

Doctor of Ministry Education: Becoming Transformed in the Middle of the Leadership Journey

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Introduction

This essay explores two significant expressions of what it means to engage the process of “becoming transformed” in the middle of a theological journey aimed at educating an advanced leader at the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in Atlanta, Georgia. The first expression of such transformation learning occurs at the institutional programmatic level, and the second at the personal level of the Doctor of Ministry (D.Min) learner. For persons involved in D.Min. teaching and learning, assessing and planning according to the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) standards, the academic journey toward offering and obtaining the D.Min. degree is a challenging one. Advancing the practice of ministry through leadership education at the D.Min. level rather than the more familiar Ph.D. requirements, is but one of the many challenges facing US theological education today. Institutions unable to meet those challenges then fail to produce the leaders necessary to help congregations, denominations, and community agencies thrive.

By calling attention to the metaphor ‘middle of the journey’, this article references two analytical perspectives on the leadership journey in doctor of ministry education at ITC. The first is as an HBCU institution of higher learning that recently celebrated fifty years of existence. The recent anniversary served as a “Sankofa” moment, an occasion not only to look back and reflect on the rich heritage of a unique project of ecumenism, but

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also to give attention to shaping the next fifty years. The second perspective of concern is that of the contemporary D.Min. learner at our institution, whose chronological ages fall between 40 and 58 years of age. These learners are keenly aware both vocationally and epistemologically of where they are situated in life as leaders. In interviews, they often express that the D.Min. educational process occurs in the middle of or at an influential place in their professional journey as religious leaders. As a result of attending to the visions, aspirations, and perspectives of both ITC's institutional stakeholders as well as of students, past and current, we have not only revised the curriculum and restructured the delivery system, but also renewed our interest in learning from persons with expertise in ministry and from faculty who represent ITC's concerns for a rigorous and high quality D.Min. education. By the latter, I mean an education that is vocationally, theologically, and spiritually meaningful, socially relevant, and that is the result of a liberating and transforming spirituality.

What follows is a description of the newly reframed D.Min. program at ITC that will be launched in the fall 2016 semester. The reframed doctor of ministry program is the result of engaging a four pronged methodology: of being attentive to the wisdom shared by many, such as President Wheeler's wisdom in the lead article of this journal issue; of listening to the concerns and needs articulated by the ITC community in general, and by the student and faculty stakeholders in particular; of incorporating the concerns of the ITC faculty for an academically rigorous D.Min. program; and of mining the existing rich resources of the ITC legacy in theological education.

Becoming Transformed: The Institution

The newly revised mission statement reminds us that "ITC is a Christian Africentric ecumenical consortium of seminaries and fellowships that educates students who commit to practicing justice and peace through a liberating and transforming spirituality to become leaders in the church, and local and global communities." Its mission is "to be the preeminent world center for Africentric theological engagement developing leaders to advance God's mission of love, justice and restoration in the world." As the ITC community of students, faculty, deans, staff, and administrators has discovered, the reality of reframing a D.Min. program, one capable of responding positively to the growing challenges of experienced pastoral and busy ministry leaders who seek a

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relevant and accessible theological education is an academically exhilarating and challenging task. The fact that ITC's twenty-year old D.Min. curriculum was antiquated and in need of improvement was most obvious to stakeholders, especially the students, and some faculty who taught in the program. What D.Min. learners desired was an adult-friendly, rigorous, and flexible interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary core curriculum for advanced ministry leaders that was common to all D.Min. students, as well as the space for a specialty curriculum.

In recent years, students have assessed the core D.Min. curriculum as 'good' but out of sync with their needs in terms of course offerings, and not conducive to learning given their growing responsibilities and what is expected of them as ministers. These assessments had to do both with the ordering of courses and with the requirement that students attend monthly courses on campus; the latter caused undue burdens (in terms of transportation costs, time, and energy), especially for those students who were not regional and had to fly in monthly to attend campus based courses. In addition, in a world in which technology enables advanced education online, ITC's D.Min. program had not yet incorporated elements of distance learning, such as the on-line Moodle software, in any significant way. And finally, although the D.Min. program had in place a three-track educational cohort model for (1) chaplaincy, (2) pastoral care specialty, and (3) church and ministry leaders, only the third was viable, dynamic, and attracting students. In 2011, in consultation with the D.Min. committee the director of the program began to articulate the need for change within the curriculum, and the need to broaden the outreach and impact of the program. Alums of the ITC D.Min. program provided valuable input, as did faculty, administrators, denominational deans, and students. A carefully revised job description for a new director of the program was crafted in 2012 by an appointed search committee, which, on the retirement of the existing director, subsequently initiated the search process resulting in the hiring of a new director of the program in 2013. At the end of the fall semester, one of the most significant and fruitful activities was the visit by a consultant expert in D.Min. education who advised administrators, faculty, and members of the D.Min. committee (a governing body) to articulate a new vision for their program, and who

