Urban Ministry Training and Capacity-Building Programs of Faith-Based Organizations

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This paper presents an overview of the history of training opportunities for urban ministry from the mid-1960s to the present time for individuals preparing for ministry within the Christian faith, specifically the Protestant tradition. The reader will get a big picture of Christian faith-based training opportunities during this time, some of which continue today. The paper also enables the reader to appreciate the shifting focus and direction that faces organizations, churches, and individuals seeking to prepare for urban ministry. Two characteristics of this shift immediately stand out. First, we see a significant emphasis on developing leaders who know how to become effective agents of change in communities with heavy concentrations of people, diversity, and issues. Second, we see an emphasis placed on community building and community development as part of urban ministry.

The programs identified by name in this paper serve only to illustrate its points, with apologies to the many fine training programs that might serve as equally credible examples. One outcome of this paper might very well be identifying the need for research that could create a credible list and clearinghouse for the multiple constructive efforts at faith-based training presently under way. Such a list would be a valuable resource to community development efforts seeking to further develop their leadership potential, and also that of others, around the complex environment of the city.

While highlighting the educational and training options of the past 40 years, this paper will provide a framework to aid individuals seeking to expand their understanding of leadership that responds to the ever-changing environment of our urban world. This short paper concludes with a brief suggestion that an opportunity exists to do some "out-of-the-box" thinking about the development of a faith-based training process that respects the definition of collaborative learning and community building.

Historically, training for urban ministry has been outside the well-established seminary and official academic leadership development programs of most Protestant denominations. Such limited opportunity for education and training for urban min-

istry remains true today. With few exceptions, urban ministry and urban ministry training receive, at best, only very limited resources from the ecclesiastical system. Preparing for urban ministry is most often seen as "specialized ministry;" therefore, opportunities for faith-based education and training stand apart from and often are outside of the established faith-based educational system.

Because urban ministry and community development education and training programs are successfully marginalized, many of these education and training programs are underfunded, resulting in a pattern of urban ministry training programs becoming transient and existing for only a limited time.

Urban ministry frequently involves a working relationship with segments of our society who have been marginalized politically, socially, and economically. Education and training for urban ministry shares this marginalization. While such a conclusion may warrant further analysis, we do no favor to the church, to its educational programs, or to the religious systems they serve by allowing this perspective. We now live in an urban society that requires those doing ministry anywhere, whether professional or lay, to understand the dynamics and dimensions of the contemporary urban environment. If the church desires to grow and keep pace with the present growth patterns of our world, then urban ministry and community development should be central to denominational and faith-based institutions of education and training at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

This paper takes some generalized looks at faith-based training options that have been available to the church and to individuals over the past 40 years. Divided into four sections, it begins with the response of the organized church to the demographic changes and social dynamics that occurred in cities in the late 1960s to the mid-1970s and the rapid development and decline of action-training centers around North America. Following close on the heels of the decline of these centers, a number of seminary programs emerged, designed to give students not only exposure to the city but also a theoretical basis for thinking critically and strategically about cities, as well as training in the skills to conduct effective ministry in an urban environment. The third section focuses on community organizing that seems parallel to the action-training centers and the seminary programs. Much of the community-organizer training focused particularly on the faith-based community. The fourth section brings us closer to our immediate time, enabling us to see the shift in focus. The further away in time we get from the crisis epitomized by the burning cities of the 1960s, the more strategic becomes the thinking and direction in urban ministry. Issue-orientation programs and service-provision programs give way to a more holistic approach that emphasizes community development. Many faith-

based educational and training programs for urban ministry in the 1980s and 1990s reflect this type of shift. In some cases, education played an instrumental role in developing the thinking behind the shift, particularly about the role of the church in community.

EXPOSURE/ORIENTATION

The 1960s proved to be a critical period in the history of the United States in recognizing and addressing the complexities of modern city life, particularly the issues of racial division and poverty. Throughout this period, urban centers experienced unprecedented levels of unrest and revolt. For many, the eruption of violence in major metropolitan cities made it clear that the problems associated with the social, political, and economic inequalities among the races could no longer be ignored as they had been in the past. As the civil rights movement moved into full swing, powered for the most part by African-American church leaders, the churches and seminaries of White Protestant denominations recognized a need to develop new tactics and strategies to educate their clergy and laity for mission and nurture in inner cities. These religious institutions recognized that they were "called upon not only to contribute to change in others, but to change themselves as well," and so set about developing a kind of training distinct from that which had come before (Younger 1987, 2).

