, working with small amounts of information, at the same time, consistently over a period of time is a more reliable manner in which to obtain information that is lasting versus 'cramming.' Chunking relates to both designing and implementing instruction by faculty members and to processing information by a learner.

“Where are We Going? Rooted in Christ’s Authority” Gagne’s Nine Steps for Instruction

Gagne was a constructivist who identified the mental processing and conditions necessary for learning. His research was on adults, which makes it especially relevant to

higher religious education. He analyzed how conditions for learning worked with stimuli and came up with nine steps for instruction that best help the learner retain information. These steps might seem overly simplistic, or seem to present too much effort in organizing a simple lesson plan but have a profound effect on creating lasting knowledge.

These steps are not meant to be gimmicky, or ways to be labeled as the ‘best’ teacher. They are steps, when given emphasis, that I believe can assist to reconnoiter the teaching eldership by creating a way that creates lasting knowledge and a strong foundation of information upon which to build.

When I prepare to teach a bible study, write a confirmation program or denominational curriculum I keep a list of these steps beside my computer. I hope that I will be faithful in forming instruction that will be lasting and relevant by being attentive to the cognitive processing at work in the task of instruction and the life of a learner.

Step One: Gain Attention

It’s as simple as it sounds, gain the learner’s attention. The mental process is that brain receptors are stimulated. Use of media cues such as visual or auditory stimulation or simply asking a leading thought provoking question will motivate the student’s curiosity. It’s very important that this aspect is not gimmicky. In a seminary classroom, prayer that is biblical and brings attention to the instruction of the day is a solid way to gain attention.

Step Two: Inform Learners of Objective

This simple task requires that the instructor tell the student the objectives for the daily lesson. The mental process is the creation of a level of expectation for the learning. It could be phrased, “When you leave here today, you will be able to define a biblical perspective of baptism, describe the confessional movements in the understanding of the sacrament of baptism; translate ‘Ex opere operato, Ex opere operantis’ and write a paragraph about why this even matters for ministry.” What’s important in this step is that the faculty member has crafted objectives that match up with learner outcomes which will be measurable throughout and at the end of instruction.

Step Three: Stimulate Recall of Prior Learning

Stimulating recall can assist a learner to encode information, especially if there are links make to personal experience and knowledge. The simplest form of stimulating recall is asking, “What is your previous experience with this topic?” The mental process involved is the activation and retrieval of the short-term memory.

Step Four: Present the Content

The mental process is the selective perception of content. This is the part of instruction where new information is presented. Content should be ‘chunked’ and organized in a clear way and demonstrated with examples, if possible. Attention to multiple intelligences would encourage considering different learning modalities, such as lecture, texts, graphics, audio narration, video, etc.

Step Five: Provide Learning Guidance

Giving learning guidance creates pathways for the brain to encode the learning into long term memory. Learning guidance can be provided through strategies such as giving examples, case studies, or analogies.

Step Six: Elicit Performance through Practice

The learner responds to questions about content to enhance encoding and verify information as correct. The repetition of repeating learning and confirming information further increases the chances that the information will be retained.

Step Seven: Provide Feedback

Immediate and specific feedback is necessary as learner's practice their new behavior as it reinforces and affirms the assessment of a high level of thinking and performance. Having assessments that are formative, added to along the course of instruction, is a good way to provide feedback. These would be called formative assessments or formative evaluations. An example of having students create a thematic lesson plan, paper, or sermon that is turned in at regular intervals, evaluated by faculty, then modified and re-written is an example of a formative assessment. It allows the learner to go back and see progress of growth. As preachers when we go to the files and pull out an old sermon we often know intimately and with humility the need for feedback!

Step Eight: Assess Performance

Being able to retrieve information reinforces the content's importance. Performance is often performed in a form of final evaluation, such as a paper, examination, or presentation.

Step Nine: Enhance Retention and Transfer of Knowledge

A student's ability to take the information learned out of the learning context and into a novel context, not rote regurgitation, enhances retention. Using a sense of retrieval of the information and generalizing it to a new context identifies optimum learning such as creating a lesson plan, sermon outline or vision for mission out of information processed in a particular class and actually implementing it in a modified way will enhance retention and the transfer of knowledge.