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identified elements of a process that would enable ITC to reframe and revise its current organizational structure and curriculum.²

The processes of assessing and planning that led to ITC's reaffirmation of accreditation (December 2015) enabled the leaders of the D.Min. program to acknowledge not only areas of strengths and future growth possibilities, but also areas where improvement was needed, including better curriculum assessment measures and the means of evaluating them. As a result of engaging in an intentional season of observing and participating, teaching and learning, consulting and researching, reflecting and discerning, in the fall of 2016 we launched our reframed D. Min. program. The fact that this occurred as we observed the 50th anniversary of the ITC speaks to the words of the title of this essay and references the metaphor of "middle of the leadership journey." Three goals emerged as program student learning outcomes (PSLO) for the newly reframed program.

PSLO 1 Connecting Theology, Education, and Professional Vocation

Students will enhance existential and theoretical knowledge related to the practices of ministry in order to address significant issues related to their professional vocation.

PSLO 2 Intrapersonal and Intercultural Leadership

Students will demonstrate and discuss examples of ministry related to their comprehension and analysis of both intrapersonal and intercultural competencies required to serve as religious leaders in a variety of vocational and professional settings.

PSLO 3 Integration and Application

² Dr. J. T. Roberson provided invaluable knowledge and insight as he prepared and presented the ITC faculty and staff with a new vision of possibilities for doctor of ministry education in December 2013. Because several of the ITC faculty had either served as mentoring faculty in the D.Min. program when he served as the dean of the Doctoral Studies at United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH, or were graduates of the D. Min program under his leadership, he is acknowledged as a respected administrator and theological educator within D.Min. education. He was assisted by Dr. Constance Chamblee. They both played an important role as educators in the 2014 annual D.Min. conference as well.

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Students will conduct original qualitative and/or quantitative research projects appropriate to their area of concentration and report effectively their professional practice that gives evidence of the both intra-disciplinary and interdisciplinary generativity in the practice of ministry for church, society, and global community.

The entire ITC D.Min. process is organized to prepare students to defend a ‘Replicable Model in Ministry’ dissertation project. The preferred research method is applied research, the development of an action-based research-in-ministry project based on situated learning. Action Research is a participatory process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. The dissertation projects are generative in the sense of promoting dialogue about what constitutes a learning community that seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, the church (local, national, and global) and the world community, including the African Diaspora.

The goal of the D.Min. Program at ITC is to attract, support, educate, and nurture women and men in leadership in Christ’s Church and the world who require professional education beyond the level of the M.Div. and who are capable of fulfilling the mission of the institution. Students who graduate from our D.Min. program will (1) demonstrate a deeper passion for God in relation to the practice of a liberating and transforming spirituality; (2) demonstrate the ability to apply intercultural skills required to serve as a religious leaders in a variety of vocational and profession settings; and (3) will conduct an original dissertation project as a study of action-based research that offers them professional development and results in a publishable article that can instruct others in the church and the academy. Working individually and in cohorts (learning communities) with faculty, mentors, peers, and community leaders, students will be provided with a supportive and caring community, a time for spiritual renewal, and an opportunity to study and learn globally within a specific context of the African Diaspora.

In an effort to improve the overall D.Min. program it was determined that we should suspend the admission of students during the 2015-2016 academic year. This gave us concentrated time to transform the D.Min. program’s structure and curriculum, and to develop a high quality attractive academic professional program for busy working church and

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community leaders. At the May 2015 retreat, faculty identified aspects of teaching and student formation that they desired to be addressed within the revised D.Min. program. These suggestions were analyzed and discussed during the following months by the D.Min. committee and other stakeholders. At the January 2016 D.Min. committee meeting, ideas and suggestions received from all stakeholders were discussed and insight provided, including the recommendation to reduce the number of Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLO). Since then, monthly meetings with the new fall 2016 mentoring faculty members continue to aid in refining the curriculum and programmatic processes.