One important methodology shared by many of the theological educational programs that developed during this period was the practice of learning through "action/reflection." Focusing on education through experience, many of the programs assigned great importance to their students' developing an understanding rooted in and followed by personal engagement. According to Clinton Stockwell, "Before we move to the 'world as it should be,' we must understand 'the world as it is'" (Stockwell 1994).

The importance of active experience for these clergy and lay folks can be traced largely to the population distribution at this time. Following World War II, many major cities experienced a significant population shift, as Whites (along with their churches and institutions) moved out to the suburbs and southern African Americans and Hispanics migrated into the inner cities. For the White and/or middle-class students who wanted to minister in urban environments, it was therefore a crucial first step to witness and identify with a reality very different than their own. In his analysis of the religious training programs of this period, George D. Younger identifies this level of involvement as "Orientation—exposing the training

group to information about urban society, racism, Afro-American history or other subject areas in which they had little previous experience." While this initial level of involvement was considered primary to the education process, the goal was to eventually move beyond orientation to analysis and the cultivation of concrete skills relevant to the specific problems of the city. The extent to which programs realized this goal varied, and oftentimes participants did not move far beyond the exposure and orientation phase (Younger 1987).

A specific example of the "action/reflection" theological education that emerged from the ferment of this time can be seen in the action-training centers that developed in major cities around the country. The first of these centers, known as the Urban Training Center for Christian Mission (UTC), was established in a West Side ghetto of Chicago in 1963. Inspired by a proposal of Donald L. Benedict to the National Council of Churches for developing an ecumenical training center, UTC's purpose was "to explore and communicate the relationship of the Christian faith to the urban industrial society, in order that the church as the carrier of the Gospel may find renewal in our generation." Among the action-training centers, UTC had the largest budget, staff, and number of trainees. In addition, it generated the most widespread publicity and acted as a key consultant and resource for the other emerging training centers (Younger 1987).

A program known as "the plunge" most vividly illustrates UTC's commitment to experiential learning. Participants would live on the streets for days at a time, dressed in shabby clothing and with little or no money, to experience firsthand the powerlessness and frustration of poverty and glimpse the citadels of wealth and affluence from a different perspective. This symbolic experience could be interpreted in widely different ways. In Carl Siegenthaler's analysis, this "prophetic fellowship" could be understood as any or all of the following: a commitment to be with people in very different situations, an openness to both the chaotic and redemptive forces within our society, a desire for greater sensitivity to the Word of God as expressed in the inner city, and an indication of the church's willingness to be changed while engaging in the work of transformation. When reporting on their time in the UTC program, many participants cited the plunge as a profound part of their urban experience, as well as their day-to-day visits to the center on the West Side (Younger 1987).

ACADEMIA

Academia, often influenced by individual faculty whose social consciousness found fuel through participation in one of the action-training programs, began to explore ways to provide educational opportunities for students who shared the faculty's social consciousness. Two patterns evolved in academically accredited programs of urban ministry study. First, a pattern of consortia efforts developed, with schools joining together to organize and structure an educational experience offered to all students from the member schools. Second, a pattern of individual efforts emerged, with schools joining forces with an urban ministry program in the city to provide training and educational opportunities for workers in the ministry and students from the school.

The first pattern can be easily identified in a program entitled Urban Ministry for Pastoral Students (UMPS). In 1973 Dr. Gill James, a professor from Asbury Theological Seminary, sought and received funding from the Lilly Endowment, a long-standing supporter of urban ministry endeavors, for this 3-year, 8-week summer program for students from eight evangelical seminaries in the Midwest. Using the teaching technique of the plunge as the starting point, followed by an orientation to the city, this program set up students in urban ministry internships that forced political and theological discussion regarding a variety of urban issues. The program was well attended and well received; when the funding ran out, however, the program—like most of the action-training programs that preceded it—ceased.

