

A Denominational Look at Preparing and Qualifying Candidates for Ministry
By Michael Stipp

I enjoy collecting old Nazarene books. When my wife and I were married over 30 years ago, we had no idea that my hobby of collecting books could some day be useful for an ANSR conference. So today, the hour has come. For such a time as this . . . it is time to share with you one of my treasures. It is a copy of Questions on the Course of Study for Licensed Ministers – Church of the Nazarene used by ministers who were preparing for ordination. Mrs. Clyde Carney inscribed her name and October 1932 on the inside cover.

The Preface provided all users instruction on how to use the book. Here is how it worked: If you and I were preparing for ordination the course of study had three options:

1. The Formal Examination Plan – this one was pretty basic. A candidate was asked to read the text book and take a test administered by the district. The study questions were all in this book but when it came time for the exam . . . the candidate would not know which 10 questions were coming his or her way.
2. The College Credit Plan – this plan was straightforward as well. Instead of the candidate being accountable to the district studies board, she or he was under the supervision of the faculty of one of the schools. But to satisfy the district board, a certificate of completion would be provided by the school.
3. The Home Quiz Plan – this was a pretty sweet option as long as a person had good penmanship. The Home Quiz plan (or “distance education”) was administered by one of our Nazarene institutions. There was a lot of work for this plan too – but part of the requirements were stiff!:

“The correctness of the answers, the logical arrangement of the paper, the quality and perspicuity of the English used, the legibility of the writing and the neatness of the manuscript, together with the general grasp of the subject will be the factors in determining the grade of the candidate.”

(Questions on the Course of Study – Church of the Nazarene, Kansas City, n.d.)

In this little book, there are hundreds of questions covering 24 subjects and divided into four year segments (six courses were listed for years 1, 2, 3, and 4). And today, in the year of our Lord 2010, the Course of Study still has 24 foundational courses that are required in every world region of the Church of the Nazarene. The questions have changed. The text books and delivery systems have been updated and there is a greater emphasis on contextualization. Here is the bottom line: Educational preparation is foundational for professional clergy.

Today the Church of the Nazarene has enhanced the expectations of ordination journey.

- The basic Course of Study continues to be outlined in the Manual
- The educational paths for ministers have been widened but the candidate must still be reviewed and interviewed by a district board prior to ordination

- Today’s candidates are evaluated by a working knowledge of the subject matter as well as “Abilities” that impact the minister holistically. The “abilities” were part of discussions and work at the Breckenridge Conferences of the 1990s which brought a fresh voice to the Course of Study. One of the areas leaders at Breckenridge asked was “How can we bridge the gap between expected performance and actual performance of our clergy?” The recognized need came from church leaders, education providers, and laity. Here are few descriptors for Nazarene clergy that were fleshed out at Breckenridge:
 - The Nazarene minister is to “BE”
 - A loving servant
 - Transformed
 - Honorable
 - Wise
 - Self-disciplined
 - The Nazarene minister is to “KNOW”
 - The truth
 - Liberal arts
 - History/tradition
 - Methods of research
 - Classical theological disciplines
 - Relational disciplines
 - The Nazarene minister is to “DO”
 - Develop personal skills
 - Pastoral care
 - Teach
 - Evangelize, Disciple, Nurture
 - Preach
 - Communicate
 - Offer leadership/administration/polity (Course of Study Advisory Committee – USA)

Breckenridge discussions introduced a new paradigm to move from a “text book and test” model and toward an “outcomes learning” model. “Outcomes learning” requires that students demonstrate they have acquired skills and learned content for each subject. There are four goals each beginning with the letter “C” that are to be incorporated into each of the 24 courses. The four Cs are:

- Content
- Competency
- Character
- Context

Learning outcomes stretch the student to have a working knowledge of the subject and speak to overarching themes of the materials. Today’s ministerial students will be asked to keep a journal of their nurturing journey. They will be invited to reflect upon the content as well as record the impact the new information is making in their lives.

