

Does Having a Formal Seminary Education
Contribute to Effective Pastoral Leadership?

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The scope of this research paper is not an attempt to answer the old and still raging debate about whether or not seminary is a necessity for those looking to enter pastoral ministry within an ecclesial setting. This aim of this paper is intended to answer the question, does having a formal seminary education contribute to effective pastoral leadership. Not many would question the overall benefits of seminary education for pastors and those seeking full-time ministry such as community, learned and developed exegetical and hermeneutical skills, a thorough conceptualization of biblical worldview, and exposure to and greater appreciation for the theological contributions of great thinkers throughout church history and those our time. Sabra (2012) stated that a theological seminary serves the church “by providing qualified candidates with the necessary theological knowledge, spiritual formation, pastoral training, educational skills and leadership aptitude. A theological seminary nurtures the faith of ministerial candidates and lay church members for effective concern for, and engagement with, the entire range of human need” (Sabra, 2012, pp. 165-166).

Jeynes (2012) noted that the intellectual propensity of theological seminaries, namely the greater emphasis on theological education, is a recent development not reflective of American seminary education in between the early 17th century and early 20th century. Jeynes (2012) argues that developing Christ-like character was of primary importance to the seminary institution, and while theological accuracy was highly valued and pursued, such a pursuit followed the view that if one’s focus is on Christ and “becoming like him, one will likely have the personal motivation to pursue right theological perspectives” (Jeynes, 2012, p. 71). Seminary education then should lead to a balance of right heart motivations and solid theology. Johnson (as cited in Randall, 2007, p. 9) argued “for the place of *orthokardia* (‘a heart rightly formed before God’) as well as *orthodoxis* and *orthopraxis*” in theological education, echoed also in earlier Spurgeonian rhetoric

that complained of too much stress on scholarship in seminary training yet not seeing “careful scholarship and spirituality as in complete conflict” (Randall, 2007, p. 10).

In 1994, a survey was conducted by the Murdock Charitable Fund, in which it surveyed 800 subjects divided into three groups; church members, pastors, and seminary professors, on the top five most important emphases of pastoral preparation (Morgan, 1994). The results of the survey showed striking and markedly significant differences in the perspectives of the three groups. Morgan (as cited in Jeynes, 2012) revealed the following list of priorities by group: The church members’ list included the following priorities in this order: (a) spirituality, (b) relational skills, (c) character, (d) communication skills, and last, (e) theological knowledge. The pastors’ priority list included the following: (a) relational skills, (b) management abilities, (c) communication skills, (d) spirituality, and last, (e) theological knowledge. In contrast, the professors list include the following: (a) theological knowledge, (b) character, (c) leadership skills, (d) communication skills, and last, (e) counseling skills (Jeynes, 2012, p. 70). While it is troubling that the professors listed theological knowledge first in priority, in contrast to the church members and pastors both viewing it as least important, it is also noteworthy that the church members listed spirituality as greatest in priority in contrast to the ministers listing spirituality as second to the least important priority of pastoral preparation and the professors not naming spirituality as even important at all. Jeynes (2012) states that empirical evidence rather than mere anecdotal observations suggest that seminaries like secular universities are suffering from ivory tower syndrome (p. 70).

Similarly, Harbaugh (as cited in Childs, 2014, p. 33) addressing concern for the tendency of seminary education to tilt toward the cognitive, offered three strategies for seminaries in preparing persons for ministry: (a) taking a whole person approach to theological education by taking into account the body, mind, feelings, and relationships of the seminarian, (b) providing tools to help students with the challenges of transition from preparation to ministry, (c) helping

students nurture their spirituality and cultivate spiritual gifts (Childs, 2014, p. 33). A group of Evangelical scholars met in Europe for the Second Langham Europe International Consultation on Theological Education, May 9-12, 2013, to discuss theological education and the church, particularly challenges of contextualization, credibility, and relevance of theological education (Parushev, 2013). The conference of scholars discussed theological education and the church “from theological, pedagogical, historical, cultural, ecclesiological, missiological perspectives”, and how closely seminary training and ecclesial mission work together (Parushev, 2013, p. 44).

