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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY
ITC

*Rebooting
Doctor of Ministry Education
for Transformative Leadership*

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The articles in this issue relate to the restructured Doctor of Ministry (DMin) offered by the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC). Dr. Edward L. Wheeler's article, "Rebooted: A Fresh Start for a Seasoned Degree," begins with a general overview of the DMin program. Wheeler points out that the initial enthusiasm that greeted the degree when it was first introduced fifty years ago has since declined, along with the decline in student enrollment in seminaries and theological schools. His article lists some of the benefits and pitfalls of the DMin degree as it has been administered at ITC. Among the benefits of the DMin program is the resulting cohort group, "peer relationships that have the potential to create ministerial support systems that last long after the degree has been obtained." (p. 1) The limitations of the DMin program include that DMin students may be too involved in their professions to expend the necessary time on the program, and that trying to accommodate DMin students with courses that are relevant to their research projects is challenging faculty in various ways. Recognizing the benefits and challenges, Wheeler suggests rebooting the DMin program in order to give it a fresh start.

Dr. Marsha Snulligan Haney, Director of the DMin program, in her first essay, "The Leadership Practicum Reformed as Intercultural Formation and Dialogue," reports that the ITC DMin Program has responded to Wheeler's concerns by broadening the goals of the leadership practicum so that students may gain intercultural (formerly called missiological) competencies. The restructured two-year DMin program is graduating students with a degree that equips them to lead churches and other organizations that are diverse in their population and experiences. In her second essay, "The Leadership Practicum: The Space Where DMin Education, Action Based Research and Interfaith Dialogue Converge," Haney argues that pastors cannot be effective in ministry in the twenty-first century unless they are equipped with skills to engage in interfaith conversations, now more than ever an invaluable form of Christian mission particularly in urban US communities. Being competent in interfaith dialogue "offers current and future Christian leaders opportunities to engage three groups of religions: African, Jewish, and Islamic, and their faith systems, based on a more relational model of interfaith engagement." (p. 1)

Drs. James T. Roberson, Jr. and Constance L. Chamblee in their essay, "The Doctor of Ministry Cohort as a Transformative Dialogue Group," focus on the transformative dialogue that they regard as an essential component of the DMin learning experience. Their article

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emphasizes the importance of the cohorts as safe learning spaces. They offer students "transformative learning dialogue moments during which a student's identity and professional ministry are reshaped by mutual conversation with other members of the cohorts on ministerial issues."

Dr. Edward Wimberly's article, "Prophetic-Pastoral Imagination in an Age of Sankofa and Post-racialism: The Concerned Black Clergy of Atlanta," attributes the continuing existence of the Concerned Black Clergy of Atlanta (CBC) to its application of the Sankofa principle. Based on the mystical bird, the Sankofa principle suggests that one should constantly look or go back to retrieve past experiences that can inform the future. Both Drs. Wimberly and Haney agree that religious practitioners must be capable of dialoguing with those of other faiths. This implies that the DMin degree must be based on a clearly understood concept of prophetic-pastoral imagination.

The final two articles are written by Drs. Greg Nash and Cassandra Hill, graduates of the ITC's three-year DMin program. Nash's article conveys the gist of his DMin project's heuristic research as well as his evolving heuristic investigation. Hill is reporting on her research on the unequal treatment of women clergy by African American denominational episcopal leadership. Both attribute their sharpened critical thinking to ITC's instructors, ecumenical environment, and available resources.

I hope that subscribers will find this JITC issue valuable, and that it will serve as a resource for schools likewise contemplating the revision of their DMin programs.

Temba Mafico
Editor

Rebooted: A Fresh Start for a Seasoned Degree

Edward L. Wheeler¹

Introduction:

The Doctor of Ministry (DMin) degree was first approved by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS) in 1970. Standards for the degree came two years later. Despite some initial reluctance to accept the degree, by the mid-1970s many theological schools had begun to offer the degree. The 1980's and 90's saw an expansion in the number of schools offering the degree with some schools having well over 100 students in the degree program. While the degree is still a viable component of the curriculum of many theological schools, other seminaries have reshaped, suspended and in some cases dropped the degree. Given the decline in seminary enrollments over the past decade and the financial struggles many seminaries are facing, the uncertainties surrounding the Doctor of Ministry degree are understandable. As we move toward the 50th anniversary of the degree, I believe that the present state of the church and the seminaries that serve the church make this the appropriate time for the ITC and other seminaries to look again at the degree and ascertain its relevance for the 21st Century. My perspective on the degree is perhaps revealed in the title I have chosen for this article: "Rebooted: A Fresh Start for a Seasoned Degree."

I believe the Doctor of Ministry (DMin) degree can, and perhaps should be, an important part of a theological seminary's curriculum. However, I am also aware that the degree has limitations that must be recognized. I will attempt to discuss "the Uniqueness Value and Limitations of the Degree" in my opening section of the article. The second section of this presentation will focus on "What Makes an Effective Doctor of Ministry Degree." While that section represents my personal perspective, that perspective is informed by almost 20 years of direct involvement with DMin Programs. The third section of this article will seek to explore "The Dangers of a DMin Emphasis." The last substantive portion of this paper will discuss what I consider to be "The Benefits of a Well-Executed DMin Degree." Here I intend to suggest the benefits for

¹ Rev. Edward L. Wheeler, Ph.D. is the President of The Interdenominational Theological Center

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the students, the school, the local congregation and for the broader church and world. The final section will be a brief conclusion. It is my sincere hope that the reader will find this article to be informative and compelling in support of rebooting and giving a fresh start to a degree that is almost 50 years old.

The Uniqueness, Value and Limitations of the Doctor of Ministry Degree

The Doctor of Ministry degree is unique to theological schools and to the ministry. It was envisioned as a terminal degree for persons who were actively engaged in some form of ministry. It was designed to provide persons in ministry with the opportunity to critically assess the strengths and weaknesses, the opportunities and challenges of the context where they were carrying out their ministry. The DMin student was then expected to design and implement a theologically grounded project that addressed an issue that the analysis of the context had revealed might be critical to the transformation of that context.

The value of the Doctor of Ministry degree is multi-layered. It provides the student with the opportunity to more fully develop a wide range of skills that are essential to effective ministry. It also affords the opportunity for the student, who is also a practitioner, to engage in theological reflection that is rarely available while a person is actively engaged in ministry. The value is also to the locale where the ministry is being carried out. Because the DMin project is designed for a particular context, that context benefits from the insights and practical applications that emerge from the project. Even if a well designed and implemented project does not produce all the desired outcomes, the assessment of where the project was deficient and the systematic analysis of the circumstances that helped create the less than desirable outcomes can provide valuable information for better outcomes in the future.

Depending on the structure of the Doctor of Ministry program, the DMin can also provide the students with peers in their cohort group that can produce new relationships that have the potential to create ministerial support systems that last long after the degree has been obtained. Due to the stress and the loneliness of ministry, the value of such relationships cannot be overestimated. To be able to talk openly and honestly to persons

with whom a minister has developed a deep trusting relationship may help stem the tide of ministerial depression and tragic suicides.

Nevertheless, there are limitations to the DMin degree that must be recognized. Perhaps the most important limitation is in the nature of the degree itself. The Doctor of Ministry degree was not designed nor is it intended to be a substitute for the Doctor of Philosophy degree. The Ph.D. is a research, teaching degree. The DMin is a degree in practical ministry. As such, the DMin cannot be used as a short cut to a tenured position on the faculty of most theological seminaries. While the DMin may allow the recipient to serve on the faculty of some schools in the area of practical theology, it is not generally accepted as being on par with the Ph.D. by theological faculties.

Another limitation of the DMin is related to the fact that the Doctor of Ministry students are practicing their vocation in the midst of their academic program. That makes it difficult for the typical student to be able to handle a regular course schedule. How and when courses are taught has to take under consideration the work schedules of DMin students in ways that might not usually be a consideration for other theological degrees. That consideration can create pressure on the faculty, the administration and the institution to identify a course structure and delivery system that finds a workable compromise for all who are involved in the program.

What makes an Effective Doctor of Ministry Program?

There are no doubt many effective DMin programs currently operating and I would suspect from the ones with which I am familiar, that those programs vary greatly. Nevertheless, I would suggest that despite a great deal of difference in DMin programs, there are some elements that are essential to an effective DMin program. Among those qualities is the ability to find the right balance between theory and praxis. The right balance requires the student to learn how to analyze the context and develop a sound and defensible theological foundation for the project. The right balance also demands that the student demonstrate organizational skills in the identification, development and implementation of a quality project worthy of the terminal professional degree. On one hand, the requirements for the DMin degree should not amount to a mini-Ph.D. On the other hand, however, the degree should require the student to

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demonstrate that the theory informs and is evident in the practical integration of theory with praxis in the project.

The nature of the DMin degree and the ability to integrate theory and praxis demand that an effective DMin program must seek out capable, dedicated students whose current ministry gives evidence of their gifts. Not everyone in ministry is a candidate for the Doctor of Ministry degree. Every person in ministry can and should seek to improve his/her ministerial skills, but not everyone in ministry is prepared to do the rigorous academic work needed to integrate theory and praxis. Additionally, not everyone is willing to dedicate the time, energy and effort needed to benefit from a quality program. Capable, committed students who want to improve their skills and are willing to make the necessary sacrifice to achieve their goal will help create the atmosphere that produces an effective DMin program. The standards of the DMin program cannot be set so low that it accommodates everyone. Reducing the DMin to the lowest common denominator is a formula for disaster. This is not to be viewed as elitist. Rather this is a reasonable expectation for a terminal degree.

A quality faculty that appreciates the value of the Doctor of Ministry degree is also essential to the creation and maintenance of an effective DMin program. This includes the teaching faculty as well as the administrative faculty that oversees the program. Faculty who teach in the program as a way of supplementing their salary but who either do not appreciate the value of the degree or who are so overextended with other duties that they are unable to commit the time needed for the proper execution of their responsibilities will help destroy a DMin program. Ineffective administrators who do not do their tasks well will also create ineffective DMin programs.

Whether the DMin program employs the regular faculty, an adjunct faculty comprised of practitioners with terminal degrees or some combination of the two, the DMin faculty must have an appreciation for the church and the ministry of the DMin student. The faculty should also be conversant with congregational systems so that they can provide adequate informed direction to students as the project is envisioned and then developed. There is a strong argument for teaming academicians with practitioners throughout the DMin program. Whether or not that is done, the insights gained from both theory and praxis must be evident in the

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teaching and mentoring process if the DMin program is to be effective in reaching the learning outcomes that are identified and desired.

The Dangers of a Doctor of Ministry Emphasis

I believe the Doctor of Ministry degree is an important degree for theological seminaries. However, an emphasis on the DMin can create problems for a school. Among the most prevalent dangers is the mistaken notion that the DMin is a “cash cow” and an automatic solution to a school’s enrollment and income challenges. While a well-run program can increase enrollment and tuition income, it is easy for an institution to calculate the positives without accurately assessing the costs associated with the DMin program. Such things as the increase in salary for faculty, especially if resident faculty have to be paid for course overloads, the cost of additional adjunct faculty and or lecturers, the cost of travel, meals and lodging for any faculty and/or lecturers that are brought in from out of town, as well as the cost of such intangibles as space usage and utilities can greatly increase expenses and subsequently reduce anticipated income. All the costs associated with providing a quality program must be carefully and thoughtfully calculated in order to determine what the tuition for the DMin program must be to avoid the program being a burden on already stressed seminary budgets.

The dangers of a DMin emphasis also include a lack of attention that can lead to a dysfunctional program. Admission standards must be clearly identified and then consistently applied. Course work, especially those conducted by persons other than the regular faculty, must be monitored so that the quality is consistent. Course syllabi should be reviewed regularly and faculty should be required to participate in well planned orientations as well as being required to report absences and inferior student performances so that appropriate interventions can be made early in a student’s journey through the DMin course requirements.

A process must also be developed that allows student projects to be assessed prior to implementation, critiqued as they are implemented and seriously evaluated once the project is completed. The desire to graduate on the part of students, the tendency of faculty to sometimes be more lenient on students who have been in the program for several years and the pressure administrators may exert to move people through the program can undermine the integrity and effectiveness of the degree.

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The aforementioned dangers point to the need for the regular faculty of the institution to monitor and have ownership of the Doctor of Ministry program. The demands on the faculty of most theological schools can be overwhelming. Therefore, it is understandable how the regular faculty can feel that the DMin program is not their concern or that those associated with the program should have the responsibility for monitoring and overseeing the program. That is a mistake. The entire faculty must protect and be concerned about the academic integrity of every degree program granted by their theological school. Without that attention, the reputation of the entire academic program will be questioned and negatively impacted.

The Benefits of a Well-Executed Doctor of Ministry Program

The benefits of a well-executed DMin program are, in my opinion, too numerous to list. However, there are some key benefits for the student, the institution, the local church, the broader Christian community and the world that I would like to identify.

No Master of Divinity degree can fully prepare a minister to fulfill all the expectations and requirements of ministry, no matter what that ministry is. Therefore, the Doctor of Ministry provides the opportunity for practicing ministers to increase their knowledge and their skills as they relate to ministry. The fact that persons must have had some time serving in a particular ministry before enrolling in a DMin program allows the student to be more aware of her/his strengths and weaknesses so that the DMin program can help the student be more effective after participating in the program than they were previously.

A quality DMin program is also very beneficial to the sponsoring theological school. To be sure, enrollment can be increased and because few, if any, DMin programs provide scholarships, the income can be helpful to a school's bottom line. However, a quality DMin program can also help refocus a theological seminary on its relationship to the church as opposed to an overly aggressive identification with the academy. Engaging in the teaching/learning enterprise that is essential to the DMin degree helps the seminary faculty to once again recognize the need for theory and praxis to be part of their teaching methodology and their commitment.

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Projects that are implemented with integrity benefit the local congregation or the ministry of the student in several ways. Perhaps most importantly, DMin projects are designed to address an identified need either in the context itself or in the broader context outside the institution where the student's ministry takes place. When implemented well, the project positively impacts the internal functions of a ministry, creates new and innovative ministries within the context or develops a ministry outside the institution that might not have been possible apart from the DMin project.

Another benefit to the context is that DMin projects most often require the use of laity in new and expanded ways. When executed well, the project increases both the confidence and the skill set of all those engaged in the project. This allows the institution to have an increased number of leaders within the context who can carry out the program whether the DMin student remains in that context or not.

The benefits of a well-executed DMin program may not be as obvious for the broader Christian community and the world. Nevertheless, the unity of the Church leads me to the conclusion that any effective project is both transferable and useful to the broader church. The prevalence of social media and the ability for persons to learn about and benefit from the sharing of information increases the likelihood that effective projects will be adopted, adjusted and implemented in other contexts. That possibility allows the work of a student in a particular context to provide an opportunity to enhance a ministry in another context thus positively impacting the whole church.

Conclusion

I am convinced that the Doctor of Ministry degree is or can be an important component of the curriculum of a theological seminary. However, it is time for the degree to be critically assessed in order to be rebooted. Like any degree, the DMin can be improved and strengthened but that will require a new commitment to the degree that is grounded in a clear appreciation of the value that the degree has and can have. Finding the appropriate balance between theory and praxis is essential to the future of the degree as is the recruitment of capable, committed students supported by a quality faculty.

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The rebooting of the DMin degree will also require theological schools to avoid seeing the DMin as a “cash cow” or as having the ability to single-handedly reverse declining enrollments without a considerable investment of time and resources. Last, but certainly not the least consideration, the faculty must provide oversight for the DMin program to protect the academic integrity of the program.

Ministry in the 21st Century will require ministers to be innovative, transformative, capable, committed, spiritually grounded, adaptable leaders. A well designed, effective DMin can help students improve those characteristics. The DMin provides the opportunity for practitioners to integrate theory and praxis in ways that allow the student to become more effective in the work of transforming institutions and communities. The ITC is one of the theological schools that is committed to rebooting the DMin in service to the church and the world. We welcome the opportunity and privilege of providing a fresh start for a seasoned degree.

