



Concern, Hope, and Motive: *A Plan of Action Toward Effective Development of Ministerial Leadership*¹

Ted Ward and E. Joe Gilliam

This document provides background and invites reflective discussion in reference to Church-Based Theological Education For Church Leadership Development In Portland, hereafter called the “Portland Project.” The intention of this project is to strengthen the churches of the Portland area and beyond through congregational participation in experiential learning for men and women engaged in present and future leadership of the churches. In support of invigorated leadership development at the congregational level, church-related educational institutions are being encouraged to explore ways in which they can become participating partners.

Concern

The relationship between higher education and the church is in a steady process of erosion:

- Secularization has reduced Christian orthodoxy to the status of an out-of-date nuisance.
- Theological values are in compromise and dissolution.
- The church has diminished influence in matters of ethics and morality.
- Educational procedures and standards have exalted intellectual excellence above spiritual maturity.

Many church denominations are facing severe shortages of appropriately prepared and experienced pastors. The key problem seems to be that entry into ministerial careers has been moved upward in the academic ladder and now is most often described as a graduate-level academic accomplishment. Valid though the specialized study of academic theology is, the effect on the church has been to create a great gulf between the small number of academically qualified pastors and the vast number of smaller parish-level churches.

Hope

Still available to the churches in many regions are the undergraduate church-related colleges (including Bible colleges), many of which have retained small pastoral education departments. Because of relatively larger emphasis on graduate-level theology, most of these programs languish for lack of steady interaction with designated churches. At most, students engage in short experiences as assigned “interns” or Sunday-service participants in musical groups and other performance-type roles—unlikely to contribute significantly to the development of a pastoral relationship with the people of a given congregation. *Again, the key problem is that the churches are unaware of the vital role they can and should play in the development of these pastors.*

¹ Ted Ward and E. Joe Gilliam. Concern, Hope, and Motive: A Plan of Action Toward Effective Development of Ministerial Leadership. An example of a proposed research inquiry, May 30, 2000

In most fields of professional education today, with the possible exception of ministerial education, learning is seen as an interaction between theoretical and practical experience. Whether the degree is in business, science, teaching, or the arts, the relationship of practical skills and underlying conceptual foundations is clearly defined and regarded as a joint concern of the applied profession and the academic community which serves it.

The Portland Project proposes such a relationship and innovation in ministry education through the cooperation of churches and colleges of the Portland area. Thus *the region can become a laboratory for discovery of effective working together and a demonstration site for coming to terms with significant educational and social development problems of this nation.*

These issues are now widely discussed:

1. The recruitment and development of those who are truly called to Christian ministry.
2. The quality and effectiveness of ministerial education.
3. The direct participation of the churches in the educational process.
4. The relationship between academic knowledge and the skills and wisdom which derive more surely from experiential learning.

The agenda for the first formal discussion of the possibilities for such a project would need to include the following items:

1. What steps should be taken by churches and their educational institutions in order to cultivate mutual accountability and effective cooperation in the recruitment, selection, support, and development of appropriate newcomers to pastoral leadership?
2. How can the availability of new ministers of the church be most responsibly and effectively increased?
3. What sort of strategies of teaching and learning would provide appropriate grounding for lifelong learning as a fundamental characteristic of church leader?.
4. How can churches, as faith communities, engage constructively in the development of leadership for church and society as an expression and fulfillment of the Gospel mandates?
5. How best can world-class scholars and church strategists be utilized for short-term and adjunct professorial roles and mentoring of Anderson University seminar participants?

Motive

The major motive is to define, refine, and put into practice a significant alternative to the ways that leadership persons are typically educated for the church. There are two aspects of this alternative: *first, the place for education of church leadership is within the church—specifically, within and in full interaction with the congregational life of the particular faith community. Second, the teaching-learning process is drawn from community-based procedures as developed for the best of adult learning experiences.*

Leadership of the church, from the church, and by the church. Although the history of Christianity reveals that no one approach to leadership style has predominated, the teaching of the Bible, especially of the New Testament, specifies and illustrates *a consistent body of principles. In brief, these center on leadership as service rather than as control or management* (Matthew 23: 1-12). Old Testament and New Testament sources on qualifications for leadership are remarkably parallel. Nowhere is any specific leadership requirement regarded as superior to one's attributes of character and relationship to God.

