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Whole Person Theological Education for Ministry: Five Building Blocks

Abstract

The whole person needs to be formed in theological programs geared to ministry. (USCCB, Co-Workers) The goal of integrating the academic, spiritual, human and pastoral is key to the hope that theological education is transformative of the individual and the community.

I propose five building blocks for theological education based on community learning theory (Sergiovanni): the community of integrative formation, the community of discernment, the community of accompaniment, the community of realism for the long haul, and the community in fidelity to mission.

Introduction

Leaders in theological education have sought to move beyond teaching informational material in order to seek transformative learning when preparing students for ministry including attention to the spiritual, human and pastoral aspects. I propose five building blocks that integrate the academic, spiritual, human and pastoral in ministry formation based on learning community theory. A well-integrated education generates hope for our faith communities, our local society and global world. I turn to three educational theorists to ground this discussion. Insights from adult educational theory supplement this reflection.

Jack Mezirow, a specialist in adult education, introduced the concept of Transformative Learning in the late 70s and the theory has continued to evolve with application to ministry formation.[1] Mezirow distinguishes between learning that is informational and that which is transformative. The latter refers to learning that changes the viewpoint of the learner enough that unfounded assumptions are tested and lead to a shift in thinking and action. Transformative learning results in the learner perceiving and responding to his or her self and environment in a new way. The role of the educator is to promote reflective thinking in a safe environment. The educator is the role model of transformative learning and is called to be authentically reflective.

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[1] Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991).

Nel Noddings, a distinguished educator and curriculum developer, is known for her work on the role of the educator in promoting caring in the classroom.[2] She has also revived the discussion on aims in education. She argues the importance of assessing ultimate goals and for a focus on educating happy and well-rounded children. She urges teachers and educational administrators to step back from the specifics and ask the bigger questions. What type of children do we hope to graduate and what educational experiences foster these goals? She argues that happiness, tempered by empathy, should be a fundamental goal.[3] Curriculum planning and community life are central to this discussion and have implications for ministry formation.[4]

Thomas Sergiovanni informs our discussion of integrative learning by looking at the social content of the educational process and at human nature, human interactions, and societal institutions.[5] He refers to this social content as the "lifeworld" as defined by Jurgen Habermas.[6] Sergiovanni argues for the importance of the lifeworld in effective learning, a central concept of learning communities.

Characteristics of the learning community as presented by Sergiovanni include awareness of developmental differences, reflection on the strengths and weakness of individual learning, and adaptation of curriculum to the interest and talents of the students. The learning community promotes ongoing active discourse as well as respect and care for others including students and teachers. The learning community sees itself as part of a greater whole with responsibilities for those in their group as well as responsibilities to society at large. He presents five building blocks: the community of relationship, the community of place, the community of mind, the community of memory and the community of practice.[7]

Learning communities have been shown to be effective among various social, racial, age and gender groups.[8] Adult educational research has confirmed the effectiveness of cooperative learning, process curriculum, attention to the learners

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[2] Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics & Moral Education* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

[3] Nel Noddings, *Happiness and Education* (New York: Cambridge Press, 2003).

[4] Nel Noddings, *Critical Lessons: What Our Schools Should Teach*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[5] Thomas Sergiovanni, *The Lifeworld of Leadership: Creating Culture, Community, and Personal Meaning in Our Schools* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

[6] Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action. Vol. 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functional Reason*, trans. T. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

[7] Thomas Sergiovanni, "The Story of Community," in *Learning Communities in Education,* eds. John Retallick, Barry Cocklin and Kennece Coombe (New York: Routledge Pubishing, 1999) 9- 25.

[8] Oscar T. Lenning, Denise M. Hill, Kevin P. Saunders, Alisha Solan, and Andria Stokes, *Powerful Learning Communities: A Guide to Developing Student, Faculty, and Professional Learning Communities to Improve Student Success and Organizational Effectiveness*, (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2013).

experience and emotions, as well as the need for healthy community life in the educational environment.[9]

Based on these insights, I propose five building blocks for theological education geared to ministry preparation: the community of discernment, the community of accompaniment, the community of realism for the long haul, the community of fidelity to mission.

