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VIEWS & NEWS

on Education of Episcopal Colleges

Service: The Intersection of Church and College

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What does it mean to be a Church-related liberal arts college? And, a question as hard, what can be the use of a consortium of distinctly different Church-related liberal arts colleges, all of which have answered the first question in various ways? Can such a consortium serve the colleges, the Church, and the wider society in some significant way consistent with profession of the Christian faith and commitment to liberal education? In the abstract, the questions would be puzzling. In the concrete case of the Association of Episcopal Colleges, made up of nine Episcopal Church-related colleges in the U.S. and overseas, the answers are clear, simultaneously posing extraordinary opportunities, challenges and solutions.

First, we ask, what is the purpose of the liberal arts college and the mission of the Church, and is there a point of intersection?

The goal of a liberal arts education, defined and redefined over its course from the Platonic Academy to the modern college, has at its heart the extension of the experience of an individual to include vi-

cariously other and different human experiences. Through reading and observation, the study of languages and systems of logic, literature and philosophy, history of times past and people far away, the liberal arts student learns to reach beyond the confines of his/her own experience into the minds and souls of other cultures and share the insights of other, sometimes very different, individuals great and small.

The Christian Church, on the other hand, has as its mission the lifting up of the redeeming love of Christ to all persons. Such a message begins with our truest and best effort to understand and appreciate the conditions of another's life and his/her way of knowing, system of beliefs, and values. Theologically, as Trinitarians we celebrate the diversity of God and look

"Education and the Church share a common goal of calling us ... to empathize with others whose backgrounds and beliefs are very different from our own."

for God's nature in the variety of the human family. To be bearers of Christ's love, we must seek first to empathize with others, to be able to see from their vantage point, to walk in their shoes.

So we arrive at the first point of intersection of the liberal arts college and the Church. Parker Palmer has called this learning to feel with and for another "educating for compassion."¹ And it must be added that to achieve these ends, the method of the college cannot be intellectual exercises alone, nor can the Church's mission be realized solely by emotional fervor. The breaking down of inaccurate stereotypes and limited perspectives is hard work, challenging our most precious held folklore, requiring a confrontation with ourselves that raises questions at the core of our being. For at center, we are protective and narrow. We use both mind and heart to defend and justify ourselves against others. Education and the Church share a common goal of calling us out of that shell to allow us to be connected, to understand, to empathize with others whose backgrounds and beliefs are very different from our own.

¹Parker J. Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known: A Spirituality of Education*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983.

This mission of Church and college takes on a special imperative in our time. The global village has become a reality. Our need is for forgers of peace, capable of bringing to the bargaining table—whether directly or as citizens influencing the policy of government, business or the Church—a sophisticated knowledge of the world, the ability to see with the eyes of those whose experience and point of view differ markedly from our own, and the intellectual acumen which allows the identification of areas of mutual interest on which peaceful solutions can be built.

Such skill begins with what may be called international/intercultural literacy. But as Americans we are woefully ignorant. Our vacations in Europe have not made us bilingual; our travel to the Third World, such as it is, is confined to the Nairobi Sheraton or Manila Hilton. When we go to Latin America, it is often to find "facts" to shore up an already well-established political philosophy, whether of left or right. And when we pass through the Third World Within, in our cities and among our rural poor, we children of suburban affluence often do not look very deep or very far. We are ignorant because we ignore, and we ignore because we know that the seeing will demand a response.

And thus we come to the second point of intersection between the Church and the liberal arts college, for the challenge of college and Church to educate for understanding takes us only half-way in our mutual mission. The second point of educating for compassion lies in the call

to public and human service. For the Church there can be no question, and no lengthy exposition is needed. Our incarnate Lord healed, fed, taught, touched. Compassion implies action.

In the academy there are those who, upholding the legacy of the nineteenth century German university, maintain that knowledge must be for knowledge's sake only. But the mainstream of liberal education—from Plato's philosopher/king through Erasmus' Christian prince to Jefferson's educated citizenry and Dewey's governance of democratic institutions—has held that the *raison d'être* of education is the application of knowledge to the addressing of human problems. The concept of "noblesse oblige" has evolved in the Western world to mean the obligation of those whose privilege it has been to be college-educated to work actively for the public good.

When as Church and college we conclude that our mutual responsibility is to educate for understanding, compassion and service, we ask how we are to achieve this aim. What pedagogy do we employ, what programs do we design? If we are to put teeth in our conviction, we know that the rhetoric of "Commencement Sunday" or college convocation will not be enough. Have we the means, the experience, the structures? The pedagogies are evolving and yet imperfect. But of all our institutions, Church and college are best qualified to accomplish the task. It was, after all, Christians who, carrying the Gospel to all nations, were the first true internationalists, and from the wandering

scholars of the Middle Ages the modern university was born.

