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· VICTOR KLIMOSKI ·

Evolving Dynamics of Formation

In 1968 I began seminary training to become a Roman Catholic priest. Twenty of us from throughout the upper Midwest composed that year's entering class. All of us came from families of Northern European descent who were active in the local parish. Sixteen were from communities in which they were born and from the parishes in which they had been baptized. Eighteen of us had some level of pre-seminary training ranging from four to six years. Without looking at our transcripts, faculty knew we each had an undergraduate degree anchored in liberal arts with philosophy or theology as a major field of study. Most of us had completed extensive studies in Latin and Greek and could read French or German. We had a broad knowledge of the Bible, its history, and the principles of interpretation. We knew the major dogmas of the church and had been formed in the devotional pieties of Catholicism of the pre–Vatican II era. In addition to our knowledge base, we had well-developed skills in writing and knew how to turn out a properly structured research paper.

Seventeen of the twenty were twenty-three years old. The oldest was thirty, and only two had had a career prior to deciding to enter seminary. We all lived in the same residence hall, following a daily way of life with a rhythm that held us accountable to be in specified places at specified times—no exceptions allowed. We were disposed to learn from our faculty what sort of priests we should become and looked to them to help us interpret the meaning of the changes set in motion by the Second Vatican Council. Apart from the great

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cultural shifts that were beginning to occur, the entering class of 1968 was very much like the other sixty seminarians at St. John's Seminary in Collegeville who were much like the generations that had preceded them. The faculty could presume without knowing who we were as individuals that we shared a fairly common degree of intellectual and spiritual homogeneity. Further, they could presume that having been raised in and by the church, we were coming to Collegeville to gain insight into *why* we believed as Catholics—not to learn *what* we believed as Catholics.

This anecdote resonates across other denominational seminaries. While faculties are probably overly presumptive to believe that students several generations back were all at the same starting point, they are essentially correct in believing that most students shared a common foundation. Even the most casual review of seminary students today produces a different panorama. Seminary students today tend to be older and have a wide range of life experiences and lessons learned from other careers. They are increasingly diverse racially and ethnically, and nearly half are women. They may or may not have had a durable relationship with a parish or congregation prior to their sense of vocational call and may or may not have been raised in churched families or families that were intact. They often lack writing and research skills and approach the tasks of critical thinking defensively or with an attitude that every opinion is worthy because it is someone's opinion. Their undergraduate work reflects the national drift from a liberal arts core to specializations in fields not immediately germane to the study of theology. As they begin their seminary work, many of today's students are seeking information and skills needed to be a pastor and not a vision of the church and ministry in mission. As a result, theory is too quickly disconnected from practice.

This generation of students seems to have a fairly clear notion of the ministerial identity *they* will claim and the relationship *they* will have with the church. They often display a high sense of personal altruism but a low sense of interdependence. They are eager to minister but not disposed to lead, finding the work of one-to-one counseling or preaching or leading worship far more congenial than the public tasks of calling forth the ministries of the baptized or engaging the issues of the wider community. They are tentatively receptive to the wisdom of the faculty and are not at all reluctant to declare a scholar as unorthodox because she or he does not share the same view of the Bible or tradition that the student holds. Increasingly, seminary students live off campus, are trying to manage a marriage and family, sometimes have the challenge of single parenting, work at other jobs to support themselves, serve a congregation in some capacity, and worry about the debt they are carrying from their undergraduate studies. And, yes, they want to serve the church.

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This composite picture, which may be overdrawn but touches on much we have heard in The Lexington Seminar, suggests that uniformity in students' backgrounds is generally gone. The narrative from United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities (2001)[1] offers a good illustration. At the core of the story is a student's complaint about the final integrative exam. As she lays out her case, drawing on her own experience and that of other students she knows, we begin to see that the way in which this student, who is a thirty-year-old lesbian from an evangelical background and still uncertain about her denominational affiliation, understands and strives for integration is not the same as that followed by the divorced student in her mid-forties from a rural community who is a student pastor or the forty-year-old white male who tends to keep real engagement in the issues at arm's length or the older African American woman married to a pastor and very involved in her local Methodist church. Each is attending seminary for different reasons and each brings a distinct background that shapes his or her understanding of and ability to demonstrate "integration."

