

Nurturing the Seminarian's Spiritual Growth - Ideas for Presbytery 's Committee on Preparation for Ministry

With more than fifty Inquirers and Candidates for Ordination to Ministry of Word and Sacrament, there is a clear limit on the amount of time and attention Grace Presbytery can give to each person under our care. Still, the members of the committee manage to communicate with each of these people on a fairly-regular basis, and the committee does its best to devote personal attention and support to each seminarian. The CPM appoints a liaison from the committee to communicate with each seminarian; most of these suggestions could be implemented best by that liaison.

1. It is helpful for the CPM to remember that all participants in the process of preparation: seminarian, seminary faculty, Session, and CPM are seeking to grow spiritually, and that each person/party can enrich the others. All participants in the preparation process are working toward the goal of enriching God's church. The CPM should feel free to solicit from the Presbytery special prayers for seminarians, and various means of support for the committee. The CPM should feel free to seek the prayers of congregations supporting a seminarian.

2. Also, it is helpful for CPM and the Inquirer or Candidate to view the issue of his/her vocation as a *tertium quid* which all are examining together. . This suggests taking a slightly different approach to the tasks of CPM: it suggests that the primary task of the CPM is to help discern God's will for the individual under care, rather than having to be gate-keeper or "judge" of a person's merit.

3. The CPM liaison can pray regularly for the seminarians whose care is your particular responsibility. Likewise, those seminarians can be apprised of your needs and struggles as well.

4. In annual consultation, CPM might spend more time discussing with the Inquirer/Candidate aspects of spiritual growth, decline, stagnation. The Committee is in a unique position to reassure people whose long-held concepts of faith issues (i.e. history of Israel, development of the Bible) are being re-shaped by academic investigation and exegesis. Study itself is a spiritual discipline, and CPM can help the seminarian see that, at the conclusion of seminary study, the student will have re-defined some beliefs, and will "own" those convictions more dearly because they were painstakingly forged. This ministry of encouragement is a special opportunity for CPM.

5. Like the Session Liaison, the CPM liaison or committee might ask the question suggested by Westerhoff: "What are you and God working on together that gives both of you satisfaction?" (Spiritual Life. page 8)

6. If funding could be made available, CPM could sponsor a retreat for those under care.

- They could explore together Chapter 5 of Westerhoff's book on Spiritual Life or

- Discuss the Lectio Divina as a spiritual discipline and as a step after exegesis and before sermon writing as part of the hermeneutic, or

- Explore the message of the Shawchuck book Leading the Congregation.

7. Invite the Inquirer or Candidate to share a discovery made about God through the semester's studies.

8. Invite the Inquirer or Candidate to share something s/he has learned . about his/her character, tendencies in prayer, strengths or weaknesses, since the individual last visited with the CPM.

9. The CPM Liaison or someone appointed by CPM because of particular skills in psychology as well as Christian spiritual growth can review with the Inquirer or Candidate the experience of psychological exams. What was happening in that event? Did the seminarian sense God's grace? God's corrective discipline? God's encouragement? Did the person sense God's involvement in the experience in other words, "What do you think GOD wanted you to gain from this experience? Additionally, the liaison and seminarian could use the information from the Myers Briggs Type Indicator to reflect on Chapter 5 of Westerhoff: Spiritual Life. They could explore together methods of prayer with which they are most at ease.