The Leadership Practicum Reformed as Intercultural Formation and Dialogue

Marsha Snulligan Haney¹

The purpose of this essay is to affirm the value of experientially based leadership formation in doctor of ministry theological education, which traditionally has been the hall mark of religious leadership with the African American context. It suggests that by re-envisioning and broadening the goals of the leadership practicum as a core practice within the Doctor of Ministry Program (DMin), students may gain invaluable intercultural competencies as they carry out their ministry, regardless of the context- congregational, denominational, societal, or global. The ability to increase one's awareness and understanding of cultural and ethnic literacy, personal formation and development, attitude and values clarification, multi-ethnic and multicultural social competence, basic ministry skills proficiency, educational equity and excellence, and empowerment for missiological (intercultural) reform are possible. Students learn best about the need to affirm ethnic identity, to be inclusive, to appreciate diversity, and how to overcome fear of human diversity, such as xenophobia, racism, and hatred toward those with different worldviews and orientations, as they intentionally engage in ministry through times of cultural disorientation. Stated differently, DMin graduates will comprehend better the journey toward intercultural competence with more

¹ Rev. Marsha Snulligan Haney, Ph.D. is Professor of Missiology and Religions of the World, and Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program at the Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia. She has served the worldwide church in more than forty countries, in a variety of positions as theological educator, pastor, chaplain, and interfaith dialogue partner. It was early in her ministry while working with the Sudan Council of Churches (North Africa) and the Presbyterian Church of Cameroon (West Africa) that she discovered interfaith engagement as a vital form of Christian mission. The two essays are dedicated to her first Doctor of Ministry mentor and life-long friend, emeritus professor Dr. Gayraud Wilmore (the Doctor of Ministry Program, United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH in 1995-1999) who taught the importance of a "pragmatic spirituality" as an active demonstration of the Christian faith that enables meaningful, authentic, and faithful responses to pressing twenty-first-century leadership realities.

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clarity as they discover the truth expressed by Maya Angelou, “We are all human; therefore nothing human can be alien to us.”²

The Methodological Components of a Leadership Practicum Based on an Intercultural Competence

It is the purpose of this essay to call attention to the methodological components of a leadership practicum designed to increase intercultural competence. I suggest that at least for one semester or three credit hours course, DMin students would participate in intentionally guided periods of theological praxis, while actively engaged in action-based research within a different ethnic or cultural context. Faculty mentors and expert practitioners would assist or accompany students as they seek to process the meanings and implications of assumptions, actions, reflections, informed reactions, and decision making that arise in response to these cross-cultural or cross-ethnic contexts.

Encouraging students to take advantage of opportunities for social and cultural boundary crossing related to their specific ministry interest or research problem utilizing the lens of intercultural studies is one valuable way of increasing their professional vocational insight as leaders for the church, society, and the global community. DMin students as congregational and ministry leaders can engage in mission and ministry while examining “faith in light of experience” and “experience in light of faith.”³ A threefold model of theological praxis that encourages attention to exploring professional vocational concerns from an intercultural perspective can be extremely helpful in broadening learning insights and strengthening dissertation projects as they encounter and engage the worlds of tradition, personal position, cultural beliefs and assumptions, and implications for actions. What follows is the recommendation of one flexible methodology leading toward intercultural competency. (The methodology is also presented in the companion article as also relevant

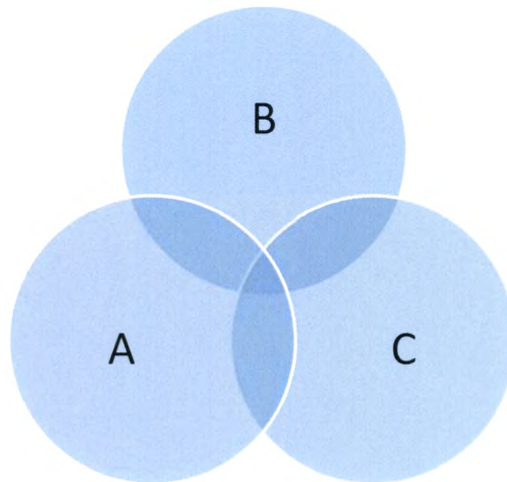
² Maya Angelou has shared these words referencing Terence, a slave whom Terentius Lucanus, a Roman Senator, brought to Rome, took under his wing, and educated him. Amazed at his abilities, he soon freed him out of respect for his abilities. Terence eventually became a celebrated playwright around 170 BCE. He famously wrote: “*Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto,*” or “I am a man, I consider nothing that is human alien to me.”

³ This is a mantra of the former director of the Ministry and Context Office, the late Michael I.N. Dash.

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and applicable to the development of interfaith or interreligious perspectives on issues encountered in the practice of ministry). With the goal in mind of increasing intercultural competence, faculty would encourage students to examine and engage interculturally in an andragogic methodology that: (1) *Engages* (asks questions); (2) *Explores* (investigates closely the ministry issue of concern); (3) *Explains* (enters into dialogue); (4) *Examines* (investigates lived examples); and (5) *Evaluates* (assesses the responses and outcomes). Encouraging DMin students to develop an attitude of openness and reflection when engaging people of other cultural

The Tripartite Nature of an Intercultural Religious Leadership Practicum that Engages Action Based Research
Figure 1



Circle A: The Intercultural Encounter

Based on a Professional Vocational Ministry Concern That Could Benefit from a Cross-cultural or Intercultural Encounter

Circle B: Sacred Text

The Ultimate Definer of the Meaning and Value of Human Diversity

Circle C: Intercultural Competence

Effective Communication and Participation in an Intercultural Situation to Effect Change

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is essential today. In *To Be One in Christ: Intercultural Formation and Ministry*, Fernando A. Ortiz recommends the following specific intercultural actions:⁴

1. Articulate a vision of the church and society that invites the spiritual inheritance of diverse cultural groups to complement and enrich each other.
2. Promote cultural awareness such that persons and groups not only become more conscious of their normative values, assumptions, worldview, preferences, behavioral norms, etc., but they can also identify how their culture resonates with or resist the gospel message and/or the faith tradition.
3. Foster cultural affirmation by enabling persons and groups to identify ways that their ethno- or sociocultural religiosity gives fuller voice to latent dimensions of the gospel and/or faith tradition, as well as ways that their religiosity can assist the larger faith community to have a fuller knowledge and appreciation for the new theological insights, prayer forms, pastoral priorities and expression of discipleship that are consistent with the gospel, but not adequately explored.
4. Cultivate cross-cultural literacy by providing varied and ongoing opportunities for persons to view events, situations, ambitions and problems from the perspective of other cultural groups and learn how these groups engage the gospel message and the faith traditions to address these realities.
5. Facilitate ongoing opportunities for intercultural sharing that enables persons from different cultural communities to participate in each other's communal life and celebrations, prayer, community service, education of the public and theological reflection.
6. Acknowledge that some persons may use referents other than ethnicity to name their cultural identity that is, youth culture, American culture, etc., and invite them to help their conversation partners see the convergent injustices of racism,

⁴ See chapter 8, "Becoming Who We Are: Beyond Racism and Prejudice in Formation and Ministry" in Ortiz and McGlone, *To Be One in Christ*. Please give publisher

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classicism, ageism, sexism, homophobias, and cultural arrogance.

7. Remember that culture belongs to the group, not simply a person, and ensure that the conversation partners who help construct the vision and the plan of our catechetical efforts actually constitute a diversified group of well-informed and representative spokes-persons of their respective communities.
8. And anticipate the need to work through the stressful feelings of isolation, alienation, fear, or anger that are inevitably evoked by the challenges of meaningfully engaging with persons unlike ourselves.

The concept of intercultural competence has expanded rapidly and urgently in the twenty-first century, and has required institutions of higher theological education to re-assess critically their policies and procedures related to theological leadership formation in a multi-culturally complex and dynamically global world. One might assume that there has developed, as a result, a significant body of literature devoted to the study of the intercultural competent student; but it does not exist. Though DMin administrators and educators are concerned about whether they are graduating intercultural competent students, there is little sign of a theology of intercultural competence upon which to draw. To speak of such a theology or theological perspective is a way of calling attention, first, to the need for critical and holistic theological thinking and active knowledge-based explorations on the themes of human diversity and intercultural realities; and second, to recognize the value that an intentionally designed intercultural leadership practicum based on outcomes and framed by intercultural attitudes, knowledge, understanding, and skills could have on doctor of ministry education formation.⁵

Clearly articulated vision and mission statements of institutions of higher education of all theological persuasions and backgrounds (whether

⁵ An attempt to address the need of a theology of intercultural competence is made in the essay, "A Theology of Intercultural Competence: Toward the Reign of God" by Marsha Snulligan Haney in Fernando A. Ortiz and Gerard J. McGlone, S.J., *To Be One in Christ: Intercultural Formation and Ministry* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015).

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formed and shaped from a denominational or ecumenical foundation) do exist. Through the use of religious imagination and metaphors, these institutions articulate a version of the type of student they seek to develop, one with the intercultural competence capable, for example, of educating and nurturing “women and men who commit to and practice a liberating and transforming spirituality; academic discipline; religious, gender, and cultural diversity; and justice and peace.”⁶ So the ITC faculty declares. But is the ITC in fact achieving the goal of educating graduate level theological students who are able to interact effectively as religious and theological leaders with persons from other cultures and in intercultural situations? I suggest that the ITC faculty, like most faculties of theological educational institutions, has much to do to educate interculturally competent theological students who are able to respond faithfully and effectively to complex immigrant, multiethnic, multicultural, and global concerns impacting congregations, ministries and their leaders.

The task of addressing this concern grew out of the recognition that although our knowledge about theological education methodologies necessary for the future is limited, theological educators can be certain that the future will be diverse: multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multicultural. Therefore, it is important and pressing to inquire how the DMin practicum may provide a framework for understanding and fostering the interculturally competent student as an anticipated outcome of DMin education.

Missiology, a theological discipline that developed in the US during the mid-20th century, has been reformed in the academy as Intercultural Studies, and has much to teach us on the subject matter. If theological education is to be perceived as meaningful, relevant, and having integrity, then attention must be given to the formation, development, and assessment of intercultural competent DMin graduates, both ordained and lay leaders, women and men, who constitute an intentional and anticipated outcome of an advanced theological professional education. What might we learn if more attention were given by DMin faculty and administrators to the concept of the interculturally competent graduate? How might we engage a methodology that encourages a holistic, integrated, and multi-disciplinary examination of intercultural competence and the leadership practicum, offering an

⁶ This reference is to the mission statement of the Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

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alternative trajectory from which to view the role and relationship of religious leadership, God, and self in a dynamic and constantly challenging and shrinking world?

The Current Multicultural Context and the Practice of Ministry

There are a number of reasons why DMin education should seek to address the need for intercultural competence and incorporate it within its curriculum and other programmatic activities. They include the following:

- the changing social realities of U.S. society as diverse ethnic, social, gender, economic, and cultural groups increase in size and social influence
- newer understandings of the Bible as a book that was written by and for immigrant communities and reflection
- the increase in awareness of the influence of culture and ethnicity on human growth and development, especially related to how effective teaching and learning, both oral and ocular, happen.;
- the changing dynamics between the growing Church of the Global South and the declining Church of the Global North, and the need for congregations and their leaders to respond as partners in God's mission
- the increase in the number of multicultural ministry possibilities in the local community that religious and ministry leaders must attend to, and
- the opportunities for both denominational and non-denominational leaders to respond to human rights and environmental justice issues that reflect the "*glocal*," that is, the interconnecting of realities that connect the local to the global in terms of both knowledge to be gained and action to be taken

However, as important as these macro factors are, an equally important and primary reason that DMin education should be concerned about intercultural competence is because of individuals— like Shanika, Daminaitha, and Thomas, Godman, Yasim—and their relationship to

churches like the new non-traditional The Redeemer Church.⁷ Located in mostly urban and suburban strip malls in most major cities, business owners such as these persons (representing varying attempts to claim a piece of the American dream) and their employees and customers daily must work and live together within a small physical space of no more than two acres of land, crossing boundaries of cultural and ethnic differences. Located in the same strip mall is The Redeemer Church, a small upstart ministry that seeks to minister to youth and deter juvenile delinquency. By commercial real estate contract, The Redeemer Church and the surrounding businesses share the same parking lot and public utility services; and as public citizens they share common concerns about the safety of their families, homes, schools, and the communities in which they work, live, and worship. Yet, as human beings they each embody a distinct worldview, philosophical and/or religious understandings of life and what gives it meaning, as well as a distinct cultural orientations. Although The Redeemer Church may be located in what traditionally has been considered an historic African American neighborhood, now Shanika, who is a second-generation African American owner of a beauty shop; Daminaitha and Thomas, who are from India and own the local print shop, Godman, who is from Nigeria and owns an auto repair shop, and Yasim, the Islamic owner of a local restaurant specializing in Halal foods: all must learn what it means to be neighbors in the new publically acknowledged multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and pluralistic society that has resulted. Like them, The Redeemer Church congregation and its pastoral leadership have discovered that they, too, must learn how to respond to that ancient religious question that has dire social consequences: "Who is my neighbor?"

Given such multi-ethnic and multi-cultural contexts in which religious leaders are called to demonstrate leadership, how does this question affect the practice of ministry? Or does it? Whether or not they are prepared, today's religious leaders are expected to engage current religious and societal issues within local multicultural communities, issues

⁷ This church, whose identity has been changed because of its recent profile, represents a growing phenomenon of store front types of churches and ministries across the nation that have been brought to the attention of the public and law, mainly because it attracts mainly urban African American youth.. It is reported that on more than one occasion, businesses have targeted the church and accused it of possibly engaging in dubious activities based primarily on racial profiling.

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that require a moral, ecclesiastical, religious, cultural, and global response. Current DMin students, and the graduates of terminal degree-conferring theological and religious programs, are expected to know how to lead congregations, chaplaincy and hospice programs, social agencies, funeral homes, and other forms of pastoral ministries in crossing cultural barriers of differences, in knowing how to be inclusive, and in broadening their commitment to the full participation of everyone in local and public life. Daily we hear negative reports of instances that illustrate why it is important to provide an education capable of enabling ministry and religious leaders to respond appropriately, intellectually, emotionally, and socially, to issues of cultural and social diversity. The presence of cultural and ethnic conflict and violence, racism, prejudice and discrimination, language differences, and differing worldviews and communication styles are often areas of great concern to our students not only because they are pastors, ministers, and Christian educators, but also because they are concerned citizens living with others in a diverse, multicultural society.

Intercultural Formation for Ministry in a Context of Cultural Disorientation

How DMin education can gain an understanding of its role and responsibility in educating the interculturally competent student as an anticipated outcome of theological education is not an easy question to answer. What are the intercultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills that theological leaders need to engage effectively persons and organizations of other cultures? As we consider this question of intercultural competence from the perspective of higher education, the research of Darla K. Deardorff is most helpful.⁸ Darla K. Deardorff is currently executive director of the Association of International Education Administrators, a national professional organization based at Duke University, where she is an adjunct Research Scholar in the Program in Education. Deardorff has published widely on topics in international education, global leadership and intercultural learning/assessment.

⁸ See “Internationalization: In Search of Intercultural Competence” by Darla K. Deardorff, in *International Educator*, Spring 2004: 13-15. Also helpful are the SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence, 2009 (Thousand Oaks: SAGE), and the Intercultural Competence Model presented by Deardorff in *Journal of Studies in International Education*, Fall 2006: 10, 241-266.

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Intercultural competence is a term used to describe the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people of other cultures. It is a lifelong, complex, and broad learning goal and must be broken down into more discrete, measurable learning objectives representing specific knowledge, attitude or skill areas. While her research on intercultural competence does not specifically include theological institutions of higher education, her focus on the graduate student as an analytical outcome of globalization or internationalization has been very helpful, particularly in terms of identifying underdeveloped areas of thinking which, if amplified, could contribute to a more holistic understanding of intercultural competence. Deardorff mentions in particular four areas where DMin education, based on the practice of ministry and the integration of intercultural competence may be helpful in addressing shortcoming: (1) the lack of specificity in defining the concept of intercultural competence, and specific components of it; (2) the lack of a designated method for documenting intercultural competence; (3) the lack of clarity as to what it means to be interculturally competent and how to collect the data on this; and (4) the lack of knowledge related to how to access meaningful outcomes.

In spite of these deficits, Deardorff's research moves us forward by raising the concern for clearly articulated statements of significant external and internal outcomes. The desired external outcome is for effective and appropriate communication, including effective and appropriate behavior in an intercultural situation. Also, the stated desired internal outcome is an informed frame of reference shift that includes traits such as adaptability, flexibility, ethno-relative view, and empathy. Whether these generic expressions of outcomes, as identified by Deardorff, are applicable and sufficient for theological education is debatable. For instance, the mayor of Atlanta has proclaimed that immigrant children, legal or not, will be welcomed to relocate to the city of Atlanta. His pronouncement was made while congregations and their leaders, and their neighbors are trying to discern if immigrants are a blessing or burden. The vision is that of DMin graduates- pastors, ministers and community and justice advocates- who have the capacity to assess and exhibit intercultural competence by broadening the work of Deardorff and others by incorporating missiological concepts such as intercultural empathy, and African centered spirituality principles based

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on Ubuntu.⁹ Until religious institutions are able to wrestle with and define theologically the concept of intercultural competence, and what it demands of them given their identity and context, authentic learning and teaching will be stymied.