One of the major points of agreement of the Langham scholars was that, “Theological scholarship is not just a privilege of theological training institutes but, in the service of the church, the heartbeat of the church. Just as the church is in need of critical theological scholarship, theology is in need of the church so that both can fulfill their mission” (Parushev, 2013, p. 45).

There seems to be much consensus among scholars that seminaries and seminary education is not primarily academic in nature but formational, sharing a role with the local church in preparing future leaders of the church to serve God’s mission in the world (Stache, 2014). Theological or seminary education is then not simply increasing our knowledge about God or “mastering a set doctrine or memorizing scripture. Participating in God’s life and work in the world isn’t determined by how much we know *about* God. It is about intimate knowledge *of* God” (Stache, 2014, p. 288).

The overwhelming concurrence of research addressed in this paper, show that serving the faith community and theological scholarship and fidelity, preceded by relationship with God, spiritual character, devotion and formation, are the primary and secondary concerns of seminary education for persons preparing to serve in pastoral roles within ecclesial settings. What does the research tell us about the effectiveness of seminary education in the development of pastoral

leadership? Fischer (2010) lists leadership development as an essential element of pastoral formation whereby the seminarian is initiated into an understanding of pastoral leadership through guided formal academic reflection upon field experiences that both serve to equip the seminarian with pedagogy and praxis (Fischer, 2010). McKenna (as cited in Marsh, 2010, p. 60) argued “little research exists, however, about the development of pastoral leaders, their continuing development as they progress through different stages as leader.”

According to Irwin and Roller (2000) most church administration is learned on the job, and while traditional seminary training focuses on the theological roles that pastors must perform, emphasis on the theological preparation without adequate leadership and management preparation “may in some cases inadvertently cause a distancing of pastors from the people to whom they minister” (Irwin & Roller, 2000, p. 54). The research findings of Irwin and Roller (2000) “indicate substantial agreement among the pastors surveyed that church management and leadership issues are highly related to their effectiveness in ministry, and that their formal training in church management was inadequate” (Irwin & Roller, 2000, p. 65). The research survey revealed that when responding to the greatest challenges that they face in ministry, pastors overwhelmingly noted management, leadership, and organizational issues, rather than spiritual issue and three out of four responding pastors felt that their churches would be more effective if they had better management skills (Irwin & Roller, 2000). As a result of these findings, Irwin and Roller (2000) offer several recommendations: (a) Pastors need management and leadership training prior to entering pastoral ministry. College courses and seminary courses taken by pastors need to include classes covering church administration, leadership, organizational theory, and change management, (b) Pastors need continuing education that may be provided by their denomination or seminary in order to sharpen their leadership and management skills and to keep up with the ever changing needs of faith communities.

Workshops and seminars are also facilitated through various church leadership ministries that partner with local churches and denominations to provide training for pastors and pastoral staff, (c) Pastors need leadership support from their denominations and or fellowships that can assist them with resources such as trainers, consultants, media and materials, evaluations and assessments, to ensure that pastors and churches are aware of available resources to help assist them with leadership and administrative challenges and difficulties that they might face, and to help prevent unnecessary failures and resignations (Irwin & Roller, 2000, p. 65-66).

Hillman (2008) argues that while many evangelical seminaries might see leadership development as part of their purpose, critics would say that the seminary institution and educational model is failing to train and develop 21st century leaders. Many church and seminary leaders agree and go “so far as to say that many of the current theological education institutions likely will not survive long into the 21st century, due in part to this perceived lack of leadership development in the schools’ graduates” (Hillman, 2008, p. 58).

Formal seminary education, according to Sabra (2012) is designed to prepare the pastor through leadership development and spiritual formation and to serve the needs of the church “by providing qualified candidates with the necessary theological knowledge, spiritual formation, pastoral training, educational skills and leadership aptitude” (Sabra, 2012, p. 165). Leadership training provided by the seminary can provide the pastor with sound leadership models based on biblical paradigms that help to guard the pastor from unscriptural cultural trends and unhealthy leadership practices that lead to devastating results. The seminary model of theological education is failing to develop pastoral leaders because it doesn’t reflect the reality of many seminarians that are either already active or preparing to enter full-time pastoral ministry (McKinney, 2004). Studies show that more and more churches are increasingly looking away from seminaries for theological, ministerial, and leadership training and are developing in-house training programs of

their own due to a growing frustration “over evidence that classical theological education has not adequately prepared men and women for leadership in 21st century churches” (McKinney, 2004, p. 150). McKinney (2004) argues further that most churches are not in a position to provide adequate theological education at an appropriate postsecondary level, however the developing trend does demonstrate that the needs of the church have changed in ways often unrecognized by seminaries and may require different types of training.

