

EDUCATION FOR GLOBAL MISSION

CURRENT OPPORTUNITIES

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After twenty years' service in global mission with our church, first as a fraternal worker/theological educator in Central America and later as a staff member of the World Council of Churches, we came to Southern California to take up an assignment with San Francisco Theological Seminary in Southern California. After fifteen months in Southern California -- working closely with the Synod's various program offices, eight presbyteries, and their education consultants -- we can say that the entire agenda of the world mission of the church is our agenda right here as we work with many colleagues to educate the whole church for our global mission. Following are a few of the exciting opportunities that we have discovered.

1. FACING THE CRISIS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Having spent "the best years of our life" in Guatemala, teaching at the Presbyterian Seminary there, we have been deeply concerned by the intense, systematic repression that has terrorized that country and El Salvador in recent years. It was only natural that we should take up the 1983 General Assembly report called "Adventure and Hope: Christians and the Crisis in Central America." We have been invited frequently to speak on this subject, and we have encouraged local churches to use the GA report (\$1.00) and an accompanying study packet (\$3.00) and filmstrip ("Born from the People") as a very current and very urgent educational opportunity.

Our Southern California Extension Center co-sponsored with Synod one of the regional consultations on Central America and encouraged the participants to join the national network of Presbyterian Advocates of GA Policy on Central America. Then we organized a travel seminar of Synod and presbytery and local church leaders to Mexico, Nicaragua, and Guatemala, and they in turn have become active interpreters throughout the presbyteries. In September 1984 we organized Synod's Task Force on Central America, which is co-sponsoring with SFTS and seven of our

presbyteries 2½ months of educational events on Central America with Theologian-in-Residence Richard Shaull (January - March 1985).

Our intention is not only to expose every Presbyterian in Southern California to the crisis in Central America but also to enable concerned Presbyterians to gain new perspectives on the Gospel and our world that will shed light on their call to justice and peacemaking as they deal with other complex issues. We believe, as the GA report and Richard Shaull's new book suggest, that a new reformation has begun among the poor, oppressed Christians of Central America, most of whom are reading the Bible for the first time and discovering that it speaks directly to their struggle for liberation and fulness of life -- even in the midst of so much suffering and death. We also believe that North American Christians can participate in this new reformation as we rediscover the Gospel through the eyes of the poor and join with them in the struggle for a just and peaceful world.

2. BUILDING A MULTI-CULTURAL CHURCH

Southern California is of course unique, but it is a model, for good and ill, for the rest of the country. The massive confluence of diverse peoples from Asia, Latin America, and the North American continent brings a special challenge to the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii and to the Southern California Extension Center of SFTS. Our context for mission includes over 3 million Hispanics, with almost half a million Central Americans, perhaps one million Asians, a million Blacks, and hundreds of thousands of Jews-Israelis, Iranians, Armenians, Arabs, and Samoans. We are all minorities, as "Anglos" are less than 50% in Los Angeles County and City.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) has been peculiarly blessed and challenged by the growth of its racial-ethnic constituencies. Between 1972 and 1984 the predominantly non-Anglo congregations in this Synod have increased from 2.5% to well over 25%, partly through outreach but mostly through the immigration of people from

sister churches founded by earlier mission efforts overseas and through the active witness of these immigrant churches. The educational challenge facing us now is large and complex. Will we continue to be an Anglo-dominated church with many ethnic congregations and caucuses, or will we discover how to become a truly multi-cultural church, i.e. with multiple perspectives on the Gospel and the world? Will the spiritual journeys of all our people so enrich us that we can be faithful witnesses of the New Humanity here and throughout the world?

The educational possibilities are unlimited. Our Synod's Black, Hispanic, Korean, and Japanese churches have their own respective theological academies, which equip laity and clergy for ministry within their particular cultural context and within the larger church. We have developed a series of seminars on the "Hispanic Reality," primarily for non-Hispanic clergy and laity, and we are hoping to design immersion experiences in Los Angeles, San Diego, and Tijuana that will further open up the cultural, social, and spiritual dimensions of justice and ministry in this region. We offer core courses on Presbyterian History, Reformed Theology and Presbyterian Polity for Korean pastors, particularly those who are coming into the new Korean-American Presbytery (Hanmi). We participated in a month-long intensive program for 30 pastors from Taiwan and will cooperate with plans for the training of Taiwanese-American pastors and laity. We hope to find ways to encourage all our churches to take up the 1984 General Assembly paper on "Christian Faith and Economic Justice," which has a good study guide, and the coming 1985 paper on "A Just Political Economy," which will raise wide-ranging, profound, and perhaps controversial issues for our church and its mission.

Education for ministry and mission must be local as well as global, culturally specific and specifically multi-cultural. Otherwise it may well become romantic and thus irrelevant or chauvinistic and counter productive. The building of a multi-cultural church is a call to spiritual and social as well as cultural transformation. The ultimate goal: a just and peaceful society.

3. SEEKING TO BE FAITHFUL

As an ex-staff member of the World Council of Churches, coming to Southern California straight from the Vancouver Assembly (1983), I have had many opportunities to interpret the WCC "from the inside." Dealing with the controversies and misinformation about the WCC is itself educational, but it is even more edifying to go on and identify some of the many ways in which local and global mission concerns intersect.

One of the more provocative documents emitted by the WCC in recent years is called "Evangelism and Mission: An Ecumenical Affirmation," which was approved by the WCC Central Committee in 1982 and by our General Assembly in 1983. It is available as a study guide for congregations from the Division of Overseas Ministries of the NCCC (\$1.00). This study can be invaluable for clergy and laity, sessions and adult seminars, because it opens up our theological understanding of evangelism and mission to embrace the entire ecumenical agenda.

Another major document, "Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry," comes out of the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC, has been taken up by our General Assembly, and is being studied by local congregations of many denominations across the country. (The document is available for \$.75 and a study guide for \$1.00 from the Education for Mission and Evangelism Office of the Program Agency.) Fifty years of ecumenical dialogue are summed up in this theological "convergence" statement, but the "reception" of this document into the life of the church requires an enormous educational effort on our part. If, however, Protestants, Orthodox, and Catholics are able to reach a common theological consensus on baptism, the Eucharist, and ministry, we may be able in our generation to take a step toward unity, common witness, and renewal that is unprecedented in the whole history of the church.

Once again it should be noted that faithfulness to the evangel and the search for the unity of the church are not only goals but also means to the unity and

wellbeing of humankind. They are, from a Reformed theological perspective, integrally related to peacemaking and justice.

CONCLUSION

These brief and scattered examples are intended only to illustrate the many profound and urgent challenges facing our church today. From my perspective, church educators and seminaries must join forces in order to begin to equip and enable the church to respond to these challenges.

This is "urgent" because our government is directly implicated in the killing of thousands of innocent people in Central America each year, in shoring up institutional racism in South Africa, and in backing unpopular dictatorships in parts of Asia. It is equally urgent because our country is experiencing a serious deepening of the gap between the rich and poor, growing racism and alienation, a massive shift of resources from social services to defense, and increasing concentration of economic power in corporate structures that fail to respond to basic human needs at home and abroad.

Education for global mission is neither romantic nor esoteric, peripheral nor superficial. It is central to the Christian vocation, perhaps as never before, in terms of these local and international realities. If we fail in this educational task, our church will surely fail to carry out its local and global mission.

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