Re-envisioning the Core Leadership Practicum Requirement

As African American theological institutions prepare leaders to engage actively and effectively in cross-cultural and intercultural ministries, it is important that they are able to identify and increase their understanding of those key factors (like experience, sacred scripture, tradition, culture, and social change) that have served to promote the Christian faith as an intelligent inquiry into God consciousness. This is crucial if theological education is to be perceived as useful and necessary by those in the pews and pulpits, as well as by those in the side streets and Wall Street—that is, as a heritage capable of embracing purposeful, creative, holistic, and healing human interactions. Because the contemporary struggle for human dignity and human rights within the USA is profoundly personal and communal, theological education has to take the first step in this suggested engagement, assisting local churches in drawing upon their spiritual, social, and theological resources in ways that ignite their sense of vision, purpose, and mission. Local churches need shepherding (mentoring) to overcome ignorance, hesitations, and the fear of change, and to provide them with a Christian moral compass as they grow in their discovery of who they are and how powerful they can become without the need to demonize either self or others who are different.

A great benefit of African American theological education is its tendency to value experientially based leadership and learning. As Michael Royster has stated, “Religious leadership within the African American context reflects a diverse and complex set of experiences, ideologies, and theological understandings as a group in diaspora. The experientially based leadership formation derives from the struggles for liberation, equality, and reconciling the African heritage with a Euro-based

⁹ Ubuntu is a Nguni Bantu term from the Southern African region, popularized by President Nelson Mandela which means literally “human-ness: and is roughly translating to “human kindness?”

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legacy into a distinct African American institution referred to as the 'black church.' ”¹⁰ The desired outcome is that by attending to a critical issue related to the practice of ministry within a multicultural or different cultural context as determined by the student, the leadership practicum course can provide both evidence of the importance of multicultural/multiethnic studies as a significant characteristic of theological education and leadership training for such multicultural and multiethnic situations. A dynamic and unique re-visioning and redesigning of the core leadership requirement to encourage intercultural understandings and skill development, such as the one proposed, will greatly assist DMin students in theological institutions to (1) gain empowering notions of selfhood within a multicultural and multi-ethnic contexts that will enable them to engage current ministerial and societal issues within an intercultural framework that explores their moral, ecclesiastical, missiological, and global responsibility; and (2) broaden as well as deepen their commitment to the full participation of everyone in local and public life.

¹⁰ See the chapter, “The African American Context” by Michael D. Royster in Sharon Henderson Callahan, ed., *Volume One: Formal and Informal Religious Leadership in the USA* 2013, (Thousand Oaks, SAGE).

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Theological Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Theological Education

Figure 2



While it is beyond this article to present a full analysis of the possible impact that redesigning the leadership practicum might have on the DMin

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educational process, what the above figure seeks to do is highlight the following:

1. **INTERNAL LEARNING OUTCOME:** The DMin student would develop an informed worldview that is capable of embracing people of other cultures and enables the student to participate with people of other ethnicities and cultures in order to work to effect social change in ways that are meaningful.
2. **EXTERNAL LEARNING OUTCOME:** The DMin student would develop the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in word, deed, and lifestyle (holistically) within an intercultural situation in either ministry or public life.
3. **INTERCULTURAL ATTITUDES:** The leadership practicum would begin with awareness training, teaching students how to be attentive to and experience the reality of the here and now as they encounter differing people. The following values would be emphasized: respect, human dignity, and the valuing of others. In addition, an openness to human differences, withholding judgment, compassion, being a risk taker, and assuming the posture of an andragogic (adult) learner, valuing curiosity and discovery would be promoted as key attitudes.
4. **INTERCULTURAL KNOWLEDGE:** The student would acquire knowledge related to: (1) the self, including cultural self-awareness and definitions, human diversity, social location, worldview, and history; (2) others, with an emphasis on understanding another's worldview and how it functions to describe a person's life, and the importance of culture and religious identities; (3) cultural knowledge of how cultures co-exist and conflict; (4) sociolinguistic awareness and plurality, and (4) the need to utilize and affirm multiple intelligences in order to shape a more informed leader.
5. **INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING:** Because intercultural knowledge involves more than simply knowledge of other cultures, and because knowledge does not constitute competency, attention must be given to the student's development of self-understanding in successfully interacting with persons of diverse backgrounds. True comprehension of intercultural teaching and learning comes through active engagement of mission and ministry practices because as learners we learn better through

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what we experience. As we engage in intercultural experiences of didactics such as listening and speaking, giving and receiving, praying and being prayed for, laughing and crying, suffering and healing, we become more proficient in the development of intercultural skills.¹¹

6. **INTERCULTURAL SKILLS:** The ability to engage in human exegesis, human archeology, spiritual geology, and story-linking are skills that can help move us beyond models of paternalism, colonialism, and imperialism, and that are developed over time as leaders learn to value their own beliefs as well as the beliefs of others. For instance, equipping oneself with the means to combat disinformation and misinformation is an important leadership skill and contribution to the construction of a culture of peace, and can ensure the development of culturally diverse communities with due regard and respect for their diversity.¹²

Conclusion

Like all U.S. institutions of higher education, DMin programs face many intellectual, social, and cultural challenges as they prepare women and men for relevant ministry in a changing world. Contemporary DMin students, as ministry leaders, often face a hermeneutical dilemma related to intercultural competence due to the current cultural disorientation that exists within theological education, the church, and society at large. In spite of this reality of disorientation, theological institutions of higher education are mandated to educate and prepare DMin graduates with intercultural skills that enable them to function effectively as leaders within a multiethnic and multicultural society.

It has been the intent of the essay to indicate how by re-envisioning and broadening the goals of the leadership practicum as a core practice within the program, students may gain invaluable intercultural competencies for their ministry at various levels: congregational,

¹¹ Sherron Kay George discussed these dyads in *Called as Partners in Christ's Service: The Practice of God's Mission* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2004).

¹² Refer to the (Multicultural and Multi-ethnic Societies-Discussion Paper Series-No. 1, Henri Giordan, UNESCO, <http://www.unesco.org/most/giordeng.htm>).

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denominational, societal, and global. The 21st century global and universal view of the world requires that Christian leaders are educated to live in it faithfully. In many aspects of Christian mission and ministry, the global has become local and the local is intricately related to the global. It is no wonder that a growing number of Doctor of Ministry dissertation projects illustrate that the pursuit of action-based knowledge is contextual, multiethnic, multi-faceted, and multicultural. Complex issues such as those related to cross-cultural ministerial appointments; the growing impact of believing immigrant communities; and, the increase in opportunities for active public and/or religious participation in local, national, and worldwide campaigns that matter,

Previously, the DMin practicum was described as a two semester course designed to place the student in a new learning context where the student could design, executive and evaluate an aspect of ministry. Because practicum supervision was not evenly available and supervisory evaluations were disjointed, the learning outcome proved difficulty to measure. The course has been reframed as an intensive one semester course with the emphasis on intercultural dialogue by leaders on leadership issues related to the student's research. The course is now described as intentionally designed intercultural dialogue with three diverse leaders on the research interest. The intentional intercultural or interfaith dialogues are designed by the student and DMin staff in collaboration to develop critical, reflective and investigative skills related to the practice of ministry and the final course project. A digital video is the final summative course outcome, one created by the student to show evidence of genuine new intercultural learning as the result of the leadership intercultural dialogue practicum. By re-imaging how the DMin practicum, as a core leadership course requirement, can be re-envisioned, two major outcomes were addressed. The first is centered on how to teach the student to become an interculturally competent professional who already functions as a religious leader in a variety of leadership contexts, and the second centered on how to increase the value of the dissertation project by utilizing and assessing intercultural knowledge related to an important practice of ministry as defined by the matriculating students. The growing number of DMin leaders and their congregations with memberships and ministries represented throughout the Africa Diaspora and the global community, as well as the number of non-traditional ministries that are addressing multicultural realities and social diverse contexts of ministry, are constant reminders that a mono-culturally based

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education is no longer adequate to address complex issues that DMin students encounter in the practice of ministry today.

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The Leadership Practicum: The Space Where DMin Education, Action Based Research and Interfaith Dialogue Converge

Marsha Snulligan Haney¹

Abstract

This essay argues that interfaith engagement is an invaluable form of Christian mission wherever Christian and other faith communities live together and share common social and geographical space. Actually, it is perhaps one of the most valued forms of Christian mission operable among dynamic multi-religious urban contexts in North America. The question that stands out is: “What would happen if the core DMin leadership course—the practicum—was re-conceptualized to enable the student who is engaged in action-based research to benefit academically from the perspectives and insights of another religion or faith tradition?” My suggestion is that the andragogy that informs my teaching among MDiv theological students at the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC), as they are equipped for ministry in the dynamically religious contexts of urban USA; has applicability for DMin education.² This unique approach toward interfaith dialogue competency supports and offers current and future Christian leaders opportunities for engaging three religions: African, Jewish and Islamic; and their faith systems based on a more relational model of interfaith engagement.

Introduction

In an article titled *America’s Changing Religious Landscape*, the Pew Foundation highlighted the sharp decline of the Christian population in the US, and the fact that unaffiliated and other religious faiths continue to grow. “Between 2007 and 2014, the Christian share of the population

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² This essay is adapted from an abridged article entitled “Theological Education in the Urban Context: Engaging the Children of Anowa, Sarah, and Hagar” that originally appear in *Evangelical Interfaith Dialogue: Mission and Dialogue: Critical Conversations for a Global Church*, Fuller Theological Seminary, Fall 2014. For the entire original article, please visit www.fuller.edu/eid.

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fell from 78.45 to 70.6%, driven mainly by declines among mainline Protestants and Catholics. The unaffiliated experienced the most growth, and the share of Americans who belong to the non-Christian faith also increased.”³ While the focus of the previous essay is on the intercultural phenomena and how the DMin practicum can be designed to encourage intercultural competence, this essay is centered on how teaching DMin students to value interfaith dialogue and to learn with other religious leaders within their ministry communities can provide a unique learning experience that may impact positively the DMin dissertation project as well as the DMin researcher. This essay argues that not only is interfaith engagement an invaluable form of Christian mission wherever Christian and other faith communities live together and share common social and geographical space, but it is perhaps one of the most valued forms of Christian mission operable among dynamic multi-religious urban contexts in North America. What would happen if the core DMin leadership course—the practicum—was re-conceptualized to enable the student who is engaged in action-based research to benefit academically from the perspectives and insights of another religion or faith tradition? In this essay, I suggest that the andragogy that informs my teaching among MDiv theological students at the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC), as they are equipped for ministry in the dynamically religious contexts of urban USA; has applicability for DMin education.⁴ This unique approach toward interfaith dialogue competency supports and offers current and future Christian leaders opportunities for engaging three religions: African, Jewish and Islamic; and their faith systems based on a more relational model of interfaith engagement.

³ The source is the 2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4 to September 30, 2014.

⁴ This essay is adapted from an abridged article entitled “Theological Education in the Urban Context: Engaging the Children of Anowa, Sarah, and Hagar” that originally appear in *Evangelical Interfaith Dialogue: Mission and Dialogue: Critical Conversations for a Global Church*, Fuller Theological Seminary, Fall 2014. For the entire original article, please visit www.fuller.edu/eid.

The Ministry Context of Religious Plurality

Located approximately five minutes from the ITC in southwest Atlanta, Georgia is the West End, a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious community that often serves as a dynamic living 'classroom without walls' for courses in Missiology and Religions of the World Department at ITC. It is often acknowledged that the defining characteristic of the West End is its wide array of religious institutions, from the historic West Hunter Street Baptist Church to an old-fashioned spiritual reader to the Shrine of the Black Madonna Cultural Center and Bookstore of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church. For at least fifteen years, the West End community has played a significant role providing ITC students with a dynamic learning context to discover and practice what it means to be a Christian leader in a religiously dynamic community with a concern for interfaith competence. Students engage the following religious faith communities:

- *The Children of Anowa* (African Indigenous Believers): Anowa is a mythical woman representing Africa and the continental values of "love and respect for life, of people and of nature."⁵ African spirituality in the West End is not restricted to places of worship, but is evident wherever African men, women and children are: in the home, the market place, learning centers and community gathering places.
- *The Children of Sarah* (Judaism): The African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem, sometimes referred to as the Hebrew Israelites, or the Black Jews, are very active in urban cities of the US. With a homeland based in Israel and as the largest African American religious community outside of the USA, the Hebrew Israelites through a number of public outreach and economic-based activities seek to impact the mind, health and spirit.

⁵ See *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*, by Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Orbis: 1995), page 10. Oduyoye further describes how Anowa is meaningful in the Ghanaian culture and makes references to other sources where Anowa is described as a priest (see *Anowa*, London: Harlow, 1970 and Longman-Drumbeat, 1980) and as prophet (*Two Thousand Seasons* (East African Publishing House, Nairobi, 1973) who represents Africa.

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- *The Children of Sarah* (Christian): Diverse Christian congregations which have had a long presence in the West End are also involved in community outreach activities. All types of congregations and congregational ministries are evident in great variations—Protestant, Catholic, Pan African, Pentecostal, multicultural and the historic Black Church.
- *The Children of Hagar* (Islam): The West End Islamic Center, known as the Community Masjid, has functioned for more than 25 years, dedicated to the establishment of Islam in the West. In addition to the followers of the late Wadith D. Mohammad also present are various forms of the Nation of Islam, and the Moors.

As DMin students seek to respond as informed leaders to complex and often challenging problems that arise within the context of the practice of ministry, they need to be encouraged to take advantage of the presence of other religious leaders and faith traditions residing within the ministry context for learning, teaching and building relations. Not only might students gain valuable insights that can enhance their dissertation projects, but they will also be challenged to develop a way of ‘being’ that informs how they as Christian leaders are to (1) treat people who embrace different faith traditions and (2) how to treat what they believe.

The Methodological Components of an Interfaith Engagement: As Theological Praxis of Christian Mission

Recognizing that there is no religion that has not been influenced by cultures and no culture that has not been influenced by religions, Christian theological institutions should actively and effectively prepare students to engage in interfaith ministries, identifying and utilizing key resources (experience, sacred scripture, tradition, culture and social change) that have served to promote the Christian faith as an intelligent inquiry into God consciousness. These same institutions serve their students well by helping them to understand the presence and power of other religious traditions, and how other believing leaders utilize their faith to promote religion as an intelligent inquiry into God consciousness. Understanding this is crucial if Christian mission and ministry are to be perceived as useful and necessary by those living and working within the West End and also globally as a faith heritage capable of embracing purposeful, creative, holistic, and healing human interactions.

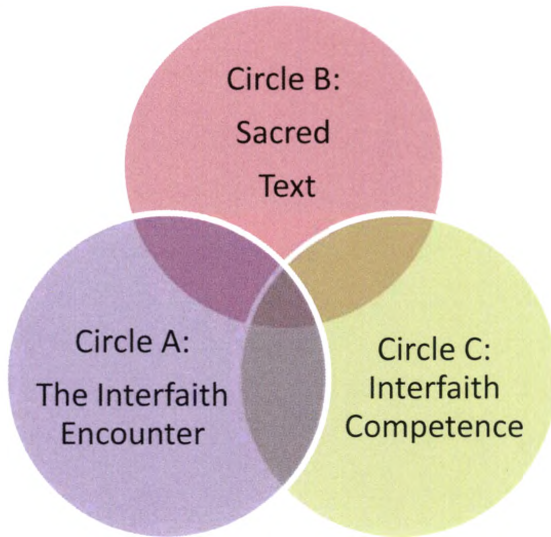
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Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., bell hooks, James Cone, Deborah Majeed, Amina Wadud, Cornell West, Jacqueline Grant, Katie Cannon, Anthony Pinn, Will Coleman and so many other community advocate/activist/ scholars remind us clearly that the contemporary struggle for human dignity and human rights within the USA is profoundly personal and communal. Because of this, and given the dehumanizing theologies and methodologies historically affiliated with Christian missions (local, national and worldwide); along with prostitution of the gospel message associated with the encounters of people— particularly of African descent—by western Christianity for economic gains; it is crucial that African American Christian leaders should use their theological resources in ways that respect people and can ignite a sense of shared vision and purpose. Local churches and their leaders across the nation, who are located in religiously diverse contexts such as the West End, need mentoring as to how they can overcome ignorance, hesitancies and the fear of change, and in providing a moral compass as they grow in their discovery of who they are and how powerful they can become without the need to demonize self, or to demonizing others who are different. It is only when theological institutions are able to help churches and ministries to embrace what church historian emeritus, Gayraud Wilmore, refers to as a “pragmatic spirituality,”⁶ an active demonstration of the Christian faith, will leaders be able to respond meaningfully, authentically and faithfully to 21st century realities facing religiously diverse communities, and the changing religious landscape.