While many impactful discussions were held, one of the most insightful discussions occurred around the concept of “re-disciplining”—meaning the ability (and willingness) of seasoned faculty members to “re-discipline” or re-organize and re-communicate one’s discipline to demonstrate it as a vibrant, coherent, and interesting field of study that is capable of shaping a response to the kinds of questions, assumptions, and research that are relevant to the practice of ministry. We have discovered the need to provide contextual opportunities for religious and community leaders to engage one another as leaders, to focus on specific skills sets within the cohorts as intentional learning communities, and the need to retain artifacts in e-folios. As we continue the assessment and planning process, we are discerning how best to energize and equip students as change agents, catalyst who are able to move outside the bounds of their immediate needs and job descriptions in order to make a lasting impact in the community and the world. Strategically, in addition to attracting pastors, church and educational ministry leaders, denominational executives, and military chaplains, we desire to broaden our marketing and recruitment efforts in order to attract leaders involved in social justice and peace-making vocations. Internally, we recognize the need for more collaboration and communication with every office within the institution. Externally, we want to help the public/ church to understand the skills that D.Min. graduates can expect to obtain and therefore our confidence in the ability of our ITC graduates to successfully implement projects of transformation, projects that will bring about deep change at both the personal and organizational or systems levels.

Becoming Transformed: The D.Min. Learner

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As previously mentioned, the title of this essay, “Becoming Transformed in the Middle of the Leadership Journey” refers not only to the transformational journey of a theological education program, but also to the transformational journey of the subjects of Doctor of Ministry education, that is the students, the D.Min. learners. Contrary to the popular myth that D.Min. applicants are only interested in obtaining the title of “Dr.” for self-aggrandizement purposes, at ITC we have found that the overwhelming majority of applicants are intentional about engaging in academic studies again (a reference to the first M.Div. degree required for admission into D.Min. program), and look forward to the intellectual challenge. Because of the D.Min. admissions requirement of “proven ministry experience,” rarely is the motivation to obtain the degree prompted by ecclesiological purposes related to ordination, or increase in salary. Instead, D.Min. learners tend to be self-motivated individuals and are primarily interested in developing a ministry (congregational, denominational or non-profit) strategy; assessing a community need; or researching a new ministry approach. In other case, the motivation is personal, sometimes the result of being in a difficult place in the practice of ministry and wishing to learn or enhance a particular ministry skill in one’s own situation. By choosing to advance their education at ITC, whether African American or not, D.Min. learners recognize and appreciate the Christian values and beliefs that place the African American worldview, experience, and practice of ministry at the core and not at the periphery of theological education and academic study.

Today’s theological leaders that apply to ITC’s D.Min. program tend to be older, second- and sometimes third-career persons. Psychologically these students are different from the previous generation in that they are smarter, but also more impatient. They can multi-task, have various levels of computer literacy, but have a shorter attention spans. They know what they want, and they want to choose the kind of D.Min. education they can buy. Not all were brought up in the church, but all have had a significant religious or spiritual experience. Financially, the younger D.Min. learners are better off than their parent’s generation, and they tend to have more debt, especially in the form of student loans. With a few exceptions, the older applicants to the D.Min. program are at a good place economically and psychologically. Family oriented, many find themselves responsible not only for their children (and/or grandchildren), but also for aging parents. As the enrollment of women in our program continues to increase, so too does our knowledge of how these women impact and are

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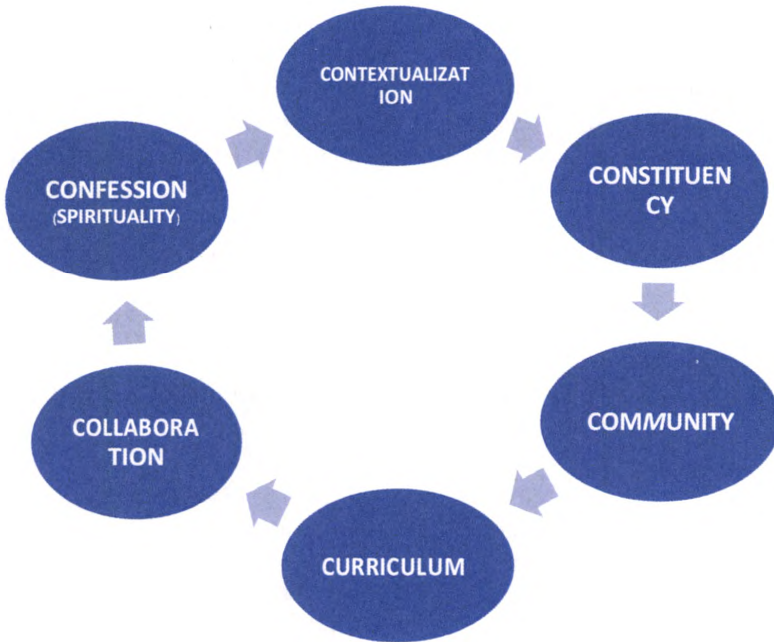
impacted by leadership both within and beyond traditional church practices. They all articulate the desire to become more proficient in the ministries in which they are currently involved.