The criteria are not technical in nature and can be responsibly discerned by the people of the church. The essence is summarized effectively by the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy, chapter 2. Most of Paul's

listed items are identified elsewhere in Scripture as qualities expected of all the people of God. Thus it follows that selection, training, and assignment for church ministry are matters of shared concern for a body of believers; indeed, participation in these responsibilities is a shared concern for all Christians. But Paul identifies only two criteria which are unique to leadership people: “fitness to teach” and “not a novice.” Each of these implies both experience and a responsible knowledge base. Even for these characteristics the people of God, broadly defined, share a significant role in making the judgments. Therefore, *all* the people of God are accountable for the experience and knowledge that they bring to bear on leadership judgments.

Education of leadership within the church. Especially in the last two centuries, institutions of formal education have become the major locus of ministerial education. In the many centuries prior, various sorts of applied learning—mentoring, reading, apprenticeship, and tutorial learning—have been the mainstay of the development of ministry competencies. *The example provided by Jesus in reference to his disciples suggests that a walking, talking, sharing of life experiences was illustrated long before the church discovered academic credit hours and professorial ranks.*

To what extent should local churches assign away to some other institution their responsibilities for leadership selection, training, and assignment? It may be that *encouraging churches to take a more active and responsible role in the development of leadership could lead to significantly increased engagement of the church with the needs of contemporary society.*

The local church as the learning community. Where learning takes place has a strong influence on the outcomes of education. The development of pastoral ministry needs to draw upon the interactive and supportive climate of the fellowship community. *The authoritative and scholarly handling of the Word of God must be disciplined to the ministerial task of compassionate concern for the nurturance of the people of God.* Whatever uses are made of the essentially competitive and potentially prideful environments of formal education should be recognized as less than optimal for the development of attributes for spiritual ministry to the church. *Thus a local church wherein the members are committed to recognizing and developing one another’s gifts constitutes the ideal learning community for ministry education.*

Regarding the planning of an effective engagement of this project, decisions on the following matters need to be made:

1. Level of interest and commitment in the enhancement of the church-and-ministerial education collaboration.
2. Evaluating the strategy of focusing the first phases of this project in one denomination and its leading educational institution and major source of ministerial leaders.
3. Developing a preliminary timetable and sequence of proposed milestones in the project.
4. Appropriate physical presence, facilities, and identity of this project on the campus and within the academic life of the collaborating institution.
5. Projection of strategies for increasing joint participation of other denominational seminaries.

Church-Based Theological Education for Church Leadership: Proposed Guidelines

The Project. The “Portland Project” is an exploration to search out and implement an alternative approach to the development of church leadership. Three significant characteristics, taken as whole, constitute the uniqueness of the project:

1. The participating churches and schools are an open-ended affiliation of churches and educational institutions committed to engage together in exploring new means and methods of developing men and women for Christian ministry.
2. The context of ministry education is assumed to be congregational. The activities and experiences of learning will engage the learners with the ministry of the congregation.
3. The educational model is styled on the best principles from research in adult education. It assumes that ministry development derives from experiential learning and thus calls for actual involvement in the doing of ministry. Thus the participant, as learner, becomes committed to a congregation and responds to its purposes while pursuing its tasks and engaging in its relationships over time.

The project is based in a consortium of churches, church-related colleges, and pastoral training institutes allied in an effort to increase the competencies, the varieties of experience, and the degree of commitment of those entering the Christian ministry. The criteria for participation are broadly defined so as to enhance cooperation and free exchange.

The Purposes.

1. Christian experience is most clearly fulfilled in a community of learning and development. Those who lead the Christian communities must be leader-learners, continuing their education within such communities, not merely prepared intellectually at some earlier point in life as the teachers for such groups of people.
2. The need for a more thoroughly grounded experiential education is the primary motivation of the Portland Project.
3. The dual concern in this project is for a balanced emphasis on theological grounding for a life of deepening Christ-like service and a well-begun involvement with the people of the church, community, and society.

Qualifications: Churches

1. Christian churches, whether as independent congregations or as ecclesiastical affiliations of similar churches, are eligible to enter into the Portland Project.
2. The definition of church includes two biblical aspects of historical Christianity: centered on the person of Jesus Christ, Son of God, and Savior of the fallen creation, and grounded in the Holy Bible as primary source of understanding of the church and its godly purposes in the world.
3. Beyond these matters, participation in the Portland Project is intended to be minimally divisive and disruptive of the established ecclesiological orders of the various Christian affiliations.