⁶ *Pragmatic Spirituality: The Christian Faith through an Africentric Lens* by Gayraud S. Wilmore (New York University Press, 2004) is the book referenced here.

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Figure 1: The Tripartite Nature of Interfaith Engagement as Christian Mission Praxis⁷



Circle A: The Interfaith Encounter

The learning process that is advocated in this essay begins not in an abstract or virtual world, but instead with a story of real people engaged in real life learning. It begins with the DMin student who has encountered a particular theme, concern or problem as result of engaging in the practice of ministry and has identified that theme as worthy of an academic pursuit. As a result of engaging in action based research, and discovering that the problem that needs to be addressed is not only of interest to Christians, the student realizes that by welcoming the insight of another religious or faith perspective centered on that very issue can serve to broaden and enrichen, and not reduce his/her knowledge base. By focusing on a real lived problem identified and described by the DMin student, one that originates as a result of ministry practice and that is brought intentionally to an interfaith encounter relative to leadership practice, allows all persons

⁷ This methodology (and the related figures presented) are adapted from the work of an international research and writing team I participated in which resulted in *God So Loves the City: Seeking a Theology for Urban Mission*, by Charles Van Engen and Jude Tiersma, editors, (MARC: 1994).

involved in the story (of dialogues) to be viewed as subjects and not as objects, and what they see, hear, interpret and experience, to receive voice. While the story of interfaith encounter focuses primarily on a problem or concern that originated in relations to the practice of ministry, it is important not to limit its public connectivity, but and to recognize that many of the ministerial issues that students seek to address have the ability to impact a number of issues of public concern: family, education, juvenile justice, economic disparity, senior care, and health disparity, and overcoming community violence.

Narrative inquiry, a relatively new qualitative methodology, is centered in the study of experience understood narratively. It encourages a way of thinking and studying experiences that follow a recursive, reflexive process of moving from a particular field (with starting points in telling or living stories) to fields of texts (data) to interim and final research texts.⁸ Any religious activity that leaders perform in the story helps expand our understanding of power actions and leadership influence. This method rejects the information deposit-making pedagogy, and instead involves students in the practice of teaching and learning based on the realism of intercultural encounters of our time. Because it also allows an enhanced understanding of leadership as the exercise of power and influence through the shaping of behaviors, practices and thoughts, it is highly recommended.

Circle B: Sacred Text, the Ultimate Definer of the Meaning and Value of Human Diversity

How does God view human diversity based on the Bible, the sacred text of Christians? Daniel Aleshire of the Association of Theological Schools has observed theologically, “it is one thing to conclude that racial prejudice and the discrimination that is caused are wrong, and another to conclude that diversity is a theological virtue.”⁹ Is human diversity a theological virtue? Even among North American Christians, the response to this questions varies. How is human diversity presented in the sacred written texts of other faith traditions such as, the Torah, the Qur’an, the Vedas, and the Tripitaka, as well as the unwritten sacred text of African and Native American spirituality? Because of the

⁸ See D. Jean Clandinin, *Engaging in Narrative Inquiry: Developing Qualitative Inquiry*, Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, California, 2013).

⁹ Daniel Aleshire, “Gifts Differing: Race and Ethnicity in Theological Education”, Chief Academic Officers Society Seminary, June 2008, 6.

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sola scriptura adage in the Protestant Christian mission movement, our DMin students must give careful attention to the Bible as sacred text and how it functions in shaping the role and praxis of interfaith competence. Because the Bible bears witness to the revelation of God in Jesus the Christ who shapes religious beliefs and practices, it is imperative in a religiously diverse society that believing people and believing faith communities understand and are able to articulate what they believe their sacred scripture teaches about what it means to be human, humanity diversity, and the diversity of human experience.

I offer one final comment related to the Bible as sacred text. Contrary to popular belief, the African American believing communities still place a premium value on the Bible as sacred text. As theologian Renita J. Weems has stated:

An on-going challenge for scholars committed to a liberation perspective on the Bible is explaining how and why modern readers from marginalized communities continue to regard the Bible as meaningful resource for shaping modern existence. This is a challenge because in some crucial ways not only do biblical authors at times perceive reality very differently from these groups, but the Bible itself is often used to marginalize them...Likewise, African American scholars have brought eloquent and impassioned charges against the Bible as an instrument of the dominant culture that was used to subjugate African American people. However, the Bible is still extremely influential in the African American religious life, and these scholars are hard pressed fully to explain why.¹⁰

Given the current USA context of terrorism, violence and hatred (referring to the mass shooting at the Pulse Nightclub, Orlando, Florida, June 12, 2016) DMin students should be encouraged to study social issues, concerns and themes that impact the human spirit from both the internal perspective of our own sacred text, as well as from the external perspective of the faiths of our neighbors, those with whom we share geographical

¹⁰ "Reading Her Way through the Struggle: African American Women and the Bible" by Renita J. Weems. 1991, in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Cain Hope Felder; Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 57.

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space and community. As Christian leaders, students must be prepared and willing to learn and teach or study with other religious people, and dialogue about the teachings and work of Jesus Christ as well as learn about the teachings of the Qur'an. The identity of Jesus as Prophet, Teacher, Savior and Liberator, on the move, constantly engaging, challenging and confronting people with the notion of the reign of God, promoting human wholeness in the midst of a dehumanizing empire, is an extremely important one for DMin students. By examining Jesus as Teacher, DMin students learn how to engage in meaningful interfaith dialogue by focusing on that which is central to our faith—how Jesus teaches by doing (we are called to do love); that he is the Text on intercultural competence, and if we want to know what he teaches about relationship with other religious people, Jews and non-Jews, we need to watch how he teaches and what he teaches. Jesus did not segregate; he teaches us how to overcome the greatest impediment to learning, fear; how to overcome walls of hopelessness and how to build people up; and how to forgive.¹¹

Circle C: Interfaith Competence

The third circle involves bringing into focus the narrative of the theological education institution and its capacity to dialogue with alums as well as current the DMin student who is engaged in interfaith activity for the purpose of shaping convictions, policy and procedures. How to define and access demonstrations of effective implementation of Christian mission as interfaith engagement is not an easy task. As was emphasized in the previous essay centered on the concept of intercultural competency, interfaith competence can be measured, but because interfaith competence involves more than knowledge of other religions, attention must be given to a larger and deeper educational process that involves the comprehension and development of one's self and attitudes in effectively and successfully engaging with persons of diverse religious backgrounds.

In an effort to advance in the process of interfaith (and intercultural) competency, higher theological education institutions must rely on their historical, psychological, sociological, theological and creative resources. It is helpful for institutions to facilitate this necessary

¹¹ James H. Cone in *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Orbis, 2013) does an excellent job in bringing together two of the most emotionally charged symbols in the history of the African American community. He explores these symbols and their interconnection in the history and beliefs of African Americans.

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and crucial dialogue related to interfaith competence by beginning with an acknowledgement of the rich resources already represented among the faculty. For instance, at the ITC professors Anne Streety Wimberly (Christian Education) and Edward P. Wimberly (Pastoral Care) have long incorporated within their educational work—among future and current theological students—a learning module on “Leadership and Multiple Intelligences.” Leadership in ministry requires an understanding of intelligence that goes beyond our normal considerations. While a monocultural perspective on the topic of intelligence with its greater emphasis on intelligent quotas (IQ) and grade point averages (GPA) prevails within the USA, this understanding is often found to be too limited and limiting. On the other hand, a multicultural and multi-religious perspective on the topic of intelligences enables us to broaden the understanding of intelligence that we bring not only to the classroom setting, but also to all other programmatic aspects of ministry. Such a shift allows us to discover that one of the most important intelligences required within the urban multi-religious context is emotional intelligence. For the Wimberley’s, an emphasis on multi-intelligences and knowing how to best utilize them helps to develop intercultural and interfaith traits important to leaders: accurate self-assessment, self-confidence, self-control, transparency, adaptability, initiative, optimism, social awareness, empathy, and organizational awareness.¹²

¹² What follows is a list of intelligences from a holistic perspective that program administrators, curriculum researchers, and educators invested in cognitive theory have affirmed as important to cultivate. The Faith Journey in Partnership Program, a mentoring program developed by Anne Wimberly at ITC identifies as important the following listing: 1. Verbal/Linguistics: the use of the spoken and written words in learning; 2. Logical/Mathematical: the use of abstract patterns, concepts, number, linear and sequential thinking; 3. Visual/Spatial: the use of physically seeing and mentally picturing images as a way of learning; 4. Body/Kinesthetic: the use of our bodies as a means of learning; 5. Musical/Rhythmic: the use of sound, rhythms, tunes and songs in learning; 6. Interpersonal: the use of communications with one or more person in learning; 7. Intrapersonal: the use of inner knowledge and reflection as a means of learning; 8. Emotional: the use of emotional sensitivity and management skills for learning; 9. Relational: the use of and value of relationships as a way of learning; 10. Spiritual: the use of integrity, intuition, wisdom and compassion in learning; and, 11. Cultural: the use of aptitudes and skills for interaction and problem solving in intercultural learning.

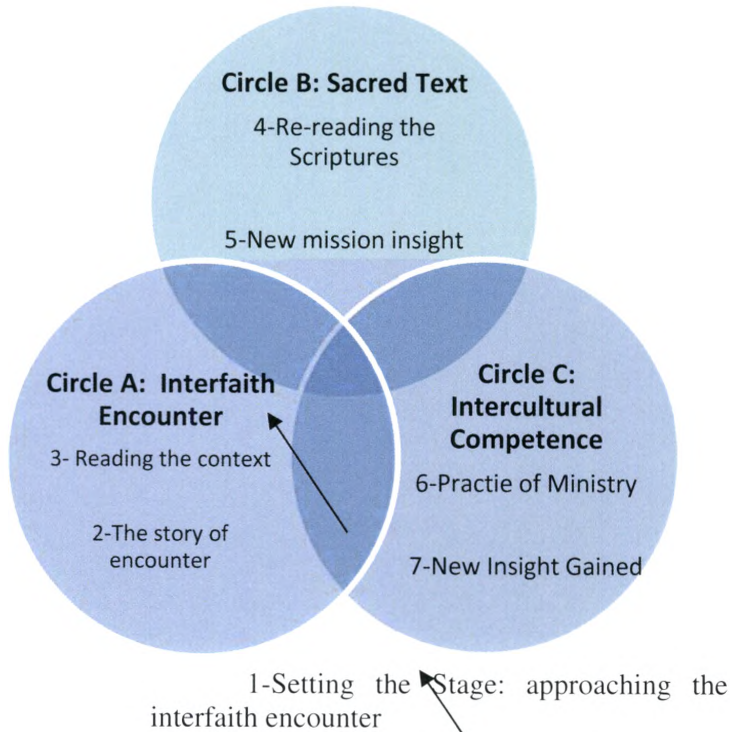
The Overlapping, Integrating Shaded Spaces of Reflection

The three circles presented below are linked by shaded spaces that symbolically represent intentional, guided periods of theological reflection, sometimes in solitude, but most often communal. This period of theological reflection on a specific ministry activity is crucial in discovering the level of interfaith competency of the student as an anticipated outcome of theological education. The late Michael I.N. Dash, Professor Emeritus of the Ministry and Context Department at ITC, would stress again and again the importance of engaging in theological and ministry reflections that examines “one’s faith in the light of experience” and “experience in the light of one’s faith”. Aimed at pressing the question about the presence of God in the experiences of cross-cultural life and intercultural realities, and the implications for that presence, Dash would utilize a four-source model of theological reflection that would encourage attention given to exploring the world of tradition, personal position, cultural beliefs and assumptions, and implications for action.

It is through dynamic theological reflection on interfaith engagement that the student is led to self-identify areas of personal responsibility and to take responsibility for personal growth and spiritual maturity as discerned necessary to accomplish a given purpose. Individual traits (flexibility, empathy, sincere listening, etc.) as well as attention to the nature of the relationship between individuals involved in an interfaith encounter are significant. Because there is no prescriptive set of individual characteristics or traits that guarantee compliance in all interfaith or interreligious situations, relationships and the quality of relationships formed are also emphasized.

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Figure 2: Methodological components of Interfaith Competence



1. Setting the Stage: Who (self-define with specificity) is attending to this encounter, and what assumptions are undergirding the encounter?
2. The Story: What ministry issue or social concern, based on action-based research, is identified as significant, one that could benefit from another religious or faith perspective and that forms the narrative inquiry?
3. Reading the Context: What contextual dynamics and relationships are at play, and how do you understand them?
4. Rereading the Sacred Text: How might a re-focus on the Bible as sacred text shed light on the particular social or ministry incident? What insight might be gained from studying the issue of concern from the perspective of another faith's sacred text?

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5. New Interfaith or Religious Insights:¹³ What new insight gained might help to shape a better understanding related to the dissertation project and/or theological reflections?
6. Leadership Mission action: What interfaith competence action and skills are required of the student as a sign and symbol of the reign of God?
7. New Insight gained into the Practice of Ministry: What new insight has been gained as a result of engaging in dialogue and viewing the ministry concern from the perspective of another believing community? As a result of engaging in this particular methodology aimed at discovering God's will and God's ways, how can we envision a different response, one that speaks of "love and respect for life, of people and of nature"?

Conclusion

As DMin students prepare to serve the church, Christian ministries, public educational institutions and other social agencies, they must be reminded that they do so within a religiously diverse context. It does no good to ignore or silence others who live within our ministry context and with whom we must share geographical space simply because their faith beliefs differ. The seven steps identified in the methodology recommended in this essay are meant to promote interfaith competence. If observed, it becomes clear that through interfaith encounters, not only do students engage in intrapersonal reflections that allows them to self-assess their ability to serve as religious leaders in a variety of vocational and professional settings, but they also discover new skills developed that may be used to serve the church and the public in variety of ways, such as: public theologian, innovative faith leader, community activist, interfaith dialogue partner, religiously inclusive creative educator, contextual and cross-cultural communicator, prophetic justice minister, and asset based community developer. By suggesting a particular methodological

¹³ Essential principles of womanist religious scholars, pastoral care givers, and womanist methodologies that are applicable and offer extremely helpful insight are as follows: the promote clear communications (verbal, physical and/or spiritual); multi-dialogical; liturgical intent, has implications for life and living; didactic intent, has implications for teaching and learning; committed to both reason and experience; holistic accountability (rejects bifurcation between sacred and mundane); and has a concern for healing.

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paradigm, attention was given to how the interfaith engagement of students may become an analytical outcome of Christian mission which points toward a process that enables us to learn how to provide students with the attitudes, skills and behaviors that will lead to effective, successful and faithful leadership competence in contexts of religious diversity.

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The Doctor of Ministry Cohort As A Transformative Dialogue Group

James T. Roberson, Jr.¹

Constance L. Chamblee²

Transformative Dialogue in a Doctor of Ministry Program can function as a transformative learning experience that fosters Professional Ministry Development for ministers. Transformative dialogic moments shape the identity of learners by means of creating learning spaces to facilitate Professional Ministry Development. The sharing, respect, and commitment to the ideas and needs of the group can serve as a *mephato* which is a cohort called together to receive training and/or mobilize each other to construct useful knowledge together as a collective. These groups or cohorts provide a unique container for transformative learning within their relationships fostered through self-awareness, group identity, and critical consciousness. Triggered by moments of cognitive dissonance, the Doctor of Ministry group works and dialogues in peer sessions and unique ministry contexts as a means for personal and social transformation. Transformative Learning literature emphasizes the role of relationships with others in such a group as the Petri dish— the growth-supporting environment— that provides both the container and space in which such learning can occur, and the dialogical processes through which learning takes place. In this article, the authors explore the concept of Transformative Dialogue Groups as a development tool for Professional Ministry Training in a Doctor of Ministry cohort or *mephato*.