Building block #1 addresses the goal of integrating academic, spiritual, human and pastoral goals in the educational experience. Building block #2 looks at best structures and practices for ongoing discernment in the education program and growth in the new 'ministerial' role and identity that is being formed. Building block #3 reflects on best practices for ongoing accompaniment in the educational program through the learning community model. Building block #4 discusses issues that arise in the current societal context that raise challenges for long-term commitments. The final building block presents suggestions for fostering fidelity to mission.

These building blocks integrate the human, spiritual, academic, and pastoral formation in programs preparing students for ministry and reflect best practices from educational research, especially insights from learning community theory. Good ministerial preparation through our institutions of higher learning generates hope.

Context

Faith-based institutions of higher education and in this case specifically ministry degree programs have great strengths along with challenges. Most excel at academics, and have well developed field education/pastoral internships as well as social justice programs. They offer a strong spiritual experience and multiple programs for personal growth in key human qualities. All strive to improve and excel in all of these fields. It is the integration of these aspects that is discussed here.

Students benefit the most when our educational programs successfully integrate and affirm all of these aspects, rather than have parallel programs each focused on one aspect separate from the others. Depending on our specific circumstances integration will look uniquely different in each educational institution. I share insights and resources from the context of over 17 years in a Roman Catholic ministry formation community of practice in addition to literature-based review and analysis. This discussion hopes to foster a collegial reflection on these issues in solidarity with our conference theme "Generating Hope: The Future of the Teaching Profession in a Globalized World."

Nel Noddings reminds us that in any educational venture we need to reflect critically on the outcomes that matter. In seeking the outcomes that matter for ministry preparation programs for laity in Roman Catholic Higher Education, that is for those who

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[9] Derek V. Price, "Learning Communities and Student Success in Postsecondary Education: A Background Paper" MDRC publications, December 2005. DVP-Praxis LTD. ERIC Ed 489439. Available from: http://www.eric.ed.gov.proxy.bc.edu/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2/content_storage_0 1/0000000b/8-/31/3f/e0.pdf. Accessed 10 March 2007. See also: Karl A. Smith and Alisha Waller, "Afterword" *New Paradigms for College Teaching*, eds. William E. Campbell and Karl A. Smith (Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company, 1997), 269-281.

are preparing for professional positions in formal roles in the faith community but will not to be ordained, I turn to two foundational documents, *Christifideles Laici*, (CL)[10] a Vatican document and Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord, (CVL)[11] a US Bishops document.

    Christifideles Laici lists as goals of the education of laity as: the call to holiness, to encounter with Christ, to mission and witness, and to a struggle for the dignity of all humans. (CL 2, 5, 7, 16, 34,)

    In the US Bishops' document Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord the ultimate goals are presented as four pillars of formation the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral:

- *Human qualities* critical to form wholesome relationships and necessary to be apt instruments of God's love and compassion
- A *spirituality* and practice of prayer that root them in God's Trinitarian life, grounding and animating all they do in ministry
- Adequate *knowledge* in theological and pastoral studies, along with the *intellectual skill* to use it among the people and cultures of our country
- The practical *pastoral abilities* called for in their particular ministry (CVL 34)

    We are also reminded by Noddings that the educational methods must be geared to these outcomes. Using Noddings' suggested pedagogy, the ministry formation program should integrate into all relationships: the modeling, practice, dialogue, and confirmation of these goals.[12]

Building Block #1 – A Community of Integrated Formation

    One of the challenges in integration in higher education is finding a balance between the highly respected place of the intellectual endeavor, which is built into the fabric of our institutions of higher learning, and the other three pillars. In my specific context in the tradition of Catholic Higher Education, the intellectual can easily overshadow the others. Yet, academic learning when integrated with the human, spiritual and apostolic formation impacts and affirms holistic growth.

