

## **UMASCE**

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### **Insights from the Carnegie Foundation Study of Clergy Education for the Teaching and Practice of Christian Education**

Notes:

Patti asked me to explore with you insights from the study of clergy education relevant to the concerns of UMASCE.

1. For those of you not familiar with the study it was a massive study of the teaching practices in theological education. It involved a questionnaire survey of faculty, students and alumni from eighteen Christian and Jewish seminaries and ten ethnographic campus site visits. It is part of a larger study of professional education seeking to understand how students are prepared for professional practice in a world dominated by an explosion of knowledge and technical resources and increasingly complicated ethical issues.
2. I could focus attention on two findings relevant to the education in congregations and denominations: a) the role of the pedagogical imaginations of teachers in nurturing the religious/spiritual imaginations of learners and b) the discovery of four pedagogies widely shared across the spectrum of theological education—pedagogies of interpretation, formation, contextualization, and performance. They just might reflect learning tasks central to the education or formation of any religious community.
3. I have chosen however to explore three “findings” through the lens of a life long career as a religious educator. By taking this stance I am bringing to the foreground my commitment to Christian education in the academy as the study of the practice of building up and equipping the church as the body of Christ in mission to the world and of religious education as the more general study of the engagement of religion and education in both theory and practice.
  - a. Finding #1: We found little evidence of a widely shared understanding of the mission of Christian education in the academy or of the relationship of academic programs in

Christian education to the practices of Christian education in churches.

- b. Finding #2: The social location of Christian education is generally marginalized both in the academy and at the intersection of the academy and denominational approaches to the preparation of Christian education leadership.
- c. Finding #3: The pedagogical role of the Christian educator in academy is marginalized in some places and subverted in others.

1. First of all the mission:

- a. There was remarkably little consensus in the schools we visited about what should be taught and learned in courses in Christian education. In some schools (following denominational and general church trends) Christian education now means age level and family ministries. In some schools it engages students in an exercise of practical theology around educational issues. In some schools it focuses student attention on catechesis in denominational theological traditions. In some schools it prepares students to be teachers in the congregations they will be serving. Some schools still prepare students to lead denominational educational programs (Southern Baptist—but generally around age level categories). There is a corresponding range of expectations for the academic quality of the work in the classes in the field. In some schools courses in Christian education are as rigorous as those in any of the other disciplines. In other schools courses in Christian education are primarily engaged with the popular literature in the field. It would be my hunch that this confusion about the purpose and mission of Christian education parallels confusion in the denominations about the purpose and mission of Christian education.

1. Second, the social location of Christian education. This is a two point issue—first of all the social location of Christian education in the academy itself; second, the social location of Christian education in the relationship of the academy and the church. Let me state the finding. Later, if you are interested we can explore roots to this finding in the story of our own denomination. (See addendum below).

- a. The marginalization of Christian education in the academy becomes evident in the lack of a consistent place in the curriculum.
  - i. A required component of the curriculum: e.g. GETS, Louisville, Trinity, CDSP.
  - ii. An elective component in the curriculum: e.g. Yale, Candler, Southwestern, Howard, Fuller with a minimalist commitment to academically prepared faculty. Enrollment depended upon student perception of teacher effectiveness.
  - iii. Submerged in some larger rubric of the curriculum (Introduction to Ministry/practical theology, Christian or spiritual formation; catechetical theology, etc): e.g. St. Johns (MN), St. Johns (CA), Catholic Theological Union, North Park, St. Vladimir's.
  - iv. Exists in another academic program unit of the institution: JTS, HUC.

- a. I would like to suggest that Christian education as a ministry of the congregation has been similarly marginalized.
  - i. In evangelical denominations Christian education has for the most part, moved from the church to the weekday school. The Sunday school still exists as an educational activity, but it is for the most part a voluntary and occasional rather than a deliberate and sustained educational experience in the lives of children, youth, and adults.
  - ii. In Catholic parishes the gap between religious education (primarily in the schools and taught by laity) and catechesis (primarily in the parish and typically directed but not necessarily taught by clergy) is widening.
  - iii. In mainline Protestant churches, denominational restructuring in the late 1960's and early 1970's effectively dis-established Christian education in the church's mission. It is now a congregational rather than a denominational ministry. Christian educators in the UMC for example, became program directors; age level ministers disappeared, denominational standards for professional leadership in the field collapsed. Judicatory

and national agency staff became managers of Christian education and other ministry options. The relationship between local church and academy became totally voluntary—a primary impetus I would hypothesize, to the shift in this organization from UMAPSE to UMASCE.

