

Relevance of Christian Education for Laity and Leaders

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Introduction: Chapter 1

Purpose of Christian Education

Changes in the organizational aspect of the Church warrants new levels of education of leaders and laity. Opportunities to deepen and strengthen the organizational resolve through spiritual and secular learning greatly benefits the Church. Education regardless of the professional field is necessary to promote continuous learning. No different is God's Kingdom – even more so, in fact. Some evangelicals would argue that organizational learning should solely focus on Biblical principles; however, there are guiding principles grounded in secular frameworks that could definitely benefit the church at-large. The purpose of this research paper is to show the significance and relevancy of Christian education for clergy and laity as it provides theological and secular foundations to advance the totality of God's work.

Education has been defined in many ways including the process of giving and receiving information. Some scholars conclude that the process of education can be an enlightening experience. As such continuing educational opportunities, deepening the understanding of leaders and laity, and extending spiritual and secular knowledge is integral to advancing the Kingdom of God.

Spiritual training is an important aspect and integral tool to promote continuous spiritual growth. The opportunities to engage and experience God in a manner exclusive of sermons and bible studies intentionally deepens knowledge of God, develops personal character, guides ministry efforts. Naidoo state that, "Studied spiritual formation in theological training in an attempt to research the connection between spiritual training and personal spiritual journey. Spiritual training has an impact and influence on personal spirituality. Christian training and

education can reduce the gap between education and service allowing for intellectual and spiritual exploration while guarding the faith. Continuous training opportunities promote spiritual maturation, which remains an important leadership responsibility."¹ The church, then, should be primed for engaging in spiritual practices conducive to intentional, collaborative, communal learning.

Characteristics of Christian Training

Cronsaw states asserts that, "There are seven characteristics of Christian training programs, which include communal, conversational, contextual, cross-cultural, character-forming, and conversational. Together these characteristics provide optimal learning that contribute to the overall viability of the local church while serving to strengthen the foundation of ministerial efforts. Within the context of learning communities within the church the philosophy of teaching and training can vary based on the mindset of the ministerial leader. These characteristics, considerations essential to church, spiritual, and personal growth, must be elevated in order to have an effectual ministry where learning is a priority.

The communal attributes elevates significant learning from the individual level to shared opportunities to learn and engage deeply in Biblical studies translating those truths to address life experiences. The crux of these communal learning environments is an essential attribute, trust. Trust facilitates collective learning and enhances spiritual formation. Opportunities for laity and leaders to hear divergent perspectives based on others' backgrounds, race, gifts, and talents broadens individual thinking and challenges the collective notions and ideas of others. Communal learning also contributes to the shared values and missions of the church. Individual

¹ Marilyn Naidoo, *An Empirical Study Formation At Protestant Theological Training Institution In South Africa* (South Africa: Religion & Theology, 2011): 138-40.

and collective spiritual growth assists in the refinement and attainment of ministerial mission efforts."²

Cronshaw asserts again that, "Active communal learning opportunities promote intensive conversation. The conversation provides participants time to learn from each other, reflect individually, and grapple with new learning. Unlike the traditional sermon that is generally a one-sided conversation where the preacher is delivering a message, training opportunities allow for dialogue and thoughtful consideration to a particular topic."³ Delving intensely into spiritual concepts promotes collective understanding and value-added insights unknown or otherwise possible in singular study. Conversation then, is an essential tool for ministry. Leaders can employ various strategies to promote the active engagement of laity and other leaders.

Ministry in local communities build programs and outreach based on its individual context and cross-cultural learning. Offering training on how to share the absolute truth of God's Word within the context of diversity broadens the scope of a ministry's reach. Educational methods linked to address cultural differences prepares laity and leaders for the changing demographics of the world without compromising the truths and revelations contained in the Bible. Similarly, contextual learning provides common language to laity and leaders around Church traditions such as the history, biblical studies, and historical theology assists in reciprocal and cross-cultural learning about how various cultures view God and subsequent historical perspectives.

Christian training contributes to character-forming. Through a personal understanding of who God is and the formation of a spiritual constitution leaders and laity form God-like character that impacts society and the local church. A key component to character forming in Christian

² Darren Cronshaw, *Re-Envisioning Theological Education, Mission, and The Local Church* (Mission Studies: 2011): 91-115.

³ *ibid.* 97.

training is the opportunity to reflect on how the new knowledge impacts his or her life and enhances the Kingdom. Inherent to self-reflection is spiritual and mental wholeness as “unhealed wounds have the potential to fester and undermine ministry.