When asked about their expectations or vision of D.Min. education, what applicants most often articulate is this: they want to belong to a teaching institution that respects them as adults, acknowledges multiple forms of intelligence, and broadens and deepens their current leadership skills. Related to the internal life of the church, applicants want to learn how to address systemic changes, transform conflict, deal with congregational diversity, and create healthy congregations. Related to the external life of the church, they want to know how to organize neighborhoods for change; to address community issues as a public leader; and how to work with diverse cultures. As D.Min. learners, students want to utilize technology to enhance and make education flexible; and they want faculty that will support their learning with resources, persons, and tools based on best practices. According to the students currently enrolled in ITC's D.Min. program, these are the processes and precepts that are necessary in order to "become transformed while they are in the middle of their leadership journey."

Reframing D.Min. Theological Education at ITC

The revised D.Min. program implemented in the fall 2016 academic year is the outcome and by-product of the intentional guided and critical thinking and re-shaping of program learning outcomes, a restructuring of the academic semester, and a forensic examination of the curriculum. Stakeholders, represented by various focus groups, contributed to an understanding of six important considerations necessary to revising or reframing an educational program.

Figure 1: Significant Components of Urban Theological Education



As the only SACOC and ATS accredited theological institution actually located in urban Atlanta, we identified six important factors that have proved to be beneficial to assess and evaluate the D. Min. academic theological program.³

³ See *Transforming the City: Reframing Education for Urban Ministry*, by Eldin Villafane, Bruce Jackson, Robert Evans, and Alice Frazier Evans. Although this work was originally presented as categories utilized in the academic sub-

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Over a four year period, the D.Min.staff and committee discerned best instructional practices, strategies, and a structure to provide D.Min. students with the understanding, knowledge, and skills that will enable them to provide meaningful public leadership to predominantly African American churches, social agencies, and community-based institutions that are facing complex challenges in multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious neighborhoods, as well as in the global community. The incorporation into the program of intercultural competence was originally developed in an effort to bring balance to the current emphasis on intracultural competence. However, in light of the growing need and the number of societal issues that impact or influence ministry practice, issues such as hate crimes and racism, terrorism, immigration, homophobia, xenophobia, misogyny, cultural appropriation, and others, we recognize that intercultural competence, specifically focused on the ability to improve effective and appropriate communications with people of other cultures and religions, has emerged as an important skill to develop, not only within US urban communities, but throughout the world. The practice of listening enabled us to hear these crucial ten concerns:

That we

- (1) Include experts (pastors, educators, community leaders, and others) as mentors to work with faculty to empower learners by providing the tools to understand the D.Min. experiences, and to improve and document effective practices
- (2) Become andragogy-centered, willing to explore who D.Min. advanced learners are, what they know, and what they still need to know in order to become proficient in ministry. It is the role of the mentoring faculty to connect important information to the content of the curriculum and best ministry practices and thus pass it along to students⁴

discipline of urban missiology, because of its commitment to people, the categories speak to key phenomena impacting both intercultural and interfaith competences.

⁴ *Facilitating Learning with the Adult Brain in Mind* by Kathleen Taylor and Catherine Marienau (2016) affirms ITC's current curricula emphasis on narratives, story-telling and story-sharing. The authors challenge long-held assumptions that logical, rational thought is the preeminent approach to knowing by showing that feelings and emotions are essential for meaningful learning to occur in the embodied brain.