While the diversity and apparent unpreparedness of today's students to begin seminary study often evokes laments among faculty members, it does not mean that theological education is compromised. What it does mean, however, is that faculty must do more than just teach their topics—as they imagined they would do when they were in graduate school. As a character in the Bethel Theological Seminary (2001) narrative says to another faculty member, "Do you realize . . . that once I set a foundation for what we're doing, I only have time in a quarter to spend about ten minutes on each chapter of the Gospels? If I start stealing time from that to deal with these 'process things' [issues in students' lives that have become public], the students will leave here underprepared to do the kind of work they're going to be asked to do. Besides, they come here expecting to get a lot of content." While the student issues raised in the Bethel narrative are not new to seminary life—ideological rigidity and problems in a marriage—they represent the host of issues that push and pull at students as they enter the traditional, formal process of preparation for ministry. The resulting tension cannot be ignored and has encouraged a new look at the need for explicit strategies of formation.[2]

This essay explores formation as a point of focus in ministerial education. That focus obviously targets students, but my experience with participating schools in The Lexington Seminar suggests that formation needs to include the faculty as well. It is tempting to think of formation as a way to "fix" students who are differently and diversely prepared to study for the ministry. Faculty teams in the Seminar, however, have often discovered that their own formation is critical if they are to help their students form themselves for the work

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of professional ministry. In its summary of the Seminar experience, the team from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (2001) noted that one insight they had gained about themselves as a faculty was that they happened to be a group of people who worked in the same building, but they had yet to form themselves as a community. This conclusion resonates with a principle point in this essay: Formation, if it is to have a transformative effect, cannot be relegated to a chaplain or the pastoral care office but must flow throughout the institution and find expression in the classroom as well as the chapel. In what follows, I offer a working understanding of formation, suggest six observations about formation as constitutive of seminary education, and explore implications for the work of teaching and learning.

THE CALL TO ATTENTIVENESS

As I listen to schools grappling with the challenges of formation for ministry and reflect on my own experience as a dean in a school where formation played a dominant role, I am drawn to the conclusion that formation is about processes and practices that sharpen one's attentiveness. *Paying attention* is an ancient admonition for those seeking wisdom in many religious traditions. Certainly, my life as a student at St. John's in Collegeville and now as a member of the staff has been formed in this call to alertness that is so much a part of the *Rule of St. Benedict*. Being attentive is important in all aspects of a person's growth and development. First and foremost, it means being attentive to the movement of God in one's life, through the Word, and in the tradition one bears. When we are advised to listen for God's voice, it means we need to be still. We need the ability to let go of our conclusions long enough to grasp the sorts of questions that should dog our steps. This aspect of attentiveness is key to cultivating spiritual depth of character and maintaining one's spiritual center in the midst of life's multiple demands.

Formation also includes paying attention to the expanding vision of a graced world discovered in the disciplined study of theology and scripture. The rigorous study of the Bible, church history, Christian teaching, or worship bring the learner and the teacher into intimate contact with a long tradition of seeking to understand God's self-revelation. While the canons of the Enlightenment and the German model of graduate training insist on an objective pursuit of the truth, the seminary classroom is always a place of wonder, of standing in awe before the mystery of God that we apprehend bit by bit. Alexander Schmemann has written that the study of theology is always an act of worship for it is an encounter with the very experience of the mysteries of God, and that encounter demands a response.[3]

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Two other dimensions of formation have specific reference to students and bear on the formative work within the faculty. The first has to do with taking on the identity of a minister—not the external trappings and privileges of the office—but the profound sense of identity that comes from conforming oneself as a servant of the gospel. For some this boils down pragmatically to learning what a minister should do. It is a formulaic approach to ministry. When one *embodies* an identity as minister, however, it means subjecting one's preferences to gospel norms. It means learning that collaboration and interdependence are cultivated dispositions of the heart that require discipline to restrain oneself from bulling ahead on one's agenda despite the circumstances. Embodiment of identity means learning to "think like a minister," an adaptation of Schon's notion of reflective practice that draws one beyond a collection of skills to an artfulness attentive to time and place, persons and circumstances, and the wisdom of God's word ever present.[4]

Second, formation includes cultivating attentiveness to the expectations required for skillful public leadership. In recent years some have asserted that, as valuable as clinical pastoral education has been in seminary life, it has endorsed unwittingly a therapeutic approach to pastoral care that can shift attention from the community to the individual. Whether that is the case is perhaps debatable. What does seem clear is that candidates for the ministry find greater appeal in pastoral work that involves one-to-one relationships than in those aspects of ministry that include forming and sustaining a community of active believers, calling forth the gifts of the baptized, and empowering people for witness and service in the world. What it means to be a pastor cannot be disconnected from what it means to be a leader, and this is a matter for formation.

SIX OBSERVATIONS ABOUT FORMATION AS AN INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICE

Embedded in the notion of attentiveness are the core elements in the life of a theological seminary: academic training, pastoral development, and spiritual and human growth.

While there is little disagreement about the significance of the elements involved in preparing the church's ministers, there is no corresponding unanimity regarding how formation formally fits into a school's culture and ethos around these core elements or whether formation is primarily about personal spirituality and only secondarily related to academic study and pastoral training. Six observations I have gleaned from my experience and my work with The

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Lexington Seminar might help inform the conversations that are certain to continue regarding the institutional character of formation.