Cronshaw asserts again that, "An offspring to focusing on self-reflection and character-forming is a mental health ministry to ensure wholeness through counseling or referral to appropriate professionals. The contemplative aspect of training in ministry simply involves teaching laity and leaders how to pray and to know God. Teaching people to pray and commune with God strengthens the steadfastness of the congregation, but also enhances the collective resolve to put God first and operate in faith. Additionally, contemplative learning undergirds sustainability within ministry causing one to slowly think, reflect, and engage in God’s Word and listen in prayer for direction. All of this learning undergirds ministerial pursuits keeping God first."⁴

The last characteristic of Christian learning is congregational learning, merging training of laity and leaders in church activities and programs. At the heart of congregational learning are experiences that bring laypeople and leaders together accomplishing a common objective such as nursing home outreach, prison ministry, or youth programs. Learning together and from one another bridges learning and doing along with various perspectives and problem-solving that might otherwise go unnoted. Leaders have opportunities to readily model for laity appropriate strategies for collaboration and Christian principles. Likewise, leaders can learn valuable information from parishioners. The reciprocal congregational learning is mutually beneficial and thoroughly undergirds the vision and mission of the church.

Transformational Leadership

⁴ Ibid. 107.

A transforming leader possesses motivational skills that compel followers, and in a transforming regime, a leader seeks to satisfy higher needs and engages the full person of the follower. Ciulla states that, "Transformational leadership assumes, "people will follow a person who inspires them; a person with vision and passion can achieve great things; and, the way to get things done is by injecting enthusiasm and energy. Common vision, mission, and goals are the thread that unites leaders and followers in a manner that not only promotes spreading of the gospel, but also to continue maturing as human beings. Christian leaders should, then, be morally and ethically bound to "raising the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led."⁵

It is incumbent upon church leaders to carefully consider the implications and relevance of attending to the whole person, not merely focusing on the spiritual acumen of its parishioners. Werhane suggested that, "Theose leader-follower model of leadership is no longer ideal in global organizations due to the diversity of cultures, skills, and challenges that require collaboration and team effort because effective leadership requires a strategic effort for diverse groups of people to work together toward a common vision and common goal."⁶ He also argued that, "Effective leaders understand the importance of team work, learning, and each participant's contribution to the vision and the elements of change."⁷ Leaders must engage in intentional learning and professional development opportunities to grow spiritually and naturally, establishing specific protocols and processes to ensure the fabric of the church are sustained, nurtured, and competitive.

Building a professional learning community incorporating shared vision, mission, goals and values catapults the organizational aspect of the church allowing all members to thrive and

⁵ Joanne B. Ciulla, *Ethics: The Heart of Leadership* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004).

⁶ PH. Werhane, *Women Leaders in A Globalized World* (Journal of Business Ethics, 2007), 425-435.

⁷ Ibid, 74.

exceed expectations. DuFour states that, "Viewing aspects of the church as a professional learning community encompasses cultural norms that provide energy and input for continuous improvement through a focus on shared beliefs about organizational learning."⁸ Effective collaboration can better organizational conditions and build great teams within an organization, thereby, producing favorable outcomes and strengthens personal efficacy in contributing to organizational learning where people at all levels, individually as well as collectively, are continually increasing their capacity to produce results they really care about. Karesh states that, "Through a focus on organizational learning, clear expectations, and effort, key church stakeholders (leaders and lay people) are exposed to an optimal and, harmonious environment."⁹

Organizational Learning

There are four organizational factors that contribute to effective organizational learning: leadership, organizational history, organizational priorities, and organization of the work. Processes well-designed and well-deployed can have a positive effect on ministerial and administrative outcomes. Organizational learning through collaboration promotes systems thinking; personal mastery; mental models; building a shared vision; and, team learning. Therefore, this organizational learning has been defined in many ways to include a focus on individual and collective efforts to achieve mutually-agreed upon results. Karesh states that, "An inquiry-based community focused on common practice and a collaborative culture with the necessary tools and structures to acquire knowledge."¹⁰

Researches McCharen, Song, and Martens state that, "Hypothesize an interdependence between the three constructs -- that one has an impact on the other -- and that collectively, the

⁸ R. DuFour and R. Eaker, *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement* (Bloomington, IN: National Education Service, 1998).

⁹ R. Karesh, *What Is Learning Organization?* (Retrieved from <http://world.std.com/~lo/>, 2002), 1.