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- (3) Develop and broaden educational opportunities to collaborate with local, public, and global partners, organizations, and educational institutions that are important to learning
- (4) Design new cohorts based on the needs of advanced learners in conjunction with denominational and societal needs
- (5) Develop a high quality and distinctive D.Min. instructional faculty that supports the curriculum. These efforts will allow us to better support the current students, attract new students, and mature with them for the years to come as their professional needs change
- (6) Intentionally seek the active support and participation of the current denominational deans and the ecumenical fellowship coordinator, and new ecclesiological partners (such as the Lutheran Center, the Seventh Day Adventist Church) in meaningful ways and at various levels
- (7) Design the directed studies course as either the opportunity to complete a portion of the intellectual work necessary for their dissertation project, to engage a body of literature, to conceptualize an idea, or to place a practice of ministry in conversation with an academic discipline. In addition, develop a culture that encourages D.Min. students to serve as teaching and/or administrative assistants
- (8) Incorporate ‘Situated Learning,’ a general theory of knowledge acquisition applied to contextually-based learning activities focused on problem-solving skills⁵
- (9) Teach mixed research methodologies as necessary knowledge. Because leadership is complex, often it is better to use several research and analysis methods including narrative inquiry, ethnography, case studies, surveys, and other participatory methodologies

The insight gained from attending to the six dynamic concerns of urban theological education described above helped to increase our listening

⁵ Considered as types of applied research, both Situated Learning and ‘Action-based Research’, are valued as a process of inquiry that prove most insightful when utilized *by* and *for* those taking the action. Learners will examine problem solving approaches in collaboration with the mentoring faculty, peer cohorts, and other leaders, learners as they seek to address effectively and holistically research questions.

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ability, and to broaden the understanding and value not only of the program but of the future D.Min. graduate. As listeners entrusted to make a difference, we clarified the role of the staff, committee, and curriculum members in helping to equip the D.Min. learner to become a leader who is able to impact the whole human and the whole human community (persons, systems, and organizations) for transformation.

Confession (Spirituality)

Transforming the City: Reframing Education for Urban Ministry identifies confession (spirituality) as one of six significant factors shaping urban theological education. Given the uniqueness of ITC, it is important to give attention to spirituality and how it impacts the D.Min. program. Spirituality is often described as a universal human experience related to the search for meaning in life and that includes a sense of connection to something bigger than ourselves. Christina Puchalski, M.D., Director of the George Washington Institute for Spirituality and Health, contends that "spirituality is the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred."⁶

At the ITC, Black theology, womanist theology, and Africentric expressions such as Sankofa⁷ are all helpful in understanding the Christian spirituality that undergirds the formation of the D. Min. program. Because spirituality speaks to the personal, communal, and social dimensions of a religious journey, the following are writings by former presidents of the ITC which provide invaluable insight into ITC's spirituality as viewed through an Africentric Christian perspective.: *Walk Together Children: The Story of the Birth and Growth of the Interdenominational Theological Center* (Harry V. Richardson); *Africentric Christianity: A Theological Appraisal for Ministry* (J. Deotis Roberts); and *Africentric Approaches to Christian Ministry: Strengthening Urban Communities* (editors, Ronald E.

⁶ Pulchaski, C., Ferrell, B., Virani, R., Otis-Green, S., et al. (2009) Improving the quality of spiritual care as a dimension of palliative care: The report of the consensus conference. *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, 12:886-904.

⁷ As the Sankofian wisdom helps to address the issue of the hermeneutical dilemma, the QEP office at ITC has encouraged the development of a D.Min. dissertation project indicator that identifies this distinction.

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Peters and Marsha Snulligan Haney). Among the significant writings by past and current faculty that help inform this perspective on Africentric spirituality are *Black Biblical Studies* (Charles Copher), *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Jacqueline Grant); *Pragmatic Spirituality: The Christian Faith through an Africentric Lens* (Gayraud Wilmore); and *Yet with a Steady Beat: Contemporary US Afrocentric Biblical Interpretation* (Randall Bailey). In addition, the ancestral spirits of former D.Min. faculty members who have taught and helped shape the D. Min. program in the past, such as the late Dr. Ndugu T'Ofori-Atta and Dr. Michael Dash, are not forgotten and continue to nurture staff. Retired elders, such as Dr. Steve Rasor and Dr. Love Henry Whelchel, continue to influence the program through their presence and readings. Current faculty continues to speak life into the program by nurturing a spirituality that affirms the *imago Dei*, the image of God within the African American or Black experience.

Yet the spirituality that undergirds the D.Min. program is perhaps best summarized in the following affirmations of Christian belief, practice, and lifestyle.