1. PREPARED DIFFERENTLY AND DIVERSELY

To suggest that we appreciate today's students as prepared "differently and diversely" for seminary studies is not an attempt to put a happy face on an unfortunate situation. In an ideal world, would St. John's School of Theology prefer that all its incoming students have the same academic and family backgrounds that my colleagues and I had in 1968? Probably. The study of theology and scripture in preparation for church ministry is enriched when people have a broad intellectual background that rests on a foundation anchored in the practices of the church. Focusing on what we might perceive as student deficiencies, however, can impede a faculty's ability to identify approaches that develop students' critical appreciation of Christian tradition and revelation. This is in part a pedagogical challenge that depends on a faculty's openness to new models of instructional practice suited for professional education in which preparation for ministerial practice is not viewed as intellectually compromised.

Although the renaissance in higher education for teaching excellence offers an abundance of resources, the starting point is learning from students themselves how they have been prepared. Claremont School of Theology undertook such a project as the faculty sought to understand, through their Lexington Seminar narrative (2000), the dilemma facing a fictional student who finds himself caught in the gray area between the deconstruction of his beliefs and the work of creating a new synthesis. In addressing the issues expressed in the narrative, the faculty recognized that they needed to understand more fully their students' sequence of theological education. Thus, they designed a process that invited a representative group of incoming M.Div. students to meet with two faculty members over the course of the year to describe what that process of taking apart and putting back together was like. Each session began with the simple request, "Tell us about your experience so far at Claremont." The faculty team listened, asking questions only when in need of clarification. The team then reviewed each interview and culled the themes for presentation to their colleagues. This example of faculty attentiveness takes seriously the experience of the students as a valid insight into the impact of the learning systems a school creates.

That said, the need to change attitudes from lament about what students often lack in background to an appreciation of what they bring to their work as learners does not suggest that standards should become thin as water. On the contrary, for formation to work faculty need to be clear on what it takes for a student to succeed academically, pastorally, personally, and spiritually as

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a ministerial leader in the church. All the listening in the world will not compensate for the absence in students of the requisite talent and disposition to respond.

2. FORMATION AS A WAY OF BEING A SEMINARY

For formation to be a transformative force in institutional life, it cannot be relegated to a department but needs to become a way of being a school. In the Bethel Seminary narrative cited earlier, the professor complaining about a suggestion that he help students process their personal issues retorts that it is not his job: "That's why we have a Student Life Office. You are the ones who should deal with these things." In one way he is correct, for schools need persons with special expertise in counseling students on personal and spiritual issues. Such persons are also a resource to faculty as they come to understand that as teachers they are formators. As the Bethel Seminary narrative shows, the manifestation of rigidity or the intrusion of personal problems cannot be compartmentalized. Such personal issues can easily shift the point of balance in learning situations and require attention. This does not mean that each faculty person needs to be a therapist, but he or she needs to be attentive to how personal matters affect encounters with course content and how he or she is frequently the person best situated to guide students to deeper insight into self and into the issues with which they grapple.

The pervasiveness of formation as a way of being a school can become chaotic if there is no consensus about the explicit criteria for determining what adequate preparation for ministerial leadership looks like. Faculty members each bring their own assumptions about what those criteria are. Some have criteria that are clear, specific, and—sometimes—non-negotiable. Others may only care that students do their work and not be disruptive in class. Still others judge adequate formation on the basis of whether they like or dislike the students personally: Could this person be my minister? That sort of variability does not contribute to the transformative potential of formation and sends a contrary message to students about the formative expectations of the school. Should students be able to demonstrate a capacity to draw critically on their studies in discussing and analyzing pastoral dilemmas? Do the ways in which students interact with one another, talk about one another, relate to faculty, administration, or staff matter? Is grade point average the sole determining criteria in assessing whether a candidate for ministry has demonstrated the capacity to exercise public leadership? Coming to agreement on such criteria is demanding work and accounts for the eagerness to delegate the "formation stuff" to a department or office. Doing so, I contend, keeps formation at the periphery of a school's life and encourages students to believe it to be as inconsequential as they perceive their teachers do.

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When formation is a way of being a school, a notable shift occurs in the design of courses and field experiences. Faculty and administrators think of creative ways in which the work of the curriculum can explicitly embody the formation criteria the faculty determine are important for preparing the church's ministers. Connections are created and clearly modeled among the various courses and learning experiences that define a student's program of study so that she or he is constantly challenged to pay attention to how the various elements cohere. At The Lexington Seminar, the team from United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities grappled with a common problem: How do we enable students notably different in their approaches to learning and formation to demonstrate integration? That question has engaged the whole UTS faculty in a discussion of what indicators are key signs of program integration. Examples of the indicators include the following:

- The student demonstrates accountability for his or her own learning process and decisions.
- The student is able to understand and articulate both the particularity of his or her own cultural, familial, religious, and personal stories as well as the resonance and dissonance with others' stories as social and cultural narratives.
- The student is able to articulate his or her own theology of ministry, drawing on core curricular areas.

