

HAVE COMPASSION ON OUR CAMPUSES! DEVELOPING CURRICULA FOR MINISTRY IN AN URBAN AND NEEDY WORLD

Fletcher L. Tink with Brian Postlewait

(Nazarene Theological Seminary and Nazarene Compassionate Ministries)

Introduction

The census announcements are in! At the turn of the millenium, the world has surpassed a population of six billion residents. It also now tilts with the majority of its residents living in identified urban areas---a first for human history.

The world is also bifurcated into the rich and the poor, with the greatest population explosions occurring in those areas that are the poorest. From 300 cities with over 100,000 population in 1900, there are now over 450 cities with over one million residents. And 20 of the 25 largest cities in the world are in areas outside of North America and Europe. Many of these mega-cities such as Dacca in Pakistan, Jakarta in Indonesia, Cairo and Lagos in Africa are burgeoning despite underdeveloped or deteriorating infrastructures leading to horrendous social crises and, at times, collapse.

The Wesleyan movement was primarily an urban movement in the cities of London, Newcastle and Bristol. The later Holiness movement in the United States had very much an urban character to it, with the cities of New England and Southern California taking the lead. With the fundamentalist splintering of liberal “social action” and “evangelism”, the Church of the Nazarene, from the 1920’s to the 70’s, de-emphasized the role of social works and urban engagement, primarily in North America as the government assumed much of the social care agenda. In the last 20 plus years, that schism has begun to reconnect as seen by the movement among evangelicals that has led to the creation of activist organizations such as Sojourners, Evangelicals for Social Justice, and World Relief, Inc. in ecumenical forms, and Nazarene Compassionate Ministries, U.S./Canada and International within the denomination.

The thesis of this paper is that changing demographics and societal issues are not only confronting the Church with new realities, but also are requiring our Nazarene institutions of higher learning to alter and expand curriculum in an effort to prepare lay persons and ministers alike to relate the holiness message to an increasingly complex and urban world that, at the same time, is becoming increasingly divided between the “haves” and the “have nots.” both within and outside of our denomination. The education and training that is taking place is, for the most part, seminal and segmented, and often overlooks the importance of non-formal and informal influences that mold values, sharpen skills and determine calling while our students are under Nazarene academic jurisdiction.

A Changing Paradigm

The emergence of compassionate ministry takes shape within a broad web of influences. At least four explanations may be given for the paradigmatic shift from the evangelization of souls to a holistic perspective of salvation. The first explanation emerges from the apparent

inability of government to resolve social crises. Indeed, the Bush administration has, in effect, mandated the Church that it exhibits a practical compassionate focus and is seeking to expedite this with the “faith-based” initiative. Most evangelicals see this as a mixed bag, fearful and hopeful of its impact both on the religious institutions that serve and on the public being served. However, unlike Olasky’s “compassionate conservatism”, this should never be an excuse for the government to abscond from its responsibility.

A second reason may be seen in the eroding social distinctions between rural, suburban and urban. Sociologists prefer to see “city regions” as the nexus of economic and cultural power, extending perhaps up to 200 miles outward, that touches on all forms of community arrangements. The same social problems that plague inner city spill outward into suburbia, small town, and countryside. Furthermore, many small towns are becoming destitute precisely because migration to cities denies them their reproductive resources.

The third explanation is the changing geopolitical climate of the world. Many of the limited access nations now will only permit mission organizations to function within their borders that have a primary compassionate ministry focus. Only when credibility is established at this level, can these groups, in some instances, engage more intensely in evangelistic proselytizing.

Finally we are reassessing our own theological. We now recognize that the Church of the Nazarene should have remained outside of the liberal-fundamentalist debate, more properly laying claim to our Wesleyan heritage which took seriously social engagement. Many local churches are now nourished by the past to view mission to body and soul as a whole.

These four sources result in the current interest in Compassionate ministry within our denomination at large and at specific academic institutions. The result is a variety of educational strategies, formal and otherwise, with our North American colleges and universities.

Compassionate Collegiate Activity

The term “compassionate ministry” is as part of our old-yet-new heritage. Understanding the history behind the term compassionate ministry and the current formal and non-formal institutional interest in this ministry provides a basis of analysis for the future.