The concept of consortia programs for urban ministry education lived on, however, and several consortia efforts for urban ministry training emerged in the 1970s and 1980s in cities that included New York, Philadelphia, Atlanta, San Francisco, Washington, and Chicago. History has not been kind to this pattern of academic efforts to provide education and training for urban ministry. The only consortium program of theological education for urban ministry begun during this time and still operating today is the program in Chicago. The Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education (SCUPE), which traces its roots to the earlier UMPS program, continues to offer its twelve member schools contextual and experiential education, including academic course work integrated with urban ministry internships. Linked with the seminary program, SCUPE also has designed a new program of theological studies called Nurturing the Call. The market for this program is not those already registered in an institution of theological education, but those engaged in ministry in the city who have not had the opportunity to pursue theological studies. This program allows participants to begin their theological studies by taking courses in urban ministry and to transfer these credits into an accredited

degree program at one of its member schools. A third program SCUPE designed and now operates, in partnership with a Chicago university, is a master of arts in community development. SCUPE organizes the Congress on Urban Ministry, which is the largest biennial conference on ministry in the city and is designed to address leadership development for both lay and professional ministers. This event provides a variety of workshops, academic courses, and site visits that reflects the diversity of urban ministry programs in the metropolitan area. An outgrowth of the Congress on Urban Ministry is a 3-week Summer Institute on developing grass-root and local church leadership with the vision, skills, and competencies for community revitalization. Finally, SCUPE now is creating an urban ministry network, the Association for Metro/Urban Ministry (AMUM). This membership network serves as a central clearinghouse of information on urban ministry and connects people doing urban ministry across lines of geography, denominations, professions, and more.

In the 1990s the Pew Charitable Trusts initiated the startup of several new consortia efforts of training for urban ministry. A couple of these efforts stand out as examples of renewed consortia programs. Contextualized Urban Ministry Education Northwest works with three Bible colleges in developing an associate's degree in Christian ministry for ethnic leaders. It also networks four seminaries in the Northwest to provide programs in urban ministry studies. The City Gate Project in the Twin Cities of Minnesota, under the administrative care of North Central Bible College, works with 15 different colleges and seminaries to develop coordinated curricula at varying levels of study. City Gate has created institutional partnerships among schools that cross lines of denominations and among urban ministerial partnerships that surmount theological, cultural, racial, and economic differences that have served as barriers to collaboration.

Many academic programs of urban ministry studies were initiated either by individual schools or church-related agencies in the major cities in partnership with academic institutions. One such program is the Bresee Institute, a church-based training and resource center for urban studies and ministry located in Los Angeles. Bresee offers an educational experience that integrates theological, practical, and spiritual foundations in course offerings for urban ministry at both graduate and undergraduate levels. The Institute also offers an inner-city internship for students. Another program is the Center for Urban Theological Studies of Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia offers four bachelor of science programs and a master's degree program "to provide education, training and resources to develop servant-leaders for the urban church, community and marketplace." Westminster also offers a doctoral degree in ministry in urban mission with a

strong emphasis on international contexts. The Institute for Urban Studies, accredited by Colorado Christian University, aims its program at urban youth and allows college students linked with the Denver public schools to teach character and life skills in for-credit classes. The program not only provides a real context of learning but also provides a series of college-level courses focused on understanding the city.

Perhaps the most adequately resourced program in this category is the Center for Urban Ministerial Education in Boston. This program, initiated and developed by urban ministry leaders from the city, has become Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary's Boston campus and offers graduate-level courses primarily for the in-service training of both Spanish- and English-speaking pastors and church leaders. Courses are scheduled either in the evenings or on weekends throughout the metropolitan area. The program emphasizes "seeking the shalom of the city—a shalom which breaks down the cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic barriers that divide us."

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

The curriculum of the earlier action-training centers and many academic programs, such as SCUPE, includes an emphasis on community organizing. The history of community organizing can be traced to the ideas of the Founding Fathers, as witnessed in their fundamental concern for the creation and promotion of justice and equality through the democratic process, and their protection of the right of groups to assemble and organize for political purposes. Community organizing gives voice to marginalized people and expands public conversation and decision-making through the development of the human resources of communities, as individuals and as collaborative associations. Conceptually, community organizers' central and most basic issue is *power*, as agitation promotes the ability of people without resources to act in ways that combat destructive existing power structures and secure the health of their environments.

The methods of community organizing employed by the church largely can be attributed to groundwork and writings of Saul Alinsky, who continues to be a major influence on many of the faith-based organizations in the city. Alinsky often worked with faith-based organizations and institutions, though their relationship was controversial at times. Catholic parishes were important in his early work with the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council, and starting in the 1950s he received

institutional support from Protestant and Catholic sources throughout the country (Parachini and Covington 2001).

