



Reflections on the Continuing Education of Pastors and Views of Ministry

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Over the last several years *The Religious Education of Adults*, written by Leon McKenzie, has been used as a text in the adult education course at Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary. In his book McKenzie observed what many others have recognized as well—that adult participation in parish education programs is not what it might be. He identifies that, however, as only a symptom. He claims that the real problems in adult education are: (1) that it is dominated by a caste system (mostly pastors) who make all the decisions about adult education in parishes; (2) that it focuses almost exclusively on formative rather than critical education; (3) that it is fixed on theological-biblical content to the exclusion of all other adult interests; (4) that it is supervised by persons who are poorly prepared to give leadership to adult education; and (5) that it is conceived in a research vacuum.¹ Since pastors, by and large, make up the caste alluded to in the first problem area, it would seem that, for McKenzie, pastors are *the* problem behind the problems in parish adult education.

The 1986-87 academic year, while the writer served as Acting Director for the Continuation Studies program at Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, afforded an opportunity to test some of McKenzie's assumptions about pastors and their relationship to adult education. At the same time, it provided an opportunity to inquire as to what motivated pastors to attend continuing education events, and to solicit suggestions for future course offerings. All, of course, are inter-related and together reflect, to some degree, pastors' views as to the nature of ministry.

¹Leon McKenzie, *The Religious Education of Adults* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1982) 57-58.

For those unfamiliar with the continuing education program at this seminary, a brief description will be helpful in understanding the setting out of which the data in this study comes. The program, called Kairos, is basically a series of one-week residence courses for pastors and lay persons taught on the seminary campus. (Only data reported by pastors is included in this study.) The week's study is divided normally into twelve sessions of approximately an hour and a half each. The majority of instructors for the courses are members of the seminary faculty. Housing is provided in campus facilities.

I. THE QUESTIONNAIRE AND SAMPLE

Beginning in the fall, 1986, Kairos participants were asked to complete a questionnaire dealing with the matters noted above. A total of 205 attended the eight events included in this survey.

The topics, and the number (given in parentheses) that attended each of the courses, were:

- Youth Ministry: Called and Sustained by the Gospel (26)
- The Ten Commandments for Today (25)
- The Gospel of Matthew—2 sessions (82)
- Hard Realities and New Visions in Rural America: Claiming Resources for Ministry (16)
- Encountering and Ministry to Difficult Persons (13)
- The Interface of Literature and the Arts for Preaching (33)
- The Ministry of the Baptized Beyond Parish Walls (10)

Of the 205 who attended the Kairos events, 151 pastors completed all or parts of the questionnaire. Pastors were asked to

- Give their reasons for attending the event.
- Name the adult education courses they had taught in the previous year.
- Identify those (the one) most responsible for making decisions about adult education in their parishes.
- Identify those whose needs were most influential in making decisions about adult education in their parishes.
- Identify whose needs they intended to satisfy as a result of attending the Kairos.
- Make suggestions for future course offerings.

At least four months, but no more than seven, after the pastors returned to their parishes, they were sent a follow-up questionnaire. This time pastors were asked if

- They attended the Kairos to assist them in their preaching, and if they had been helped.
- They attended the Kairos to assist them in their teaching, and if they had been helped.
- They had initiated a specific adult education course in their parish as a result of their attendance at the Kairos.
- They were motivated to attend the Kairos for some reason other than, or in addition to, getting help with preaching and teaching.

Of the 148 follow-up questionnaires sent to pastors, 94 completed and returned them.

II. PASTORS AND PROBLEM AREAS IN RELIGIOUS ADULT EDUCATION

As already stated, McKenzie seems to believe that parish pastors are the basic problem to a series of problem areas in adult religious education. The question with which to begin, then, is: To what extent are pastors involved in that area of a congregation's ministry?

Who is responsible for making decisions about adult education? Pastors were given five options from which to choose when responding to this question: pastor; education committee; adult education committee; "it just sort of happens"; and "other." If they marked more than one, they were asked to rank them in the order of their influence.

Out of the 151 pastors who responded to that question, 99 said that they were the most

important factor in making those decisions. Of those 99, 23 didn't mark any other influence. Figure 1 summarizes the results of that item on the questionnaire. Those results make clear that though education committees and adult education committees exercise some influence, they don't compare with that of the pastor. In the "other" category, the Director of Christian Education was identified by two as most influential, while the church council filled that role in one parish.