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Transformative Dialogue Group

Transformative Learning in Adult Education³

Transformative Learning,⁴ introduced by Jack Mezirow in 1978, is a theory of adult learning in which individuals learn to critically examine prior assimilated frames of reference, mindsets, and systems of belief. Transformative Learning occurs as a result of individuals examining and reflecting on prior held assumptions and expectations and, finding them to be problematic, revising those expectations. Throughout the course of an individual's lifetime, belief systems become frames of reference or what Mezirow terms as meaning perspectives through which all experiences are filtered and understood.

Distinguishing between adult learning and formative learning by assessing the latter as the process by which knowledge is gained as a result of traditional educational programs is one of the key components of Transformative Learning Theory. During the formative learning process, individuals acquire knowledge as a result of assimilating information acquired in childhood often from parents, teachers, and other authority figures. Information gained during this time is taken in uncritically and involves information taken for granted such as values, beliefs, stereotypes, distortions, and prejudices. Transformative Learning is the process of examining, questioning, and revising prior formative learning through critical reflection. Within this process, learners assess the integrity of deeply held assumptions in order to bring about new ways of defining their worldview.

The Transformative Learning process initiates inconsistencies between prior and current state of beliefs or cognitive dissonance. Mezirow envisioned this dissonance to trigger the process that forces learners to begin self-examination and to scrutinize their set of assumptions or beliefs: an event he calls a disorienting dilemma.⁵ Once triggered, the learner progresses through the ten steps of the transformative

³ For a thorough treatment of Transformative Learning in Adult Education the reader is referred to the book: Edward W. Taylor and Patricia Cranton, *The Handbook of Transformative Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice* (San Francisco : John Wiley & Sons, 2012).

⁴ Jack Mezirow *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999).

⁵ Jack Mezirow, *Learning As Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 21.

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learning process which involves an accretive process of altering specific beliefs imposed by external trigger events and which force individuals to challenge the premise of their original frame of mind or habits of expectations. Mezirow acknowledged that a disorienting dilemma could be an evolutionary or revolutionary process involving incremental shifts in consciousness. These shifts in consciousness can be epochal or incremental events over an individual's lifetime⁶ and can result in personal disequilibrium which changes an individual's perspective.⁷ According to Mezirow's theory, Transformative Learning occurs across the following phases:

1. a disorienting dilemma;
2. self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame;
3. a critical assessment of assumptions;
4. recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared;
5. exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions;
6. planning of a course of action;
7. acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing ones' plans;
8. provisional trying of new roles;
9. building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships; and
10. a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective⁸

Transformative Learning occurs as a result of an internally imposed disorienting dilemma. Progression through the ten phases of Transformative Learning varies across and in accordance with individual's unique circumstances. This transformation may involve objective or subjective reframing. In reframing, individual's points of view are transformed through critical reflection on the content of a problem or on the process of problem solving, thus, resulting in perspective transformation.

⁶ Taylor and Cranton, *The Handbook on Transformative Learning*.

⁷ Edward W Taylor. "The Theory and Practice of Transformative Learning: A Critical Review." ERIC Publications, no. 374. (1998): 41.

⁸ Taylor and Cranton, *The Handbook on Transformative Learning*, 86.

Transformative Dialogue Group

The Doctor of Ministry Focus Group

The Doctor of Ministry (DMin) degree is an Association of Theological Schools (ATS) defined degree. According to the ATS Degree Standards,⁹ the purpose of the DMin degree is to enhance the practice of ministry. This degree is designed for persons experienced in substantial ministerial leadership who wish to enhance their competencies in pastoral analysis and ministerial skills. Persons participating in an ATS approved DMin program are required to “design and complete a written doctoral-level project that addresses both the nature and the practice of ministry.”¹⁰

Many DMin programs operate on a cohort basis, whereby a group of students will go through the program and finish together. The DMin cohort can adapt the characteristics of Focus Group Research¹¹ in defining a DMin Focus Group. A Focus Group is generally thought of as a qualitative research method whereby a small (normally 6 to 12) group of participants are led by a moderator to explore the probable success of a particular commodity. The moderator would guide the participants through a series of questions to explore nuances of the commodity. This technique can be used in exploring issues in the practice of ministry. A mentor for the cohort, who has expertise in the ministry issue, can serve as moderator of the focus group and the DMin students can serve as the participants. Each participant will examine the ministry issue through the lens of their particular context. It could be further stipulated that the DMin projects the students will work on should address the same ministry issue but approached through different contexts and from different perspectives. As an example, a DMin Focus Group whose ministry issue is Christian Education would be mentored by a person with a terminal degree and practical experience in Christian Education. Persons joining the group would understand that the particular ministry issue of the group is Christian Education.

⁹ ATS Degree Program Standards, <http://www.ats.edu/accrediting/standards-and-notations>, accessed November 5, 2015.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ David L. Morgan, *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed., (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1997).

Collaborative Learning and Social Constructivism in a Transformative Dialogic Group

Social Constructivism,¹² as discussed by Beck and Kosnik, operates as an essential element to group learning within the Transformative Learning Process. Constructivist assumptions hold that individuals interpret their experiences in their own way as a result of their perceptions and understandings. Collaborative inquiry, as a part of Transformative Learning, is a process of examining, questioning, and revising those perceptions and experiences within the context of groups. Such groups, known as Transformative Dialogic Groups, are delineated as a collection of individuals who are there to support each other's personal learning with a goal of self-discovery in the context of relationship with others.¹³ These groups provide a unique container for Transformative Learning by fostering critical self-reflection brought on by members' commitment to the group. The DMin Focus Group in which Collaborative Inquiry takes place, operates as a container or space that supports personal growth and change. This article takes the position that a DMin Focus Group can provide a context for Transformative Learning utilizing a dialogical approach. The Doctor of Ministry Focus Group can function as a growth-supporting environment to facilitate a dialogical encounter of group members as they process through the ten steps of Mezirow's Transformative Learning theory.

Engaging in group dialogue functions as a conduit for fostering critical reflection in the process of Transformative Learning. This critical reflection can take place on three levels: within the ministry context, between peers, and within the academy with ministry professionals. At the ministry context level, each person in the DMin Focus Group works with a group of stakeholders within their ministry context which can be referred to as Context Associates. DMin students participating in dialogue within this group of Context Associates will facilitate reflection, action, and analysis to assist them with addressing real issues within the ministry context. Additionally, group dialogue with Context Associates can assist the student with research to enhance their study of the ministry context. This research includes the congregation, its location, history, community in which it is located, characteristics, strengths, and perception of its need.

¹² Vygotsky, Lev. *Mind in Society*. (London: Harvard University Press, 1978).

¹³ Taylor and Cranton, *The Handbook on Transformative Learning*, 361.

Transformative Dialogue Group

In the process of examining the ministry context, Context Associates enter into group dialogue for reflection, action and analysis to assist the DMin student with the development of their Doctor of Ministry project.

At the peer level, a part of the group dialogic process allows focus group members to assist each other by providing safe, trusting, and respectful learning environments for peer reactions. These reactions involve an individual or intrapersonal process of critical reflection or discernment in genuine dialogue with others working toward similar goals. Within these groups; dialogue occurs on a relational basis where members are fully present with one another in the ongoing processes of relating, often eliciting a disorienting dilemma or dissonance. This dissonance or seeming contradiction among peer group members is grist for transformative group work. To the extent that peer group dialogue highlights dissonance, perspective transformation can occur at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup levels.

Group dialogue with ministry professionals can evoke what Shapiro et al, calls a critical systemic consciousness: the social emancipatory approach to Transformative Learning. This level of dialogue induces a contextual critical consciousness as suggested by Paulo Freire in his *conscientization*.¹⁴ The focus here is on understanding and changing shared aspects of group members' social realities, locations, and contexts.¹⁵ Such a level of dialogue works to understand the ways in which the structural and systemic causes of what may be first perceived as personal problems or limitations. The social emancipatory approach involves any process in which individuals reflect together on the shared aspects of their realities and develop a deeper understanding of the structural and systemic limitations to their full participation.¹⁶ Professional group dialogue reflects on individual's lived experiences as well as what plays out in the group's current internal dynamics. As a result, group consciousness is elevated through dialogue about how oppression and/or injustice is occurring elsewhere and what can be done to interrupt it.

In addition, dialogue with the academic disciplines focuses upon shared inquiry into issues related to oppression and liberation. Here, the emphasis centers upon unpacking and transforming collective, internalized oppression and domination. Students are able to engage in

¹⁴ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (New York: Continuum, 1993).

¹⁵ Taylor and Cranton, *The Handbook on Transformative Learning*, 366.

¹⁶ Ibid. 367.

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Action Research¹⁷ through collaborative inquiry among groups emphasizing shared inquiry into issues related to oppression and liberation. Although collaborative inquiry can involve a group exploration of any question of shared interest, it incorporates repeated Action Research cycles of inquiry, action, reflection, and dialogue.¹⁸

The Doctor of Ministry Transformative Dialogue Focus Group

The DMin Focus Group can function as a Transformative Dialogue Group which focuses on a particular ministry issue. Schapiro, Wasserman, and Gallegos have commented on the transformative power of dialogue and have suggested “dialogue as a process through which people in groups can explore their assumptions and ways of meaning making.”¹⁹ They suggest the group can function as a growth-supporting environment that provides the container and space for learning to occur, as well as the dialogical process through which learning unfolds. Peggy Gabo Ntseane looks at Transformative Learning from an African perspective and has suggested ‘the role of elders is also important for transformative learning because of the knowledge embedded in their wisdom and experiential learning.’²⁰ She also uses the African term *mephato* to refer to a cohort called together to receive training and mobilize each other to construct useful knowledge together as a collective.²¹ This article is suggesting that the DMin Focus Group is able to function as a *mephato* to appropriate knowledge in a given ministry issue with the purpose of improving the quality of ministry for the church. The mentor of the DMin Focus Group is seen as the elder providing the wisdom and training for the *mephato*. This objective is consistent with the requirements of the DMin program as defined by ATS.

Schapiro, Wasserman, and Gallegos have suggested three kinds of transformative group work that facilitate Transformative Learning in the transformative dialogue group, namely:

¹⁷ Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury, ed. *The Sage Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice*. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008), p 366.

¹⁸ Taylor and Cranton, *The Handbook on Transformative Learning*, 367.

¹⁹ Steve Schapiro, Ilene Wasserman, and Placida Gallegos, “Group Work and Dialogue” in *Handbook on Transformative Learning*, 356.

²⁰ Peggy Gabo Ntseane, “Transformative Learning Theory: A Perspective from Africa” in *Handbook on Transformative Learning*. p 274 – 286.

²¹ Ibid.

Transformative Dialogue Group

- Personal growth and awareness
- Relational empathy across differences
- Critical systemic consciousness

The DMin Focus Group functioning as a *mephato* has the strong potential to facilitate these different types of group work in Transformative Learning. To facilitate personal growth and awareness, DMin students will develop a Spiritual Autobiography. The discussion of the Spiritual Autobiography within the *mephato* facilitates what Mezirow calls critical reflective discourse. Such discourse permits the critical examination of beliefs, feelings, and values that were uncritically assimilated primarily during the formative learning years. Relational empathy across differences is examined through the dialogue process in a peer environment. Each participant represents a different context and is able to see some of their own issues through the eyes of others in the *mephato*. The fact that the *mephato* is focusing on a particular ministry issue through collaborative inquiry provides a critical systemic consciousness.

Conclusion

DMin Transformative Dialogue Focus Groups or *mephatos* have the potential to provide substantive research and investigation for the purpose of advancing personal and social transformation for the individual, the ministry context, and the church in general. Group dialogue within the *mephato* with others of like mind facilitates an individual's growth as they work toward effecting necessary changes in relationships, organizations, and systems. Such dialogue fosters critically reflective thought, imaginative problem posing, and discourse which promotes group deliberation and group problem solving. At its optimum level, the DMin Transformative Dialogue Focus Group or *mephato* can be organized to address issues such as social injustice, domestic violence, homelessness, police brutality, and other social ills the church is called to confront. Such an approach to ministry problem solving can serve as catalyst for initiating movements for addressing oppression. Focusing on the realities of oppression with the intent to alter them fosters an elevation in consciousness about how it is occurring elsewhere and stimulates conversation on how to interrupt it. In essence, this is the demonstration and culmination of perspective transformation as a result of group dialogic work.

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Prophetic-Pastoral Imagination in an Age of Sankofa and Post-racialism: The Concerned Black Clergy of Atlanta

Edward P. Wimberly¹

Introduction

Studying the Concerned Black Clergy of Atlanta (CBC) is a significant undertaking for a variety of reasons. The most important, however, is that it has had a practice of meeting once a week on Monday mornings, except on national holidays, since 1983. How and why this organization has met regularly for over thirty-two years is a story that needs to be published. This task includes chronicling the religious and public significance for CBC's existence in the eyes of its own membership. It also encompasses the written statements over the years by others who have described the significance of CBC. This article will introduce the reader to the reasons why CBC has had a long and significant history of doing public theology in Atlanta for the length of time that it has.

The main reasons for CBC's thriving continuance can be found in the title of this article. The meaning of the name Sankofa² is based on the Ghanaian emphasis on the Sankofa Bird. The Sankofa Bird is a mystical bird, and this bird took only from its past what it needed for the future. It was an egg. This symbolic meaning embraces a time element which emphasizes that the past is essential to understanding the present. Analogously, the Sankofa orientation to CBC's Prophetic-pastoral Imagination and Civil Rights dimensions grew out of past models of public

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² Sankofa is an Akhan wisdom saying (Ghana) symbolized by a bird that flies forward while its head is tilted backward. Sankofa literally means that it is wise to go back and fetch what was right in the past and utilize it in the present. It is similar the Zimbabwean proverb, *Hwirira sure ine muto*. "Returning to the (good) past (practices) yields desired rewards."

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theology.³ CBC's public theology model emerged from the Civil Rights efforts of Dr. Martin Luther King and the Ebenezer Baptist Church and Dexter Avenue Baptist Church legacies. It is a legacy that is about holistic justice embracing what pastors, congregations, and community activists did during the Civil Rights era and later activist efforts toward liberation.

Sankofa prophetic-pastoral imagination is the term that identifies the legacy of the person-centered Civil Rights approach to ministry. From the definitional point of view, Sankofa prophetic-pastoral imagination is a practical re-conceptualization of the care of persons by drawing on holistic practices and resources from within the church and the community. It draws its focus from the Civil Rights Revolution, and its prophetic and pastoral imagination, and it is all about imaging a new reality focused on justice, mercy and love. It is a tradition that facilitates conceptualizing the practice of a holistic justice dimension of liberating persons from oppression and emphasizes full democratic participation in society. Connected to this holistic imagination is the way African American faith communities have historically drawn on its faith tradition and experience to deal with and overcome racism, injustice, and dehumanization.

Sankofa prophetic-pastoral imagination is all about drawing on communal insight and African American faith resources to fashion a model of ministry that fosters faithful and a meaningful existence despite dehumanization. Sankofa is a symbolic imaginative movement that facilitates African Americans' movement forward drawing on resources from past successful efforts toward liberation and full participation in society.

Key to this Sankofa and prophetic-pastoral imaginative looking to the past are the Civil Rights legacy along with the Black Power and African American cultural revolutions. Its source was the African American pilgrimage throughout the history of the Americas beginning with the slave trade during and after the colonial period. The black church as well as cultural, social organizations, and educational institutions during and following slavery, all embraced the Sankofa pastoral imagination. This tradition has been and will continue to be a reservoir of resources for moving forward.

³ The meaning of prophetic imagination builds on Walter Brueggeman's book entitled *The Prophetic Imagination*, second edition (Louisville: Fortress Press, 2001).

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The reality is that Sankofa prophetic-pastoral imagination and Civil Rights undergird several practices that CBC employs. Some of these practices will be identified and explained in the following the defining of the meaning of prophetic pastoral imagination.

Why Public History of the Concerned Black Clergy Now?

At the American Academy of Religion and The Society for Biblical Literature on November 20, 2010, my colleague in theological education at the Interdenominational Theological Center, Dr. Jacquelyn Grant, did a lecture on the call to ministry. The concern was raised related to tangible outcomes of the justice movement in contemporary life. The concept of outcomes related to tangible outcomes and expectation of results in an age of post-racialism. Post-racialism was defined as the reversal of justice where the gains of the Civil Rights movement are being dismantled and severely challenged. It is the effort to reverse the gains of justice and return to the way things use to be.⁴

The term post-racialism has been introduced dramatically as a result of the 2016 election approach and what is happening particularly during the Republican primary and the phenomenon of Donald Trump and his call to bar Muslim immigrants from immigrating to the United States. Clearly, this political agenda brings to the foreground the attitudes of many who would like to undermine the goals of a full and integrated society.