At one time the Church of the Nazarene had a “one-size fits all” approach to ministerial preparation. None of us at the ANSR Conference were ordained in 1932. But you probably should know that those seeking ordination in 1934 – received an updated Questions on the Course of Study with a revised recommended reading list! When it comes to preparing our clergy – in our movement . . . we are always moving forward. But in case 1932 roles around again – this author will not have to buy a book!

I have worked with three directors of Clergy Development. Let me share with you something that all three leaders have said – and this is my paraphrase: “When the General Superintendent lays their hands upon the heads of those they will ordain – no matter where they are in the world – those General Superintendents want to make sure that the fundamental standards of education are met through the course of study.” In other words, ordinands in Kansas City have the same educational core as those ordained in Bangladesh. The Clergy Development Department is charged with the responsibility to ensure that a review system is in place for all curriculum used educating our clergy globally.

Here is how the process works: First a curriculum from one of our colleges or universities is sent to the Regional Course of Study Advisory Committee (RCOSAC). For each major the outcomes of each class must satisfy core objectives of the 4 C’s listed above. Once approved the RCOSAC takes the recommendation to the International Course of Study Advisory Committee (ICOSAC) to ensure that curriculum is reviewed and approved. The third step is to bring these courses to the General Board for adoption.

Today, the Clergy Development Department and the International Board of Education work in cooperation to ensure that clergy all over the world have access to quality education. It is important to every global ministry leader to have a Course of Study contextualized so that clergy learn to minister effectively in a culture they are called to serve. The Clergy Development Department encourages a vast array of delivery systems. This paper will describe some of the resources available to clergy preparing for ordination in the USA and Canada region. As a part of this study we will explore a variety of assessment initiatives that help bring mentoring, interviewing and examination to candidates.

This paper will be a narrative of a Samantha Green Brown and Sam Brown, who are characters I created from the numerous stories I have encountered as a Coordinator for Clergy Development. The ministry leaders Samantha and Sam encounter are not fictitious. This paper is informed by an Assessment Summit held in Kansas City, MO in April 2008. I have created conversations from what leaders shared with Clergy Development personnel at the Summit, and also from personal communication from leaders I have contacted in developing this paper. Our movement is blessed to have so many gifted persons creatively leading licensed ministers through the course of study and preparing women and men for ordination. Believe me – “they get it”! The ministry partners who examine the hearts and lives of gifted clergy are praying and coaching and cheering each one. The scriptural theme of the Clergy Development Department is the theme of many who are attending this ANSR conference. “As a prisoner for the Lord,

then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.” Ephesians 4:1 (NIV)

Ministry Scenario 1: Samantha Green - called to ministry.

Samantha Green, a second year student at Southern Nazarene University, and an active member of First Church sensed a call to ministry. She made an appointment with her pastor, Rev. John Miller and explored the tug of God on her heart. Samantha was overwhelmed by the encouragement and support of Pastor Miller. When she left the pastor’s office she could hardly wait to share with her friends on Facebook of her call preach.

Question: What is currently available to Samantha and her pastor?

Clergy Development currently offers a 67-page resource entitled **Handbook For Christian Ministries**, on the web site NazarenePastor.org. The handbook is designed to assist ministry students in four things: 1. Understanding “the call” 2. Need for educational preparation 3. Guidance for ordination 4. Path of life long learning (Course of Study Advisory Committee – USA)

The handbook serves as a compass for mentoring pastors, too. Clergy Development understands that the persons called to vocational ministry are mentored in community. The handbook encourages the invaluable underpinning of the local church. Web resources for the pastor include an application page for the candidate and interview guidelines for the church board.