A Brief History of Compassionate Ministry

Times have changed sufficiently that the term, “Compassionate Ministry” has very much a Nazarene color to it. Just do an Internet word search on the term and one finds that independent churches and Nazarene institutions monopolize this language. Other groups talk more about social action, social justice, social services (Lutheran) or charities (Roman Catholic).

Our Nazarene college campuses have tried to catch the wind in their curricular development, perhaps as the byproduct of an explosion of activity and organization in the area of Urban/Compassionate ministry of the last 25 years. Movements that outlast their founders or the initial dynamism their infancy must and do find ways to overcome generational transition and so demand educational and training structures for such a transition.

There are micro and macro indicators of these structures. The micro indicators include

compassionate institutions such as Community of Hope in Washington, D.C., Golden Gate Community in San Francisco, and The Lambs Manhattan Church of the Nazarene. All of these works were birthed out of a common vision of committed individuals. All three have grown, metamorphized, and sustained themselves through successive changes in leadership. Macro indicators include the subsequent development of many other ministry centers all over the world, impelled by lay leadership and finances. In the mid 1980's, Nazarene headquarters eventually evolved a structure to support and encourage their existence, commissioning the denomination to make central its mission and purpose to the Church. Compassionate Ministry Centers and Good Samaritan Churches were identified and a movement began to be knit together.

Simultaneously, as a response to disasters befalling fellow Nazarenes around the world, spontaneous dollars began to flow to Kansas City. It was the response of a bent knee and an open pocket, and not a response of suited servants around a conference table. Headquarters formed a bureaucracy to manage these monies, establishing Compassionate Ministries International.

What kind of education / training has emerged to assist in generational transition of this movement? We would submit that education / training is developed in three different domains. These three domains of training are expressed in the curricular and corporate life of our Nazarene Colleges and Universities. Setting aside questions of adequacy, we will return to them later. We will explore education / training as it relates to Urban / Compassionate ministries on Nazarene College and University Campuses in three conceptual domains. Robert Clinton in "Leadership Training Models (1984) develops these three domains of learning. They are the formal, non-formal, and informal.

Formal Training in Colleges and Universities

Let us begin with the formal domain. This domain represents training on a highly organized level. It may include curricular inclusion of Urban / Compassionate ministries into degree programs. Likewise it can be associated with the development of training centers and other institutional programs. Several colleges and universities currently have programs.

Eastern Nazarene College (ENC) offers a minor in Urban Ministry. This degree emphasis consists of courses from both sociology and religious educational tracts. Generally 4 to 5 students participate in this program per class year. ENC also offers an urban immersion course during their January term. Approximately 25 students participate in this program annually.

Trevecca Nazarene University (TNU) has developed two Compassionate Ministry minors. A professional minor connected with the Religion Major and another designed to compliment other university majors. This coming year they will offer the anchor course to both minors, entitled "The Ministry of Compassion" with ten to twelve students participating. This program exists in spite of limited local involvement by students in compassionate ministries outside the campus.

Nazarene Bible College (NBC) does offer one elective course titled Urban Ministry, however it is not a part of an emphasis or minor.

Nazarene Theological Seminary (NTS) currently lists an Urban / Compassionate Ministry emphasis for M Div. student. It has a core curriculum of six courses. They include Theology and Strategies of Compassionate Ministry; Practicum in Urban Systems; Practicum in Urban Issues, Introduction to Urban Ministries; Urban Community, and The City in Theological Perspective.

In recent years, NTS sponsored a partnership with The Bresee Institute for Urban Training in Los Angeles, encouraging a full year involvement there. However, that arrangement has been terminated.

Point Loma Nazarene University (PLNU) purposely does not have an urban or compassionate ministry emphasis. However, an emphasis takes form in a “Ministry for Life” minor that can be attached to any degree program. The curriculum addresses the issues by way of partnerships and internships with local churches. For instance, PLNU is leasing a section of the Church of the Nazarene in Mid City to run co-curricular and service learning in conjunction with the local multi-ethnic congregations. Students assume summer internships including extended exposure to neighborhoods within the context and concern of the local church. Course credit is given for internships that require involvement, readings and written reflection.