More significantly, perhaps, is the fact that the faculty is considering the pedagogical implications of such a list. How will they teach differently so that students can gain the knowledge, skills, and abilities the indicators reflect? Thus, as a result of faculty consensus on its criteria, formation gains institutional footing and begins to reshape curricular design.

Finally, I contend that formation has become a way of being a school when the awarding of a Master of Divinity or pastoral ministry degree is contingent on the student's response to formation in all its dimensions—academic, pastoral, spiritual, and human development. That means that a student who carries a 4.0 grade point average but demonstrates few other attributes for pastoral leadership will not be able to complete the degree. If we offer no accountability for a degree as a sign of one's suitability for professional ministry, the degree is lopsided at best, misleading at worst.

3. Formation and Student Response

Those who work closely with formation report that few students come to seminary seeking formation. They may assent to the idea, but they begin to resist when it poses questions they would rather not hear or raises issues they would prefer to avoid. If formation includes being attentive to the movement of God

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in one's life and listening to the needs of the church, it is only natural that what the student imagines she will be as a minister may rub up against what the church actually needs in its ordained and professional ministers. The same holds true as the student begins to mark out how she or he will relate to denominational officials. Negotiating between personal preferences and desires and those of the larger community is part of the formational task. Can I be a pastor in situations in which people think and see the world differently than I do? Am I able to collaborate appropriately with denominational officers? Can I share leadership with members of my congregation as we work in partnership? Can I deal with the realization that my ways are not necessarily God's ways?

The answers to such questions are not always the ones that students want to hear. It is not easy to learn that some of one's behaviors have a negative impact on others and the community or to learn that one's view of the world, theology, ministry, the church, and what a pastor should do is incomplete or misinformed. Formation is about change, and change can be painful. As a result, faculties should not be surprised when students become disgruntled at being asked to take a closer look at their conclusions about the sort of minister they intend to be. Students like to be affirmed, but they also need to be attentive. A formative atmosphere, created and sustained by the faculty, makes both affirmation and challenge equally productive. But it may not make students immediately happy.

Because student satisfaction plays such a strong role in decisions about seminary life, schools may be hesitant about giving formational feedback. Will too much directness—even spoken out of love—motivate a student to switch schools? This is not a trivial question in an age when every tuition dollar is precious. But the resolution is not a matter of being more or less direct. The invitation of students into a formational process needs to be adult in every way possible so that there is mutual understanding from the very first day about how the seminary and the student work cooperatively to achieve the ultimate aims of formation. This includes ensuring that students and faculty share an understanding of what formation means—that it includes, for instance, both growth in the spiritual life (often the student's assumption) and demonstrated progress in attaining the attributes of one who will lead as a pastor. In its indicators of integration, United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities clearly expects students to take responsibility for their own growth and development even while the faculty is poised to provide the intellectual, spiritual, and personal resources needed to support that process.

4. Formation and Assessment

The assessment movement in higher education has made schools increasingly aware of the need to measure and justify what they are doing. That is a reduc-

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tionist view of assessment, but it does help emphasize the need to determine whether what we do has the intended impact. Academic and pastoral formation lend themselves to measurability in ways that spiritual and human growth formation do not, which is why the efforts of a faculty to determine formation criteria are so important. Such criteria may be fairly broad. For example, consider the following criterion from a draft of *Indicators of Integration* developed by United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities: "Demonstrates awareness of their personal strengths and limitations and takes responsibility for their own emotional health."[5] As faculty discuss how such a criterion might be manifested, members begin asking assessment questions. What will the student need to know? How might she or he act? How might students describe their growth as they move through the program? Who can help us see students in relationship to this criterion? Such a discussion may help faculty realize that a formation criterion sounds good but does not enjoy shared meaning within the faculty. Or faculty may discover that there are no ways to determine whether a student is responding to what the criterion specifies. Students may not know what the criterion means or what they should be doing in regard to it. This aspect of assessment analysis can have an invigorating effect on a school as it helps faculty think together about what they expect of students. Furthermore, as they examine the criteria they establish, faculty also reflect on what is happening in courses and other learning experiences that equip students to meet formation criteria.

5. FORMATION AND THE CHURCH

The church is sometimes a distant partner in the preparation of candidates for ministry. Some of that distance results from the implicit trust of the denomination in the expertise of the seminary. Some results from the seminary's reluctance to let the church become too deeply involved in the functions of the seminary. Formation, especially in regard to cultivating the identity of a minister as pastoral leader, is an excellent forum in which the seminary and the church can work closely together. Church leaders and denominational officers need to understand the challenges of seminary formation in all its dimensions and the reasons that standards are often rigorous and demanding. At the same time, seminary faculties need to be in intimate communication with denominational leaders, exemplary pastors, professional ministers, and lay leaders about the life of the church in the world-as-it-is.