The International Council of Accrediting Agencies for Evangelical Theological Education (ICAA) Manifesto, 1990, 2nd Edition (as cited in McKinney, 2004) listed twelve priorities of theological education: (a) Contextualization, (b) Churchward Orientation, (c) Strategic Flexibility, (d) Theological Grounding, (e) Continuous Assessment, (f) Community Life, (g) Integrated Programme, (h) Servant Moulding, (i) Instructional Variety, (j) A Christian Mind, (k) Equipping for Growth, and (l) Cooperation (McKinney, 2004, p. 154). Not listed among the values and priorities of theological education was pastoral leadership development, which again speaks to the growing leadership gap that exists in local churches due to undertrained and inadequately prepared pastoral leaders entering into ministry in an ecclesial setting. The mission of the seminary and seminary education should be “to develop servant leaders—mature, disciplined, intelligent disciples of Jesus Christ with leadership skills who will penetrate every walk of life in their respective cultures and indeed around the world” (McKinney, 2004, pp. 158-159).

Leadership and management textbooks commonly define leadership as the ability to influence followers i.e. as an act and an outcome, but rarely does leadership get defined in terms of an ontological becoming, which Fischer (2010) identifies as taking place within the intersection of leadership development and spiritual formation, “becoming a good follower is a seminarians first step on the way to becoming a good leader” (Fischer, 2010, p. 7). The aim of

the seminary, Fischer (2010) states, is to help “the student to identify with Christ as the unifier of the Christian community” (Fischer, 2010, p. 7), by blending the secular leadership theory of servant-leadership with the biblical based Christian concept of the good shepherd, wherein the seminarian sees pastoral leadership as much more than a style or mere influence, but a transformation of character with Christ the Shepherd as the model for the appropriate set of attitudes and behaviors (Fischer, 2010). A formal seminary education should teach seminarians that pastoral leadership is never a direct consequence of any ontological difference between ordained pastoral leaders and the congregants as if ordination made pastors leaders, but pastoral leadership in an ecclesial setting is authentically demonstrated when pastoral leaders invite congregants to take part in the mission of God (mission Dei) and to freely assimilate the mission of Christ (Fischer, 2010).

In an effort to fill the vacuum of developed pastoral leaders in local churches, Trinity Lutheran Seminary began an innovative approach to seminary education designed to lower the rising costs of a seminary education and train pastors to be better leaders through a re-envisioned seminary educational model called the 2+2 model which is essentially a Leadership in context or a “traditioned innovation” model of education. This model provides the seminarian enrolled in their M.Div. program, two years of contextual learning for Trinity alongside an appointed faculty supervisor, where learning takes place both in the congregational setting and on campus during cohorts throughout the first two years. The third and fourth year M.Div. student will invest the remainder of the two years learning via on campus face to-face instruction and online learning (Binau, 2014). Basically, 2+2 is two years of residential learning followed by two years of serving and learning in a congregation (Binau, 2014). One of the features of the 2+2 model that proves it’s effectiveness to help Trinity Lutheran Seminary fulfill it’s mission to “form leaders for Christ’s church at work in the world” (p. 41) and to advance it’s conviction that the world

needs leaders who can further God's mission to heal and redeem all creation, is its commitment to providing what Irwin and Roller (2000) recommended which is (a) leadership training and development, (b) continuing pastoral education beyond the seminary, (c) pastoral support through faculty that also engages the congregational context throughout the process benefitting both the student and the church with materials, coaching, consultation, and evaluations.