Southern Nazarene University (SNU) recently created a B.S. in Urban Ministry under the jurisdiction of the School of Theology and Ministry. It is a comprehensive major that includes courses from the disciplines of communications, psychology, sociology, biblical studies and theology. This degree is self-described as preparation for inner city/urban ministry. In addition to the major, SNU offers a minor with the same emphasis requiring eighteen units of specified course work. The flexibility of both these programs allows student to obtain course credit from any approved urban studies program.

Non-Formal Training as Denominational and College Strategies

Training that happens formally represents the highest developmental form of ‘education / training.’ Far less concrete but far from unimportant is the domain of non-formal ‘education / training’. The non-formal domain is characterized less by permanent structures than by evidences of expedited training and flexible strategies. Examples of such include: conferences, seminars, workshops, retreats, or organized short-term experiences.

The most frequent far-reaching example of non-formal ‘education / training’ existing in many of the colleges and universities takes form as organized short-term intercultural experiences. Most notable are the denominationally sponsored ‘Youth in Mission,’ and ‘CAUSE.’

Youth in Mission (YIM) is advertised and coordinated through Nazarene Youth International as a summer long mission immersion for Nazarene college students. In the summer of 2000, one hundred and three students, representing all nine Nazarene institutions in the United States and Canada, and state universities, participated in eight- week immersions. They comprised twenty-four teams in nineteen different sites, in sixteen countries including five North American cities. Part of the Youth in Mission experience includes a two-week briefing and de-briefing.

CAUSE (College and University students Serving and Enabling) has been coordinated through the office of Nazarene Compassionate Ministries International since 1986. Initiated when student leaders from several campuses contacted NCM, its goal is to serve impoverished areas of the world. CAUSE is a short-term entry program lasting from ten to fourteen days with several colleges passing off assignments sequentially to each other. Its thrust is to make a holistic impact in one or two countries a year. From the student’s perspective, CAUSE is designed to teach ‘compassion as a lifestyle.’ CAUSE has had participation by all of the Nazarene Colleges and Universities, however ENC, ONU, TNU and MNU have been among its most activist

participants. As derivatives of these two programs, several institutions have set up direct connections with sites where short terms experience education / training occurs.

Point Loma Nazarene University (PLNU) most notably has set up Love Works which rivals CAUSE in size and scope. PLNU alone sends approximately ten teams per year around the world for two week immersions. Teams meet over several months for service orientation. PLNU also works with local urban churches to conduct a summer long ‘urban plunge’ experience. Students attending worship and are actively engaged in neighborhood activities.

Eastern Nazarene College (ENC) has a direct relationship with the Nazarene Ministry Center in Sighisoara, Romania. Under the direction of Dorothy Tarrant, three to eight students per semester work alongside people and children at the center. During ENC’s January term, approximately twenty-five students engage Romania for an intensive month long program. ENC also designates specific chapel services for the promotion of Compassionate Ministries themes or speakers.

Trevecca Nazarene University (TNU) Like ENC, TNU has designated specific chapel services for the promotion of compassionate ministries. In addition, TNU has made a significant effort towards non-formal ‘education / training’ by way of conferences. Over the past six years TNU has sponsored three conferences dealing with issues surrounding the development of compassionate ministries through the multidisciplinary context. Its most recent conference addressed compassionate ministries and public/private partnerships. Speakers included Ron Sider (Evangelicals for Social Action), Oliver Phillips (Nazarene Compassionate Ministries USA/CAN), Larry Bollinger (Nazarene Compassionate Ministries International), and Gustavo Crocker (Compassion International).

Mid America Nazarene University (MNU) in connection with its agricultural department has developed ‘Jubilee Village,’ a simulation experience designed to awaken individuals to the needs of developing world countries. Students participated in simulated experiences of poverty and hunger of a global village and are challenged to adopt a compassion lifestyle appropriate for Christians. Generally 25 to 40 students participate in this simulation that is conducted several times per year.

Student-led ministries have proliferated on many of the campuses. PLNU, ONU, ENC all have multiple internal ministries of urban / compassionate ministries (five or more each) developed and directed by students. These range from construction crews that do home repairs, homeless feeding programs, meals for elderly, comfort for people with AIDS, etc.