Person(s) Responsible for Adult Education	Rank of Factor for Responsibility			
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
1. pastor	99	40	4	
2. education committee	29	27	17	
3. adult education committee	16	7		
4. it just sort of happens	4	3	4	1

Figure 1: Responsibility for Adult Education in Parishes

Based on the sample, it is apparent that McKenzie was quite correct in his observation that pastors do have considerable influence in determining the adult education programs in their parishes. That being the case, the pastor's knowledge of and convictions about adult education are critical in shaping that area of a congregation's ministry. Unfortunately, McKenzie argued, pastors are not equipped to lead in that area.

Professional preparation of pastors to be leaders in religious adult education. It was McKenzie's judgment that leaders in adult education should be prepared for that position through a two-year degree program with 18 semester hours in adult education, 6 elective hours in general education courses, and 12 hours in religious studies. Lacking that background, wrote McKenzie, many pastors tend to approach their planning of adult education in one of three ways: preemptive (friendly autocrats who make decisions based on their needs and abilities); ascriptive (leaders who assume they know what adults need to know, and go about meeting those needs); and diagnostic/prescriptive (leaders who

assess needs, but assume that the church is only interested in meeting those related to being a member of the church).² The pre-emptive and ascriptive leaders, suggested McKenzie, often teach courses in their parishes based on the material they received while attending continuing education events such as Kairos.

Several attempts were made in the two questionnaires to address these concerns. Unfortunately pastors were not asked to state the number of courses in general and adult education that they had taken in their undergraduate and theological studies. At Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, however, there is only one basic education course required of all Master of Divinity candidates, and one elective adult education course that usually has an enrollment of 15-20 each year. Obviously there are none who graduate from this seminary, lay professional or ordained, who satisfy McKenzie's expectations as a result of their work done here.

While some larger parishes may have sufficient financial resources to employ a full-time

adult educator whose preparation satisfies McKenzie’s criteria, the vast majority of parishes simply cannot manage that and wouldn’t even consider it. In most parishes it will be a member of the “caste” who will make decisions about adult education—or, will make decisions about those who will make them, and the process to be used in making them.

Testing McKenzie’s complaint that many pastors use what they learn in continuing education events as a basis for courses in their parishes, thus indicating a pre-emptive or ascriptive approach, was a concern in this study. As Figure 2 indicates, developing an adult education course in their parishes was not a particularly high priority for these pastors. The follow-up questionnaire specifically asked whether pastors attended the Kairos for the purpose of getting help with their teaching, and whether they got that help. Of the 94 who responded, 73 did have that intent, and 71 received that help. Twenty-six reported that they developed one or more courses out of their Kairos experience. Only one noted that he based his courses specifically on notes taken at the Kairos.

Intended Use of Kairos	Rank of Factor						
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th
1. adult education course	5	19	10	9	2	2	
2. preaching	72	20	8	2	1	1	1
3. meeting needs of ind. in congregation	25	18	10	3			
4. meeting needs of congregation	12	22	19	3			
5. meeting needs in community	4	13	11	4	1		
6. meeting personal needs	24	17	17	8	3	3	
7. meeting needs of family			2	1	1		1

Figure 2: Intended Use of Learning Gained at Kairos

²Ibid.,139-144.

It is apparent in the sample that most pastors came to the Kairos expecting something to help them in their teaching, and that they found it. Whether that’s a problem is another matter. One would assume that surgeons would use in the operating room, and adult educators in their professional responsibilities, what they learned in continuing education events. As pastors called to teach, could they be expected to do less than “use” their learning in ways that assisted them to carry out their call? This probably wouldn’t be a problem for McKenzie, however, if biblical and theological courses taught by pastors didn’t dominate the adult offerings in parish education programs. The next question, of course, is: Does that dominance exist?

The biblical/theological focus of religious adult education. It was McKenzie’s opinion that courses available to adults in the church were exclusively biblical or church-oriented. That

came about, he argued, because those responsible for adult education were primarily oriented in those directions. McKenzie concluded that unless pastors became aware and responsive to a broader range of interests and needs, or allowed others to give leadership to adult education, adults in any sizable numbers would not be attracted.

The questionnaire used in this survey did not ask pastors to name *all* the adult education opportunities available in their parishes over the past year, but only those courses taught by the pastors themselves. A total of 147 responded to that question, reporting that together they taught 377 courses. The distribution of those courses among the 147 pastors is illustrated below.

Number of Courses Taught	Pastors Teaching that Number of Courses	Number of Sessions	Number of Courses
0	4	1-5	110
1	38	6-10	111
2	37	11-15	36
3	40	16-20	35
4	17	21-25	10
5	9	26-30	13
6	1	31-35	4
7	2	36-40	11
8	1	41-45	0
		46-50	2
		Above 51	6

While the number of courses taught is one measure of pastoral commitment to adult education, the number of sessions is another. Pastors reported a rather remarkable total of 3,865 sessions distributed over the 377 courses.