**“Where are We Going? Rooted in Christ's Authority”
Community Formation**

By Community Formation, I mean intentionality around creating Christian community in the actual process of seminary education. What identifies us as extraordinarily unique, as a people who are called and gather together on seminary campuses, is our calling to give thanks to God through exhortation on the Word, prayer and song *is* the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. The church is called to be the visible and witnessing community of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the essential structure of the community called the church is being that of an unfolding narrative rather than an institutional system.

Pastors are called to teach and to preach a Christ-like obedience. Seminary community is the formation location for such instruction. We, along with God's people,

have an extraordinary story to tell in the church, with one another and to the world in everything we say and do, wherever we are. Newbiggin relates in *The Household of God*, the following about community.⁷

“It is surely a fact of inexhaustible significance that what our Lord left behind Him was not a book, nor a creed, nor a system of thought, nor a rule of life, but a visible community. He committed the entire work of salvation to that community. It was not that a community gathered round an idea, so that the idea was primary and the community secondary. It was that a community called together by the deliberate choice of the Lord Himself, and re-created in Him, gradually sought - and is seeking - to make explicit who He is and what He has done. The actual community is primary; the understanding of what it is comes second.” (p.20)

As pastors are informed and formed to be pastors, I suggest that we are at a time ripe for the recovery and reimagination of the disciplines of the third mark of the church. These disciplines set us aside as practicing Christians. In the midst of processing copious amounts of information, it is important not to forget the extension of an invitation into community with a sense of the holiness and humility, such living requires before God; even in an institution of higher learning!

My understanding of the critical nature of community in seminary life preparing for service in the church began for me with my hands in the sink. The phone rang and it was Darrell Guder. “Weird” I thought. It was a professor who I perceived as aloof, and he was calling me at home. With the phone balanced on my shoulder and my hands in the dishwasher, as our children licked up the sprinkles at the bottom of their ice cream bowls, Dr. Guder came to the point, “I’d like to invite you to be part of a small group.”

My initial reaction was negative. I was already part of a small group of women who met weekly, as we could, without a strong sense of accountability but we prayed and kept up with one another.

What I know now is that it was no mistake that I had my hands in the water when Dr. Guder’s invitation was extended. At seminary, in the opening convocation, I witnessed the Assurance of Pardon led from the baptismal font. I heard the water. I saw the water. I knew with a stronger sense of confidence God’s forgiveness in Christ and claim upon my whole life, sustained by the Spirit. The Spirit let down in me, and it has been pretty messy ever since!

God was visibly and generously present as God’s Spirit was forming me from dry bone Ezekiel like ways while I was in seminary. At one level, I was going through the hoops, doing what I needed to do as a seminarian, but at another level, worn to a frazzle, trying to do the work that needed to be done. I balanced being a full-time student, lived apart from my partner, and kept two children in as stable an environment as possible. The balance was always on the edge of tumbling.

The invitation to participate in a program called EFS, an intentional community of study and prayer now sustained through the Company of Pastors, was an invitation to live into my baptismal identity and evangelical calling in an accountable life together with

⁷ Newbiggin, Leslie. (2002) *The Household of God*. Paternoster Publishing.

God's gathered people. It came at a particular and critical time in the midst of my formation for pastoral ministry.

I was a child of the Presbyterian Church raised with the expectation that I would always be a leader in the church, *in traditional ways*. I organized Vacation Bible Schools; I taught Sunday School; I taught confirmation; I directed church musicals; I was a leader in the church. Where God had called this *traditional* 'stay at home Mom and community volunteer' was to a life as minister of Word and Sacrament. I only came to understand that calling more fully as a seminarian as I processed information and made myself vulnerable in covenant community through EFS. As I prepared for this calling, this intentional invitation by a professor, to be part of a community of accountability, was very important in my formation as a pastor.

Skills modeled and practiced in this small group from reading the bible and confessions; and holy listening to practicing prayer daily inform the manner in which I serve. The invitation led me to live into my baptismal identity in profound ways returning in worship to remember whose I was, as a child of God, with accountability and high expectations for daily disciplines, yet room for forgiveness when it was not possible.

