

Enews for 01/03/2024
They Didn't Teach Me That in Seminary!

When I arrived at my second congregation, I discovered that the session had approved, in concept, the idea of establishing a memorial garden where people could scatter the remains of their loved ones after they died. The taskforce appointed to make it happen included people who wanted to have their remains scattered there one day and gardeners who had some ideas about how to design it. However, to get the project done, we also needed to work with the Zoning Board to write new zoning laws, work with the Clerk of Court to subdivide the property, and get the City Council and the State Cemetery Board to approve the project. All of that took much longer than anyone ever expected (years) and included several rejections before it was all approved. Meanwhile, there was a man waiting to scatter the remains of his wife who died before I was called to that congregation! During that whole process I said more than once "They never taught me any of this in seminary!"

Pastors often say those words while setting up chairs for a luncheon, negotiating repairs to the furnace, dealing with a termite infestation in the education wing, and doing the annual evaluations for church staff. In my case it was only mostly true. I was blessed in seminary to be taught polity by the Rev. Dr. Kurtis Hess, a retired General Presbyterian who reserved the last 30 minutes of our three-hour classes to the question "What do you really want to talk about?" That time gave us the opportunity to talk about those things that are part of ministry but not part of the curriculum. I was also blessed to have a summer internship fall through which sent me scrambling to find another way to fill my summer. I ended up enrolling in the first module of the Certified Church Administrator Program which taught me a lot about insurance, building maintenance issues, and church management software that was likewise not usually part of the curriculum. I commend that program for church admins/secretaries/executive directors/etc. but I also commend it to pastors of small congregations who often wind up handling these things because they do not have the staff to handle it. ([click here for more information on CCA Program](#))

Most presbyteries, including Eastminster, require that pastors be given two weeks of continuing education leave a year. However, as I speak with pastors, they often do not fully utilize this leave which is a shame because this leave benefits both the pastor and the congregation as that pastor learns and grows to be able to serve with more confidence and in new ways. I usually spend some time in the quiet days after Christmas reflecting on my goals for the coming year including my continuing education goals. I encourage our pastors to do the same and our congregations to encourage and support your pastors in taking their education leave. As you do, here are a few opportunities that I commend for pastors looking to fill in what they didn't learn in seminary...

- **Certified Church Administrator Program** – As described above this is a great opportunity to learn more about the administrative side of congregational life! ([link](#))

- **Association of Partners in Christian Education Annual Event (APCE)** – A great way to learn how to teach better, find out about curriculum options, and talk with other church leaders who are struggling to do Christian Education ministry these days! ([link](#))
- **Calvin Symposium on Worship** – Be rejuvenated with wonderful worship while talking about preaching, liturgy, and sacred music. ([link](#))
- **Interim/Transitional Ministry Training I** – With course material on conflict management, mission discernment, and group process this is as helpful for installed pastors as it is for those feeling a call to Interim/Transitional Ministry. In the end, all churches are in transition, so all ministries are transitional! ([link](#))
- **Church Financial Leadership Grant Program** – The Presbyterian Foundation provides grants to help pastors learn how to lead their congregations towards greater financial and missional vitality. They have several pre-approved education programs and are open to funding others that meet that goal. ([link](#))
- **The Arts, Recreation, & Worship Conference (ARW)** – Deepen your creativity, broaden your leadership skills, and experience personal spiritual renewal that will enliven your faith and the life of your congregation. ([link](#))
- **Lombard Mennonite Peace Center (LMPC)** – LMPC has a variety of intensive trainings that focus on family systems theory and conflict mediation. ([link](#))
- **New Wilmington Mission Conference** – An intergenerational (bring the family!) program in our own backyard that brings mission-individuals, pastors, and mission workers together. ([link](#))

That is just a small sampling of opportunities available for pastors to deepen their faith and develop new skills. Also, note that most of these opportunities are not just for pastors; members and other church staff can attend many of them as well. If you or your pastor has benefited from one not on the list, let me know about it so I can share it with colleagues and consider going myself!

May the Peace of Christ be with you,
Barry