From the above one can conclude that pastors invest a great deal of time and energy in their ministry of adult education. The question for McKenzie, however, is not so much the number of courses, but the breadth of the offerings. An analysis of the titles of the 377 courses allowed for their division into the seven categories as summarized below.

Category	Number of Courses
Bible	168
Doctrine	47

New member	41
Equipping church members	32
Assisting persons to deal with life situations	37
Dealing with social issues	11
Miscellaneous	41

The evidence overwhelmingly supports McKenzie’s notion that the courses taught by pastors deal almost exclusively with biblical, theological, and church membership concerns. Again, programs represented in this survey may be far more broad than indicated here. But combining the above with the data reported under those responsible for adult education in the parish, one is left with the suspicion that McKenzie is correct in his observation.

The questionnaire also asked pastors to identify whose needs were considered when adult education courses were organized and offered. Four options were given, and where more than one was marked, pastors were asked to rank them in order of their influence. As Figure 3 illustrates, the needs of the congregation and its individual members are those that concern these pastors and congregations most. Though more data is necessary, a tentative conclusion thus far seems to be that the projected needs of these members and congregations are basically biblical, theological, and member-oriented, and that those needs have been determined by pastors who see themselves as primarily responsible for adult education in the parishes they serve.

Factors Influencing Decisions for Adult Education	Rank of Factor				
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
1. needs of individuals in congregation	75	26	3		
2. needs of individuals in community		13	9	5	1
3. needs of the congregation	64	38	5		
4. needs in the community	4	8	13	12	

Figure 3: Needs that Influence Decisions about Adult Education

Two remaining problem areas identified by McKenzie. The emphasis upon formative rather than critical education, and the lack of systematic research in adult education planning are two more problem areas identified by McKenzie. With respect to the first, it’s difficult to make a judgment whether classes are formative rather than critical unless one is in the class. Though the higher number of Bible classes may suggest an emphasis upon the formative, that could be off the mark. Pastors in this survey were not asked to identify their teaching style, or their course and session objectives. Without more data at this point, that problem will have to await another time. However, once that data is available, the question still needs further discussion: Should adult education stress one or the other, or both the formative and the critical?

With respect to the second problem area, McKenzie is probably correct that there is a lack of *systematic* research in planning for parish adult education. Nevertheless, pastors did report informal efforts to solicit information and help in their planning, even though they weren't asked for that information on the questionnaire. Many, undoubtedly, felt uncomfortable that they had described themselves as the most important influence in making decisions about adult education in their parish, and were compelled to state that they asked for and/or listened to suggestions. One wrote, however, that it did no good to ask; folks in his parish just didn't care. Whatever the pastor offered was fine with them.

III. MOTIVATING FACTORS FOR PASTORS INVOLVED IN CONTINUATION STUDIES

According to research summarized by K. Patricia Cross, there are four qualities that describe those who participate in adult (continuing) education: (1) they have more than one reason for their participation; (2) they are motivated by a desire to apply what they are to learn; (3) they are confronted with new tasks or issues for which they need help; and (4) they enjoy learning.³

Part of the purpose of this survey was to determine in what ways pastors are similar/dissimilar to adult learners as a whole, and to gather information helpful in planning future continuing education events. The results of the survey are summarized under the headings suggested by Cross.

Reasons given for attending a Kairos event. What motivated you, pastors were asked, to attend "this" Kairos? They were given nine options, including a space for "other," from which to choose. Where more than one was noted, they were asked to rank them. Pastors gave an average of 3.9 reasons for their attendance, a figure that compares very closely with that of more general adult education samples, and suggests that participation at Kairos events cannot be predicted on the basis of a single factor.

While participants are influenced by several factors in making their decisions about continuation studies, some weigh more heavily than others. Figure 4 illustrates the relative influence of the factors. Research has consistently demonstrated that fellowship, leisure, and timing are important motivating factors for those participating in adult education. Pastors showed that they are no exception to this research, particularly as reflected in their responses to items 1, 7, and 8.

Cross reports research that suggests that congruence between the adult learner and the learning environment is an important factor in predicting participation.⁴ Since faculty, and especially known faculty, are an important part of that environment, one might have predicted that as a more important factor than reflected in the above. On the other hand, several pastors noted that *the* reason they attended was to be with a particular faculty person.

Applicability as a motivating factor in Kairos attendance. As Figure 4 points out, the topic was the one most important factor influencing pastors to attend a Kairos event. Since over 60% of the sample attended events focused on preaching, and since all dealt in some way with issues related to ministry, one can

³K. Patricia Cross, *Adults as Learners* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981) 83-85.