Informal Training

The final domain of education / training is the informal mode. Informal training is the most difficult to document. Informal training happens in the midst of everyday life as students interact with their given context. The intentionality of the training is dependent upon relationships both corporate and personal for it to be of value. Mentoring, reading of relevant books, watching the news can be seen as elements of informal training.

When campus representatives were asked about the ethos of urban / compassionate ministry concern within the student body, all indicated that there is a rapidly increasing “buzz” being generated. Students are participating to a greater degree across the board in all arenas of

‘education / training’ opportunities. That which was at the periphery ten years ago is now at the center. This is evident by the increased involvement in Youth in Mission, CAUSE, student ministries, and specified curricular enrollment.

At some institutions the informal ‘education / training’ surfaces by way of individual professor/student relationships. However, even at institutions where Urban / Compassionate ministries is entrenched in formal modes, these individual relationships still seem to be the catalyst for students moving from peripheral involvement to more formal commitments.

Examples of these relational models include reciprocal relationships between ENC graduates who work in Boston compassionate ministries and students who volunteer. Or the congregational modeling at Church of the Nazarene in Mid City, San Diego for Point Loma students who develop relationships with professors intentionally committed to the city. Or participation of SNU students in the developing work of Jerry Appleby and Reach our City in Oklahoma City. Or intentional communities that have been formed by students immersing themselves into long term commitments without course credit, as an antidote to the instability of college life. This is happening at NTS, PLNU, and MVNC with students who are sharing life together under covenantal commitments.

Strategic Issues for the Future

An assessment of present collegiate activities reveals several issues for future consideration. These issues revolve around several questions concerning curriculum, ministry placement and compassion as an academic ideology.

Curricular Concerns

There is a struggle to determine the essential elements of an urban / compassionate ministry curriculum. Should every campus have a designated “major” or one, both or a combination of these inter-related fields? Should one campus offer the “major” while other campuses provide a minor. By making an “emphasis” or “major” or “minor” do we marginalize the topics as specializations inaccessible to others?

On the other hand, some non-Nazarene schools has discussed integrating urban and compassionate ministry themes throughout the curriculum, seeking to enlist faculty in a recasting of their courses for greater sensitivity to the topics. This is a hard sell given the intransiency of faculty attitudes.

Some suggest that every student ought to take a course in “compassion lifestyle” as an ethics or other alternative in order to graduate. The Nazarene ministerial course of student is currently discussing this as an inclusion to their requirements for pastoral credentialing.

Ministry Placement

What is the marketability of graduates with majors in compassionate ministry. Because it is a somewhat nascent field for student, most ministries do not value formal educational experience, and rely more frequently for job placement on the “old boy network” or understudies.

Furthermore, the current entrepreneurial status of compassionate ministry does not value

or encourage the focus of training, because of cost and limited exposure to organizational realities. Campus life, as a close-ended sub-culture, can be a poor prelude to this; though, admittedly, typical student poverty could be a good orientation if seen as a training mode.

Yet there is great possibility in the combination of multi-departmental training. World Vision is on the verge of sending several hundred of its employees to Eastern College for professional training in a four part module MBA degree or two part module certificate to its staff. Among the modular courses proposed by Eastern are:

- Foundations for Leadership
- Servant Leadership
- Strategic Thinking for Non Government Organizations
- Human Resource and Personal Management
- Perspectives on Poverty and Development
- Managing Cultural Differences
- Organizational Development and Change
- Advocacy, Public Policy and Civil Society
- Spiritual Formation for Christian Leaders
- Applied Research
- Managerial Accounting/Financial Management & Control
- Management of Information Systems
- Marketing, Communications and Fundraising for Non-Government Organizations
- Relief & Mitigation for Disasters & Complex Humanitarian Emergencies
- The Global Economy in the 21st Century
- Integration Seminar

For Nazarene purposes we would also suggest the inclusion of seminars in the area of “Wesleyan or Jubilee Economics” and “Social Justice Advocacy.”