    It is beyond the scope of this paper to present a comprehensive case for integrative learning or whole person formation. Numerous studies have affirmed integrative learning. Parker Palmer and physics professor Arthur Zajonc, advocate

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[10] Pope John Paul II. *The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Christifideles Laici*, (Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 1988).

[11] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry. (*Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 2005).

[12] Noddings, *Philosophy of Education*, 2nd ed. (Bolder, CO: Westview Press, 2007), 226.

teaching that honors the mind, heart and spirit.[13] Their extensive discussion of the divided academic life and transformative conversations on campus supports integrative or whole person learning. They refer to numerous studies that affirm integrative education. The intent of this paper is to reflect on practices from the learning community model that help move in this direction.

The hope for the educational process and learning space in a learning community is that it becomes a holding environment for dialogue, modeling, practice and confirmation of ministerial giftedness, identity and skills. The goal is that each person experiences the hospitality and respect to which Christian living strives along with growth in empathy and service to the greater society.

Adult educational research notes that the learning community model allows for this process in ongoing dialogue between and among faculty and students. An important characteristic of learning communities is collaborative and cooperative methods where the student is engaged in critical reflection.[14]

Adult educational research also urges the integration of the experience of a student in the learning process, as well as the establishment of clear goals and outcomes.[15] Suggested methods include process curriculum, defined as one in which the student has a voice in the method and content of the curriculum. In a process curriculum the teacher approaches the educational interaction seeking what would best fit the unique encounter of the students through dialogue and experimentation.[16]

Evaluation and testing when informed by the best adult education theory helps the student integrate the material. Methods of testing affirmed by adult education theory accentuate the practical application that will be needed and the interests of the students. This allows for interaction and questions, take-home testing, group work or projects. Evaluation thus promotes review and improvement. Evaluation tools that foster collaboration skills, spiritual grounding, interpersonal effectiveness, emotional stability, ethical discernment, and integration of learning into outlook and behavior are most appropriate.[17]

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[13] Parker Palmer and Arthur Zajonc, *The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal, Transforming the Academy through Collegial Conversations* (San Francisco CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

[14] Karl Smith & Alisha A. Waller, "Cooperative Learning for New College Teachers" *New Paradigms For College Teaching*, eds. Wm E. Campbell and Karl A. Smith (Edina, MN: Interaction Book Co., 1997).

[15] Derek V. Price, "Learning Communities and Student Success in Postsecondary Education: A Background Paper" MDRC publications, December 2005. DVP-Praxis LTD. ERIC Ed 489439. See also Lenning, "Conceptual Framework For Creating Powerful LCs," 89-109.

[16] Lenning, "Achieving Optimal Student Success Through Powerful SLCs, PLCs, and LCs," 111-169.

[17] Price, "Learning Communities," 6. See also: Stephen Brookfield, *Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986). See also: Brookfield, *Developing Critical Thinkers: Challenging Adults to Explore Alternative Ways of Thinking and Acting* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1997).

Most students in ministry programs are highly motivated and deeply committed. Failure in academic assignments is often seen as a failure in their response to God's call. Faculty sensitivity to student emotional challenges is important as noted in the work of Stephen Brookfield.[18] Students are gifted in varying ways. All of these gifts are needed in the mission of the church. In a learning community model, students struggling academically find support and encouragement as they discern their gifts in response to God's call. As Noddings argues, education and happiness should not be contradictions.[19]

Faculty preparation enhances the learning community. Caroline Simon in *Mentoring for Mission* advocates for mentoring of new faculty.[20] Her insights for a "theology of imperfection" give permission to all teachers to grow through experimentation and experience. Sharing of best practices would involve the affirmation and encouragement of the flourishing not only of students but also of faculty and staff. Simon reminds us of the need to 'give permission' to experimentation in learning in which failure is a natural part of growth.[21] A community that shares best practices would allow for space and time to speak truth in love and to foster reflection and growth. The faculty community of practice would encourage the flourishing of all colleagues and especially new faculty.

The learning community model is similar to the biblical image of pilgrims together on a journey and would best describe the respectful Christian witness of all members of the learning community in carefully striving to respond to a call to holiness, to encounter with Christ, to mission and witness, and a struggle for the dignity of all humans.

