



The Polis
Center

*We bring things
into perspective.*

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COLLEAGUES:

Being a member of the clergy today is tough work. In a busy, self-absorbed society, we are charged with forming a community from a disparate array of individuals. We work with people in the midst of personal crisis and grief, trying to balance their need for compassion with our need for perspective. For our own health, and the health of our congregations, we need time for rest, reflection, and learning.

Continuing education, whether pursued during a sabbatical, or shoe-horned somehow into our crowded schedules, can be one source of renewal.

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CLERGY NOTES

CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR CLERGY

Dan Schroeder has been a pastor for 20 years, serving "good, solid congregations" of average size. "But they're not able to offer tremendous perks," said Schroeder, who currently serves the 200-member St. Mathew's United Church of Christ in Evansville. Consequently, he has had few opportunities to enroll in continuing education conferences and workshops.

This summer, however, Schroeder and seven of his colleagues from churches in southwest Indiana began a three-year continuing education program, offered through Christian Theological Seminary (CTS) and funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. Tuition for the Indiana Clergy Peer Group Study Program is \$3,000 per year. The program contributes \$2,200 per person per year, with the remaining \$800 coming from the pastor and his or her congregation.

The groups of eight are self-selected. Groups must meet diversity requirements in two of three categories: denomination, gender, and race. Schroeder's group, called Da Group, has five males and three females; there are two UCC pastors, three Disciples, one Presbyterian, one Lutheran, and one Methodist. Their three-year program began in August.

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CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR CLERGY

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Once a group has been formed, CTS assigns a facilitator to help with writing a proposal outlining how the group plans to use the funding. Da Group, for example, has planned several retreats. One scheduled for Brown County in April 2001 will feature historian Randall Balmer, who will discuss the reciprocal influence of the church and American culture. The group has also planned trips to Jamaica and Cuba, to study how churches operate in unfriendly political and cultural environments, and a trip to San Francisco, to observe a Methodist church involved in urban ministry.

The Peer Group Study Program is only one of several continuing education options available to local clergy. (See the interview and resources sections for more information about CTS's program.)

The Indianapolis Center for Congregations will offer a major conference on "meaningful worship," January 18-20, 2001, at East 91st Street Christian Church and other sites, featuring speakers from around the nation. ICC suggests that attending clergy bring along a "team" from their congregations.

"We have devoted a lot of thinking to continuing education for clergy," said ICC Director John Wimmer. "We're getting away from the 'lone ranger' model. The chances of success increase exponentially with the number of people from a congregation who participate."

Another continuing education option is to enroll in a course at one of the local colleges, universities, or seminaries.

In his preaching class at CTS, Professor Dan Moseley often has one or two people in a class of 15 who are auditing the course, or who are non-degree students. Non-degree students are also common in the classrooms at Crossroads Bible College, which began as a college designed to serve older, married people. Though its student body has become more traditional, it continues to serve a high

percentage of older students. To accommodate them, Crossroads offers many of its courses in three-hour blocks, mornings and evenings. Courses popular with clergy include an expository preaching class, theology courses, and a class on "culture, race, and the church."

For most clergy, brief workshops and conferences remain the most practical and accessible form of continuing education.

"Clergy tend to prefer shorter, intense sessions rather than spreading the instruction out over semesters," said Moseley, who spent 30 years as a parish pastor. "In my experience, there were periods when I was free to go to week-long workshops somewhere in the country. There were other periods when I had to stay close to home. A lot of clergy have problems scheduling every Wednesday afternoon for an entire semester."

In the Peer Group Study Program, only three groups have been approved to date. One group was rejected for being composed of eight white men of the same denomination. It's difficult to get a diverse group of eight people to commit to a program and stay with it through a drawn-out planning process.

But Dan Schroeder, who was deeply involved in the planning process for the Evansville group, considers the time and energy he spent a good—and necessary—investment. In addition to belonging to Da Group, Schroeder attends a weekly Bible study with other pastors in his area, as well as a monthly support group for UCC pastors.

