

## Nurturing the Seminarian's Spiritual Growth *Ideas for the Session Liaison*

The Session Liaison's experience can be very meaningful not only for the seminary student but for the liaison as well. In ministry as a liaison the Elder has a unique opportunity to develop a relationship which involves friendship, encouragement guidance, occasional re-direction and joy. The Elder works with the seminarian toward the goal of growth into a church professional prepared to lead from pulpit, in board room or hospital room - a person who is eager to sense God's active presence in any situation. Here are some ideas for helping the Session liaison-seminarian relationship to flourish by mutual exploration into spiritual growth.

1. It is helpful for the Session Liaison to remember that both student and liaison are seeking to grow spiritually. This is a share~ mutual journey. The Liaison need not know the answer to every question and need not feel obliged to be "ahead" of the student in spiritual growth. Indeed, people learn and grow spiritually at different rates~ this kind of growth is one's own experience, and no one is "ahead of" or "behind" someone else. So, Liaison relax and enjoy letting your own spirit be nurtured as you support the seminarian.
2. Pray regularly for the seminarian whose care is your particular responsibility and feel free to solicit the prayers of that person for yourself.
3. Essentially, as you endeavor to encourage the spiritual strength of your seminarian, you are addressing a question to that person: "How is it with your soul?" If it is well with the student's soul, then you can listen to his or her experiences of well-being, 2nd share the joy and gratitude related thereto. If the student is struggling spiritually, together you can explore the nature of the struggle, and encourage the seminarian to continue the struggle. You may need to encourage the student to seek out the counsel of someone on the seminary's faculty or staff. If spiritual life is at a comfortable plateau, neither high or low, that might be something to appreciate, or it might be time to guard against complacency.
4. Another way to get at the matter of a seminarian's growth spiritually, would be to ask the question suggested by John Westerhoff: "What are you and God working on together that gives both of you satisfaction?" (See Westerhoff: Spiritual Life, page 8.) This would be a fine question for each of you to answer to the other.
5. Give the seminarian a "Little Blessing Book" which encourages the student to record each day some experience of God's grace. The experience does not have to be "profound" in terms of rarity (i.e. Today I won the lottery.) It is profound in the fact that a human being became aware of God's activity and presence at a particular moment. (i.e. There was a beautiful rainbow in the sky today, (or) When I was in the line at the bank today, there was in front of me a lady holding a baby, and the baby played Peek-a-boo with me.) A blessing is any experience of grace. Then, later those blessings can be reviewed and remembered with thanks.
6. With the seminarian, when you have some real time together (a few hours), read the explore Chapter 5 of Westerhoff's book. You might share with each other how you are most comfortable/least comfortable praying.

7. At the end of each semester, when finals are over and papers have been turned in (and the student can relax for a little while), reflect together on this question, "Upon what attributes of God do you find yourself reflecting most often?"

8. Other possible discussion questions include:

a. Share with me a discovery you have made this year about God.

b. Share with me a discovery you have made this year about yourself.

c. Tell me how your studies and plans seem to be affecting your family. (spouse, children, parents, siblings, any other significant people.)

9. If the seminarian is married, be sure to listen to any concerns that may arise regarding the spouse and/or children.

10. In general develop an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect so that the student under your care senses your interest and support, and feels "safe" in sharing matters of a personal (confidential) or spiritual nature with you.

11. You might want to write out for yourself a personal mission statement as you approach your ministry as a Session Liaison. You could work alone, or join with other Liaisons who are nearby, to discuss the nature of your responsibility, to learn from each other, and to encourage each other. Be mindful that your Presbytery's Committee on Preparation for Ministry might appreciate receiving a copy of your mission statement, because not only would it help them more clearly communicate with you; it might also provide a guide for other congregations whose Session Liaisons would like to clarify their responsibilities.