Building Block #2 - A Community of Discernment

Discernment of call, affirmation of call, and gradual growth into a new identity and role is important during the educational/formation process. Discernment for any ministry, and lay ecclesial ministry in particular, is a process that is not only personal but also communal. Discernment occurs most often within the life of the parish/congregation, school or university, and youth or young adult ministry. I maintain that the ministry education program should share in this mission of the faith community and participate in an appropriate way in the discernment process of potential students for ministry, ordained or non-ordained. This will vary depending on the practice of the faith community and the relationship of the educational institution to the faith community. The point that I make is that the ministry education program should take seriously its role in the process of discernment. Something is stirring in their hearts and needs to be

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[18] Stephen Brookfield, *The Skillful Teacher: On Technique, Trust, and Responsiveness in the Classroom* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 75-95.

[19] Nel Noddings, *Happiness and Education*.

[20] Caroline Simon, Laura Bloxham, Denise Doyle, Mel Hailey, Jane Hokanson Hawks, Kathleen Light, Dominic Scibilia, and Ernest Simmons, *Mentoring for Mission*: *Nurturing New Faculty at Church-Related Colleges* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2003).

[21] Simon, 57.

examined and discussed. The educational institution has a role, though the extent can vary.

Admissions into a program brings the student into a web of relationships that hopefully help support the ongoing discernment and growth that takes place in a community of learning. This approach makes a commitment to the flourishing of the student. Discernment continues during the educational process as students face academic, human, spiritual or pastoral challenges. A discernment of personal gifts and weaknesses as well as the choice of a specific ministry will also need attention. The learning community can be helpful in providing honest feedback regarding these issues either formally, as in an integrative seminar, and/or informally, as in conversation with faculty, staff or fellow students.

Dr. Reinhard Hutter of Duke University notes that honoring truth is a necessity in Christian hospitality.[22] Hutter reflects on the relationship between hospitality and truth in reference to worship and doctrine. These insights are also applicable to the discernment process in a learning community. Hutter contends that "both hospitality and truth are inherently connected to the practice of forgiveness."[23] It involves accepting "the truth about oneself and one's need to receive and grant forgiveness."[24] Hutter refers to obstacles to honoring the truth such as self-deception as well as the desire to be liked by others, leading to a need to please. He discusses other impediments such as dishonesty with self, using truth only in a functional way, and not integrating truth into our lives but keeping it "isolated." Hutter notes the need to honor and acknowledge the truth and then to invite others "into the same acknowledgement."[25]

In a community of Christian hospitality, faculty, staff and other students can become strong influences fostering healthy discernment. The time spent in prayer and liturgical gatherings, at community gatherings, or informal interactions assist with discernment by practicing honesty.

After initial discernment of call, the forming of ministerial identity is an important task. Regular, scheduled opportunities that allow students to reflect on their ministerial identity such as core seminars, skill building workshops, contextual education assessments are key to allowing a student to reflect in an ongoing manner with feedback from appropriate professionals. A community of discernment supports and models this ongoing process in the learning community with Christian hospitality and honesty.

Building Block #3– A Community of Accompaniment

While discernment looks specifically at ministry identity and suitability, the community of accompaniment takes this further and looks at the broader needs of the whole person over time. The community of accompaniment continually works to support

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[22] Reinhard Hutter, "Hospitality and Truth: The Disclosure of Practices in Worship and Doctrine" in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, eds. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy Bass (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2002), 206-227.
[23] Ibid., 211.
[24] Ibid., 213.
[25] Ibid., 214-215.

the needs of the community members. The practice of pastoral care in and beyond the educational environment is the basis of this building block.

A community of accompaniment can be characterized as a place that not only allows for ongoing discernment but actively supports, models, and practices 'ministry.' This discussion of accompaniment looks at the specific ways a learning community can be intentional about support and accompaniment. And most importantly, a community of accompaniment also looks outside its own membership circle to offer accompaniment to others as needed.