"I am a man in his middle 40s who has been pastoring churches since his middle 20s," Schroeder said. "I had come to the point where I needed to make time to do this, lest I lose my energy for ministry." Schroeder said that he has "danced at the edge of burnout"—adding that he considers himself "extremely lucky" that he was able to latch onto groups that have allowed him to avoid that fate.

— Ted Slutz

STRAIGHT FROM THE SOURCE

AN INTERVIEW WITH DAN MOSELEY

Dan Moseley is director of continuing education and professor of preaching and parish ministry at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis. Before joining CTS three years ago, he spent 30 years as an ordained Disciples of Christ pastor, serving churches in Kansas City, Nashville, and Oklahoma City.

For the current academic year, CTS has 16 events on its continuing education calendar. Most of these are one- or two-day workshops ranging in price from \$30 to \$55. Upcoming events include a one-day workshop on "Renewing an Established Mainline Congregation," October 23, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.; and a conference on "Spirituality and Sexuality," November 1 and 2.

Clergy Notes: What are the issues of concern to you as the seminary's director of continuing education?

Moseley: One of the things we're working on in seminaries is how do we recreate ourselves for a world that requires a lifetime of education? How do you help people develop so that they say, "This is just the beginning. I've got a lifetime of learning ahead"? CTS, and all educational institutions, are in the process of this kind of rethinking.

CN: Is the same true of congregations and denominations in general?

Moseley: Denominations are just now beginning to get a clue, because most of the mainline churches are facing struggles regarding leadership. The leadership of the churches that emerged out of the '50s and '60s are retired now, and in the '60s and '70s, with their anti-institutional emphasis, there were a lot fewer of us who went into church leadership. So there's beginning to be a dearth of effective leadership. All the denominations that I'm aware of are working very hard to redefine the leadership training program and the continuing development of leadership. But it takes denominations quite a while to adjust. It takes several years to refocus the financial resources to make that happen and define how it will happen. So, I see some things happening, but I'm not sure that it's a top priority yet.

CN: What role did continuing education play in your own career as a pastor?

Moseley: I wouldn't have been able to make it without continuing education. My soul needed the kind of intellectual, communal stimulus that comes from getting away and getting together with people to explore the kind of issues I worked with daily in the parish. Effective leadership is a balance between intimacy and distance, and if you never get distance, it's hard to be an effective leader. I got to the point where I had two weeks of continuing education leave every year, and a three-month sabbatical every five years, to do that kind of nurturing. It was the only way I knew to do ministry effectively.

CN: What kind of response do you get to the programs you offer?

Moseley: Unfortunately, we live in a time of star power. When we had Raymond Brown here a few years ago, we packed the place. When we had Madeleine L'Engle here, we packed the place. But there aren't a lot of people looking at our programs and saying, "These are topics that are important for me to know more about." I believe that ministers wear out and burn out because they don't nourish their souls. They get caught in systems that suck it out of them. So, I'm not so much concerned about education as I am about the soul and survival of the clergy out there dealing with this stuff daily.

CN: What do you think accounts for the tepid response to the programs?

Moseley: Some clergy want something that has immediate transference—for example, a seminar on church growth that offers 12 'practical' things that you can take from here and apply over there. We don't do much of those kinds of workshops. We're an academic institution, and our focus is on the understanding of churches and faith and theology. If the pastor understands what the tradition has to offer that will sustain people over a lifetime, then he can build a long-term strategy that will grow the congregation's spirit, and as a result grow the congregation. That's the approach we take, whereas a lot of people want a handbook on 'how-to.'

COLLEAGUES

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Sometimes we need to focus on the practical, how-to issues of ministry. At other times, we may need to step back and "relearn" the faith and traditions that first drew us into ministry.

In this issue of Clergy Notes, we examine some opportunities for learning that balance the practical with the conceptual; that integrate fellowship, study, worship, and retreat. We hope these will provide you with a starting place, the next time you find "the going getting tough" and you need to "get going"—whether back to basics, or off in a new direction.

What are the elements that contribute to a pattern of life-long learning? What resources are available in classrooms, small groups, retreats, and even electronically? I'd like to hear about experiences that have been meaningful to you. Let's keep in touch.

Kevin

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