Furthermore, there needs to be a combined efforts of our institutions, academic and ecclesial, to screen and credentialize personnel for service in both fields, and to communicate clearly the opportunities generically and specifically that are available. There also needs to be a “seamlessness” of academic programming that will reduce the guessing game of what qualifies, in what sequence, best produces Christian urban and compassionate ministry leaders.

Re-Thinking Compassionate Ministry

Perhaps we Nazarenes have become too comfortable with the “compassionate ministry” taxonomy to our effort. Very little emphasis is given to transformational ministries, beyond individual conversion. We shy away from terms such as social justice and advocacy, in part, because of our conservative bent. Yet it seems that some dedication of our curriculum must be given to issues of structural change and transformation. Until our academic institutions create a cadre of informed leaders and laity, we will always be engaged in relief rather than reformation, not only to the larger society but also within our own ecclesiastical organization.

Conclusion

There is growing curricular attention in Nazarene higher education institutions to the twin concerns of urban and compassionate ministry. Though we have treated them as dual focus in this study, they are not mutually inclusive, by any means. Urban” itself has stereotypically referred to “inner city” often with racial or ethnic connotations. As such, it has often been identified with poverty, crime, violence, and physiological needs, i.e. housing, food, clothing, medical care.

However, we would posit that “urban” is more expansive than this, perhaps using this composite definition of the “city:”

“A city is an agglomerate social organism containing a population of at least 20,000 persons in a relative density that packages a critical population mass necessary for spawning and nurturing a wide variety of value-systems, life styles and power constellations. Cities are particularly receptive to, and instrumental in creating innovation and change. With this capacity for change is introduced various kinds of dysfunctional effects, including cultural, sociological, economic, psychological and spiritual.”¹

If this is the operative definition of the city, there are, and ought to be, many connecting points with Nazarene university curricula that seek to relate the message of the Gospel to the urbanizing world. Understanding of the urbanizing process and how it impinges on all of life, should be a part of the developmental process of student education.

However, to understand and relate the phenomenon of urbanism to the curriculum in increasingly expansive and effective ways, needs to be supplemented with specific material on “urban ministry” which we would define as “the active engagement of Christians as co-regents with God in the life of the City, for the purpose of identifying, introducing, exhibiting and celebrating the Kingdom of God in all manner of spirit-enhancing forms. These forms include those of specific evangelistic intent, both individual and corporate. For example:

1. Those of **remedial** intent, that is, providing care for the needy, restoring the damaged, reconciling the divided, recycling the discarded, in short, the mission of Jesus as expressed in Luke 4:18-19 and, of the Christians in Matt. 25:35-39.
2. Those of **creative** intent; that is, the building of community both as ecclesia and alternate communities, the embellishment of life in all dimensions.
3. Those of **confrontational** intent; that is, recognizing the evil forces at work and countering

them with spiritual engagement, including intercessory prayer and fasting, encounters of spiritual warfare, and incarnational suffering.”

The training offered to all students on campuses ought to inform and develop skills in each of these areas,

The compassionate ministry piece is not confined to urban areas but often overlays the issues presented above. However, many of the programs serviced by the Church of the Nazarene, such as agribusiness, disaster relief, community health facilities, may operate in non-urban areas, and may have their own international and missiological issues to be studied.

The Church of the Nazarene, given its Methodist theological heritage that so brilliantly exhibited practical forms of ministry to both the urban and compassionate agenda, is in the process of recapturing that vision, connecting it to sound Biblical exegesis which increasingly is motivating laity and students alike.

Our training institutions are trying to respond with an uneven, sputtering sample of courses and student initiatives in these areas. Our hope for this paper is to create heightened dialogue that learns from our efforts and projects practical possibilities for the future.

Works Cited

Clinton, J. Robert (1984) *Leadership Training Models: A Self-Study Manual for Evaluating Training*. Altadena, CA: Barnabas Publishing.

Endnotes

Fletcher L. Tink, *From Order to Harmony: Toward a New Hermeneutic for Urban Mission*, Ph.D. Diss. Fuller Theological Seminary, 1994. This definition of "urban" and the subsequent description of "ministry" are the composite definitions compiled after researching a variety of operative definitions offered by 254 urban ministry strategists and practitioners.

[**RETURN TO COVER PAGE**](#)