- ▶ D.Min. education at ITC is a prophetic voice concerned about the well-being of the entire community, male and female, adults and children
- ▶ D.Min. methodologies at ITC attempt to help faith communities see, affirm, and have confidence in the importance of their experience and faith for determining the character of the Christian religion in the community
- ▶ ITC's D.Min. educational goal is to challenges all oppressive forces impeding the struggle for survival and for the development of a positive and productive quality of life conducive to personal and communal freedom and well-being
- ▶ ITC's D.Min. theology opposes all oppression based on ethnicity [race], sex, class, sexual preference, physical ability, age, religion, and immigration status.

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These unique affirmations are at the core of womanist theology and are adopted from it.⁸ They are evident throughout the D.Min. program in various forms, and ultimately celebrate and affirm the rich distinctives of ITC's theological and ecclesiastical history. Christian womanists, theologians, and scholars reminded us: of the centrality of the Incarnation; of the sacredness of the ministry context as the subject, not object; to value relations (personal, congregational, community, denominational, academic and public) and partnerships; to respect the image of God in each person and to form moral character; the importance of sacred space; and the sinfulness both of intellectual imperialism and of the failure to recognize the limits of knowledge.⁹ In terms of the Bible, womanist methodologies and approaches embrace biblical exegesis that both reclaim and critically evaluate; that are multi-dialogical, relational, liturgical, didactic; and that use reason, imagery, and metaphorical language. Within the D.Min. program, spirituality takes place not only during the appointed worship hours, but is reflected creatively within each cohort as a learning community, and even within the development of original scholarship that identifies indispensable knowledge related to the learner's practice of ministry, and that links the past, and the present, and the future.

⁸ The roots of modern theological Womanism grew out of the theology of James Hal Cone, Katie G. Cannon, Jacquelyn Grant, and Delores Williams. Cone developed black theology, which sought to make sense out of theology through black experience in America. In his book *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Cone argued that "God is Black" in an effort to demonstrate that God identifies with oppressed black Americans. Subsequently Grant, a first generation womanist theologian, argued that Cone did not attend to the fullness of black experience – specifically that of black women. In 1982 Grant wrote, "Black theology cannot continue to treat Black women as if they were invisible creatures who are on the outside looking into the Black experience, the Black church, and the Black theological enterprise. It will have to deal with women as integral parts of the whole community." Her identification of these two realities, that Black male theology and white feminist theology have ignored the realities of Black women's lives, resounded with the life experiences of women of the African diaspora and others worldwide.

⁹ *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society (Religion, Race, and Ethnicity)* by Stacey Floyd-Thomas (NYU Press, 2006) speaks to issues such as the sacredness of ministry contexts, the value of relationships, and respect for humanity. Notions such as intellectual imperialism inspire institutional reflection and advocacy.

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The Revised D.Min. Academic Delivery System

The revised two-year D.Min. degree curriculum consists of a total of thirty credit hours that can be earned by active participation in required seminars and related monthly cohort online discussions and resources offered each semester; one required core course titled *The Black Church, and Ethical Teachings*; an intercultural leadership dialogue practicum; a directed study elective, and a year-long dissertation writing course. For church and ministry leaders who desire an alternative academic experience, a one-year professional leadership certificate program is offered that consists primarily of the same first year course offerings of the D.Min. degree program without the second year devoted to researching and writing the dissertation project.

According to *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination*,¹⁰ the challenge of educating ordained religious leaders (Jewish, and Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox Christians) consists of attending to (1) pedagogies of interpretation of sacred scripture; (2) pedagogies of formation, that help students in the formation of their personal identity, dispositions, and values; (3) pedagogies of contextualization, that help to provide understanding of the complex social, political, personal, religious, and cultural conditions that surround and impact them and their ministry; and (4) pedagogies of performance, that help students to acquire the skills of preacher, counselor, worship leader, community advocate, and other roles through which they exercise their pastoral and ministerial responsibilities. Throughout our curriculum, we seek to attend to these functions, identifying andragogy as a transactional process of adult learning, and have made four key observations. The process is challenging us to make sure the encounter between mentoring faculty, adult learner, the content or subject matter, and the ministry context an active, challenging, collaborative, critically reflective, and transforming one. Our curriculum is concerned with learning with and from ministry leaders and practices in various cultural, religious, and worldwide contexts. It is undergirded by an educational philosophy that emphasizes epistemological assumptions, an adult

¹⁰ A good resource for understanding the distinct challenges of educating priest, pastors and rabbis, communal and classroom pedagogies are discussed in detail. *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination*, by Charles R. Foster and others (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006).