Ministry Scenario 2: Samantha Green at Nazarene Theological Seminary

Samantha was a bright young woman and serious about her call to ministry. In order to prepare her heart and mind for effective service in a post modern world – she enrolled at NTS. While attending seminary she learned that the school has a “balanced” interest in her as a person as well as a student. There was a focus to develop critical thinking but also a concerted effort to deepen her journey with God through spiritual formation. Although journaling and critical thinking was emphasized in the undergraduate level – the seminary journey was challenging in a fresh new way.

Lessons from NTS:

NTS assigns advisors to new students. Students are required to attend a course on spiritual formation as well as chapel. Assessment takes time as well as academic preparation.

The spiritual formation class incorporates peer groups and relies on an experiential component. Students are asked to write a “rule of life” – in essence this is an in-depth self assessment. Students are asked to design strategies to reach personal and professional goals. Spiritual formation incorporates timely and strategic assessment – but with the goal of a nurturing component. This is a fluid time for students where they encounter restoration, progression, and/or transition. Students update the “rule of life” throughout

their seminary career, and a keep a portfolio that informs their journey through seminary. By the time the seminary experience concludes, students will have been assessed in multiple ways at various stages of preparation (Schwanz and Hardy, 2008).

Ministry Scenario 3: Samantha Green - called to missions

Samantha Green completed a cross-cultural ministry major at Southern Nazarene University and then completed an MA in Missions at Nazarene Theological Seminary. She was fluent in Spanish and believed God called her to be a missionary for the Church of the Nazarene.

Samantha did her homework and learned that missions is different than it used to be. She heard that after college and seminary, she could serve two years as a pastor and then proceed to the mission field. But that scenario changed. She learned that before a candidate can be invited to serve as a career missionary many opportunities of ministry must be explored. She discovered that Mission Mobilization, located at the Global Ministry Center in Lenexa, Kansas, was committed to matching her skill set to a “good fit” on the field through a process called “ministry assessment.”

Lessons of Assessment for Mission Mobilization (MM):

Assessment is not an event. It is a process. No short term missions experience can provide an adequate foundation for launching a long-term cross-cultural ministry assignment. Global MM has incorporated a discipleship concept of evaluating individuals’ skills, for confirming their calling and adaptability. The model of missions is different than it used to be because mission work is different than it used to be, which is reflected in the way candidates are assessed. It is crucial to network in the assessment process – both the candidate and MM discover a “mutual assessment.” Marty Hoskins, Director of Mission Mobilization said, “Mentoring for missions needs to happen at the local level. The pastor needs to guide the candidate through the process.” (Hoskins, 2008)

Mission candidates are encouraged to engage in cross-cultural missions to get exposed to missionary service. Candidates are then introduced to a formal assessment. It should be noted that Global Mission depends on feedback from the Nazarene universities to assess individuals. Youth in Mission has begun to involve NTS during their debriefing time.

The actual assessment is a done with a team of behavioral professionals and practitioners. The candidates communicate with written and verbal interactions. The goal is that each candidate who undergoes this assessment leaves encouraged – for everyone has a place in the Kingdom of God. This multi-method assessment model includes testing, behavioral feedback, observations from colleagues, applications and evaluations (Hoskins, 2008).

Ministry Scenario 4: Samantha and Sam Brown - called to plant a church

Samantha and her new husband, Sam prayed about starting a new church. They felt God prepared them and called them to reach the “twenty-somethings” attending the University of Illinois in Urbana, IL. They were moved and motivated when eight of their friends were willing to relocate and find jobs in the area to support the new work. The Illinois

District Superintendent, Dr. Jim Spruce connected the Browns with his district NewStart coordinator – and the correspondence has not stopped. The district NewStart coordinator required that before a NewStart church could be launched, the Browns would need to participate in a NewStart Assessment.

Lessons of Assessment for NewStart:

NewStart assessment has actually become a venue for training leaders. Research indicates that prior to 1990, only seven percent of new churches succeeded. Assessment became a way to answer the question of how to place the “right” leader in the “right” place. And now those who are assessed and start churches have a success rate of over 90%.