Wheeler (2011) argues that leadership development is played out in seminaries in a typically unnoticeable way through the often unnoticed leadership of the seminary president and senior leaders, who bring leadership qualities to their roles that create stability, financial growth, increased student enrollment, etc. The most effective seminary presidents and the senior team model collegial styles of leadership that can infect the whole school by influencing subordinates to work together as a team rather than as brilliant individual contributors and interacting "with their boards, graduates, and a wide network of friends for the school, thousands of persons who learn from their example as they teach the public about the seminary and the values it embodies" (Wheeler, 2011, p. 43). Wheeler (2011) stated, "the most skillful presidents often demonstrate what it means to think and act institutionally" as well as what it means to "exercise good judgment, listen carefully, and uphold the faculty's legitimate prerogatives; they do not play favorites, bully, or lie. Mutual respect does not necessarily mean complete agreement" (Wheeler, 2011, p. 42-43). In this way, the seminary models leadership by example, an example that soon to be pastoral leaders can take with them into the church and into the world.

Schultze (2010) makes the suggestion that faculty can assist seminarians in their development as leaders through the promotion of faith based community organizing which can be a useful source of leadership training. Citing President Barack Obama's testimony that he learned more working as a community organizer in Chicago than he did as a student at Harvard Law School, Schultze (2010) points out that many national organizing networks one-day,

weekend, and ten-day training sessions where leaders learn how “to direct meetings, build relations with one-to-one meetings and gather information in research actions. They also attend sessions with academics and others to analyze and discuss public policy concerns and community needs” (Schultze, 2010, p. 26). Schultze (2010), speaking from previous experience as a seminarian whose leadership development also came from training as a community organizer, is convinced that community organizing’s history of success in developing leaders will benefit seminarians particularly since they are likely to engage faith-based organizations during their field education practicum of their last year (Schultze, 2010). “Supervised participation in the work with reflective evaluation of the experience will contribute to their leadership development” (Schultze, 2010, p. 27).

Review of the Literature

This literature review will focus on two areas of pastoral leadership development: seminary preparation/pastoral leadership readiness and continued education as it relates to lifelong learning opportunities to further increase skills and knowledge through workshops, seminars, post graduate certificate courses, written and media resources that are offered by the seminary.

Seminary Preparation/Pastoral Leadership Readiness

Many studies have been conducted on seminary effectiveness over the years. The results have been far from conclusive as formal seminary education is always reforming. Jeynes (2012) argues that the modern seminary, like their university counterparts having succeeded in becoming nothing more than ivory towers offering academic rigor and intellectual development, yet are out of touch with the realities of life and detached from the real world. Jeynes (2012) reasons that seminaries are doing a poor job at preparing students to function practically in the real world and cites as an example that most seminary grads are able to articulate the general

distinctions between Calvinistic and Lutheran theology but lack the leadership skill to know not especially cognizant of (a) how to discern which people to spend the most time counseling, (b) how to draw together in harmony people who are in conflict, (c) how to ensure that one will not inaugurate more changes in a given year than a congregation can handle, and (d) how to balance being a good listener to the needs and hearts of the congregants and providing decisive leadership (Jeynes, 2012, p. 70). McKinney (2004) posited that evangelical theological education has deeply embedded within its institutions, four historical commitments: (a) commitment to biblical training, (b) commitment to the Great Commission, (c) commitment to holy living, (d) commitment to ministry formation (McKinney, 2004, p. 148-149).

McKinney (2004) warns evangelical seminaries however, of the danger of becoming nostalgic about the past and failing to be able to respond to present realities and future challenges such as the changing needs of local churches, changes in education, changes in student population and demographics, and changes in technology, all pointing to the need for renewal in seminary education that begins “with more biblical understanding of the church and leadership in the church” and an abandonment of the rigid allegiance to classical theological education which often focuses too much on cognition and content-orientation “rather than the reproduction of leaders who reproduce” (McKinney, 2004, pp. 154, 156).

Budiselić (2013) agrees with McKinney’s warning that seminary institutions need to align its mission and efforts toward the needs of the church, serve as resources for the church, and focus on training students for church ministry and leadership. Echoing McKinney’s (2004) perspective, Budiselić (2013) reasons that the purpose of formal seminary education is for ministry, and that the effectiveness of seminary education should then be measured by how it directs its educational model around the churches need for ministry and leadership development and its own need to:

Strengthen the church and take part in God's plan in order for the church to become a place for equipping God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ as a whole may be built up, resulting in unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, maturity, and attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:12-13)

(Budiselić, 2013, pp. 145-146).