⁴*Ibid.*, 119-121.

Motivation to Attend Kairos	Rank of Factor Influencing Attendance at Kairos							
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th
1. fit into schedule	12	11	15	16	5			
2. topic of the Kairos	57	22	15	6	2			
3. faculty for the Kairos	9	15	15	9	4	2		
4. ministry needs of pastor	13	27	14	8	4			
5. ministry needs of congregation	7	10	6	5	2	2		
6. ministry needs of community	1	4	5	1	1		1	
7. fellowship with other pastors	3	9	9	13	2	4	1	1
8. get away from parish setting	7	4	17	13	13	2	3	

Figure 4: Factors Influencing Pastors to Attend Kairos Events

conclude that this sample of pastors, again, reflects the overall response of adults to learning opportunities—they want that learning to be applicable to their life and work.

The follow-up questionnaire demonstrated that motivating factor even more clearly. Out of the 94 responses:

68 expected the Kairos to assist them in their preaching, and 77 received that help.

73 expected the Kairos to assist them in their teaching, and 71 received that help.

25 had organized an adult education course in their parish on the basis of their experience in the Kairos.

58 indicated that a factor other, or in addition to, preaching and teaching influenced their decision to attend the Kairos. Of those factors, 33 directly relate to pastoral responsibilities such as counseling, ministry to particular groups and persons, and administration.

Pastors were also asked to list topics on which they would like future Kairos events to concentrate. A total of 157 suggestions were given. These were distributed in the five categories noted below.

Category	Number of Requests
1. Biblical	35
2. Systematics/doctrinal	23
3. History	6

4. Pastoral theology	84
5. Issues	9

Among the requests included under pastoral theology, the largest number of requests were for administration (19), counseling (15), teaching (10), and

preaching (8). The data, based on Kairos events attended, and those desired, demonstrate that pastors are motivated to attend continuing education events that are *directly* related to their perceived responsibilities as pastors. Obviously, those who plan and teach in those contexts must be cognizant of that factor if they hope to attract and retain participants.

New tasks or issues as motivating factors in attendance at Kairos events. That many pastors requested courses in administration and counseling suggests that they are facing new and challenging responsibilities in those areas for which they are not now prepared. The overall evidence in the survey, however, would make it appear that it is not the new, but the traditional tasks and responsibilities, that attract the most pastors to Kairos events. To be sure, it may be a desire to add some new dimension, some freshness, to those responsibilities, but preaching and teaching, supported by biblical and theological study, remain the primary interests of those pastors who attended the eight events reported on here. And those are the interests that are expressed in the adult classes these pastors taught in their parishes.

Current social issues had a remarkably low priority both as topics for their teaching and as motivating factors for attendance at Kairos. The Kairos on the rural crisis, which issue really could not be called new in 1986-87, had only 16 participants. Another issue-oriented Kairos, on family violence, was cancelled because of low registration. It isn't clear what one should make of this, but there are several possibilities that could be explored. One is that pastors see the seminary as a place for biblical and theological study and look to other agencies for help in dealing with social issues. A second possibility is that the seminary has not identified those issues that are presently challenging pastors, and thus has not offered any help in dealing with them. Perhaps resource persons or others in the community/congregation are perceived as better equipped to teach such classes or pastors prefer not to deal with issues that could be controversial. Or it could be that many pastors do not include a direct response to these emerging issues as a significant dimension in their view of ministry. This is an important area for more study, research, and experimentation.

Growth and the joy of learning as motivating factors in attendance at Kairos events. Pastors weren't asked to respond to the question: Do you enjoy learning? One wonders whether that is the kind of question that should be asked. There is a considerable amount of "soft" data, however, that addresses the question. First, there is the fact that after four years of graduate study preparing them for ministry, these pastors voluntarily returned to the seminary for "more of the same." Second, in an open-ended question asking why they attended, fifteen responded that it was for personal and spiritual growth. Unsolicited, especially on the second questionnaire, many noted that they had attended Kairos for several years, had always enjoyed themselves, and looked forward to coming events. There were only two unsolicited negative comments, and both reflected a desire *to learn more* than the Kairos had offered them.

Though some formal evaluation is done in the program, much of it is done informally. Individuals and small groups, over the past year, have been asked to comment on their week at Kairos. What has been reported verbally in a general way corresponds with the written evaluations—that participants

desire, and enjoy, learning. All of this should be no surprise. Research in general adult education indicates that the higher the level of education to which a person attains, the greater is their predictable participation in continuing education. They are “good at learning,” and people continue to do what they do well. Whether they admit it in their last quarter before graduation, pastors must harbor a healthy enjoyment of learning. Appealing to that quality by giving close attention to the other factors related to adult participation in educational opportunities would seem to be at the center of a continuing education director’s work.