NewStart trains assessors on districts. The basis of NewStart assessment is not to evaluate “calling.” The intent is to help candidates understand how they are “wired” and how God can best use their gifts and abilities. Assessors are taught to become familiar with one particular candidate/couple. NewStart looks for a range of assessors to get various perspectives on the candidates. There are four possible outcomes for those who are assessed:

1. An “unconditional” assessment means a person or couple could go anywhere and start a new church. Assessment works both ways – it confirms the call or redirects it.
2. A “conditional” assessment describes those who would fit as NewStart pastors within certain parameters.
3. A “deferment” indicates there are issues to address before pursuing NewStart further.
4. Those who are “redirected” are mentored to find a way God could use them in ministry.

At the Assessment Summit, Jim Dorsey said, “What keeps this process objective is a scaled evaluation that assessors fill out at the end of the assessment week.” (Dorsey, 2008)

Ministry Scenario 5: Samantha and Sam Brown invited serve on the Pittsburgh District

Samantha and Sam discussed their call to serve as co-pastors with District Superintendent, Steve Dillman. Dr. Dillman was thrilled to have the couple interview for Pittsburgh Second Church, and then went on to explain the assessment process. The Browns were invited to attend a future assessment weekend and were supplied with a packet of resources from the Center for Ministerial Development – located on the district. The Browns were impressed by the weekend schedule and noted the matrix of district leaders. Along with the studies and credential boards – there were additional evaluation/communication components:

- Training Center
- Shepherds’ Advance (continuing education)
- Assessment Center
- Mentoring and Coaches Training
- Teaching Churches

The Browns then reflected about their passed assessments. Sam asked, “Is all of this screening necessary? We both have been tested and evaluated in other Nazarene institutions. Dr. Dillman, what is the value in assessment? Have you seen it make a difference on your district?”

Dillman smiled and put the Browns at ease and said,

“We are now five years into this assessment process and I think I can give you some feedback on effectiveness. Some of this will be apocryphal and some is objective.

Objectively:

- The average tenure of a pastor on the Pittsburgh District has increased by just over two years (from six years previous to our assessments to 8.1 years as of last year).
- The number of men and women called into ministry on our district has increased from a pool of about 20 prior to assessment to over 35 today.
- The number of district-assessed ministers who have been called to churches on our district has increased from four to at least ten (in the last five years).
- The number of NewStarts led by district-assessed ministers has increased from two to seven.” (S. Dillman, personal communication, March 23, 2010)

Dr. Dillman concluded by saying, “. . . you see, Samantha and Sam, we are not trying to put you folks through another screening process, but we are interested in the coaching and mentoring process. Our coaches can actually go into the interview with our candidates. The coaches are assigned according to gender; however, the coach is not necessarily a pastor. The purpose of the assessment is to connect candidates with as many persons as possible. The outcome of the assessment is called a “ministry covenant.” The covenant is individualized for each candidate.

Lessons from the Pittsburgh District:

Steve Dillman has placed all of the Pittsburgh District Assessment resources on the DSLDP website hosted by the USA/Canada Region (www.DSLDP.org). The resources are available to any district leader who wants to explore effective ways of mentoring and coaching ministerial candidates toward ordination. The assessment center is now in its fifth year and Dillman offers this report:

- In regard to attrition, we have had one district-licensed minister admit to moral failure who is going through restoration and attending NBC with the expectation of re-entering ministry in the future.
- We have had one minister whose spouse refuses to participate or support her husband to the point that the DBM couldn't renew his district license. He currently serves as a lay minister.
- We have another assessed minister who had doubts about his call and he has decided not to pursue ministerial licensing at this time (which, by the way, is one of the expressed goals of assessment in that we believe the Holy Spirit will use the assessment information to communicate the call or lack of a call more clearly to those who think that God is calling them to ministry). (S. Dillman, personal communication, March 23, 2010)

Ministry Scenario 6: Sam and Samantha Brown - called to serve on the Southern California District

Sam and Samantha had a wonderful experience at Second church in Pittsburgh and their congregation more than doubled in attendance in 6 years. Their story was featured in Nazarene publications and Clergy Development asked them to offer workshops at each of the summer PALCONs.