As a result of this growing phenomenon of post-racialism, the concern is how should we return to the Civil Rights agenda of the 1950's and 1960's? I am the historian for the Concerned Black Clergy of Atlanta (CBC), and I am writing a book telling its story. The goal of this article, however, is to set the stage for later telling in book form, how CBC provides one answer to how we can return to the Civil Rights agenda in the twenty-first century.

Indeed, this article explores preliminarily how to return to the Civil Rights agenda of the 1950's and the 1950's. The story of CBC of Atlanta, Georgia began in 1983. This organization provides one strategy for pulling together churches, political organizations, the business community, the medical community, the educational community, and interested citizenry for the purposes of fulfilling the dream of democracy and overcoming post-racialism.

⁴ Edward P. Wimberly's Diary, November 22, 2010.

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This article, then, focuses on the history of the practices that CBC has utilized to recover the Civil Rights agenda and the Beloved Community strategies for the 1980s and beyond. Going forward, the goal here is to begin the story setting the stage for how CBC provides key answers about how to move forward.

Prophetic-Pastoral Imagination

The concept prophetic-pastoral imagination has already been defined focusing on imaging the reign of justice in the United States. Pastoral imagination focuses, however, on the personal dimensions of how to conceptualize the personal dimensions of justice and liberation from social and cultural oppression. The concept talks about how to image and teach within the context of the church the connection of the personal and the social. In *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* the authors talk about strategies that pastors use to engage and address new situations and circumstances that help to transform life using the resources of "inherited religious and academic traditions to convey or model for students' pastoral, priestly, or rabbinic imaginations."⁵ In order to address practical situations, the practices of ministry is a transformative art, and it requires "reinvesting inherited traditions with new meanings and strategies in response to changing circumstances and shifting contexts."⁶ When applied to work of CBC pastoral imagination, CBC draws on the faith traditions that include ministerial practitioners that are primarily Christian, Jewish, and Moslem. Consequently, there needs to be a well thought out understanding of prophetic-pastoral imagination.

Fundamental to CBC's understanding of prophetic-pastoral imagination is the effort to re-conceptualize the Civil Rights Revolution, the Black Power Movement, and the African American Cultural Revolution and imaging how these Sankofa legacies can be applied to a larger number of issues and events in the African American community. What shaped the imagination of CBC have been fundamentally the practices of the Civil Rights Revolution, the Black Power and African American cultural traditions along with the Sankofa focus. These methods of political engagement are related to voting rights efforts and the ending

⁵ Charles R. Foster et al., *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 13.

⁶ Ibid.

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of segregation. In fact, CBC organizes itself to address a comprehensive list of problems that impact a large number of concerns relating to the lives of African American people.

The first principle of prophetic-pastoral imagination comes from the understanding that the Civil Rights Revolution under the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and how he understood the holistic connection between prophetic and pastoral imagination. Later in this introductory chapter, Dr. King's specific contribution to prophetic-pastoral imaginative strategies will be spelled. For the purposes here, however, his ideas about prophetic-pastoral imagination will be introduced.

First, Dr. King's prophetic-pastoral imagination was shaped by his seminary experiences at Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania and later at Boston University where he received his Ph. D. But key to his prophetic-pastoral imagination was also his being mentored by his father Martin Luther King Sr. and his ministry at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta.

For both Martin Luther King Senior and Junior "shepherding the flock" and theological education were essential to ministry. In fact, "Daddy King" was a member of the Board of Trustees at the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) and the Board of Morehouse School of Theology when I first began teaching at ITC in 1975.

The reader will see later when the practices of CBC will be introduced, that pastoral empathy for the needs of the parishioners and their social context was central in both Kings' understanding of ministry. Consequently, prophetic-pastoral imagination had fundamentally to do with improving the lives of the parishioners and the people in the surrounding community. Therefore, prophetic-pastoral imagination had to do with the needs of persons and their community. Secondly, prophetic-pastoral imagination had to do with how the pastor drew on the faith tradition and the resources of theological education to carryout ministry in the church and in the community. Thirdly, prophetic-pastoral imagination involved how pastors were to engage the power structures so that the lives of the parishioners would be enhanced. Consequently, prophetic-pastoral imagination had something to do with drawing resources from theological education, developing a method of drawing on traditions of faith and reason, and developing strategies of social engagement with the powers to be using the United States Constitution and the political process. In short, prophetic-pastoral imagination was the process attending to the needs of those in the church and the community, drawing on the church and

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governmental institutions to respond to the needs of the people. Finally, prophetic-pastoral imagination was the drawing on the sanctions from the faith community and governmental resources for the purposes of fashioning and foster models justice.

In the next section the focus will be on the different methods and strategies of prophetic-pastoral imagination growing primarily out of the Civil Rights, the Black Power and African American Revolution. Indeed, CBC benefited from a long Sankofa tradition of prophetic-pastoral imagination such as colleges and theological educational institutions, both black and white: these were central in the development of prophetic-pastoral imagination.

The Signature Practices of CBC

Not only will this article introduce the reasons why CBC has had a long and illustrious practice of significant weekly meetings, it will also identify eight signature practices that have contributed to the success of CBC over the years. Moreover, the ethnographic research approach is the method best fitted for exploring these practices providing the best historical picture for why CBC has been successful over many years.

For this historical study, Mary Moschella's definition of ethnographic research will be used. For her, ethnography is a research methodology useful for studying pastoral practice.⁷ She says it has the best potential for unearthing significant historical reasons for identifying for those who are insiders and outsiders of an organization who want to understand the "why" of an organization's success. This method will help provide CBC its own mirror for those inside and outside CBC to envisage the why of its success.⁸ This research method will be used by CBC members and its followers to promote conversations about best practices that can be used to promote public engagement, civic participation, and practical democracy. This research will also provide a picture of what is going on within the organization and give valuable information when the evaluations of CBC are carried out on a regular basis. This method of research will also provide valuable data for why the organization's institutional effectiveness has been regularly demonstrated over the years.

⁷Mary Moschella, *Ethnology As A Pastoral Practice: Introduction* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2008).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

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The research method will also provide information on how CBC's historic practices are an outgrowth of the Civil Rights legacy. Other benefits of this research will also be the contributions that this research will make to institutions that are interested in providing effective approaches to ministry, especially those approaches that are long lasting and need to be duplicated.

Moreover, this research will also help to signal to the theological educational community how important it is to link the preparation for ministry with the appropriate student learning outcomes. Consequently, this research project will have significance for assessing how students and faculty within educational institutions help students to develop and assess the prophetic-pastoral imaginations.

The research will also provide valuable data for understanding its existence and work as it fulfills its mission. CBC's mission is to provide leadership, advocacy and service to the homeless, helpless, and hopeless in the community.

The Significance of Ethnographic Research for Studying CBC

Ethnographic research, according to Mary Moschella, is very useful for exploring the impact of prophetic-pastoral practice for at least eight reasons. First, it provides the organization an appropriate mirror in which to look as it identifies the dimensions of its story and as it excavates with due diligence its essential practices. Mirroring here refers to the pictures of the organizations' practices that surface as the research activities are undertaken. These practicing activities define CBC's central identity. There are many practices that have proven to have staying power for over thirty years. The significance of the mirroring dimension is one of those practices of the CBC study, and it enables those involved in CBC's decision making to discover and name the practices that emerge from looking into the mirror at itself in action.

The second ethnographic movement of this research is for the CBC leadership to use it for a self-assessment that grows out of the mirror that the research provides. There are certain practices that appear in the mirror which have become signature activities that have made CBC what it has become over the years. Such practices become essential parts of its self-identity, and such practices need to be identified, evaluated and improved. One such practice has been called the Monday Morning Forum.

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The Monday Morning Forum is a leadership practice that enables the CBC president and committee leaders to develop responsive public decisions and conversation with those attending the forum meeting. These conversations focus on the needs of the poor, downtrodden, left-out, and oppressed. This practice of conversation has many dimensions, and it grows out of the signature practice of the pastoral leader attending to the “crisis of the needy” and neglected.⁹

Key to the forum is the fact that it has emerged as the sign of the central self-identity practice of CBC. When CBC members try to do an organizational assessment, the forum and its standard practices are the first to be addressed. The forum represents an example of participatory democracy. This means that everyone has a voice. When someone wants to speak and has been given permission to speak, the speaker is expected to be treated with respect and kindness. Respect for the speaker is one of the best practices that make the forum a safe space to talk.

The third practice that is important to ethnography is the practice defined as discernment of the presence of God in the forum. There is also prayer from the chaplain or the chaplain designate for that day at the beginning of the forum meeting and at the end of the meeting as well. The expectation is that God’s presence is invoked, and those present are aware of God’s presence when it manifests itself.

A fourth dimension of the ethnographic research method is the practice of community building that takes place. Following the opening prayer at each meeting each person present, no matter how many people who are present, is asked by the president of CBC to give his/her name, the organization that he/she represents, and his/her relationship to CBC. Other community building practices also include practices to provide the rules for how to get the floor for speaking, the establishment of an order for responding to the presenter, the number of questions that can be asked to the speaker during the question and answer period, and gently but firmly stopping questions when the rules are not followed. Key, is the effort to make the forum a safe space for the conversations to take place.

The fifth ethnographic dimension is for the research to spell out the identity formation process taking place during the forum. Identity formation relates to the actual day to day practices that enable the organization to see itself in the mirror. More often than not CBC as an organization envisages itself as providing a space for practicing public

⁹ Edward P. Wimberly, “Forum-ing.”

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theology, where faith perspectives are provided for advocacy and service to the needs of the homeless, helpless, and the hopeless. The role of the executive president of the CBC is to bring theological perspectives to bear on the issues of the forum participants and the program updates related to the agenda. There are always community presenters, and there is an expectation that at some point the problems being addressed at that meeting will be put in a theological perspective.

The sixth ethnographic perspective is helping the community associated with the CBC political engagement to be committed to the principles of Civil Rights as well as to the United States Constitution and particularly its voting rights provisions. Public theology at CBC takes seriously the rights of all human beings to participate in the principles of democracy to the fullest extent of the law spelled out by the Constitution.

Seventh, CBC must also develop its organizational identity through the practices of doing periodic evaluation of how it is carrying out its mission. This also involves evaluation efforts to renew its best practices and the functions of the organization through periodic evaluation. This is one reason why CBC has a stellar record on meeting on Mondays except of national holidays. Attention is given to CBC's organizational life cycle (founding, expansion, stabilization, decline, and renewal) is always taking place particularly through the executive leadership of CBC.

Eighth and finally, CBC's practice of electing successful black pastors of local churches to the presidency of CBC is a practice that has roots in the Ebenezer Baptist Church tradition of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. King's identity as a pastor of a local congregation was the platform where he was able to see the needs of people. He was able to lay the foundation where his pastoral ethnographic approach enabled him to identify the needs of people he called the church as well as by the community, government, social agencies, foundations, and educational institutions. In fact, as ethnographic research takes place at CBC, we learn that partnerships with non-church organizations are essential to doing public theology.

The Ethnographic Research Method and The Leadership of CBC

It is clear that the ethnographic method of doing research is the crucial practice for really understanding the success of the forum model that CBC undertakes. I refer to this model as forum-ing. More specifically, forum-ing lends itself to what John Patton, in his book *Pastoral Care in*

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Context: An Introduction to Pastoral Care, talks about in the chapter, "The Pastoral Carer as 'Mini Ethnographer.'" ¹⁰ He concludes:

The task of ethnography is to discover the story of a particular group of people. The ethnographer attempts to understand the myths, rituals, daily activities. The key ethnographer is one who establishes relationships of trust and collaboration in which further observation can be conducted. The ethnographer is particularly skilled in drawing upon knowledge of the context to make sense of behavior. ¹¹

One of the reasons for the more than thirty years of CBC's success meeting every Monday (except on national holidays) is the fact that part of the elected president of CBC's function is to put each Monday morning forum into its proper theological perspective. More specifically, it means that the agenda of each Monday morning forum must be put into line with CBC's understanding of its historic story and mission. This takes place when the president literally couches the agenda of the day in light of CBC's mission and self-understanding. This is significant in that the presidential updates, not only remind the attendees of CBC's mission, but they also help the attendees to discern their self-understanding as a forum for carrying out public theology. In short, the president of CBC becomes a mini ethnographer by helping the membership to update its story and identity weekly.

The Significance of the Prophetic-Pastoral Identity of CBC Leadership

Another key dimension of CBC is that it follows the tradition that all of its presidents since 1983 have been successful black local church pastors. The presidents maintained their pulpits while providing leadership to CBC. Of critical significance is that this practice grew out of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s understanding of what it meant to be a pastor and how he actually practiced ministry from the perspective of an ethnographer.

¹⁰ John Patton, *Pastoral Care in Context: An Introduction to Pastoral Care* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 43.

¹¹ Ibid.

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Dr. King understood pastoral ethnography. He did not use the term ethnography at all, but in November of 1948 while in seminary at Crozer Theological Seminary, he wrote a paper entitled “Preaching Ministry.” In it he emphasized that the twentieth century preaching “grows out of the time in which the preacher lives.”¹² He continued:

I think that preaching should grow out of the experience of the people. Therefore, I as a minister must know the problems of the people that I am pastoring. Too often do educated ministers leave the people lost?¹³

It is critical to understand that Dr. King brought to the Civil Rights movement what we call today Sankofa prophetic-pastoral imagination, and it is the awareness of the social context in which his parishioners live. As a seminary student he demonstrated a form of practical theological thinking and reflection that enabled him to envisage how social problems impacted the lives of his parishioners. In his quotation above, he was warning that seminary education needed to include an awareness of the parishioners’ social context. In short, he was promoting a model of what now is being called a mini-ethnographer. That is, Dr. King knew, as a seminary student, that he needed to practice a form of ethnography where he attended to the lives and stories of his parishioners. He understood he had to connect with them and learn from them. He understood the context of racism in which his parishioners were living, and he wanted his seminary education to be something he could utilize throughout his ministry. In the paper he prepared for the classroom, he wrote a statement closely related to how we understand ethnography today. He said:

Above all I see the preaching ministry as a dual process. On the one hand I must attempt to change the soul of the individual so that society may be changed. On the other I must attempt to change the societies so that the individual soul will have to change. I am a profound advocate of the social gospel.¹⁴

In short, the seminary student Martin Luther King, Jr. understood that ministry to the soul always had a social and cultural context, and the minister/pastor must develop an approach to ministry that included a pastoral awareness of social context. The implication of his prophetic-

¹² Clayborne Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, .vol. VI (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 69-71.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid. 72.

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pastoral imagination is that when doing his pastoral role, he would always have to include assessing the social context in which his parishioners lived. Such assessment led him to practice what is meant by holistic justice. Holistic justice is the practice of justice that includes the soul and spiritual dimensions of the individual and social liberation, as well as the whole person dimensions of participatory democracy. That is, real democracy is enabling each individual to participate in the democratic decisions taking place in society to the full extent of the law.

It is important to point out why we mentioned Dr. King in the connection with being a mini-ethnographer. At least three and perhaps more of the presidents of CBC were mentored at the Ebenezer Baptist Church in the tradition of Daddy King, Dr. King and their successors. For example, at least three were mentored by Dr. Joseph Roberts during his pastoral leadership at Ebenezer.

The major point is that part of the success of CBC and its signature usage of the Monday morning forum practice may be the result of the mini-ethnographic practices carried out by its leadership grounded in the Civil Rights emphasis on social context. The significance of public theology taking place through the use of mini-ethnographic practices could really be the key for the success of the Monday morning forum for so many years. The presidents of CBC as mini-ethnographers provided several practices for the public theological forum where political issues related to justice and democracy were addressed on behalf of the poor, homeless, and oppressed.

The Practice of Mini-Ethnography and Public Theology

Through the use of the mini-ethnographic research model for writing the history of the CBC of Atlanta, it has come to my awareness that the history of CBC is really about telling the story of the practices of CBC. Particular emphasis will be placed on its mission and the practices that it uses to accomplish its mission. The best description of the role of the ethnographic model in helping to write the history is taken from the metaphor used by John Patton called “The Pastoral Carer as “Mini-Ethnographer.”¹⁵ For Patton, the task of the mini-ethnographer “is to discover the story of a particular group of people. The ethnographers

¹⁵ Patton, *Pastoral Care in Context*, 43.