Budiselić (2013) concludes that formal seminary education lacks purpose when it does not assist the church in the development of leaders and ministry and only when seminaries return to an earlier foundation of understanding that Christ established the church not academic theological institutions, the existence of dissonance between the church and the academy will disappear and the academy will be made up of the ranks of the church who actively lead and are in touch with its ministry and leadership needs.

Fischer (2010) stated, "seminarians are supposed to learn how to become effective pastoral leaders" (Fischer, 2010, p. 6), but the primary means through which this is to happen is in concert with the church rather than occurring as on-the-job training. Fischer (2010) expressed disappointment that little attention is paid to leadership in seminary curriculum and reasoned that while a pastor is more of a shepherd than a leader, the pastor's ability to lead however is essential, making it all the more necessary for the seminarian to acquire the skills for effective pastoral leadership (Fischer, 2010, p. 5). Taken from hints on pastoral formation from the Program of Priestly Formation, 5th edition, an ecclesial document about leadership development, Fischer (2010) constructed a more detailed treatment of how the seminary can help the church accomplish leadership development through the four pillars of human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation:

- **Human Formation.** Under this pillar, leadership is learned through obedience, not a blind obedience and dumb reflex, but by thoughtful, discerning and responsible

consideration for the truth. Because the pastoral leader knows how to obey Christ and other church and seminary leaders, he is able to invite and require obedience from others in accordance to the Gospel. Becoming a good follower is a seminarians first step on the way to becoming a good leader.

- **Spiritual Formation.** This pillar affirms the spiritual power of the pastor and the concept of service as demonstrated by Jesus Christ. Spiritual formation assists in the development of pastoral leaders by emphasizing that the nature of leadership in the church is rooted in the nature of Jesus' leadership to the church as expressed in His service. In this way, servant leadership is seen not so much as a leadership style as much as a set of attitudes that good leaders embrace.
- **Intellectual Formation.** Under this pillar, seminary curriculum should include courses in leadership contextualized to pastoral leadership.
- **Pastoral Formation.** Seminarians reflect on their experiences of leadership in courses guided by pastoral field educators. Acquiring leadership skill demands reflection as well as practice. Pastoral internships offer seminarians an extensive practical exposure to ministry in the context of the local congregation and the seminary campus (Fischer, 2010, p. 6).
Irwin and Roller (2000) put the question of whether having a seminary education

contributes to effective pastoral leadership into perspective, in their study of pastoral preparation of church management, by stating, of the 99 pastors of the Northeastern District of the Christian and Missionary Alliance surveyed, "While most pastors perceived that their spiritual preparation for ministry was adequate, most reported that their management training was inadequate. Pastors

also perceived that their success as pastors was related to their ability to manage and lead their churches” (Irwin & Roller, 2000, p. 53). Pastors serve in both spiritual and leadership roles which means that pastors must continually contend with two kinds ecclesial issues, spiritual and administrative, and without the proper preparation in both areas of ministry, pastoral leaders tend to give spiritual answers to organizational problems and organizational answers to spiritual problems (Irwin & Roller, 2000, p. 53).

Continued Education

How is leadership development being facilitated for pastoral leaders who are post seminary graduates? Olson (2009) stated, “ongoing training and development is a critical component of sustained ministry effectiveness” and that pastoral leaders should not view seminary as something that they did past tense as in complete but rather something they must do in the present tense as in ongoing (Olson, 2009, p. 42). One of the benefits of continued education in the area of leadership training and development is that the pastoral leader who is engaged in continuing education models ongoing learning as examples of the very learning, growing, and changing that they wish to see in their congregants (Olson, 2009).

