

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: A CURRICULUM TO EQUIP LAY PASTORAL CANDIDATES FOR
SERVICE IN THE PENNSYLVANIA CONFERENCE

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Problem

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, Pennsylvania Conference leaders nurtured a desire for lay pastoral development. However, a cohesive training program did not emerge. Although lay training programs with other foci and the efforts of some local salaried pastors had produced a few lay pastors, a streamlined, accessible, principle-driven, and competency-based program was needed. With an increase in pastor to member responsibility of 64% from 1970 to 2005 and no growth in the number of churches in the same period, the creation of a training program was deemed to have missional import.

Method

An eleven-month curriculum was formed and delivered during 2008. Its purpose was missional. It included the learning components of linking theory to practice, fostering spiritual formation, and utilizing mentoring relationships. It taught the competencies of people skills, biblical preaching, spiritual vitality, spiritual leadership, and team building. Curriculum success was measured by ministry longevity and surveys of graduates, congregations, and mentors.

Results

Twenty-seven students enrolled in the course, eighteen of whom graduated. Graduates reported that their ministry activities increased an average of 60% and their overall ministry ability an average of 66%. In the competency areas, they estimated increases of 27% in people skills, 58% in biblical preaching, 39% in spiritual vitality, 49% in spiritual leadership, and 43% in team building. Lay pastoral mentors and congregations also positively assessed their abilities. The main curriculum weakness was an underdeveloped mentoring program. Five graduates were placed in pastoral positions and all graduates increased ministry involvement.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that a streamlined, accessible, competency-based, and principle-driven curriculum for lay pastor development significantly increases lay involvement in ministry. This finding suggests that broad implementation of the proposed curriculum would have positive missional impact. It may also have implications for other forms of ministerial education.