After one of the workshop sessions at Point Loma the Browns were greeted by Dr. John Denney, the DS of Southern California. Dr. Denney explained that one of the churches on the district was open and he began to dialogue with the Browns about their philosophy of ministry and what it meant to be Missional. The Browns were puzzled why John was not talking about the “opportunities” of the church and the beauty of the area. Instead, they hear the word “missional” sprinkled throughout the conversation. Samantha asked, “Can you tell us about this district? Is there a district missional theme?”

Dr. Denney outlined how he sought to find the right fit for each open church. Denney said “I try to spend enough time with **church boards** so that I get to know them and study the church and start having a series of discussions with the leaders. Those discussions are designed to help them begin to ask some tough questions about who they are, what they are, why they're there, what is their role in the mission of Christ in that community. It's not easy to define what a missional church looks like because it is, or ought to be, oriented towards the culture in the community where it's located. I try to help them to boil it down to a commitment to the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. I help them to start defining some things that they should be doing and identifying things that they are not doing that they could be doing. And we do all of this before we ever even consider a pastor. In fact, that goes into the process of developing a leadership profile because once we have begun to get some sense of direction on those questions regarding what this missional church might look like, we begin to emphasize that the Lord is more concerned about having the right kind of pastor in that church than even we are because it is His church.” (Denney, 2004)

Samantha followed up, “Do you spend a lot of time assisting churches work through a missional strategy?”

Denny said, “I often will tell a church – for this church to have a real turnaround and become the kind of church that pleases Christ in this community, it's going to take a miracle and that's what we need to begin to pray for, that God will, in fact, provide the kind of pastor that can lead this church from its period of decline or plateau to a new chapter of growth.” (Denney, 2004)

Now was Sam’s turn. “Dr. Denny, how has this approach helped in pastoral changes? How many changes have you had in recent years?”

Denney replied, “Until this past fall, I went about a year without a pastoral change. I've done three this winter. Admittedly, I have an advantage in that not many pastors want to leave southern California.” (J. Denney, personal communication, March 22, 2010)

Lessons from the Southern California District:

John Denney believes like most District Superintendents - that the number one job of a DS is to get the right people in place. Denney also spends a lot of time with church boards on the front end of the research process and speaks to them about change. So while Clergy Development is supporting many models of assessment for ordination preparation, we are hopeful the pastor will become a part of a healthy congregation. When John Denny was interviewed by Dr. Tom Nees in 2004 the discussion revealed an interesting nugget: Because Dr Denney invested time in preparing the church boards, pastors rarely relocated from the Southern California district. Denney would tell boards:

"You need to work with this pastor. Once you have decided to become a missional church and God gives you the gift of a missional pastor you need to support him or her. And when those people come to you (with a complaint), here's what you say, 'Before we called this pastor we as a board decided that we needed to make some changes because we want to become a missional church and we know that change is not easy. In fact our pastor is doing exactly what we've called him here to do.'" (Denny 2004)

Ministry Scenario 7 Sam and Samantha Brown - mentors on the Southwest Region's Ministerial Candidate Retreat.

Sam and Samantha were seasoned ministers and loved Southern California. One day an over-sized envelope arrived with a return address of Center of Pastoral Leadership, Point Loma Nazarene University. Samantha carefully opened the envelope and found an invitation for the Browns to assist with a ministry assessment weekend. The mission and vision of the weekend was fascinating:

“This weekend is uniquely designed to provide licensed ministers seeking ordination with a deeper understanding of their calling and personal development. With your involvement, the weekend will help ministry candidates to:

- Identify personal strengths and gifting
- Receive focused guidance and direction
- Develop deeper self-awareness
- Review the Nazarene ordination process
- Cultivate supportive relationships with District pastor-leaders and other ministry mentors

At the heart of the workshop are three group sessions focused on drawing parallels between great leaders in the Bible and today's need for God-called leadership. In addition, the weekend provides opportunities for reflection during seminars covering such topics as maintaining personal boundaries, the minister's source of significance,

healthy family relationships in pastoral service, “best practices” in ministry, and the spouses role in ministry.