Where are We Going: Rooted in Christ's Authority Vocational Discernment

Suggesting that vocation is less about discovering our occupations but more about uncovering our preoccupations⁸, Brian Mahan points to this very human capacity to want to be in control of our own lives, fighting against the perfect freedom that comes from being yoked and leashed by God for service. He quotes Gerald May, of the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, "the longer we live, the more we ache to be loved for who we are rather than what we do."

When we produce for the sake of producing; or create identity by what we do, we sin. Seminaries represent an ideal location, or learning context, for discernment and deconstruction from self-prescribed motivations that turn us away from Christ's authority over all. Seminary faculty members, and I would say administrators, have an incredible ability, task and call to serve as God's agents of instruction with information, but also with formation in covenant community. Shaped with solid and rigorous academics nurtured with Christian practice, God's people will be turned from motivations that keep them on the run serving Pharaoh's church instead of Christ's church.

Invitations into intentional covenantal community shaped in the disciplines of a life of faith, rooted in worship are important when we form pastors for ministry. It is almost impossible to imagine that an institution could legislate community as part of curriculum, and legislation would most likely render community as 'ingenuine' yet, intentionality directed toward invitations into intentional theological communities is an aspect of seminary life that has deep potential to form pastors. Learning how to discern God's call in community shapes God's people for life in the church.

⁸ Mahan, Brian J. (2002). *Forgetting Ourselves On Purpose, Vocation and the Ethics of Ambition*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass p. 183.

Where are We Going: Rooted in Christ's Authority
Vocational Discernment: Continuing the Process from Seminary to Pastorate

Edward Farley, in his series of essays, *Practicing Gospel*, responds to the historical, yet on-going, situation that shapes pastoral ministry, suggesting that changes have occurred in theological institutions but clergy have not translated those changes well into congregational life.

But certain institutional features of these denominations contribute to the persistent hegemony of popular piety. One of them has to do with the curious split between the world of the theological seminary and the world of the congregation. The world to which clergy are routinely exposed remains to the congregation a secret. The changes of the early and middle twentieth century (biblical criticism, ecumenism, non-absolutistic ethics) became standard fare in the theological seminaries. Furthermore, the more recent praxis and minority-oriented theologies (feminist, African American, inclusive sexual orientation) are powerfully present in the ethos and pedagogies of these schools. But something seems to happen when ministers take up their tasks in congregations. The world of the seminary and the popular piety of the congregation rarely engage: not in the sermon, not in the educational program, not in the liturgy. ... But the hegemony of popular piety seems minimally affected. ... But another reason stands out: the inattention of congregations and their leaders to adolescent and adult education as a genuine theological education. The strange institutional character of church education fosters and sustains popular piety, not the transcendent radicalism of faith.

If piety is defined as “that which unifies the specific acts and attitudes of the Christian life, then a person’s piety is a pattern of being and doing that arises out of a specific interpretation of the gospel.”⁹ George Stroup claims that a failure to understand life lived before God has had a ‘corrosive’ effect on Christian piety. He suggests that the disciplines of daily reading of the Bible, daily prayer, confessional reading, worship and understanding of a life of service with God in society have been corroded to the point to which they are forgotten.

Coming out of the corral after a half-marathon I witnessed a young child squatted down, writing in the dust with his finger. After I passed by, I said to those I’d just run with, “I wonder if that’s what Jesus looked like when the woman caught in adultery came before him?” Those I was walking with rolled their eyes and said, “Whatever!?”

Recovering and reclaiming the teaching eldership of the church, teaching Christ-like obedience requires acts of translation. After the race, I apparently needed more translation skills!

I have a good hope and sense that the PC(USA) is deeply called to imagine new ways and a new emphasis on the teaching eldership in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church of Jesus Christ. In training pastors for ministry, my hope is that we might think deeply about instructional theory and implementing some pieces in the classroom, but in addition, narrow our focus to include the importance of intentional communal practices of formation.

⁹ Stroup, George (2004) before God. Grand Rapids, Michigan. Eerdmans. P. 3.

Reflection Paper, Re-Forming Ministry
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