1. The third finding centers on the marginalization or subversion of the place of the Christian educator in the academy. This is not a really new phenomenon. I have long been interested in an anomaly I have seen in many colleges and seminaries. On the one hand the field and often the faculty in Christian education are marginalized and on the other hand, many professors of Christian education end up as department chairs or deans—at the center of institutional power.
  - a. At one level I should not have been surprised. Religious educators well into the 1980's were typically trained in educational leadership. That was no longer generally true of their colleagues in Bible, theology, church history who in most denominations typically had little or no pastoral or leadership experience.
  - b. At the same time until the 1970's academic Christian educators had been significant and influential pedagogical consultants to the church. Christian educators in the academy moreover, were responsible for equipping a cadre of professional leaders for the ministry of Christian education in congregation and judicatory. In this effort they were guided by relatively widely shared standards and expectations for that leadership. Most Protestant denominations however, no longer rely in any sustained or systematic way on the expertise of the academic Christian educator. To varying degrees congregations in seeking paid staff in Christian education moreover, no longer emphasize formal college and/or seminary training for professional staff in the programs they call Christian education. The academic building up of a professional group of professional leadership in Christian education is now central to the mission of very few schools—Garrett and Pfeiffer perhaps the UMC leaders in the field now.
  - c. At the same time the educational leadership expertise of the

Christian educator has been increasingly utilized by the academy. We discovered Christian educators leading teaching workshops for their colleagues; Christian educators at the center of curricular revisions; Christian educators serving as academic deans—indeed Christian or religious educators in five (or almost one third) of the schools in the study either had just completed, were in the midst of, or had just been appointed to serve as the deans of their schools. A heightened consciousness to pedagogy through programs of the Wabash Center is certainly a contributing factor. At the same time, the teaching and research agendas of Christian educators in seminaries tend to be increasingly more like that of their colleagues—more connected to the advancement of Christian education as an academic field than a professional ministry practice. The commitment to building up and sustaining a professional constituency is diminishing.

- d. This raises for me serious questions about the future of the role of the Christian educator in the academy. What is the distinctive contribution of the academic Christian educator at the intersection of the academy, the field or discipline of Christian education if we can be said to have a field anymore, to religious communities that require a deliberate and sustained education if they are to have a viable future.

Discussion: Questions of clarification; Discussion of extent to which I have named something others have experienced; Implications for an organization concerned about the preparation of leaders for and a denominational approach to the education of its members.

An addendum (which informs comments in my presentation)

1. When I was in seminary and during the early years of my teaching—professors of Christian education provided academic leadership for Christian education in the church—both as theoreticians and as trainers of leaders. In this regard programs of Christian education had their parallel in teacher education and nursing education programs.
2. the training of the professional Christian educator occurred in the context of the traditions of a liberal education (in church related colleges and seminaries). Some academic training occurred in other kinds of institutions—New York University.
  - a. The curriculum in the field tended to reflect the theological and educational values and agendas of the sponsoring church body.
1. In the UMC story, that all changed after 1968 and the restructuring of the two merging denominations. The 1968 General Conference dismantled the educational system of the merging denominations—disconnecting the education of the congregation from the academic education of its members and the professional education of its pastors, Christian educators, etc. It also disconnected the work of the national church agencies from congregations. At the same time church related colleges, increasingly influenced by the research university, were loosening ties with their religious traditions. The model for academic excellence shifted from public service to objective inquiry.
  - a. The Methodist Conference on Christian Education collapsed—and in its place several other groups emerged linked only by overlapping voluntary memberships—CEF, UMAPCE, Youth Ministers, etc. So professors joined CEF. Board members funded and participated in UMAPCE. But the relationship of church and academy in each was personal rather than structural.
  - b. A major casualty of these historical shifts has been the undergraduate program in the field. Some colleges intensified

ties with local conferences—providing an economic basis for their continuation (although probably contested by their colleagues in other parts of the college)—Centenary, Oklahoma City, Pfeiffer, Martin, Columbia College may be in this group to varying degrees of success. But compare the list to those with active degree programs in the 50's and 60's: Huntingdon, Birmingham-Southern, Lambuth, Georgetown, Lycoming, Scarritt, Florida Southern, Texas Wesleyan among others.

- c. A similar shift in seminaries. In the 1980's Christian education faculty were radically diminished and almost disappeared from the scene—especially in some schools—Boston, Drew, Yale, Union, Candler, Duke. Perhaps more significant our academic roles shifted.
  - i. Greater pressure to publish research oriented scholarship—even as denominational publishing houses were pushing at the same time, for a more popular literature.
  - ii. A greater tendency to draw on congregational educational practice to explore larger themes of religious education—as a part of the great commission in evangelical schools and as an expression of the public church in more mainline schools.
  - iii. Then as the academy increasingly set the agenda (even as it was moving away from a model of liberal education to a model of scientific inquiry) for the church with only partial success and for the profession.
  - iv. Now to the issue that these comments raise for me. In a sense it is not a new issue, but is framed differently. In both or either academic and professional education, what is the function and place of religious education or its derivative Christian education?
    1. The latest Auburn Seminary study of seminary graduates raises questions about the value of teaching Christian education and other fields of ministry practice in seminary. The study seems to suggest that a theory-application model of learning is preferable; that Christian education and other fields of ministry study are primarily skill sets than substantive fields of study.
    2. when it no longer has a clear professional

constituency committed to shared standards of entry, responsibility or promotion. And in the UMC where strong forces exist countering the academic preparation of its local church educational leadership and ties to denominational structures are voluntary (as in UMASCE and CEF).

3. When the constituency no longer functions as a context for shared curricular concerns—note wide range of expectations in introductory courses and in the varying extent to which the field is required for seminary or for ordination.
4. What is the relationship of the study of Christian education to practical theology; are they partner disciplines; is religious education a sub-set of practical theology or of education?
5. How are we to think about the public dimensions of the study of Christian education and the preparation of leadership in Christian education in the larger field of religious education in a multi-religious world?