And today, the vast network of the Anglican Communion, with its institutions of higher learning, its churches and its hundreds of service agencies, is an unmatched resource for the education of our young.

Drawing upon this structure, the Association of Episcopal Colleges has initiated a series of programs for college students—those at Episcopal Colleges and others—which bring together learning and service in various patterns. In some which we call service-learning, the experiences of service and learning are tightly joined so that the service becomes a kind of field study for the social sciences. Using the service as "meat" for academic inquiry, the students work under qualified academicians: reading, doing research, writing papers and conducting case studies. But it is a learning which goes beyond the traditional "observe, record, analyze and conclude," for the students are not only observers, but participants and contributors as well. They keep a journal of their own growth in understanding those with whom they work and whom they serve, and examine their own assumptions and values. Some would call this theological reflection, though of course not all students give their work such a label. Other programs place students for a summer, semester or year in Church-related service agencies to learn informally by observation under the direction of a

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Dr. Linda A. Chisholm with the late Rev. Dr. L. Brent Bohlke

"By placing students in an intercultural/international setting for service and by asking them to study and reflect upon that culture in relation to their own, students gain a new perspective on human life. Equally important, as they perform needed tasks which without their help would remain undone, they discover both the need for and rewards of service... and develop a sense of self as giver."

professional supervisor and to reflect upon the experience.

The pedagogy of these programs is simultaneously new and old. It is new in that it is practiced in places new for higher education, including the Third World. Among the current locations for Learning Through Service are Kingston, Jamaica; inner-city London; Guayaquil, Ecuador; Manila, the Philippines; a leper colony in Liberia; a shelter for the homeless in Los Angeles; a soup kitchen in New York City; a program for street children in the South Bronx; a home for neglected and abused children in Nevada; and church missions in Appalachia. The pedagogy of Learning Through Service establishes a new rhythm of reflection and action, uses new teaching resources, suggests a less passive and more self-directed student who will demand a new relationship of teacher and student, and requires both faculty and student to adopt a new definition of and stance towards "course material." The country and culture of those the student serves become the heart of the curriculum, the object of change the student him/herself.

But the means of learning and the values implied are age-old and honored. Reflection upon experience is, after all, the most fundamental of means to human learning. By placing students in an intercultural/international setting for service and by asking them to study and reflect upon that culture in relation to their own, students gain a new perspective on human life. Equally important, as they perform needed

tasks which without their help would remain undone, they discover both the need for and rewards of service. As they care for the young, the sick, the handicapped and the elderly; as they teach the illiterate and jobless; as they build bridges and repair churches, students develop a sense of self as giver.

Erik Erikson has defined the developmental task of the young adult:

In youth, ego strength emerges from the mutual confirmation of individual and community, in the sense that society recognizes the young individual as a bearer of fresh energy and that the individual so confirmed recognizes society as a living process which inspires loyalty as it receives it, maintains allegiance as it attracts it, honors confidence as it demands it.²

Appealing to both the idealism of youth and the longing for exploration and adventure, the Learning Through Service programs invite our young to be partners in the Church's and colleges' quest for understanding and call to service, and the experience of Learning Through Service becomes the vehicle for the "mutual confirmation between student, Church and society. As students study and reflect on their own cultural background in relation to others, gain competence through the practice of social and technical skills, and grow to independence by managing study, work and living arrange-

²Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth & Crisis*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1968, p. 241.

ments, they discover they are productive and valued.

The Carnegie Foundation's recent report on higher education recognizes the importance of this dimension of education. It attacks parochialism, intellectual and social isolation which "limits vision," calls for men and women who "not only pursue their own personal interests but are also prepared to fulfill their social and civic obligations," and holds out the prospect that higher education reformed may deepen and renew the channels of our communal life and help us to understand the realities of our dependence on one another. To that end, the report recommends:

- that all students complete a service project as an integral part of their undergraduate experience;
- that colleges offer deferred admissions to high school graduates who devote a year to voluntary service;
- that voluntary service be recognized in the admissions process.³

The Learning Through Service program of the Association of Episcopal Colleges is in place, prepared to respond to the challenge of the Carnegie Foundation, prepared to contribute to the future leadership of Church and society, and prepared to draw out the best in today's college students.

³Text of Carnegie Recommendations on Undergraduate Education, "The Chronicle of Higher Education," November 5, 1986.