Religious institutions have a variety of intersection points with community organizing. First, the language of faith and ideas that exists in churches and denominations has a certain congruence with the organizers' work of inspiring, affirming, and motivating marginalized people for positive change, as the prophetic tradition has been about the work of "comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable" (Adams-Leavitt 2003). Second, religious institutions share the common goal of developing the social/human capital and vital networks essential to creating livable, just, and free communities. In a culture in which market values increasingly overflow into all spheres of life, and as group identities disintegrate while contractual and client relationships abound, the bonds formed through a common faith and place of worship are a rare and valuable asset. It may seem only natural, then, that the faith-based organizations that sought to educate leaders for urban transformation collaborated with the community organization groups active in the inner cities, and incorporated their insights and methodologies into their training programs.

In the late 1960s an organization called the Gamaliel Foundation in Chicago attempted to link local religious bodies with groups organizing around housing issues. The name of this organization was inspired by Biblical references to Gamaliel, a religious leader of Jerusalem who looked for God's hand in the activities of agitating groups and who was the teacher of Paul (who then went on to found many of the early Christian communities). The name reflects the organization's mission to recognize the existing forces for renewal, as well as train people for organizing. With its expansion over the years and reorganization in 1986, the Gamaliel Foundation now represents another unique model of faith-based education, one that seeks to empower community leaders through a congregational approach and attempts to "organize the organizers" on a national level.

The Gamaliel Foundation creates affiliates and sponsoring committees, who then work with local communities to identify priority issues and train people for the action necessary to realize their vision. Typically, developing these affiliates takes about a year, and currently the Gamaliel Foundation has 45 affiliates in 17 states. As part of the affiliate development process, the Gamaliel Foundation provides local groups with a step-by-step plan designed to organize local congregations across racial and denominational lines for the goal of public "actions" that give them influence among the other decisionmaking bodies of the community. The Gamaliel Foundation helps implement the plan in two ways: first, by helping to select and hire a professional organizer who can identify potential leaders and guide the activities,

and second, by providing retreats and educational events that teach participants the basic concepts of organizing and the skills needed to interact personally with political, corporate, and institutional leaders (Parachini and Covington 2001). While most of the educational events are open to all participants, the Gamaliel Foundation offers courses specifically for clergy designed to help them balance "the demands of maintaining their own institutions while at the same time addressing issues of justice and community concerns."

URBAN MINISTRY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Most recently, the practice of urban ministry throughout North America placed significant emphasis on community and community development. Closely attendant to this link between urban ministry and community development is an emphasis in education and training programs on the necessity for understanding the dynamics of community and community transformation. Leadership development and the implementation of competencies and skills related to taking a leadership role in community transformation have become prominent. While an argument might be made that urban ministry is more than community development, it is helpful to recognize that community development provides a working framework for all the dynamics and dimensions associated with urban ministry that is not strictly service oriented.

The case for understanding urban ministry as community development begins with a very basic proposition: God created life to be lived in harmonious community. This theological proposition provides the basis for all religious dialogue and efforts for community building, community organizing, and community development that are not focused on gain of power. It provides the foundation and philosophical base for determining the content of community training, investment, and work for all humane and faith-based efforts aimed at revitalizing community. The proposition contains not only the theological but also the sociological, psychological, political, and economic implications for understanding urban ministry. Theologically, the proposition assumes an understanding that both life and community have their origin in the divine order of creation. Sociologically, the proposition states not only the possibility of harmonious community but establishes it as the objective of life. Psychologically, the assumption asserts that "well-being" does not come solely from finding oneself but from finding oneself in association with others. Politically, the statement sets priorities: the common good is politically correct. Economically, the proposition challenges the assumption that a scarcity of resources in God's cre-

ation naturally leads to competition rather than harmony both within community and among communities.

More and more established educational and training programs for urban ministry now focus on community development, with new programs springing forth. Two such newly developed educational and training programs that serve as examples of this combined emphasis of community development and leadership development are the Campolo School for Social Change at Eastern University in Philadelphia, and the master of arts in community development at North Park University in Chicago.