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attempt to understand their myths, rituals, and daily activities.”¹⁶ In addition, they are to make observations based on the trust relationships that have been formed, draw on the knowledge of the context much in the same ways as a participant observer would.

Since my taking over the role as the Historian for CBC, I have been doing research as a participant and observer. Most of all, I have been impressed with the many institutional and organizational practices that characterize CBC’s story. CBC’s working functional identity and mission are wrapped up in its practices, and my effort will be to tell the story of CBC drawing on its practices. Major practices include (1) forum-ing, (2) the presidential legacy and succession, (3) the work of the special committees, (4) the salutes to Black Fathers, (5) the salutes to Black Mothers, (6) the health walk, (7) the Clergy Seminar Lunches, and (8) the Executive Board meeting.

The central goal of each of the practices is to help CBC form public theologians who are finding their own voice and identity as authentic human beings. They understand their call to vocation in the public arena. They embrace the democratic ideal of participating fully in life to the fullest extent as possible. Indeed, the end result of the public theological goal of CBC is to enable its membership to internalize the democratic goal of full participation in society as well as to enable others to exercise the same end.

The Formation of a Public Theologian

The legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as a mini-ethnographer included his ability to use his personal encounters with his parishioners to discern how difficult it was for his parishioners to grow and develop in a racially segregated society. At the core, the racially charged world of an unjust society was thought of in material terms alone, and there was a separation of the physical and spiritual.¹⁷ Moreover, the private was separated from the public and personal ethics was separated from public ethics as well. The end result was that personal agency was separated from political

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Edward P. Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care and Counseling: The Politics of Oppression and Empowerment* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 82-97.

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efficacy.¹⁸ What Dr. King understood in his understanding of personal agency was that it would lead to the development of political efficacy.¹⁹ Dr. King understood that "undermining self-awareness is one of the major political strategies of racism. Getting a people to doubt their worth and value as human beings by creating images of worthlessness protects the racial position a social status. Thus, enabling African Americans and other socially devalued persons to practice self-awareness is the first step in undercutting the impact of racism."²⁰

Indeed, Dr. King knew that self-awareness as a practice of self would lead to public awareness. Related is the fact that personal agency will lead to enabling political awareness and efficacy as well. The key point is that developing our individual selves leads to social agency and awareness of the needs of others.

Moving Forward

The major concern of this history of CBC is to explore why CBC has been in existence from 1983. The answer is that CBC envisages very clearly that it is impossible to separate the private spheres of existence. Life is holistic, and CBC has allowed this principle to influence its life from its inception up until the present. In the upcoming chapters of the book, the history of CBC will be examined in light of the eight signature practices of what is called Sankofa pastoral imagination. Sankofa Pastoral imagination is defined as the African American legacy of holistic thinking about ministry demonstrated by the ministry of justice spelled out in the 1948 paper of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. entitled "Preaching Ministry."

¹⁸ Ibid., 84-86

¹⁹ Ibid., 85.

²⁰ Ibid., 84-86.

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Research That Does Not End: A Sampled Research Approach for Discovering, Engaging and Sustaining Authentic Praxis Ministry

Gregory A. Nash¹

Introduction

“Is there anyone who can take stock of his own weakness and still dare to credit his chastity and innocence to his own efforts? And could such a person think to love you less, on the pretext that he has had smaller need for your mercy, that mercy with which you forgive the sins of those who turn back to you? If there is anyone whom you have called, who by responding to your summons has avoided those sins which he finds me remembering and confessing in my own life as he reads this, let him not mock me; for I have been healed by the same doctor who has granted him the grace not to fall ill, or at least to fall ill less seriously. Let such a person therefore love you just as much, or even more, on seeing that the same physician who rescued me from sinful diseases of such gravity has kept him immune.”²

This article is being introduced with words found in Saint Augustine’s *The Confessions* because I am attracted to Saint Augustine’s autobiographical style of chronicling his confessions as well as

¹ As an Atlanta, Georgia native, I earned a Bachelors degree from Clark College (now known as ClarkAtlanta University), and then simultaneously earned a Master of Business (MBA) degree from Atlanta University (now known as ClarkAtlanta University) and a Computer Operations Diploma from Atlanta Area Technical School (now known as Atlanta Technical College). After nearing a twenty year corporate career with IBM, I was divinely called to ministry. As a response to the divine call, I pursued and earned a Master of Divinity (MDiv) degree from Duke University’s School of Divinity. In 2011, I earned a Doctor of Ministry (DMin) degree from Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC). While consistently practicing ministry through traditional venues such as church, I also practice ministry through the non-traditional venue of Vance-Granville Community College (VGCC). Currently, I am VGCC’s Department Chair of Adult Basic Skills, a part-time VGCC instructor teaching life skills in the Federal Correctional Complex in Butner, NC and a Co-Coordinator of VGCC’s Male Mentoring Program.

² Maria Boulding, trans., *The Confessions /Saint Augustine* (New York: Vintage Spiritual Classics, 1998) 34-35.

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Augustine's theological brilliance. It was not readily apparent when I began my academic journey at the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in 2008, but my attraction to autobiographical styles of writings would become an essential component of my Doctor of Ministry (DMin) research project based on a research methodology known as heuristic research. Heuristic research was ideally suited for me because heuristic research creates a phenomenological lens that spotlights personal experiences and insights by asking: How did the researcher experience a particular phenomenon? Heuristic research pioneer, Clark Moustakas, expands this notion further by declaring, "In heuristic research the investigator must have had a direct, personal encounter with the phenomenon being investigated. There must have been actual autobiographical connections."³

This article samples my DMin project's heuristic research as well as my evolving heuristic research. Additionally, this article examples the inherent autobiographical writing style of heuristic research. Though specific to my personal story, hopefully this article will serve as a template for which readers are able to import their own personal stories. Succinctly, this article offers an autobiographical narrative purposed to highlight how heuristic research can help validate and evolve calls to ministry in the midst of uncertainty and adversity in hopes of inspiring Doctor of Ministry candidates to consider heuristic research as their research methodology of choice. Doing this may produce more ministry leaders that will be more systematic in discovering, engaging and sustaining authentic praxis ministry.

A Brief Confession

I had no idea why God called me to ministry and no idea what I was called to do. I had no interest in ministry leadership. Admittedly, I had a relatively strong relationship with Jesus Christ and was routinely involved with some outward form of Christian service for the majority of

³ Clark Moustakas, *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Applications*, (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 1990), 14.

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my life.⁴ Admittedly, I knew and know the voice of the divine.⁵ So there truly is no question about the source of my call. Nevertheless, I confess that I do not understand why God would not be satisfied with the sincere efforts of my *trying* to do enough to be theologically comfortable. What do I mean when I note, being “theologically comfortable?” It means to find justifications, reasons, examples, etc. to do what we (humans) desire or want in ways that allow us (humans) to believe or feel that God is ok with what we (humans) desire or want (independent of God’s desire or want). Ministry leadership was not my desire or want. At least that is what my conscious mind was telling me. But, could it be possible that I may have subconsciously desired or wanted to be in ministry leadership? After all, I was called to ministry during some of the most difficult times of my life. And, could it be possible that an unconscious self-constructed call to ministry be a way of escaping some of those difficulties with marital strife being the greatest source of my difficulties? Could it be possible that an unconscious self-constructed call to ministry be a way for me to be “theologically comfortable?”

An Attempt to Define the Authenticity of A Call To Ministry⁶

On one hand I claimed I had no doubt as to the source of my call. On the other hand, I clearly had doubt.⁷ Was I divinely called to ministry? Was the call anchored in an authentic reality? Or, was the call anchored in some self-constructed reality? Assuming the call was anchored in an authentic reality what does God expect? What do others expect? What does one expect of self? How does one explain this thing called “call?” I

⁴ I use the term relative here because I believe that human sin and frailty challenges one’s ability to fully maximize being in relationship with Jesus. Scores of theological doctrines, writings, traditions, biblical narratives and the like support this belief.

⁵ *The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.* John 10:3-4 (NIV)

⁶ In the context of this article, authentic, divine, divinely, and truly are used interchangeably.

⁷ James writes: *One who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.* James 1:6b (NIV). Confirmed.

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struggled with these questions as well as many similar questions. I happened to have been called (whether authentic or self-constructed) while working a demanding full time corporate job; working to nurture a one year old son; and working through intense marital strife. My assumed authentic call came in the Fall of 2002. As a matter of note, my call included suddenly hearing a supernatural voice that literally whispered the word: Duke. Readily, Duke University came to my mind. But, the connection between Duke University and my call was not readily clear. Out of curiosity, I searched Duke's website where I unexpectedly discovered Duke had a School of Divinity.⁸ Immediately, I began investigating the possibility of starting Duke Divinity School as early as January 2003. Subsequently, I applied and was accepted into Duke's Divinity School. I was ready to start classes in January 2003. I believed that my call must have been divine based on evidence that I considered to be providential. Providential evidence was varied, but consistent in ways that would allow me to pursue my call to ministry. Three exceptional examples of providential evidence come to mind. I considered it divine grace when I was readily accepted into Duke Divinity School after being out of school for twenty years. I considered it to be a miracle when I was reassigned to a new corporate position that would allow me to attend Duke's full time academic program without trading off full time work responsibilities. Most important, I sensed a spiritual peace that helped me feel assured that I would be able to balance full time work and full time curriculum without sacrificing significant time with my young son.⁹

When looking at all considered being providential, it may have been clear that I was authentically called to ministry if not for all of the contrasting evidence. The most contrasting evidence of all was my then wife's adversity towards my "claim" of being called. Adversity from my

⁸ As unbelievable as it may seem, I had no idea that Duke had a School of Divinity. I earned a Master of Business Administration (MBA) in 1983 and there was nothing in my conscious mind that would have caused me to think of going back to school. More so, there was nothing in my conscious mind that would have caused me to think of going back to a school specifically associated with divinity.

⁹ As a confession, being an accessible/accountable father was/is one of the most important aspects of my psychology. Candidly, if I thought that I would have had to sacrifice significant amounts of time with my son to follow my call, any and/or all advancement to follow my call would have ceased. Thank God for grace and mercy.

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then wife was so strong that I chose to cancel plans to start Duke Divinity School in January 2003. Was I truly called to ministry? Would God call persons to ministry without making it *totally* possible for them to fulfill their call?

Does Adversity Validate or Invalidate an Assumed Divine Call?

Eventually, I pushed through a myriad of adversities and started Duke Divinity School in August 2003. Relationally, one of the greatest adversities of my entire life arose. My 2 year old son was being subjected to behavioral labels and at 6 years old was diagnosed Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). As a response to the ADHD label, efforts to subject my son to mind altering prescription medication were initiated and perpetrated by persons with perceived power.¹⁰

As challenging as this time period was, I was able to excel academically, exceed work performance expectations, and compartmentalize my brokenness in ways that shielded outsiders from the realities of my pain, confusion and doubt.¹¹ I believe one way to validate divine movement and/or divine involvement is to see evidence of the impossible becoming possible. My ability to endure the next three years of heightened adversities was my personal witness of the impossible becoming possible. Those years included my earning my Master of

¹⁰ Two points of importance must be noted here. Point one; I acknowledge the realities of ADHD. For some, ADHD is reality. However for others, ADHD is not reality as in the case of my son; thus, my use of the term, “label” because labels do not necessarily reflect reality. Point two; I note “persons with perceived power” because eyewitness accounts and documented correspondences between these particular persons and me provide evidence that these persons saw themselves as authoritative figures who had the power to make decisions regarding my son independent of me. I would not and will not accept any notion that human beings have the power to make decisions regarding *anyone’s* child independent of *any* sound minded, caring, well respected, accessible parent/caregiver/guardian.

¹¹ To be clear, I do not credit myself here. Having the ability to excel, exceed, and compartmentalize during this time period was the reality of divine grace. As a matter of fact, I credit 2 Corinthians 12:8, 9 as the touchstone scripture that got me through this period and beyond. *Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”* (NIV)

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Divinity (MDiv) degree, my son ending up in an elementary school that was led by a culturally sensitive principal who dismissed ADHD allegations, and marital strife being tempered just enough to keep my marriage afloat. From this perspective, adversity validated my assumed divine call. But, time and a more intensified set of adversities would again challenge my confidence (and quite frankly, challenge my Christian faith). Concerns about the authenticity of my call to ministry returned. It was becoming more and more difficult to distinguish authentic reality from self-constructed reality.

An Evolving Focus on the Human Mind

Prior to the adversities highlighted in this article, I had not consciously noticed the fragility of reality. In retrospect, I realize that adversities specific to marital strife created a pathway for me to begin taking a closer look at the fragility of reality. Entry into this pathway occurred when I began engaging in marital counseling sessions. The more marital counseling sessions experienced, the more evidence that my then wife's version of reality was vastly different than my version of reality. I did all I could to look at myself as openly as possible. If there was fault, blame and/or unknown brokenness deeply packed within my mind, I wanted to unpack it. Thus, I readily embraced any and all marital counseling inquiries. As a matter of record, my sense of reality was consistently validated by those considered to be counseling experts. Independent of record, any validation favoring me was invalidated by my then wife. Undisputable evidence, and/or undeniable facts that did not align with my then wife's reality were routinely dismissed by my then wife. When my then wife was asked if there was any *possibility* that she might have a biased view of reality, she replied, "absolutely not." Interestingly, marital counseling seemed to have worsened a marriage that was becoming more and more unbearable.¹² My then wife's reality saw me as an evil, self-serving, derelict who had no family values and one who grossly mistreated his son.¹³ As painful as the following confession was

¹² *Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* 2 Corinthians 12:8, 9 (NIV).

¹³ This is a glaring example where undisputable evidence, and/or undeniable facts do not align with my then wife's reality.

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(and continues to be), the need for psychological counseling was obvious. It was time to focus on the inner workings of the human mind. My corporate job included Employee Assistance Program benefits which meant that I and my then wife could employ high cost professions who focused on the human mind and who could hopefully help distinguish authentic reality from self-constructed reality (for both me and my then wife). Time with psychologist proved helpful. In brief, my reality got clearer and clearer every time I would sit through psychological sessions whether sessions were joint or individual.¹⁴ Based on expert opinion, my call was real. There were no psychological skeletons. I was not looking to hide my life struggles behind a ministry calling that did not truly exist. The call was real. Time with psychologists helped me see the delicacy of the human mind. It was becoming clear that my call to ministry included a call to focus on the human mind. I began to connect the dots between insights regarding fragile realities, time with experts who specifically focused on the human mind, and the relentless effort to alter the psychological and physiological make up of my son's mind. My call to ministry had evolved. What next?

Interdenominational Theological Center DMin Project – Research in Action

At this point, the authenticity of my call to ministry was no longer in question. Adversity validated the call. Psychological evaluation validated the call. Time spent in the call validated the call. Although the call itself was no longer in question, questions like “what next” persisted. With the understanding that my ministry needed to include some type of focus on the human mind, I began investigating schools with psychology programs. Psychology programs that were most interesting to me were *practical* programs, meaning these programs went beyond academic theory. These programs focused on academic *practice* which requires *action*. Without question, my program of choice would have to be *practical*. Also without question, my program of choice would have to be

¹⁴ Note we (myself and my then wife) researched and engaged various licensed psychologist in search of objectivity, openness and candor. We had sessions with male psychologist, with female psychologist and even had sessions that included a male psychologist and a female psychologist collaborative team. I was intentional in finding ways to determine differences between authentic realities and self-constructed realities.

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one that would not require me to move to another city/town.¹⁵ I was attracted to Interdenominational Theological Center's (ITC's) Doctor of Ministry program because I believed that this particular program would allow me to simultaneously explore my call to ministry and equip my call to ministry in *practical* ways.¹⁶ As mentioned in this article's introduction, my Doctor of Ministry project was a heuristic research study of my experience during completion of a Doctor of Ministry degree. It featured an understood divine call to engage in a particular ministry while struggling to understand what, when and how to engage it.

Specifically, this project was a study of the phenomenon of being called to engage in a praxis ministry that particularly pertains to the human mind while at the same time undergoing extreme personal difficulties related to the call and without the benefit of a clear understanding of the call or the call's direction. More specifically, this project was a study of the phenomenon of being called to engage in a praxis ministry that particularly pertains to protecting the minds of African American boys from unwarranted mind altering prescription medications.

