



What Training Should Senior Pastors Provide to Associate Clergy?

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Observation has strongly persuaded me that senior pastors often leave their associate clergy in what might be termed limbo, unattended, on a course of non-directed spiritual destiny. Pastors often neglect to remember that the term “associate” literally means “to join as a partner, ally, to connect or join together, to combine.” If this definition holds true, then associate clergy are metaphorically connected to senior pastors, which heightens the expectation of developmental assistance on the part of associate clergy.

Senior pastors and associate clergy are connected by spiritual calling and placement, whereby they are ecclesiastically commissioned to operate as one voice in various tones to convey the gospel of Jesus Christ in words and deeds to congregants each week. Associate clergy can be either a hindrance or help depending upon how well they have been prepared to do ministry by their senior pastor. If pastors and associate clergy are sincerely connected as one, then the spirit of deliberateness must be bi-directional. Associate clergy must be deliberate in insisting upon training, while the senior pastor must be deliberate in providing training.

A word of wisdom to all associate clergy: *Don't wait for your pastor to approach you concerning training. Instead, display a hunger that demonstrates your thirst to become connected with your pastor, that you might glean from their experiential pastoral journey.* It is ultimately each individual's responsibility to secure all of the training that they can to do their best in all areas of ministry to which they have been called.

Pastors, if you have more than two associate clergy it is highly advisable that you establish some type of ministerial training program. Several things should be considered as the program is developed. First, attendance in the program should be mandatory for all associate clergy. Just as the secular context requires its employees to attend mandatory training, the senior pastor must likewise require associates to participate with the same level of commitment. Second, training should consist of at least one monthly session. I would strongly suggest that the time frame range from one to two hours per session. This will assure that training is occurring at least twelve times a year. As minimal as that may sound, much can be accomplished within a year time frame. Third, make sure you establish specific goals, objectives, and expectations, enabling both pastor and associate clergy tools of measurement at year-end evaluation. This will help immensely in determining how to correct, amend, or expand your program. Don't fail to have the associate clergy anonymously evaluate you, and you should evaluate yourself. Fourth, it is critical that the senior pastor provide much of this training even if there are occasions when specialists are brought in to address areas such as: familial issues faced by women in ministry, counseling persons who have been sexually abused, counseling gay teens, or how to design a budget for an individual church ministry, etc. Remember, these associates are connected to you. They are an extension of you when they stand to preach, teach, lead worship, read Scripture,

pray, or provide the benediction. Their every action while serving in the church will shine a light (rightly or wrongly) on what you have and have not done to prepare them for ministry.

Now, what might a ministerial training program include? What courses will be possible, practical, and beneficial in preparing associate clergy for effective ministry? The following are only recommendations that are certainly open to expansion and adaptability to your specific church context. The following five categories can be considered as starter areas that can further be developed into a curriculum that might be used in a theological institute.

First, **address the expansive landscape of various theologies**. Associate clergy who are seminary or non-seminary trained would benefit from consistent exposure to various theological constructs. Although there may be a particular theological conviction conveyed by your church body, clergy should be very familiar with various theologies, understanding their origins, historical significance, how they differ, their foci, and their strengths and weaknesses. Most African American senior ministers with theological training from North American seminaries were taught a predominance of Eurocentric theologies. Most other theologies were seen as heresies or not to be seriously considered. Such dogmatism can lead to narrow mindedness and restricted thinking. Pastors, whether you agree or disagree, permit your associates to engage the pearls and perils of various theologies in order for them to ascertain their own information and develop their theological positions.

Rather than settling for just learning traditional, orthodox, classical theologies of persons such as Augustine, Warfield, Augusta Strong, John Calvin, and Martin Luther, present at the introductory level other existing theologies: *womanist theology* with its foundationalists Katie Cannon, Delores Williams, Emile Townes, Jacquelyn Grant, Angela Davis, and bell [sic] Hooks; *feminist theology*, whose foundational writers include but are not limited to: Rosemary Radford

Ruether, Phyllis Trible, Letty Russell, and Elizabeth Schusler Fiorenza; *Liberation theology*, with Juan Luis Segundo, Jurgen Moltmann, Gustavo Gutierrez, and Paulo Freire as it foundational leaders; *Black theology*, with James Cone, Dwight Hopkins, James Deotis Roberts, Albert Raboteau, and Gayraud Wilmore as some of its foundational proponents; *African theology*, with Kwame Bediako, Joseph Healey, Agbinkhianmeghe Orobator, and Josiah Ulysses Young III; *Latin American/Hispanic theologies* of Ivone Gebara, Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz; and even Indian, Asian, and Korean theology. This list can serve as a starting point to engage the study process. Remember, there remains the study of systematic theology, biblical theology, historical, constructive, Christian, and Islamic theologies that need attention as well. As one can see, the subject matter is almost endless as one studies theology.