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education model, problem based learning, collaborative peer support, and does so in ways that are clearly connected to ITC's mission statement.

The cohort learning communities identified to initiate the newly reframed D.Min. program in fall 2016 are three. The first cohort is titled *Leadership of the Church, Disconnected Youth and Public Response*. Cohort members will explore and critically examine the nature, purposes, and challenges of ministry with Black youth and young adults in light of developmental stage theory, differences between the millennial and post-millennial generations, ethnic-cultural and religious realities, climates of relational dissonance, and young people's increasing disconnection from organized religion. Analysis and dialogical interaction will build on outcomes of studies on disconnected young people in general and disconnected Black youth and young adults in particular and what these data suggest for ministry. Cohort members will be expected to assess as well as propose ministry models and pedagogical practices that address real life stories and issues of young people appearing in research and in their congregations/communities. Attention will also be given to storytelling and story-linking around cohort members' own experiences of adolescence and young adulthood compared with today's young people as a basis for assessing their own attitudes, interests, and preparation for engagement and ministry with and on behalf of young people. Participant observations at selected ministry sites will provide experiential bases for course deliberations.

A second D.Min. cohort will study *The Black Church: Social and Environmental Justice and Public Policy*. It is designed to help contemporary church leaders hone their professional skills (cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual) for leading the church in addressing social justice issues in a postmodern world. In no age can a Christian in good conscience avoid the following three classical Niebuhrian ethical questions when facing a social justice crisis: a) "What is going on?" b) "What is God doing in response to what is going on?" and c) "What ought to be my response?" Given the complex realities facing Christian leaders today, Black leaders in particular by virtue of their experiences collectively and individually must hear these questions anew as they forge prophetic and liturgical responses to structures of injustice. We expect these questions to help D.Min. learners as they frame and respond faithfully to current social justice issues concerning race, class, gender, environmentalism, and immigration. How the following ethical resources and methods can be utilized to engaged social injustice in an effort to

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respond to current challenges will also be investigated: a) the Bible-centered ethical resource tradition, both Old and New Testament teachings; b) the civil religion-centered ethical resource tradition, primarily encompassing the nation's founding documents of social and political justice; and c) the black American ethical resource tradition, primarily embracing both black folkloric and non-folkloric Christian and humanistic sources.

The third cohort, that concerned with *Pastoral Professionalism and Spiritual Care*, is designed for persons who aspire to professional competency in pastoral, parish, institutional, and/or non-traditional ministry. Faculty will facilitate students' reflection upon sustaining modalities of pastoral presence and self-care and will help them identify and develop inter-/intrapersonal tools, resources, and equipment needed by caring professionals. With such training, we expect that students as caregivers, whose practices are informed by holistic, growth-oriented, theo-psycho-social theory and pastoral care skills that facilitate relational healing, under the consultation of professionals in the field will be better equipped to help care-seekers.

The Revised D.Min. Academic Structure

To improve program and student learning outcomes, the D.Min. academic structure was also revised. Central is now the Intensive Week of instruction, which begins each semester and is followed by monthly online teaching and learning sessions. The model, introduced at the 2016 Annual Doctor of Ministry Conference in March, embodies ITC's commitment to a "liberating and transforming spirituality" from a holistic and global perspective, and was well received as creative, relevant, and informative.

Because of the unique words, terms, and phrases used to describe the primary curricular and co-curricular experiences, I provide a brief glossary.

1. "Reasoning." In contemporary Caribbean folk culture, the term "reasoning" is used to describe any form of *intellectual interaction*. Reasoning sessions provide a space for reflection, formation, and sharing of best practices, through concrete examples of how we can enhance our ability to become better agents of God's transforming presence in the world for justice and

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peace. These sessions are facilitated by various D.Min. mentoring faculty and guests lecturers, depending on the curriculum.