Accompaniment can be structured into the program first through supportive relationships of faculty to student, as well as among the faculty and staff. These interactions may range from formal events such as: liturgies, faith sharing sessions, spiritual direction, and faculty advising, to informal interaction at meals, gatherings or celebrations.

Time and schedule can be structured so that there are plenty of informal opportunities for sustained conversation. Even the programming of class schedules could bring people together both in time and in location allowing time for meetings or group sessions before or after classes. Cohorts of students based on either graduation or admissions standings could have structured requirements that allow for consistent interaction: community worship, formation meetings, faith sharing, workshops, service projects, retreats or meals together. Some combination of consistent healthy and sustained interaction that allows for bonds to form not only between faculty and student, but also among the diverse members of the student body is needed.

Administrative practices should reflect the larger vision of the learning community. This would include supportive hospitality and a safe "holding area." It would also mean attention to fairness in allotment of resources. Knowing the stories of the students helps administration to support them when needed. Good communication between administration and students is crucial, not only for building up the life of the community but also for helping locate resources and support.

Many schools have multiple areas for students and faculty to gather. These 'commons' allow for hospitality to be practiced and encouraged. The marginalized need to be invited into the 'center' both in the physical space and in the social web. There are multiple levels of marginality that should be looked into and reflected upon by the community.

The interaction in a learning community can be a wonderful arena for modeling ministerial presence, caring relationships, and Christian virtues. The question of how to balance family responsibilities with the commitments to ministerial formation is important and needs reflection. The skills of balancing the demands of the unique circumstances of each person with the demands of the program are skills similar to those needed when dealing with multiple demands in ministry. Sharing the stories and experiences of dealing with family and work issues and responding to these demands in Christian fidelity is an important witness.

Celebrations that allow interactions among students, staff and faculty as well as a 'passing on' of the history, mission, and memories of both the programs and the bigger picture, the body of Christ, are important. Births of children or grandchildren, weddings and baptisms are important transitions or events in the life of the individuals in a learning community. The beginning or end of an academic semester, the publishing achievement

of a faculty colleague, or the completion of a service project can all be moments of pause for celebration in a community of accompaniment.

The hope is to avoid students simply coming for class and then just leaving with no significant community interaction. Intergenerational and diverse student populations allow for each of the groups to teach and challenge the other. Diversity also challenges us to grow and mature through the sharing of varied life experiences and life lessons.

The same would apply to the academic community reaching out in support of the greater community around them, reflecting and identifying their responsibilities to others. Modeling healthy ministerial interactions in the learning community and beyond helps students gain the ability to look beyond individual needs of local faith community needs to the greater issues in society and the world.

Building Block #4 –A Community of Realism for the Long Haul

A healthy realism regarding the demands of ministry is an important gift that faculty and staff and the learning community can bring to each other. Insights about tensions and challenges that impact various congregations and those in leadership can help form realistic expectations, survival skills and insights for a healthy response. These tensions are found on multiple levels, international, national, local and within communities of worship.

As faith communities we face grave international issues to which we need to respond in appropriate ways.[26] Issues arise in the current societal context and local communities. We have political differences, election/media tensions, economic tensions, racial tensions, inner city neighborhood changes, tensions between police and communities.

Many of our communities of worship are challenged with declining numbers, aging congregations, and consolidation of parishes. In the Catholic community there is reported increased stress on clergy and staff as they are assigned to cover multiple parishes, work within tighter budgets, and face instability in employment. Attention to how to prepare students to face these challenges while striving to enhance the dignity of every person is needed.

Tensions exit between differing ecclesiological visions within faith communities. These may be difficult to discuss unless there is trust and honesty in the learning community. Programs of study often stand firmly in one or another ecclesiology sometimes expressing criticism of other understandings of the church or viewpoints in the church. Students are well served when they are exposed to the viewpoints and emotional issues that are central to various positions. The ability to be respectful and empathic to those who have differing attitudes is an important skill. The ability to move a community toward the enhancement of every person and the work of social justice is built on these skills.