Heuristic Research Does Not End, It Begins

One of the most powerful aspects of heuristic research is having the opportunity to answer the question: How did the researcher experience a particular phenomenon? At the time of my 2008-2011 research, I was experiencing the pain and injustice of my son being wrongly subjected to behavioral labels, wrongly diagnosed Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and wrongly being pressured to accept being regimented by mind altering prescription medications that were not warranted.¹⁷ I experienced pain because I understood the negative impact of behavioral labels, especially when and where it comes to African American males. Behavioral labels often cause those who are labeled to

¹⁵ As previously noted, being an accessible/accountable father was/is one of the most important aspects of my psychology.

¹⁶ Furthermore, there was no requirement for me to move to another city/town.

¹⁷ There are overwhelming numbers of proof points that support my conclusion that there are many wrongs associated with mind altering prescription medications. One of the most visible proof points can be found in seeing the growth, talent and success of my son. It is horrifying to think of the untold numbers of African American boys who have been regimented by unwarranted mind altering prescription medications.

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be discriminated against, socially ostracized, suspended from school, restrained, harmed, maimed, incarcerated and much too often as of late, murdered. I experienced injustice because I was being accused of harming the son that I was diligently trying to protect. My then wife consistently worked to bring legal action against me. I experienced both pain and injustice when standing before a judge who blatantly disrespected and racially stereotyped me while issuing unfair rulings that were contrary to the facts and independent of the evidence.¹⁸

I completed my DMin project, successfully completed and defended my project dissertation and earned my Doctor of Ministry degree May 2011. No matter the challenges, I never surrendered to the relentless pressures to medicate my son. Eventually, allegations of ADHD ceased.¹⁹ After all, there was no *real* evidence that supported ADHD allegations. Factually, there was plenty of evidence that contrasted ADHS allegations. And though the formal aspect my heuristic research may have ended, the imports of heuristic researcher were really just beginning; in accordance to research pioneer, Clark Moustakas' instructional quote stating, "In heuristic research the investigator must have had a direct, personal encounter with the phenomenon being investigated. There must have been

¹⁸ As divine fate would have it, on Saturday, November 7, 2015, I "happened" to walk past a Durham newspaper stand while grocery shopping. Prominently positioned on the front page of Durham's Herald-Sun newspaper read the following: *Judge Hill reprimanded for referring to parents as 'idiots.'* Although the reported reprimand was related to specific circumstances in a specific divorce and child custody proceeding that occurred on August 7, 2014, proof of this judge's manner of blatant disrespect was made public. Durham's Herald-Sun noted that the North Carolina Judicial Standards Commission found Hill: Made "inappropriate comments." Upchurch, Keith. 2015. Judge Hill reprimanded for referring to parents as 'idiots.' *The Herald-Sun*. November 7. Again, the North Carolina Judicial Standards Commission findings were specific to a specific complaint filed with against Hill. Note my painful and unjust encounter with Judge Hill occurred in late 2012. At that time, I witnessed others being disrespected and judged unfairly (in my view). It would be very interesting to research Judge Hill's pattern of behavior towards African Americans in general and African American males in particular.

¹⁹ *Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* 2 Corinthians 12:8, 9 (NIV).

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actual autobiographical connections.”²⁰ Does this not sound like an ideal approach for discovering, engaging and sustaining authentic praxis ministry? This approach was and continues to be ideal for me. My research has not ended, it is beginning.

²⁰ Clark Moustakas, *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Applications*, (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 1990), 14.

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The Search for Pastoral Equality for Women Through Spiritual Empowerment

Cassandra Hill¹

Ordaining women to the ministry appears to be commonplace now. However, appointing them or using them in the church as senior pastors or in other leadership roles is still a tug of war, a real struggle. In my denomination, the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC), women continue to answer their call to the ministry, they are allowed to study with the Board of Examiners which prepares them for ordination over a five-year period. Following ordination, some women are appointed to churches. However, more often than not, they remain at their home church with duties that have been relegated as women's work—Church school teacher, Bible study leader, Christian Educator, Children's Church/pastor, visiting the sick and shut-in—all under the watchful eye of the male senior pastor. The acceptance of women as Christian educators and associate ministers appears to be an obvious attempt to limit the rights of clergywomen. While these are significant roles, women's calls should be taken as seriously as men's with the understanding that they, too, can be senior pastors leading congregations. There appears to be a great deal of concern over ordaining women, when in fact, it is a mere formality for the majority of women in ministry in the AMEC. The experiences and contributions of women as administrators, managers, nurturers, caregivers and biblical and theological scholars speak volumes to the ability, skill and expertise of women. Women are very capable of being senior pastors in churches that are led by men who are less and less skilled.

The question is whether this symbolic display of support for ordaining women or the resistance to appoint them to pastoral charges is legally mandated or is it a matter of normative expectation? This is of importance because, regardless of the answer, neither has succeeded in significant attitudinal change on the part of clergy or lay. Women are still seeking equality in pastoral ministry.

¹ Cassandra Mency Hill, DMin, is an ordained itinerant elder in the A.M.E. Church; a third generation pastor. She is the pastor of Wrens Chapel AME Church in Wrens, GA. She has served the AME Church on the local, presiding elder district, and connectional levels. She is the administrative assistant in the Office of Black Women in Church and Society at ITC.

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In 2004 some 45.45% of all persons ordained itinerant elder were women in the Atlanta North Georgia Conference. That year there were fifty ordained clergywomen, and yet only fourteen female clergy were appointed pastors.² The disparity is great and continues year-to-year, appointment-to-appointment. These inequities drive one to seek methods, and strategies that will empower clergywomen to be strengthened to speak up and “act up” for changes within the church. By design this should encourage other women and men to pursue the changes that will challenge the status quo. At the very least it should bring about interest in engaging in conversation concerning pragmatic leadership roles for women. Women in this conference, clergywomen and lay, are a numerical majority. What, then, keeps them from pastoral equality?

Therefore, the dissertation project leading to the Doctor of Ministry degree for this writer focused on introducing *spiritual empowerment* as a survival strategy and a force for women in ministry to initiate equity in the pulpit.³ The writer hoped that this study would enable women, who are a numerical majority in our church, to experience the power that is of God, which will lead toward personal wholeness. It is the female clergy who must begin the work of transformation—in attitude and praxis. Attitude, because while some women are in favor of women as senior pastors, a great number of women are opposed to the idea or the reality of women as senior pastors. Praxis, because it is obvious that men are not willing to be fair in their assessment of and recommendation to bishops of women for pastoral appointments to larger congregations. So it is women who must take up the cause.

One can look at spiritual empowerment as that inner force that knits humanity and divinity into oneness so that one has a deeper understanding of God’s love in one’s life. This should be evidence through the ability to help others achieve spiritual growth. Here it is used as a term to indicate the gaining of spiritual power and control over one’s life by oppressive groups. If this can be comprehended then one can begin to

² Minutes of the 129th Session of the Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference held at Big Bethel AME Church, May 25-28, 2004.

³ Cassandra Mercy Hill, “Spiritual Empowerment for Pragmatic Leadership in Pastoral Ministry: The Case for Equality of Clergywomen in the Atlanta North Georgia Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church” DMin. diss., Interdenominational Theological Center, 2004.

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understand that equality of the sexes, in whatever genre, is a necessary means for survival.

Men will not give up what they conceive to be *their* power without women staging a strong and determined struggle. In this instance, men's view of power is filled with misconceptions. Nonetheless, Frederick Douglass understood power and stated, "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."⁴ So we do not expect by any stretch of the imagination that equality will be freely given. We do expect that people, in general, and the AMEC, in particular, will begin to deal honestly with the realities of women's issues and their search for equality in pastoral ministry.

We are confronted with the social construct of patriarchy in this church. Patriarchy assumes that males are superior to females; it assumes the value of women and their role in society, among other things. It assumes that power is a male "thing." While this social construct, like race and gender, is nothing real (of course the biological is factual in race and gender), it is a socially agreed upon contract that these are proper values. It is a dominant way of talking or doing something so that it becomes real in our minds.⁵ One is left to understand that in a male-dominated church—in authority only—women cannot take what belongs to the man, after all man has a family to feed and bills to pay. What a novel concept for women—who have families to feed and bills to pay?

The motivation for this project began sixteen years ago as another Annual Conference passed and women were not given appointments. Five years into the system, the writer, now an itinerant elder, was not appointed to a church. After going from building to building with the Bishop and other ministers, the humiliation turned to tears and the tears turned to anger. It was difficult to comprehend how anyone, including the writer, could put themselves through such anguish. Yet year after year they did. Unless there was some glaring reason, the males eventually received appointments. The women who were overlooked and not recommended by the presiding elders were observed by this writer as useless and unfit to

⁴Frederick Douglass. (n.d.). BrainyQuote.com. Retrieved November 5, 2015, from BrainyQuote.com Web site:

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/f/frederickd134371.html>.

⁵ Forum Module 3 and 4 by Carolyn McCrary and Makunga Akinyela in Atlanta in *DIVAS Forum* on 3/27/2004. This forum was designed to engender conversation concerning the pastoral inequity of women in the AMEC.

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be leaders of congregations. One dared not say anything (unless asked) for fear of retaliation. This observation stood in stark comparison to the men who received appointments. Men, who had less education, were older and some seemingly in ill health received appointments because the male presiding elder recommended them. So the writer entered this project with the venom of a cobra. It was realized, however, that what was needed was spirituality that would bring in the divine. Attitudes can be changed, but it takes far more power than any human being has. It was cathartic to explore this subject with earnest and with the spirit that lives, or should live, inside of people. Talking with other women and journaling was very helpful. It is obvious that much is needed in the way of bringing humanity and spirituality together. It is a heavy carry—but not to worry, this writer's attitude changed through prayer, conversation, journaling and observation of the AME Church system.

Now the same feelings that are present as an African American reaches into gender reality. In the writer's journal, those feelings of racism from the minds and hands of white people leap over into sexism in the minds and hands of black men.

In a journal entry in November 1998, the writer wrote the following:

[...Life as an African-American woman in the AME Church is humiliating, painful, sad, excruciating, sad, painful, sad, painful humiliating, sad, and painful. It is dehumanizing and tormenting to see people oppress you because of patriarchal power and you want to scream "No!" but because you're only one and you have been conditioned that this is a man's church, you remain silent as the tears roll down your cheeks—but you can't let them see you cry because "they" would use that as another reason not to appoint you to a church. This is a damnable way to treat anybody!!]⁶

Bishop Vashti M. McKenzie, the first female bishop elected in the AMEC, in her book *Not Without a Struggle: Leadership Development for African American Women in Ministry* states the concern this way:

One of the greatest sources of frustration for women of African descent in America is having the door shut in our faces twice.

⁶ Cassandra Mency Hill, journal entry, November 1998.

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The door of education, economic empowerment, career advancement, employment opportunity, and achievement is shut once for the color for our skin (racism) and again because of our gender (sexism). Further the frustration is greatest when it is a member of our African American family who shuts the door the second time. It hurts most when the door is slammed by the ones with whom you have worked side by side for equality.⁷

Letty Russell also resonates with this feeling as she states that although white women and women of color share in the oppression of patriarchal structures, the double or triple layer of oppression experienced by women of color, who are often also poor, means that their experience is as different from that of white feminists as “purple to lavender” or Hagar to Sarah.⁸

The frustration and disrespect that is felt caused this writer to want to examine the church in which she had grown up and the conference to which she belonged. How can a black man discriminate against anybody, but particularly his sister, when discrimination is much of what he has known?

The writer used a survey to sample attitudes about women as senior pastors with the laity and clergypersons. The writer’s journals were also used, as well as a sister group that met at varying times during conference meetings. Finally, a forum that was designed to desensitize women and men to the realities that exist in the church and to generate a conversation for the purpose of educating, inspiring and liberating clergywomen with the desire that they would become empowered to empower others. The forum had five modules, besides the opening and closing. The first module aimed at helping the group to understand the spiritual empowerment issue and why it was important. The second module was designed to keep this from becoming a session that put men down. The third module was a dialogue between the presenter and the group. This helped the group to understand their internalized oppression.

⁷ Vashti M. McKenzie, *Not Without a Struggle: Leadership Development for African American Women in Ministry* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1996), 119.

⁸ Letty M. Russell, *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 27.

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The participants were led in externalizing oppression and internalizing liberation. Internalized oppression was defined by Dr. Carolyn McCrary as the acceptance of the oppressors' understanding of the oppressed, which largely serves the interest of the oppressor and may or may not be based upon truth regarding the oppressed⁹. Module four asked the question Now what? What is needed now that women are being empowered to access equality in pastoral ministry? Finally, Module five was a lively, informative discussion wherein the group used the strategic planning method of *SWOT to analyze* the denomination. It aimed at identifying the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.¹⁰ It helps to understand who we are, what we face and how we can *fix things*. The closing's objective was to motivate and encourage further forums and then to pass the torch on to others so that spiritual empowerment becomes real throughout the conference. The success of the forum depends on getting the right people to do each module. Modules three through five *must* have professional, expert presenters trained in people skills and psychology. Somehow people have to remember how racism is fought and apply the same grit to sexism. It is only when the top leadership in the AMEC becomes involved that real change is possible. Therefore, it is highly recommended that this forum begin in earnest with the bishops of the church. This forum has been utilized in varying forms with its leaders in each of the churches that the writer pastored (each congregation had less than 50 members). However, it has led to better communication and more spiritual leaders who are strengthened to empower. More time should be encouraged in the development of the project and methodology thereby ensuring the success of the project when bringing together theory and research. The urgency of this cannot be minimized.

There are many challenges that face DMin students; but all of them begin with the courage to be oneself. Then they can take advantage of every door that *cracks* and walk through with the confidence in their call and the ability to empower others to be who they were created to be, in whatever genre—woman or man. The DMin program at the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in Atlanta, Georgia did this for the writer. There is a need for the development of more precise critical

⁹ Carolyn L. McCrary, "The Wholeness of Women," *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* XXV (Spring 1998): 258-294.

¹⁰ Albert S. Humphrey is credited with the strategic planning method of SWOT-ing.

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thinking. Here at ITC the writer was afforded the resources and tools by many scholarly professors who would not allow for failure. The diversity of denomination, faculty and student body at ITC made for a wide range of learning experiences. This is where the writer belongs.

When the writer initially began the journey at ITC in 1972: working toward a Master of Divinity degree, there were approximately 20 females in all of the school of nearly 200. In fact, at that time, the schools were looking for females to attend. Looking back now, it was difficult to even think of being a pastor and so that was never a consideration. Twenty-seven years later, the call became so great it was impossible not to answer. Nevertheless, the same barriers existed for females going into the ministry of pastoring—gender bias being the largest to overcome. The writer was always up for a challenge. The motivation may not have been the most noble, but that would come. Women seemed to have the need to try harder and seeking out a doctorate degree seemed to be the best thing to do. Since the writer was employed by one of the denominational constituents at ITC, this was a natural fit. Taking advantage of this opportunity made more sense than not utilizing the opening. The writer had been a church school teacher, Bible Study leader, Christian Educator and, finally, an assistant pastor under the supervision of the male senior pastor. When you're number two, you must try harder—so the DMin degree was the next step to trying to be a senior pastor.

The womanist program at ITC is second to none. Through the work of Dr. Jacquelyn Grant, Founder and Director of Black Women in Church and Society (BWCS), it was an empowering experience to have access to various womanist resources as well as to one of the founders of womanist theology.¹¹ BWCS was founded in 1981 with the express purpose to encourage and to facilitate the inclusion and full participation of women in the life and work of the Church and the larger society. For nineteen years, Black Women in Ministerial Leadership, which is one component of BWCS, has provided a viable primary paradigm for Black women's leadership, rooted in a commitment to spirituality, morality, equality and justice; as well as funds to strengthen the economic realities of more than 300 women seminarians. It also gave funds to male

¹¹ Jacquelyn Grant, *The Office of Black Women in Church and Society: 2015 Report to the Board of Trustees of the Interdenominational Theological Center* (Atlanta, GA: Black Women in Church and Society, 2015).

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seminarians.¹² Therefore, because of the research and study the writer aspired to, Interdenominational Theological Center was the right and only place to pursue the knowledge and degree needed to compete, so the writer thought. It was the right place to begin the struggle for equality in pastoral ministry, but competing was another thing. So to borrow the words of the late Ted Kennedy: "...the work goes on, the cause endures, the hope still lives, and the dream shall never die."¹³

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Edward M. Kennedy, "1980 Democratic National Convention" (New York City, New York, August 12, 1980), accessed June 30, 2016, <http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/tedkennedy.htm>.

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