¹⁰ Ibid.

constructs create new opportunities for learning and deployment of innovative strategies. There is a significant relationship between knowledge creation and collaboration in support of organizational learning. This research is instructive for the church as a self-renewing organization in identifying growth areas and accessing the knowledge and expertise to provide learning to the congregation. Additionally, the foci on environmental factors that propel organizational learning proffers significant information relative to how to cultivate knowledge, share knowledge, and execute knowledge within the church setting.¹¹

The factors of organizational learning and practices related to knowledge consists of three primary parts: (1) supportive learning culture, (2) organizational autonomy, and (3) collaboration, and the key to measuring organizational learning is a focus on the organizational factors that support or thwart professional learning. Scribner states that, "Organizational learning in one study focuses on the double-loop level of learning, which is applicable to complex learning environments. Double-loop learning requires continuous examination of the decisions made that guide practice and often results in new learning using existing organizational knowledge or replaces existing organizational knowledge with enhanced processes of information. Results concluded that there are four organizational factors that contribute to organizational learning: leadership, organizational history, organizational priorities, and organization of the work. Further, results indicate double-loop learning a significant factor in sustaining professional learning. Using these processes in the church to enhance institutional knowledge can have a positive effect on ministry outcomes."¹²

Self-Efficacy Related to Organizational Learning

¹¹ B. McCharen, J. Song, and J. Martens, *School Innovation: The Mutual Impacts of Organizational Learning and Creativity* (Educational Management Administration and Leadership: 2011), 39 (6), 676-694.

¹² J.P. Scribner, K.S. Cockrell, D. H. Cockrell, and J.W. Valentine, *Creating Professional Communities in Schools through Organizational Learning: An Evaluation of a School Improvement Process* (Education Administration Quarterly: 1999, 35(1)), 130-160.

Efficacy has long been researched and continues to hold correlative value as a significant and “strongest predictor of outcomes and achievement. According to the Webster's New World Dictionary, efficacy defined is that which produces the desired effect. John Bull states that, "Self-efficacy, is an individual's belief about his or her own ability to accomplish a goal to produce a positive outcome. General efficacy, then, is “outcome expectancy – an expectation that teaching in general will impact learning given the specific contextual variables such as poverty, race, and/or gender.”¹³ Personal efficacy is a self-evaluation and analyses of one's knowledge, skills, and abilities. Bandura asserted that, “Efficacy expectations determine how much effort people will expend and how they will persist, which is significant in the area of teaching and learning. Attending to the needs of leaders and lay people through collaborative learning requires an understanding of self-perception and personal beliefs in one's ability to produce favorable outcomes for the church.”¹⁴

Expectations

Saphier states that, "Members of any organization who dedicate time and energy to the continuous improvement of that organization are productive for three primary reasons: someone significant cares about him or her; he or she believes it would be worthwhile to do well (hope and optimism); and, he or she believes in their ability to do well. Conveying key messages to members such as, “This is important. I believe in you. You can do it. Your hard work leads to achievement” creates a rich environment with high expectations for all. Additionally, expanding

¹³ R.M. JohnBull, M. Hardman, and L. Rinne, *Professional Development Effects on Teacher Efficacy: Exploring How Knowledge of Neuro-and Cognitive Sciences Changes Beliefs and Practices* (San Francisco, CA: Paper Presented At the American Educational Research Association, 2013), 3-4.

¹⁴ A. Bandura, *Self-Efficacy: Toward A Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change*. *Psychological Review* 1977, 191-194. [Hhttp://dx.doi.org/10.1.1.315.4567&rep=rep=1&type+pdf](http://dx.doi.org/10.1.1.315.4567&rep=rep=1&type+pdf)

ones capacity through learning, clear expectations, and effort coaches each member toward personal and spiritual improvement."¹⁵

The pastor's role in fostering a growth mindset within the church involves not only affective characteristics and actions, but also cultivating learning through the continuous development of a repertoire of tools and strategies to effectively equip each member with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to be his or her best self. Just as secular educators explicitly teach effective effort by focusing on time management, presenting research-based strategies; selecting appropriate resources; using feedback to improve work; and, teaching people to persevere; so, too, must the church adapt similar practices to build, refine, and prepare its leaders and lay people. Having high expectations cannot occur merely by making the statement, but by the actions that follow to fully engage and promote leadership with the church.

Research Strategy

There is a plethora of information on educational databases about education and existing opportunities within various settings that extend learning. As noted in the bibliography section many of the references relate to organizational learning in the public school or university context; however, those same concepts are applicable to church organizations. Using Google Scholar as well as the university's journal database proved helpful in finding scholarly journals and studies. Renowned evangelical leaders have written extensively about church leadership and the need for Christian learning. The books have proven to be the foundation of many Christian educational training programs, such as books by John Maxwell and Rick Warren. These books do possess influence in building the Kingdom and provide inspiration to the reader. There is, however, insufficient research and studies about training in church, but consistent indication that

¹⁵ J. Saphier and R. Gower, *the Skillful Teacher: Building Your Teaching Skills*, 5th ed. (Action, MA: Research For Better Teaching, 1997), 43, and 91.

secular scholarship is used to inform church training practices. It is incumbent upon the Church clergy to decipher the studies that could potentially enhance leader and laity knowledge and promote growth within the church. These references and resources will inform the methodology used to ascertain leaders and laities qualitative viewpoints related to the relevance of Christian education.

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