A mature attitude and the ability to speak appropriately regarding the tensions in the church and in society are needed. Diverse experiences during ministry training can

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[26] Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004), 187-215.

be most helpful. Insight into what leads to embattled ideologies and what helps move towards common ground is valuable.

Knowledge of the public perception of the church is also needed. The Catholic Church still faces fall-out from the sexual abuse scandal. Some dioceses have embittered groups due to closings of parishes. Public attitudes and misunderstandings about the Catholic Church's positions on issues of morality add to these tensions. These and numerous other issues are heavily laden with emotion. The ministry students need preparation to be firmly grounded, deeply rooted and well supported. The hope is that the formation program allows for experience of and exposure to the varying attitudes and tensions in order to be able to understand, respond and minister with pastoral sensitivity in this environment. It would be unfair for our students to be unprepared.

Good self-care, professional consultation and guidance are essential for long-term effectiveness and health. It is also vitally important for the student to be aware that secondary trauma can occur as a result of ministering in acutely painful situations. This will be further discussed in the next section.

Good role models and mentors are also important in a ministry program. The long-term experience and commitment of those already successful in ministry is an important resource. These role models need to be integrated at various opportunities. Engaging alumni in this role would be an important step. Graduates who model healthy ministerial relationships and can support students in weathering various storms are valuable assets.

Salaries for Catholic laity in professional ministerial roles tend to be low. Job security is often precarious. Educational loans become a financial struggle. The ministerial program has a responsibility in presenting an honest picture. From the time of discernment and the application process honest feedback about salaries and employment realities would be helpful. The experience of alumni in finding jobs and in living on the current parish or school salaries needs to be shared. Ministerial programs that develop funds for helping defray the educational costs of lay ecclesial ministry programs provide a great gift.

When working in the church one also encounters the challenge with 'turf' or little kingdoms of personal power within the parish, school, hospital, or other program. Flexibility and conflict resolution skills are crucial to successful pastoral ministry. Ability to communicate clearly and pastorally to all sides in a conflict is important. There are also community-building skills that are beneficial when a faith community is torn by division. Workshops on conflict management and on the topic of difficult conversations are helpful. The ability to move from being embedded in a specific conflict to looking together at the larger picture or a greater issue is needed.

Alumni can provide regular reality checks for the students. Stories of success and challenge can be shared. Discussions, reflections, projects both in classrooms or in the life of the learning community can highlight the challenges of ministerial leadership over the long haul and assist in having a better picture of the reality.

Building Block #5 – A Community of Fidelity to Mission

The ability to see beyond our individual situation to the larger picture is a great gift. Fidelity to mission can be strengthened in a solid grounding in a communal identity. We are called as a community. The images of 'people of God' and 'body of Christ' were revived at the Second Vatican Council.

The mission is a communal one with the goal of being as leaven in the world and forming a 'family of God.'[27] These images indicate that no minister is alone in their ministerial commitment. Each is unique but part of a larger picture. The learning community is a place to learn that success or failure are not measured by a specific event, especially a personal or institutional failing, but rather it is about being a steady presence in humble faithfulness.

Just as educational challenges raise doubts about one's call to ministry or giftedness for ministry, so too the many problems that come up in the faith community, in life of the parish staff or the personal life of the ministerial leader can take a toll on confidence and commitment. The confusion and discouragement when these problems are experienced needs to be processed. In ministry education programs these issues can be addressed in the classroom, in contextual education (field education), internships, in the prayer life of the community, as well as in skill building seminars or workshops. Students would benefit greatly learning these skills and being aware that ongoing support is needed to persevere.

There is also a need for the students to reflect on their commitment to a new relationship in the church. This requires a mature love for the Body of Christ, the Church. It requires the ability to acknowledge the sinful human beings that make up the church and yet also notice the holiness of so many. The ability to know that the "Church is God's love at work in the world, God's offer of salvation uniquely through Christ" requires a deep awareness and recognition of participation in the body of Christ (CVL 40). The tension between knowing the "dark side of the Church's history" and rejoicing in the goodness of the Church, and gratefulness for "the gift of God who upholds and renews her" needs a certain level of maturity (CVL 40).