In that dialogue, I contend, is the vision for new models of seminary formation that bridge the weary argument of whether students need more theology or more preaching. They need both in a way that equips them as agents of transformation in their congregations and parishes. To do that, seminaries

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need to have the full support of their constituents, and their constituents need to learn the costs of forming the type of pastoral leaders they seek. An example of a seminary that is attempting to maintain a healthy dialogue with its constituents is that of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, which, as part of its project for The Lexington Seminar, invited bishops in its service region to be part of a lecture series, thus encouraging the bishops to meet with faculty and students and discuss issues the bishops face in their leadership roles.

6. FORMATION AS A LIFELONG PROCESS

As formation matures in a school as a way of life, it should become evident that this way of being a school models a lifelong process, not just a procedure for being ordained or credentialed for ministry. Being attentive, obviously, is not a practice for students alone nor is it something one does only in the seminary. Among the benefits in being in a formation environment are that students ideally gain (1) the skills and disciplines for self-assessment, (2) an appreciation for the role of mentors, and (3) an openness to change and adaptation as they engage the work of ministry, attentive to the lessons it continually teaches about being a disciple, about creating community, and about being a leader who calls forth the leadership of others for the sake of the gospel. In a 1987 study of assessment of the professions, Joan Stark and her colleagues (Stark, Lowther, and Haggerty 1987) identified six clusters of competencies for professional development.[6] One of them was the degree to which graduates of a professional school were able to adapt to changing circumstances encountered in the practice of the profession. Someone has remarked that seminaries are excellent at helping students become very good seminarians. The speaker, a seminary professor, was not as sure seminaries were as skilled at helping them become excellent pastors and professional ministers. A view of formation as a lifetime process positions graduates to live a life of attentiveness because it has been in the rhythms of their experience since the time they were students.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

These six observations about formation relate in large measure to those processes and expectations faculties create for students as a way of helping them develop a pattern of life undergirded by a keen sense of attentiveness. Much of the conversation in seminaries today focuses on what we need to do for a population of students who have changed in some significant ways from those who preceded them twenty or thirty years ago. We know that students may not necessarily catch on as they proceed through the program, not because of their

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willfulness but more often because of the circumstances of their lives. As a character in the narrative of the Church Divinity School of the Pacific (2001) says to a student, "Preparation for ordained ministry is not only education and training, you know, but also formation. In fact, the traditional Anglican seminary approach has been described as 'formation by osmosis,' because so much of it has to do with studying and praying together in community."

In 1968, my classmates and I learned a great deal by osmosis. We dwelt together with sixty other seminarians in close quarters, following a common rhythm of life that taught us far more than we perhaps acknowledged. The osmotic approach no longer holds. The invitation to students to grow and change needs to be explicit, clear, and direct. Structures that served the osmotic phase of seminary training need to be reexamined and changed as radically as necessary in order that students might reap the greatest possible benefit from their experience in a formative environment.

The concern for the formation of students as pastors and ministers well equipped to lead congregations, deeply grounded in theology and scripture, trained in the arts of pastoral ministry, and committed to their spiritual and personal growth is an admirable addition to the agenda of seminary faculties. What we have learned in The Lexington Seminar, however, is that this concern does not stand alone as though it were a fix for students bearing deficits because of their backgrounds. Formation concerns reverberate throughout the system and have tended to lead schools participating in the Seminar to a new focus on the faculty itself.

Some of the participating schools offer dramatic examples of what happens. Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary (2000) came to the Seminar with a narrative filled with familiar concerns. How do we teach students to think theologically? How do we help students appreciate the value of the entire curriculum, especially the traditional disciplines, for ministry? How do we get students to buy in to our model of learning that proceeds from foundational courses to the treatment of more specialized topics? How do we engage students as the adult learners they are, some of whom are already serving congregations?

As the Eastern Baptist team processed its narrative in the Seminar, the focus shifted. Eastern was coming to the end of a major revision of its curriculum for which the questions noted above were very important. The faculty recognized that the design of the new curriculum had great potential. It would move from teaching-centered to learning-centered pedagogies, from a course-based to a competency-based curriculum, from reliance on GPAs and field evaluation to ongoing assessment and discernment throughout a student's time in the program, and from keeping spiritual and character competencies as external variables to making them integral to the curriculum itself. These are heady

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aspirations. As the time approached to implement this grand design, faculty began to ask, "Are *we* ready?"