Qualifications: Church-Related Colleges

1. Church-related colleges are defined as post-high school institutions of two, three, or four year scope, having formal or informal identification with a sector of the broadly-defined church of

- Jesus Christ.
2. The intention is not to exclude post-graduate institutions but to recognize that the collegiate level is the major source of those who respond to the calling to Christian ministry. Thus a major characteristic of this project is the emphasis on increasing the ministry-related teaching and experiential involvement of persons who are in this level of education. The one requirement is that such an educational institution have some well-defined program or track which is identified as a “minor” or “major” in ministry preparation.

Qualifications: Pastoral Training Institutes

1. Recognizing that there are non-academic programs of ministry education, especially experiential programs of induction and development through service and on-the-job mentoring, such programs, called for purposes of this project “institutes,” will be eligible for participation.
2. Most of these institutes are generally represented as not-for-credit adult learning centers and illustrate the importance of accommodating a wide variety of learners through a wide variety of sub-divisions of program activities.

Qualifications: Learners

1. Learners are the major reason for the Portland Project. These men and women represent the future of the church. Helping learners develop, within the context and experiences of the local congregation, is the major objective of this effort. The intention is to nurture and to encourage, not merely to evaluate and to select. Toward this end, the major criteria for leaders-as-learners in the Portland Project will be a willing spirit, a commitment to service, and an inquiring mind.
2. The standards for selection and advancement of learners within the church-based experiences of this project will be determined by the entities and organizations constituting the member organizations.

The Consultative Center

1. At the core of the Portland Project is a consultative center providing resource services to enable the participating congregations and educational institutions to more fully implement the educational model. These services will be planned and managed in such a way as to assure equitable and parallel assistance to each of the participant constituencies.
2. The selected resource people will be of two sorts: those who can provide short-term teaching as needed to supplement the local resources, and ministry education consultants whose periodic visits will serve to keep the project moving according to a coherent and systematic plan.
3. In addition to these resource people whose contributions will be steady and topical, efforts will be made to bring nationally and internationally noted persons for public presentations to draw attention to the importance, indeed, the urgency of the Portland Project. A major purpose of these public symposia and lectureships is the spreading of the central ideas and themes of the Portland Project to other locations across the world.
4. As the project expands, and especially as it becomes part of a national or global network of similar ministry education affiliations, this consultative center will take on a role as a clearing house, think-tank, and conference center giving attention to educational and theological problems as they arise within the affiliated congregations and communities.

Collaboration and Affiliation

The Portland Project is to be characterized by its high degree of cooperative teamwork, learning from the differences in polity and approach of the individual units, and celebrating the unity which comes from the similarities in commitment to Christian service and ministry.

Individual project units are encouraged to establish regular means of communicating and exchanging information which can be mutually valuable. It is expected that successes as well as failures will be acknowledged in respectful ways through which all participants can learn.

One of the most esteemed purposes of the Portland Project will be the ways in which the people of congregations and their affiliated institutions will come together to exemplify a collective learning community bearing testimony to the truth and strength of Christian spirituality.

Sequence of Project Phases: Subject to Revision

Phase One: Project Organizing

Objectives:

- Communication

- Identification of Prospective Sites—Churches and Institutions

- Enlistment of First-Round Participants

- Selection of a Project Advisory Panel

- Consultation With Pastors and Educators in Similar Projects in Other Cities

- Selection of Project Coordinator

Phase Two: Church Leadership Consultation

Objectives:

- Clarifying a Biblical Basis for Leadership in the Church

 - (In-church workshops for extant leadership persons)

- Planning with Pastors and Church Boards

- Planning of Policy and Procedure of Support for Learners

- Writing the Document Representing Points of Agreement and Commitment

Phase Three: Identifying Participant Educational Institutions

Objectives:

- Clarifying a Biblical Basis for Leadership Education in the Church

 - (In-church workshops for pastors and other extant leadership persons in conjunction with educational personnel from participating educational institutions or programs)

- Planning with Administrators and Faculty Persons

- Launching Three to Five Pilot Project Churches (Two to six interns in each)

- Writing a Document to Represent Points of Agreement and Commitment

Phase Four: Establishing the Guidelines, Standards and Expectations

Objectives:

- Developing the Guidelines for Project Participants

 - (Note that the descriptive documents call for minimal emphasis on conformism.)

- Training Workshops for All Project Participants—Concerning Implementation of the Guidelines

Phase Five: Regular Operations