IV. CONTINUING EDUCATION AS A REFLECTION ON VIEWS OF MINISTRY

The survey reported in this article began with the hope that the observations of Leon McKenzie could be set aside as just that, observations without data to support them. Or, if his observations were correct, that they did not apply to those pastors who attended Kairos at Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary. What has emerged from that study are two thoughts on the subject of ordained ministry and adult education in the parish.

First, on almost all points McKenzie was on target in his observations of pastors and their relationship to adult education in the parishes they serve. They do exercise a great deal of control. They do concentrate on biblical/theological/church-oriented topics in their teaching. Though the evidence is not conclusive, there is the suggestion that they do not gather data systematically to aid them in their planning for adult education, and that they do not have the credentials that McKenzie prescribes for leadership in that area. Though many pastors were concerned to disassociate themselves from an approach that McKenzie would call ascriptive or pre-emptive, there isn’t enough information in the survey to make any judgments about the ways in which pastors administer their adult education programs. Whether all this is good, unfortunate, or just the way things are depends a great deal on one’s perspective.

Leon McKenzie’s position reflects the andragogical principles developed by Malcolm Knowles. While not all adult educators agree with those principles, they do enjoy widespread support.⁵ Pastors can neither reject them, however, nor apply them unless they are aware of them. Perhaps a brief introduction for all pastors in that theoretical approach is what is needed. Then pastors would have the vantage point of evaluating whether or not McKenzie is correct—that when those principles are adhered to in practice, participation in adult education will increase.

In any case, pastors are likely to continue to be the key persons in the adult education programs of most congregations. Changes commended by McKenzie would most likely occur in allowing for greater participation on the part of other adults in planning for, and implementing, programs, and in the broadening of the course offerings in most congregations.

Second, what the pastor teaches in that program, and what courses pastors attend for their continuing education, are not likely to change all that much. If it is true that pastors, like most adults, participate in continuing education for the purpose of enhancing how they carry out the responsibilities of their

vocation, then those skills which they seek to enhance provide clues as to how pastors view their ministries. Pastoral identity, as reflected in this study, centers on the pastor's responsibility to preach and to teach, not just in general, but to preach and teach the gospel.

The view of ministry projected in this survey of pastors is that of the Word—the Word preached and taught out of a theological tradition. To a lesser degree it is a view of ministry concerned for administering a congregation, for counseling skills to assist persons in their needs, and for the equipping of laity to assume their responsibilities in the life and work of the congregation. If one were to use the familiar categories of the priestly and prophetic offices in ministry, the emphasis would appear to be upon the former. Again, one cannot be sure of that, based on the evidence. Bible studies on Amos, for example, would provide ample opportunity for the prophetic.

At the same time, the sample suggests a view of ministry that is almost exclusively focused on the congregation and places a low priority on explicitly dealing with current social issues. And though worship and the sacraments were not forgotten subjects, both the Kairos program for 1986-87 and the requests for future events did not emphasize them. The continuing education of pastors and adult education courses taught in parishes are only two, among many, dimensions in considering how pastors view ministry. More research is needed—both in the areas identified in this survey, and in others having to do with the work and the choices pastors make—to get a clearer picture of what pastors understand their ministry to be.

Sometimes a letter says more than a pile of statistics. Such a letter came attached to one of the second questionnaires sent to pastors who had completed the first. It came from one who had attended the event on the rural crisis, and it demonstrates the positive connection that can exist among continuing education, the application of learnings to immediate needs, and a view of ministry. That letter provides a good place to conclude.

Hi!

The Kairos was very helpful and I've been writing to others who participated and who have already gotten support groups going. So the Kairos became a networking beginning as well.

Things here are looking bleaker every week. The farm pressures are extreme. Some families have opted to work full time at a town job and farm part-time (which ends up being two full-time jobs). This creates family tensions, irritability, health problems. We have growing numbers of farmers having heart surgeries done. We've had a few cases where young farmers have resorted to writing bad checks for grain or defrauding the unemployment service and have been arrested. The counseling load is increasing and often I feel helpless. But the resources I received at the Kairos help! I'm contacting county agents, have passed on information on new small business set up, and refer to career counseling agencies because of the information I received at Kairos.

Thanks for the help. It is a life-line for me to know that the seminary continues to care about the ministry and issues facing those they send out!

Hope things are going well for you and your family. God's blessings on you and your work.