> We were excited about the design and goals of the new curriculum, but in our hearts we really wanted someone else to deliver it. We weren't quite ready to give up old, familiar ways. We couldn't imagine what would take their place. We needed more than an engaging curriculum. . . . We needed to be converted as teachers and as learners. . . . We would need to go against ways of teaching and learning we had come to accept as good, necessary, and even right.

As a result of this insight into the faculty costs of designing a curriculum responsive to a changing student population, Eastern began to attend to the ongoing formation of its faculty. The school initiated a series of luncheons at which senior faculty nearing retirement were invited to reflect on their experience and the lessons learned. There were retreats and workshops designed to address needed faculty competencies if the curriculum was to achieve its purpose. The very first retreat, however, began by inviting faculty to reflect on how the change in curriculum would affect their spiritual and professional lives. In pairs, faculty members shared their anxieties about the changes they faced and prayed together over them. As a group, the faculty explored the range of costs associated with the changes that were ahead as they implemented the new curriculum and faced a series of dramatic institutional events. Issues they addressed included (1) accepting relationship as key to faithful teaching and learning, (2) learning the needs of students, (3) understanding the personal and institutional transformation required to begin new ways of teaching and learning, (4) relating to external partners, and (5) defining ways administrators could support the transition implicit in the new curriculum.

What Eastern has learned in this process has been underscored by several schools participating in The Lexington Seminar. Nothing of significance can happen in a school—including developing a vibrant formation environment—without cultivating significant personal and professional trust within the faculty itself. This may occur as a result of the day-to-day activities of faculty, but it is no more certain than "formation by osmosis." Too many stories are repeated by faculty in too many schools to deny that seminary life is often akin to being on a treadmill. Time is swallowed in great gulps by a host of activities, programs, and commitments that are individually good in their intent. Taken together, however, this host becomes oppressive. Small faculties spread themselves thin in efforts to be all things to those seeking theological knowledge and spiritual growth. A good portion of that responsiveness to needs stems from a spirit of altruism that one can only admire. But the truth of the matter is that many schools keep expanding programs and commitments in order to attract more students in order to raise more revenue in order to meet the

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rising costs of higher education. This is not a matter of being busy. For the most part, faculty understand that seminary life entails busyness. There is a difference, however, between being busy and feeling harried.

As schools wind themselves tightly with obligations that seem to multiply with little relation to one another, faculty disperse into those areas in which they have some measure of control. They dread meetings, they avoid volunteering for initiatives in which they might even have some interest, and they stop talking. What Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary discovered, along with several other schools participating in the Seminar, is that when space and time are provided for conversation, things happen. People begin to discover the depth of shared convictions, the real sources of disagreement and difference in perspectives, the network of support and encouragement that often lies dormant, and the capacity to get a lot of work done because the chatter of distancing oneself from the fray yields to substantial exchange of ideas, concerns, and—yes—feelings that reflect the richness of what it means to be people vocationally called to seminary teaching.

This has been the case for Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (2000) in its efforts to build faculty relationships. There faculty members have engaged a sustained discussion of how to define, nurture, and teach core concepts of Anabaptist/Mennonite theology in a school where a substantial percentage of students are not Mennonite. Weekly faculty luncheons organized around related topics have produced insight into the points of agreement and disagreement about what constitutes the Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition and vision. More importantly, such discussions have had a notable impact on faculty morale. As Associated Mennonite's president, Nelson Kraybill, stated in the seminary's project report, "Of my five years here, I experienced this past academic year as the one when the faculty most seemed to enjoy each other, came to faculty meetings in the best spirit, and seemed most energized for their work. . . . For the first time I have seen, faculty had a structured opportunity to learn what and how others teach."

Could this outcome at Associated Mennonite have occurred without a "structured opportunity"? Perhaps. But the general wisdom gained through the conversations encouraged by The Lexington Seminar indicates that such changes are most likely to occur with the aid of an intentional plan. Therefore, based on what we have learned during the course of The Lexington Seminar, I would propose the following strategies for consideration.

DEVELOP A FACULTY FORMATION PROGRAM

The process of developing a formation program for faculty requires a series of decisions. The first is a decision to address the obvious questions:

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- Where will we find the time?
- How will we ever reach agreement on what to do or learn to enter into conversations that are not about business?
- How will this affect advancement to tenure and promotion?
- How will we get everything else done besides?

While these questions are important, they too often take on definitive value. The ability to respond to them rests, in part, on the second decision that the seminary must make: to decide to create the temporal space in which formation can occur, because nothing will happen if faculty formation is wedged in among everything else.

So how might space be created? One way is to declare a truce, such as Associated Mennonite Seminary did, on taking on any new initiatives for at least a year—no new grants, no new programs, no new external commitments. Such a truce tangibly declares a break in the pattern of continuing to do more. A truce, however, is temporary, so a third set of decisions must occur. The seminary must decide to develop criteria for evaluating which current aspects of seminary programming should continue and which should be brought to a close. This decision is painful, for advocates almost certainly exist for any activity the school is doing. But the time has come for schools to be increasingly intentional about deciding which of all the good things they might do they will do—given the available resources *and* their commitment to faculty formation. Without this sort of purposeful decision making, no space will be created, and faculties will continue to be fragmented and harried.

