

Sierra Leadership Network Curriculum: Month 6, Year 2

Participation in the Sierra Leadership Network (SLN) is a process of adult learning. It is the responsibility of the participant to do their assignments and seek out the necessary accountability. It is the responsibility of the participant to schedule time with their mentor, not the other way around. Here is a checklist of this month's exercises and space for comments. All useful generated materials should be placed in your Sierra Leadership Network binder. The mentor will look over the exercises and be given opportunity to add their own comments. Be sure you take your binder to the quarterly meetings at Granite Springs Church to also be available to the SLN directors.

Month 6, Year 2

Date Completed

____/____/____ Doctrine of Christ [Estimated time: _____]

Mentor Comments:

____/____/____ Church Culture: [Estimated time: _____]

Mentor Comments

____/____/____ Purity : [Estimated time: _____]

Mentor Comments

Participant Signature

Mentor Signature

I. Doctrine of Christ

1. Read the following on the person of Christ
 - a. Nicene and Athanasian Creeds (www.crcna.org has copies of CRC doctrinal statements)
 - b. Belgic Confession: Articles 10, 18, 19
 - c. Heidelberg Catechism: Q/A 15, 16, 17
 - d. Contemporary Testimony/Our World Belongs to God: 24-29
 - e. Introducing the Reformed Faith by Donald McKim: Chapter 8
 - f. Church History in Plain Language by Shelley: Chapter 11

2. We will never fully encapsulate theologically the person of Christ. Because he is God, he is beyond our comprehension, yet because he is a man, he is accessible to our senses. Every theology of Christ is an attempt to place some kind of frame of reference around him that we can understand. You will notice from your reading of the ancient church councils that the occasion for delineating who Jesus is was always prompted by a historical attempt to access and specify something about Jesus from their contemporary frame of reference. This is part of the reason that the language of the creeds are steeped in the philosophical language of their day. As McKim aptly articulates, with each clarification the church made they were attempting to safeguard the role Jesus plays in our salvation by his nature. Because the Bible doesn't articulate a finished doctrine of Christ (just as it doesn't do so with the doctrine of the Trinity) our theological attempts are kind of like finding the solution to a puzzle by working backwards or reverse engineering it. Through the Bible we meet Jesus, we see his work, we understand a bit of how he had done what he has done for us and now we are going to try and frame who he must be by what he has done. He clearly must be God, but he clearly must also be human. The categories come from the philosophical climate and culture of those seeking to articulate it, but the necessary boundaries of the puzzle come from Scripture.

3. Do letter "a" and then do either "b" or "c":
 - a. Reverse engineer from Scripture the doctrine of Christ. Find the relevant Bible passages that speak of Christ and write a doctrine of Christ that you believe will speak to a contemporary audience. What questions or challenges are in our contemporary society that your doctrine of Christ addresses? What are the terms and concepts that your doctrine must address.
 - b. Compare the teachings of this orthodox, historical Christian Church concerning Christ with those of the Jehovah Witnesses. How do they match up? How would you defend our doctrine of Christ vs. theirs?
 - c. Compare the teachings of this orthodox, historical Christian Church concerning Christ with those of the Mormon church (LDS). How do they match up? How would you defend our doctrine of Christ vs. theirs?

II. Analyze Church Culture

Before I begin I must attribute much of this section to Ron Vanderwell and the D. Min. project he is working on in church culture. He in turn attributes Edgar Shein. You can find his books on organizational culture in your library or at Amazon.com.

Culture is inescapable for humanity. Humanity cannot express itself, nor understand anything outside of a cultural context. Culture is residue of past learning. Culture is how we have learned how to do what we do. This residue in turn shapes our perspectives. “This is the way things work. This is the way things are...” All human thought and activity is replete with human culture. It is inescapable, and for that reason your church has its own culture. One helpful analogy for this is the way we fold a map. Once the map has been folded one way, it the outcome was at all positive your organization will tend to fold it the same way again. Learning is incredibly important for us to move on to learn other things, so once we’ve gotten comfortable with a particular fold we tend not to want to think about it again and we keep folding it that way.

Now imagine your church is that folded map. Maybe its environment has changed. Maybe the culture of the community surrounding the church has changed. At some point it will become sneakingly obvious that the way your church has folded its map is no longer the best way for the map to be folded. This presents a problem. You’ve always folded it this one way and you’re comfortable with that, and to fold it another way would involve some un-learning and re-learning and this is hard, costly work. What should you do? It is the job of the leader to help the church through these kinds of processes.

Your church’s culture is probably somewhere between “ordained by God” and a product of a broken, fallen world. If you read Jesus parable of the wheat and the tares and apply it to your church culture, you’ll get a picture of the dilemma. You won’t be able to weed the whole field without doing serious damage to the good things. At the same time, as just another fallible you will undoubtedly botch the job of really discerning what is wheat and what is not. The job of the leader is to help lead the congregation to a place of greater faithfulness and a field of greater fruitfulness.

1. Reflect with your mentor on the culture of your congregation and the leadership needed to make your congregation more faithful and more fruitful.
2. One way into this would be to follow an adaptation of the exercise in Edgar Shein’s The Corporate Culture Survival Guide. The following would be a group process exercise. (I am not asking that you lead your church in such a process, just perhaps walk through these steps with your mentor or another trusted friend who knows your church. You don’t necessarily have to write anything up about it. It is a reflection exercise.)

- a. Explore your church's "artifacts". Artifacts can be habits, sayings, practices, patterns, etc. that display your church's culture. Does your congregation have a "dress code"? What expectations does the church have on member's participation beyond Sunday? How does the church handle meetings? How are decisions made? Who really makes decisions? What rites, rituals, symbols, stories, etc. mark your church? Do a brain storming session and list these kinds of things.
- b. What are your church's espoused values? What are the things your church has written about and for itself to follow in mission statements, value statements, anniversary publications, etc. What does the church say about itself.
- c. Look at where the differences are between your church's actual behavior and its espoused values. These will give you clues to the underlying assumptions held by your church that you likely don't dare to speak.
- d. Once you have uncovered some of these underlying assumptions, recognize that this level is extremely difficult to change. If some of these assumptions are markedly sinful they might be things that over time, with subtlety and care the church leadership may need to work at changing. Other things that are more neutral should be taken into consideration as the church makes its plans. If a fold doesn't need to be reworked, make your plans along the fold. The church will have an easier time achieving its goals if your decisions are in accordance with its culture.

III. Purity and Sexuality

This assignment is simple. Read and reflect on chapter 5 of Philip Yancey's Rumors of Another World titled "Designer Sex". (It is a great book, well worth the price. If you can't beg, buy or borrow a copy, drop me an e-mail and I'll get a copy of the chapter to you.) Reflect and discuss (with your mentor, your spouse, or a trusted friend) your own discoveries about how your own sexuality has been broken and distorted by this fallen world. No need to post or write anything up. Just have a good talk and arrive at some good insights.