2. “Mbongi.” *Mbongi* (pronounced Bone-gee) is a Congolese word that means “the learning circle.” “At the end of the day...people would come to discuss, to make music, to confront problems, and to touch the world of spirit. This creates community. *Mbongi* tends to reduce social strata, promote unguarded interaction, and inspire respect and joy.” The goal is to create learning circles (student cohorts) that function as “*learning circles.*”¹¹
3. “Balm yard.” Throughout the African Diaspora (and especially in Jamaica), the “*Balm yard*” is a location where healing rituals are practiced to retain humanity. In the context of the D.Min. program, it refers to scheduled and intentional worship experiences that include worship with the ITC community, within individual cohorts, personally, and as the D.Min. program community.
4. “Yeonguja ui cham-yeo” (연구자 의 참여). “*Yeonguja ui cham-yeo*” in the Korean language means “*Engagement of the Researcher.*” We offer various workshops focused on the student as researcher and writer, in order to help them improve their research and writing skills.
5. “The Provost’s Hour: Rivers, Roads, Railroads, Rhythms and Rhetoric.” Within the African American historical journey in the United States, these eclectic images are dynamic reminders of the various ways in which people have sought “liberating and transforming lives.” This session, facilitated by the Provost of ITC, is dedicated to promoting lively learning and creative and

¹¹ See “Mbongi” by Christopher Hedge and Titos Somba at <http://www.christopherhedge.com/mbongi/> While this reference is taken from there, the academic discussion is best presented in K. Kia Bunseki Fu-Kiau, *Mbongi: An African Traditional Political Institution* (Berlin: Afrikan Djeli, 2007).

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artistic dialogues with “elders.” Elders in this context are persons of any age with wisdom to share, through storytelling and story linking dedicated to the African American experience.

6. “The ITC’s President’s Hour of Power.” During each Intensive Week (Thursday evening, 7:00-9:00 pm) we have an informal time of conversation and wisdom sharing. Dedicated to encouraging discourse and dialogue, the D.Min.learners and the general public will grow in their understanding of the role of the public theologian and will experience academic hospitality.
7. “Agentes de restauração da comunidade.” In Portuguese, this term refers to community healers. Community healers in the context of our D.Min. program are all stakeholders (faculty, students, alums, and staff) who voluntarily gather at the end of each Intensive Week to assist with evaluation and assessment.¹²
8. “*Harambee.*” Swahili is a Pan-African language and is chosen to reflect African Americans' commitment to the whole of Africa. The Swahili term “*Harambee*” means “Let’s Pull Together”, and is a call for unity and collective work and struggle of the [in our case, D.Min.] family. It refers to scheduled time for the D.Min. learners to become familiar with the official policies and procedures related to the D. Min. program and the responsibilities of the professional student.
9. “*Jambo.*” In Swahili, *Jambo* is a friendly way of greeting a peer that means “hello.” (*Habari* is used when speaking to older people.) This is an informal opportunity for all D.Min. students to become acquainted with one another and to begin networking with one another.

Now that theological education has a global and universal view of the world, it is crucial that church and ministry leaders are provided with the knowledge, skills, and perspective that will teach them how to function in

¹² According to Dr. Reginaldo Braga, associate professor of Christian Education at ITC, “In this way, healing is restoration and the stakeholders are agents of it.”

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it in as purposeful and meaningful public leaders. The use of these unique words, terms, and phrases we think describe the primary curricular and co-curricular experiences necessary to promote both personal and communal transformation at the worldview level.

Conclusion

Because it is the mandate of theological institutions to teach and educate Christian clergy and ministry leaders who seek the reign of God and desire to minister effectively in the rapidly changing and diverse communities, D.Min. programs across the nation face many intellectual, social, and cultural challenges as they educate women and men. In this article, guided by the metaphor ‘middle of the journey,’ I sought to describe perspectives and procedures related first, to the institutional aspects of the D.Min. program at ITC, and second to the D.Min. learner. To capture and build upon the dynamism suggested of the motif of journey, I gave special attention to the spirituality undergirding the reframed D.Min. program, as well as the revised academic delivery system and structure. I described our insights about the general processes of assessment and evaluation, but also about our growing awareness of how those of us connected with the D.Min. program might continue to rethink its institutional and educational goals. As ATS has stated, “Among the educational goals of theological learning, teaching, and research are theological, ethical, and critical responses to global realities and concerns—*Global interconnectedness*.”¹³

Together, these influences enable the institution and learners to function effectively as transformed and active persons on a continuing journey. By suggesting a particular curriculum and a methodological paradigm, I gave attention to both the D.Min. educational process and the D.Min. learner as a competent graduate student and as co-contributors to a relevant theological institutional journey that we hope contributes the transformation of all.

¹³ See the *Guidelines for Evaluating Globalization in Commission Schools, ATS, Standard 3*. This quotation is from 3.2.4.1 of the *Self-Study Handbook*. Accessed at <http://www.ats.edu/uploads/accrediting/documents/self-study-handbook-chapter-6.pdf> on June 29, 2016.

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