Reexamine the Implicit Role of Faculty

For the vast majority of theological schools, being faculty also means implicitly taking on administrative duties. It is the price paid for a model of governance in which faculty not only set administrative policy but do the heavy lifting to implement it. This approach emerged in a period when higher education moved from a paternal structure in which faculty relied on their administrators to do what was needed to keep pathways to classrooms, chapels, and libraries reasonably uncluttered. I am not arguing against the faculty's role in determining institutional direction and policies, but it is naïve to think that one can be fully engaged in the demanding work of teaching, in the development of one's scholarly expertise, and in service to church and community while also functioning in named and unnamed administrative roles in the web of committees that frame the average theological seminary.

Seminaries too often assume that their structure is inviolate. But the truth remains, despite the accrediting expectations of the Association of Theological

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Schools, that there is no template. Schools are free to order the prescribed functions in ways that serve their core purposes. And as they are free, schools must be willing to challenge themselves with conversations about delegation, trust, accountability, and fluidity in structures and thus enable administrators and faculty to create the models of academic life that are best suited to the needs and realities of theological education and ministry formation.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

While assessment can add a new layer of busyness to seminary life, its underlying principles are rich in potential. Faculties may sometimes argue that the ways they do things in the classroom are sacrosanct and bear directly on the quality of graduates. But how do they know that? What makes the difference between a "good" graduate and one who falls short? What *is* a good graduate in terms of her or his abilities to succeed and lead in the ministry? What specific components in the curriculum and the environment of the school have the most evident impact on whether a student responds to the opportunities offered or simply "gets through the program"? Faculties often hold on to practices and requirements out of an untested conviction that without them the curriculum will fail. As a result, few things really change, and the tendency is to tinker rather than make purposeful adjustments.

As faculties become increasingly skilled at constructing outcomes assessment plans, they will be far more able to determine what works and does not work in achieving institutional goals. They will be less swayed by anecdotal stories and better able to assess program impact at macro and micro levels. Outcomes assessment is not about customer satisfaction but about how what a faculty does affects what it seeks to accomplish. This level of objectivity—when it is based on queries and goals that faculty generate—enables purposeful, targeted decisions regarding curriculum and institutional life.

REDESIGN THE MASTER OF DIVINITY DEGREE

Paying attention to what outcomes data teach will eventually encourage faculties to radically re-envision the purposes and structures of the M.Div. degree. The current structures of that degree have been created for a student population that no longer exists. While some schools have done an excellent job interrelating the theoretical and practical aspects of this professional degree, too many schools still tend to treat attention to practical theology and ministerial arts as accommodations in the degree rather than as ways of knowing distinct and integral to the degree itself. Redesigning the Master of Divinity degree from the bottom up, a design in which the life of the church takes precedence,

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cannot occur without faculty members engaging their individual and corporate understandings of their educational tasks. They must ask themselves questions and seek out answers and solutions: How might a faculty construct a curriculum in consultation with seasoned pastors and other professional ministers? What pedagogical changes become necessary once we take seriously what we know about adults as learners? How do such changes disorient and intimidate people accustomed to being experts in their discipline and masters of their classrooms?

While there are technical aspects in redesigning a curriculum to be more responsive to emerging needs of the institution and the society it serves, a shift in the curriculum's underlying assumptions calls for adaptive work. As Heifitz and Linsky suggest (2002, 13), adaptive work is dangerous because it calls for "experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments from numerous places in the organization or community." That is why the next suggestion is particularly important.

DEVOTE SIX DAYS EACH YEAR TO DISCUSSIONS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Alverno College has earned a national reputation for the integral role of assessment it has established at every level of institutional life. Every course is keyed to core competencies related to the faculty's understanding of what a graduate of Alverno needs to know, to do, and to think. When one asks administrative leaders or faculty how the college has been able to maintain this labor-intensive commitment for more than twenty-five years, the answer is simple. Faculty meet in three annual institutes of three to five days each, the focus of which is to examine what faculty are doing, what they are learning, and how they teach differently as a result of student experience. Faculty "teach publicly" and are resources to one another in terms of pedagogy. In short, they take their formation as faculty as critically as they do their development as disciplinary experts. What the seminaries participating in The Lexington Seminar have overwhelmingly demonstrated is that substantive change in teaching and learning—indeed, in institutional life generally—will not occur until sustained conversations become integral to faculty life.