Second, **explore the art and craft of preaching.** A productive curriculum in preparing associates for preaching would include, but not be limited to, studies in sermon construction, genres of preaching, models, and historical and contemporary preaching and preachers. Exposure to African American preaching literature is critical for improving black preaching. Have students read Cleophus LaRue's *The Heart of Black Preaching*; Henry H. Mitchell's *Black Preaching*; Miles Jerome Jones's *Preaching Papers*; William A. Jones Jr.'s *Responsible Preaching*; H. Beecher Hicks Jr.'s *Preaching Through a Storm*; Gardner C. Taylor's *The Scarlet Thread*; Marvin McMickle's *Where Have All the Prophets Gone?*; and Martha Simmons and Frank Thomas's *Preaching with Sacred Fire: African American Sermon from 1750 to the Present*, which is the only anthology of African sermons. These are only some of the works that should be explored. Also discuss with associates the excellent works on preaching: Paul Scott Wilson's *The Practice of Preaching*; Bryan Chappell's *Christ-Centered Preaching*; Stephen Alford's *Anointed Expository Preaching*; Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching*; Leonora Tubbs Tisdale's

Preaching as Local and Folk Art; Donald Demaray's *Introduction to Homiletics*; Jana Childers's *Birth of the Sermon*; Alex Montoya's *Preaching with Passion*; Fred Craddock's *Preaching*; and David Buttrick's *Homiletics*.

Third, **teach pulpit etiquette**. Pastors, if you desire your associate clergy to present themselves in a certain manner while occupying the pulpit, conveying and teaching this expectation behind the scenes can assure that your desires are fulfilled. Decide the simple issues that can often be annoying: Do you want all associates involved in worship to wear clergy robes? Are all ministers to enter the pulpit together? Barring an emergency, are associates allowed to leave and return to the pulpit throughout the service? When you provide assignments for the worship service, are there certain ways you want things done? Are they to read Scripture only or read and expound on the text? Do you want them working every Sunday in some capacity of the church and/or worship service?

Establish a schedule so that all associates are afforded the opportunity to work and learn. Hold regular mock worship services for training purposes. Seminaries generally do not teach these particulars for obvious reasons. Therefore, it becomes critical that the senior pastor shares his or her thoughts and do not fail to reiterate them often.

Fourth, **teach leadership**. As senior pastors, we are preparing associates for future leadership roles within their present or some other ministry context. Knowledge of church administration, a congenial but firm leadership style, the ability to do basic counseling and to know when to make a referral, church governance, polity, etc., are some of the key areas that search and personnel committees will look for when hiring pastors, church executives, and general church staff. Three books have served me extremely well in my personal development as a leader and in preparing associate clergy to be leaders: Samuel D. Proctor and Gardner C.

Taylor's *We have This Ministry*; Floyd Massey Jr. and Samuel B. McKinney's *Church Administration in the Black Perspective*; and C. Jeff Woods's *Better Than Success: 8 Principles of Faithful Leadership*. Each focus their content on leading within the African American church context. There are also numerous great secular books on leaderships that associate clergy can obtain.

Fifth, **encourage your associates to commit to continuing education mainly in but also outside classrooms**. Associates should be encouraged to value the importance of being life-long students. Not only must they become students of the word of God, its related subjects of hermeneutics, biblical studies, language studies, theology, etc., but they also the need to consistently read in the areas of poetry, philosophy, technology, literature, comedy, biographies, politics, health, economics, and more. Have your associate clergy take classes and attend lectures; there is so much that we need to know. For instance, today's preacher must understand at a basic level things such as global economics (surely the recent recession has taught us this), the effect of global warming and eco-justice for the poor, and the future of health care. All are subjects that warrant continuous study to determine their impact and import as persons do ministry in the twenty-first century.

In conclusion, I reiterate that the information provided is only a suggested starting point for senior pastors to consider upon initiating a ministerial training ministry in their church. I do not claim any expertise in the area of ministerial preparation. These are only suggestions that I believe may help a pastor who might be considering the subject matter. May this effort find your spirit encouraging to all associates who are under your pastoral care. Remember, they are joined together with you for the work of the kingdom. Amen!