As the ministry student enters into a new relationship with the Church this ministerial identity needs to be firmly in place for this public role. It is a great gift to ministry students for the educational programs to affirm the collaborative nature of ministry, the need to encourage the flourishing of all, and the importance of building up all members of the body.

Ministry students will also benefit greatly in learning how to process personal experiences of misunderstanding or human failings and help others to do so. Our educational programs can assist the future minister by reflecting on how to handle issues of injustice, unfairness, job insecurity, etc. Monika Hellwig reminds us of the bigger picture when she notes that there is the ongoing work of redemption that is taking place

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[27] Paul VI, Pope. *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), 7 December 1965, Vatican document available from: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html. (Accessed 14 September 2016.)

and it will continue. She urges the minister not to waste their energy on bitterness or resentment.[28]

All of our students in ministry programs would benefit by reflecting on these issues. Understanding their ministry and roles as servants in the life of the whole church allows for a broader vision. It is a great service to the ministry students to have some experience with dealing with misunderstanding or human failings and being able to see the bigger picture.

The issue of forgiveness and reconciliation is a key aspect of fidelity to mission. In classes, contextual education/internships, in service projects, retreats and prayer this important topic should be modeled, discussed and affirmed.[29]

The educational learning community that practices habits of forgiveness and reconciliation builds an important foundation for ministry. These same skills can be brought to the parishes and congregations, to those marginalized, to those encountering brokenness in their families and relationships, to ethnic and racial tensions and other divisions.

A growing personal indifference in one's ministry is a sign of concern. Signs of unhealthy balance have been researched by those studying secondary trauma in psychologists or compassion fatigue in first responders. In ministry we encounter in our congregations unexpected death, suicide and illness, those hurt or killed by violence, families dealing with the opiod crisis, military service related traumas, etc. While ministry generally does not encounter the levels of crisis that first responders and medical personnel or the secondary trauma that psychologists will experience, the insights from compassion fatigue studies are helpful when facing difficult situations.[30]

A healthy look beyond our personal and local issues to a bigger picture is helpful. A balance between commitment to these important issues and taking time for self care through non-work related activities is important. Studies on compassion fatigue in first responders and psychologists reveal that self-care is crucial. Included in this is having other interests to balance out the stress. Self care and an honest sense of self is crucial to good boundaries that will avoid compassion fatigue.[31]

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[28] Monika Hellwig, " 'The Reign of God is Among You': Biblical and Theological Themes for Lay Leadership," *Called and Chosen: Toward a Spirituality for Lay Leaders*, Zeni Fox and Regina Bechtle, S.C. eds., (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2005), 49.

[29] L. Gregory Jones & Celestin Musekura*. Forgiving as We've Been Forgiven: Community Practices for Making Peace* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010. Also: Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu. *The Book of Forgiving* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014).

[30] Martha Teater, John Ludgate, *Overcoming Compassion Fatigue*, (Eau Claire, WI: Pesi Publishing and Media, 2014).

[31] Thomas Skovholt, Michelle Trotter-Mathiason, *The Resilient Practitioner: Burnout and Compassion Fatigue Prevention and Self-Care Strategies for the Helping Professions*, 3rd Edition, (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016).

Conclusion

Having a clear understanding of the ultimate goals for ministry education encourages the integration of the human, spiritual, academic and pastoral aspects of preparation. Dialogue, modeling, practice and confirmation are most effective in supporting the discernment and affirmation of call, the ongoing building of ministerial role identity, and gaining skills for long term commitment and fidelity to mission. The learning community model is well suited to these integrative goals.

Faculty, staff and students can take comfort in knowing that they are part of a people of God seeking to be as leaven in the world. Through the Trinitarian encounter with the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit all of the faithful are drawn into relationship as a body. A healthy, balanced and humble stance of service can be modeled and practiced in the learning community.

In reflection and discussion together as faculty, staff and students let us continue to strive to generate great hope.

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