
INTRODUCTION

KRISTINE STACHE

The teaching of religious leadership can be an ambiguous endeavor. Is leadership taught or caught? Is one born with the gift of leadership or can it be learned? Is it possible to teach about leadership or must it be learned in praxis? How one teaches leadership can vary as much as who teaches and to what end. In the spring of 2012, The Academy of Religious Leadership (ARL) gathered for their annual conference to engage in conversation on this theme: *The Teaching of Leadership: Equipping, Training, Forming?* Through presentations, papers, directed conversation, and even play, we explored methodologies, theories, and theological education institutional culture to reflect on what it all means for teaching leadership.

The essays in this volume of the *Journal of Religious Leadership* represent the variety of presentations that engaged the academy in reflection and conversation.

Our goals were not to come up with a preferred methodology or list of how-to's, but to participate in mutual learning and broaden our own perspectives around this shared passion.

The four essays included in this volume offer us very different entry points into the conversation. The first paper introduces the teaching of religious leadership, creating a foundation for, and setting parameters to begin, our discussion. It is followed by two essays that introduce specific methodologies and implications thereof in the teaching of leadership. The first explores how provocative play can be employed to take the teaching of leadership beyond strategies and concepts to understanding and reflecting upon attitudes, beliefs and values that shape our students as leaders. The next essay looks at the importance of peer learning groups in the leadership formation process

Kristine Stache served as president of the Academy of Religious Leadership (2012-2013) and is Assistant Professor of Missional Leadership and Director of Certificate Programs and Distributed Learning at Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa

post seminary. The volume ends with an extensive report from five seminaries sharing their research into how students of their academic institutions are shaped by an ecology of vocation.

This volume of essays begins with a piece written by Dr. Norma Cook Everist on “The Teaching of Leadership.” Dr. Everist sets the stage for a theologically grounded conversation, using ecclesiology to assess the theology of methodology. She proposes that teaching is more than passing on information; the equipping, training and forming of leaders for the church in the Twenty-first Century is about creating trustworthy learning environments where leaders can be challenged, encouraged and gain confidence in their own abilities. As beings created in the Image of God, we are formed for a call to ministry by who we are prior to formal theological education; how we are shaped during our time of study; and beyond, as we live out our vocations day to day. This essay is accompanied by sets of reflection questions for your own study or with groups of learners.

Robert Martin and Russell West offer us an opportunity in their article, “*Insisto Rector: Provocative Play for Serious Leadership Learning*,” to explore ways that leadership learning could be “enhanced through pedagogies of play.” Play, they argue, allows participants to move beyond the immediate, cognitive understanding of decisions and activities, and brings a deeper level of analysis looking at the values, beliefs, and attitudes that shape decisions and ideas. But play in and of itself is not enough. The role the instructor has in setting the boundaries for play and guiding a thorough debriefing at the end of play is vital to the learning that occurs through play.

The third essay, “Learning Religious Leadership In Situ,” written by Willem Houts and David Sawyer, addresses the need for leadership development to continue beyond the days of formal seminary. The authors propose a model for the continued development and formation of leaders in first call settings. Formal education is not enough to develop ministry leaders in today’s ever-changing world, they argue. Intentional peer learning groups for continued reflection and accountability are needed for the ongoing formation process.

This paper draws on both personal experience and current research on the effectiveness of peer-learning groups

The final article is a report on a recent comparative study looking at “The Ecology of Vocation” at five different seminaries representing distinctive faith traditions (Fuller Seminary, Harvard Divinity School, Luther Seminary, The King’s University, and Methodist Theological Seminary of Ohio). Under the direction of project leader Scott Cormode, each seminary set out to create a map of the relationships and interconnectedness of networks that shape the formation of their respective students. Specifically, the ecology explored included five key parts:

1. Formative faith experiences
2. Faith during college and one’s first career
(if applicable)
3. Congregation of call
4. Seminary years
5. First steps into ministry

However, through this study, each institution also discovered, unexpectedly, that one’s institutional ethos and culture played an important role in the shaping of their faculty and delivery of education. The mental models of their students were shaped not only by each student’s ecology of vocation, but by the mental models of their academic institutions, professors, and congregations, which shaped the research methodologies of this project as well.

So I invite you into this ongoing conversation about the teaching of religious leadership, as we continue to be equipped, trained, and formed in our own quests, to understand how best to journey with our students, academic institutions, and organizations in the ongoing process of developing leaders in ministry.