Finally, the weekend includes a private consultation with a professional assessment specialist helping you to discover and understand your ministry profile.” (Shoemaker, 2008)

Samantha placed a phone call to Dr. Norm Shoemaker to explore what this invitation was about. As she was dialing she remembered that the Southwest region covered nine districts (including Hawaii). “How could there be a **regional** Ministerial Candidate Retreat?” she pondered.

When Norm answered the phone, Samantha felt like she was talking to an old friend! Norm said warmly, “Samantha, this is a work in progress . . . but we are incredibly excited that our region is working in strategic partnership. You see this is not just a college thing with Point Loma, we have buy-in from every district superintendent as well as our General Superintendent. We have been asking ourselves ‘How are we doing in mission on the Southwest?’ and quite frankly we are learning to work together.” (Shoemaker, 2008)

Lessons from the Southwest Region:

The nuts and bolts of basic assessment are common with other assessment instruments.

Unique to this regional experience:

- There is intentionality to offer assessment for Spanish and Korean congregations
- Funding is shared
- The entire region is involved
- The region has uniformity –that a Ministerial Candidate Retreat was important to professional development.

Lessons from additional Nazarene Ministry Partners:

I am nearing an end of the paper, but not to an end of available resources! It is incredible what God is doing through Dr. Roberto Hodgson, Hispanic Coordinator of USA and Canada. The program ENTE (Specialized Nazarene Theological Education) now is providing ministerial preparation for ordination in two locations, El Paso, TX and Kansas City.

In El Paso, there are eight students that will complete the 24 modular courses for ordination this year. A graduation ceremony is planned for September 18 at El Paso First Church. The students are from three different districts.

There are 26 Hispanic Ministerial District Training Centers in the USA/Canada and currently 845 students are enrolled in the ministerial programs. The training centers are using the 24 modules curriculum. (R. Hodgson, personal communication, March 22, 2010)

Assessment is not new to the Canada West District. The CWD offers assessment to both licensed ministers and church planters. The district anticipates using Strengths Finder in January 2011. When asked if the assessment center has made a difference in attrition, the District Administrator, Rose Graham offered the following statistics:

“In 11 years we have:

- Assessed 110 candidates
- 19 were not recommended
- 14 were recommended but chose not to apply for a district license

Of those recommended:

- 42 Serve in the COTN now, 25 in a paid capacity
- 11 did serve with the COTN but now Serve in other denominations
- 3 minister in other denominations
- 12 dropped out of the process prior to ordination
- 5 were ordained but no longer in ministry
- 4 were licensed but never held a ministry role

(Graham, R. personal communication, March 23, 2010)

Conclusion

Dr. Dan Copp, Director of Clergy Development said, “The job of Clergy Development is not to create resources for assessment. Rather, we want to build a core that will enable us to better aid the process of assessing preparedness for ordination.” (Copp, 2008)

Admittedly, we at Clergy Development have some challenges before us. There are inequities between districts – what one district does in the area of assessment is not automatically accepted by another district in the United States and Canada. The conversations and scenarios of this paper provide a glimpse into the process of ordination. It should be noted that it is the responsibility of the districts to credential the clergy. Clergy Development’s role is to provide resources for districts that seek assistance.

We are not a church where “one method fits all” – thank the Lord for our diversity. We are unified in our mission, uncompromising in our message and steadfast in our polity. It is this author’s hope that our USA/Canada regional office, our nine educational zones and our 81 districts continue to explore ways of investing and encouraging positive assessment experiences for those seeking ordination.

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