This realization is evident in the projects undertaken at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary and Associated Mennonite Seminary. This was the case as well at Claremont School of Theology, where the effort to listen to M.Div. students led to a sustained process of faculty listening to one another because of what they began to hear from students. Sustaining conversations about pedagogy and the life of theological educators helps to surface the rich talent that exists in every faculty so that members can encourage and be resources to one

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another. Regular, public conversations about teaching and learning emancipate the classroom and particular courses as an individual's fiefdom. The curriculum in its entirety becomes the work of the faculty as a whole.

More importantly, discussions of the central work of the faculty as a community of teachers become a powerful path to faculty formation, for such discussions return frequently to core values about one's discipline, one's sense of vocation as a teacher, and one's vision of the church and its mission. There is no pretense that this will produce some form of homogenized harmony. There will be divergence, disagreement, and even struggle over what constitutes a "theological educator." But as the formative process for students seeking to be pastors for the church is challenging, so is the formation of a theological faculty a process unbounded by terminal degrees and faculty handbooks. Rather, it is a dynamic process of change and adaptation—the very thing we urge upon our students and can model for them.

DO LESS. TALK MORE. CHOOSE WISELY.

These suggestions for giving due attention to the formation of faculty are costly. Some of them run against the canons of faculty life as we know it. Some require a hard rethinking of the seemingly impenetrable structures that hold a school together. To encourage schools to do less may sound preposterously cavalier, especially to institutions that have concluded that doing more is the only way for them to remain viable. But the level of busyness evident in so much of theological education is ultimately counterproductive. This does not suggest that schools are failing to produce graduates who can respond adequately to the needs of the church. It does suggest that the quality of life is compromised when schools move from being busy to being harried.

The tiger that time has become will not be tamed easily. One powerful way in which it may be better managed is through sustained, substantial conversations about what matters. The design of The Lexington Seminar rests on its ability to provide time, space, and structure for discussions that seldom or never occur at home. As Lexington teams have returned to their home institutions and replicated in a variety of ways similar opportunities for discussion, they report that wonderful results occur. Faculty life and relationships become reinvigorated. People discover a new sense of common purpose and shared values. As in the case of Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, faculty found courage to confront their anxieties about change and face up to a series of institutional crises that challenged their best thinking. However, talking more about what matters is not a magical balm that rids the institution of all blemishes and warts. As the final report from Claremont School of Theology (2000) illustrates so well, the quality of faculty conversations has significant

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impact but does not suddenly alter the complexity of complex people living in complex settings:

> We learned by conversational practice how to listen openly to positions that are different from our own. . . . An emerging discovery is that the most important tensions we experience are probably not going to go away. We will need to learn not only to live with them, but even to affirm and embrace them.

The renewed interest in the formation of seminary students is important for the reasons cited in this and other essays in this volume. Students have changed in ways that challenge faculty ability to engage them in deep learning about the Christian faith and the mission of the church. Taken seriously, formation as a process of learning and following the ways of discipleship is like a stone cast into a pond. The circles spread outward, and everything is altered. As faculties encourage their students to be attentive to their relationships with God, to their understanding of Christian tradition, and to their images of the professional minister and the contemporary congregation, faculties themselves will be challenged to pay heed to their own best advice. Formation wedged in after everything else is done meets a requirement; formation that reminds a community of learners to create space, to reverence time, and to drink deeply at wisdom's well is transforming.

NOTES

1. All narratives cited in this book can be found in the Archives section of the Seminar's Web site: http://www.lexingtonseminar.org/.
2. I recognize that formation is a category largely adapted from the Catholic experience, which itself emerged from the monastic tradition of guiding individuals into a particular tradition of Christian discipleship. Its use here and in the wider seminary world reflects the need to be more intentional about helping students acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions that are needed for moving into a communal and leadership relationship with the church and local congregations.
3. See the chapter on "Liturgy and Theology" in Fisch (1990).
4. "The question of the relationship between practice competence and professional knowledge needs to be turned upside down. We should start not by asking how to make better use of research-based knowledge but by asking what we can learn from a careful examination of artistry, that is, the competence by which practitioners actually handle indeterminate zones of practice—however that competence may relate to technical rationality" (Schon 1987, 13).
5. This effort is being lead by Dr. Barbara Ann Keely, a faculty member of United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities (www.unitedseminary-mn.org).
6. The six competencies are *conceptual competence* (theoretical foundations of the profession); *technical competence* (ability to perform tasks required of the profession); c*ontextual competence* (understanding the societal context of one's work and the ability to do a multi-perspective analysis of the environment); i*nterpersonal communication competence* (ability to

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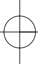

use written and oral communication effectively); i*ntegrative competence* (capacity to meld theory and skills in response to specific situations); and *adaptive competence* (ability to anticipate and accommodate changes by gaining new knowledge, new skills, and a new focus on context for the sake of the church's mission).