

A Dramatic Re-enactment of the Summit for Judicatory Leaders & National Staff

Report from subgroups of the various conferences:

- A. As you are aware, our conference has several ethnically and culturally distinctive constituencies. These groups have their own unique traditions concerning the nature of the church and, consequently, the nature of ministry. We have already developed programs for our folks. We need help in certain traditional academic areas. We will retain control of the design of the curriculum and use your faculty to fill in the gaps. Ideally this will be done on site.
- B. From our perspective, our participation in your program would be more feasible if your students took the courses that we are already planning to offer here during the summer.
- C. Pardon me, but that sounds like you intend to dump our candidates into a generic program. That one-size-fits-all nonsense will simply not work with us. We are not all alike. We have distinctive cultures with distinctive values that require distinctive forms of pedagogy. Do not try to force us into a common mold. If you do, you are only perpetuating the lies that were told our folks when their congregations joined the UCC in the late 1950's. They were promised that their local traditions and habits would not be compromised. But no sooner had they joined the denomination, and they were told that their way of preparing people for ordination was invalid and that the college/seminary path was normative for everybody. Can anyone spell "cultural imperialism"?
- D. But, with all due respect, why do you want us to participate at all? We have no special familiarity with your cultures and no expertise in the appropriate forms of education. Why do you need us?
- E. That is a good question. To be frank, I have not been impressed with the new ministers in our conference who have come from your seminary. Maybe we can do a better job of preparation all by ourselves. But, we do live in a fallen world and we need to be as wise as serpents. We need the political respectability that association with seminary programs conveys. And there are some bodies of content that your faculty are trained to deliver. With some guidance from us, perhaps your faculty could develop forms of instruction that don't reek of the prejudices of the European enlightenment.
- F. I must confess, your vision sounds very labor-intensive, not to mention expensive.
- A. Presumably some of the grant money that you have received can be used to subsidize the itineration of your faculty. Surely you do not expect financially beleaguered judicatories such as ours to pick up the tab.
- B. Excuse me, but our conference has a very different perspective on all of this. We don't really have any sort of viable program already in place. We don't have a coherent program of preparation for licensed ministry to serve as a foundation for these non-seminary paths to ordination. The truth of the matter is that we are not educators, and we have no possibility of becoming such; we are administrators struggling to hold a geographically far-flung judicatory together. Most of my staff's time is spent trying to persuade congregations to stick with a denomination whose actions they find to be increasingly disturbing. Their remaining hours are

- devoted to locating anyone at all to serve the thirty to sixty member congregations that we have scattered about our region. We are not even sure where we should begin with this multiple paths to ministry stuff. So, why don't you just design and staff something for us? You seminary people are the educational experts. We trust you to do it right.
- C. Well, we have initiated a summer lay academy. In consultation with you and the other conferences, we could develop a set of core courses for the summer academy to address your common needs. You could bring your folks to our campus for the courses in our summer program.
 - D. I was with you until you said "bring them to campus." That would be difficult. The travel would put an unacceptable financial burden on our students. Remember, much of our neck of the woods is an economic disaster. That is particularly true of the regions thick with tiny churches, and it is those regions from which candidates interested in non-seminary paths to ordination are most likely to come.
 - E. So what do you have in mind?
 - F. You bring the education to us. Your faculty could lead periodic workshops in various locations.
 - G. Before we get bogged down in the pro's and con's of these divergent visions, I would like to offer a more irenic proposal. I want to make it clear that I understand the concerns of both conference minister A and conference minister B. The situation in my conference is somewhere in the middle of the spectrum. We already have in place a lay licensing program. Its skeleton is sound; we merely need to put more substance into the structure and tighten it up a bit. With modifications, it could be used as a model for preparation for ordained ministry according to the new multiple paths. Here is our proposal: we could send our folks to some of your summer courses, as long as we can have a voice in what courses get offered. For example, we must have some instruction in Reformed and broader UCC theology. I realize that such a specialized course is something that you would not necessarily offer in your lay academy, but you would probably pick up a few interested individuals in addition to our own folks. Furthermore, we would also want some additional courses taught at strategic centers around our geographic area. We have already tried the intensive weekend workshop model, and that limited classroom experience is sadly inadequate. So, perhaps your faculty could follow up an initial presentation with some distance education, via e-mail conversations, directed readings, and the evaluation of written work. A course could culminate in another workshop-style plenary.
 - H. Well, parts of your proposal are entirely feasible. We could offer some of the campus-based courses in our lay academy in July.
 - I. We could plug into the lay academy for some of the offerings; however, we couldn't do it in July.
 - J. Why not?
 - K. Most of our folks go on vacation in July. We couldn't ask them to sacrifice family time. They are making enough sacrifices for ministry already.

I like the idea of some campus-based and some on-location offerings. But frankly, my people don't identify with the Reformed tradition and don't really want UCC theology. We need help with expository preaching.