Mead (2005) explains that an explosion of change is occurring in every field and pastoral leaders like other leaders need to continue their education as knowledge in their fields continue to expand. This explosion, Mead (2005) argues, has left many seminaries behind, leaving clergy to drive continued learning efforts on their own, becoming education consumers of sorts, shopping wherever they can find help, whether it be non-denominational conferences, seminars or secular sponsored training, all of which may not be very helpful. Pointing to the need for both cognitive knowledge and experiential knowledge, the former of which is typically the emphasis of seminary education, Mead (2005) points to the continuing education model of the Experiential Leadership Institute, of Virginia Theological Seminary's

Life Long Theological Learning Program, which describes the goal of their continued education program in this way;

"To help increase self-awareness of one's leadership style and the impact that it has on others, to learn to observe what is happening in a group and be able to adapt one's interventions based on those observations, and to use one's own experiences for self-reflection and learning" (Mead, 2005, p. 4).

Binau (2014) agrees with Mead (2005) that rapid changes demand that post-graduate pastoral leaders commit to continued leadership training and development. "In the information age that is the 21st century, where knowledge grows exponentially every year, it is crucial that all leaders in Christ's church develop a commitment to lifelong learning" (Binau, 2014, p. 42).

Cook (2005) also agrees with the necessity of lifelong learning for pastoral leaders beyond seminary, but sees continuing education as not making much of a difference whether it's a semester long course or a three-day event, or an all-day seminar, unless what is being learned intellectually is not put into practice in holistic ways. Cook (2005) is wary of the continuing education or popular seminars like church growth or contemporary worship that attract pastoral leaders by targeting a populating desperate for a quick fix to increase membership size or measure their churches up against the cutting edge, and observed that most pastors rarely benefit from these kinds of seminars and are in need of continuing education that is of a deep, long-lasting benefit that is spiritually and holistically enriching (Cook, 2005, pp. 14-15).

Stache (2014) contends that continuing education for pastoral leaders is not the sole responsibility of the seminary, and placing theological institutions on a pedestal to determine what is needed and what needs to be offered puts the seminary right back where it is trying to get away from...the ivory tower out of touch with reality and the changing world around them.

Stache (2014) suggests that seminaries partner with denominations and congregations as both a

resource for continuing education and a way of connecting people and communities with formational educational offering for everyone (Stache, 2014, p. 291).

Method of Qualitative Research

My research would use the case study method of qualitative research because the case study would allow me to describe an experience or a problem, make initial hypotheses, conduct research in gathering information and making observations, revise hypotheses and theory, and tell a story through data collection (Breslin & Buchanan, 2008, p. 38). My case study in particular would be a descriptive case study of two groups, pastoral leaders who are seminary graduates and pastoral leaders who are non-seminarians. Yin (as cited in Rule & John, 2015, p. 3) stated a case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. The goal of case study research is analytical generalization rather than statistical generalization (Rule & John, 2015). Yin stated, “Case study method enables a researcher to closely examine the data within a specific context. In most cases, a case study method selects a small geographical area or a very limited number of individuals as the subjects of study” (Yin, 1984, p. 23).

Disadvantages, biases, and weaknesses of case study case are that they provide very little basis for scientific generalization since they use a small number of subjects, some conducted with only one subject (Yin, 1984, p. 21). Case studies are often labeled as being too long, difficult to conduct and producing a massive amount of documentation (Yin, 1984). Case studies can produce a great amount of data over a period of time and the challenge comes in when the

data is not managed and organized systematically. My research is challenged because it is difficult to draw a definite cause/effect from case studies.

Some researchers cite the lack of systematic procedure as a weakness in the case study research method, considering it not scientifically empirical in methodology. Another criticism of the case study method within qualitative is that it is often considered too subjective (Gog, 2015, p. 38). Case study research generates vast amounts of information, which may be too great to systematize. The ability to systematize this amount of data depends upon the researchers' capacity and methodology and skill in converting an enormous amount of information in different formats into synthetic information that can be compared to the model proposed in the research which may take too long and result in massive, unreadable documents. (Villarreal, 2017, p.156).

The case study method is preferred because the case study research is preferably used for research question, which focus to explain something by using the question terms how and why. Additionally, the case study method gains relevance the more in-depth explanations and descriptions are required (Gog, 2015, p. 38). Another advantage of the case study is another major benefit of case study research is its feasibility and opportunity of using multiple data sources and collection techniques. This triangulated use of quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques is called a mixed methods design. It enhances a research because a diverse and stronger array of evidence can be collected which leads to a deeper and more thorough understanding of the phenomenon (Tumele, 2015, p. 74)

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