The Campolo School's program in public education and the public school system addresses not only the problems but also the attending issues and causes of inadequate funding for city schools. It focuses on the need for job creation among the poor and has created graduate programs designed to equip students to empower indigenous people to develop and own faith-based microbusinesses and industries. The program intentionally looks to and at urban churches as resources and incubators that will nurture into existence a variety of microbusinesses. The school also implemented a new graduate program in urban public policy that engages students in the theories and techniques for impacting government and commerce with values that reflect Christian teachings about the Kingdom of God. The school has a commitment to working for structural change in the economic and political systems of the city and to this end has developed specialized programs in urban studies and leadership.

The master of arts degree in community development offered by North Park University is a practitioner-oriented degree program for working professionals who find their responsibilities demand enhanced skill sets and knowledge bases. The program was designed by SCUPE, which continues as a partner with North Park in the implementation of the design. The common mission is the creation of a supportive learning community of committed professionals from diverse backgrounds who share a passion for social, economic, and environmental justice and a desire to advance in the leadership skills necessary to build an inclusive and holistic community. The program seeks to prepare leaders in city neighborhoods to engage in effective grassroots community building by combining insights from business, politics, policy, economics, and social theory. A sample of courses includes Christian Traditions in Community Revitalization; Practical Applications and Theoretical Understanding of Social Change; Community Organizing; Advocacy, Ethics, and Policymaking; Advanced Skills in Statistical Analysis, Finance, and Urban Planning; and Networking Lending Institutions, Funders, Government Officials, and Programs with Community Leaders.

The program finds inspiration in the historical and religious understanding of the creation of communities, theories of social change, and a critical review of current strategies and programs in community development. The faculty members are all community practitioners, and the program is built around the experiences of seasoned community organizers, youth workers, executive leadership, community boards, agencies, churches, and organizations committed to serving people and families in the city. Students have the benefit of completing hands-on master's projects with classes and courses often taught within community-based organizations or churches. In 4 years the program has grown from an initial group of 8 students to a student body of more than 80. Such training programs, particularly when they stress asset-based community development, take urban ministry in a new direction that has potential for bringing health both to the community and to the congregations in urban settings.

CONCLUSION

While identifying patterns of movement that have occurred in urban ministry over the past 40 years is not easy, three patterns stand out. First, we have moved away from the issue orientation of the action-training centers toward a more holistic emphasis on the understanding of diversity. Second, we have moved further away from allowing urban ministry to be defined out of a service-industry motif toward that of a capacity-building work. Third, confrontation has become less of a hallmark of urban ministry, and community development has replaced community organizing as the more descriptive work of the church.

If these patterns prove correct, we must ask how training programs keep pace with the changing patterns. Unfortunately, the designs and structures of most educational and training programs simply do not lend themselves to strategic alliances with the broader community. Most programs, both academic and nonacademic, are organized and designed for the learning objectives and gain of the *individual* rather than the *group* or the *community*. Individuals who choose to benefit from training are most often required to leave their community where they live, often times never to return, to go to a center of training or institution of education. This movement out of community in order to get education drains communities of some of their best human resources and disrupts the flow and balance of developing community. Such disruption need not happen if we could consider a totally different design, structure, and process of training and education that does not exploit, disrupt, or take away from community—one in which the educational process actually builds and contributes to building healthy communities.

First, we should consider structuring an educational process that reverses the direction or flow of obtaining the community development training. Instead of individuals moving toward educational opportunities outside their community, what if they could take advantage of educational and training opportunities in their community? Imagine a faith-based training program in community development coming to a community or neighborhood for 1 year. The program would be only for churches, agencies, and organizations of that community that desire to collectively address the projects, concerns, issues, opportunities, and capacities of their community.

Second, we should build an educational curriculum, structure, and process around community learning objectives, which would be an improvement on emphasizing individual learning objectives. This approach would mean designing an educational process that would be responsive to cohort groups and the collective community of learners. Imagine a 1-year training program in your community that resulted in the following action:

- Having a real impact to improve your community and your neighborhood.
- Developing a collective network among faith-based leaders that is neighborhood-based and ward-based, as well as citywide.
- Linking faith-based community leaders to resources, government, and other institutions.
- Expanding the capabilities and capacities of the community.
- Expanding the field of possibilities of practitioners.
- Teaching leadership and community change skills.
- Emphasizing an asset-based/self-empowerment framework.
- Holding community-issues forums.
- Developing a neighborhood-information service.
- Using skill-building learning modules.

Such a vision is well within the realm of possibility and deserves the energy, attention, and resources of those who understand the importance and the strategic role that the faith-based sector can play to develop healthy communities.

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