

## WRS: A SOLID FOUNDATION FOR PASTORING AND PREACHING

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When the Lord first called me to the preaching ministry in 1980, I knew that I was going to need more than just an undergraduate education. A lot of the guys around me in college were eager to get into the ministry right after graduating with their B.A. in Bible, but I had the idea of seminary rather ingrained from my upbringing in the Bible Presbyterian Church under the pastorate of John Janbaz in San Bernardino, California, as well as the mentorship of my pastor in Southern Oregon, Harold Anderson. Though not pastoring a BP church or ministry, Rev. Anderson had talked long of his seminary days at Biola in the distant past, and had convinced me of the value of further training.

Then, I had the opportunity to travel on a couple of ministry teams for Bob Jones University and saw first-hand what happens when young, enthusiastic men with minimal training get into the pastorate. Many of the churches that we visited were pastored by such men. Though they were often well-loved by their people, they had little respect given to them simply because they hadn't lived through most of the life experiences common to the older people in their congregation. Their preaching also often reflected a lack of life experience and wisdom, though technically they were usually quite respectable. They made a lot of mistakes in administration, and often faced counseling situations that were simply beyond them. More than one of these young men confided in me, some with tears, that they wished they had stayed in school for more education, training, and experience. Seeing the reality of minimally trained men trying to struggle through ministry further cemented in my mind the conviction that I needed more training.

I had been accepted in the graduate School of Religion at Bob Jones already when Rev. Janbaz called and talked to me at length about the benefits of a real seminary, not just a graduate school, for a minister of the gospel. I also began to see that a breadth of education would be helpful, in terms of being taught from more than one perspective in different schools. And, as I moved toward the ministry of a Bible Presbyterian pulpit, I came to believe that I needed to attend our Bible Presbyterian seminary, WRS. It was a choice I have not regretted. At the time, WRS was not accredited, but that did not concern me, since I had no desire to become an academic—I was interested in the pastoral ministry of the BPC. When I finished my other graduate work in speech at Bob Jones, my wife and I moved to Tacoma and I began the work.

Clearly, Western Reformed Seminary had designed the Master of Divinity program with the aim of producing men who could handle the Word of God well. The program was heavy in original languages, theology, biblical introduction and interpretation, and church history. Keeping the studies vital was accomplished by constant and lively (read, *spirited*, *intense*, and sometimes *loud*) class discussion, times of fellowship and recreation with students and staff, and practical application in local church and presbytery ministry. My favorite classes were the

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Oxford-style classes in theology I had with Dr. Hascup, which stretched my mind and challenged my heart to really *know* what I believed, and moreover, to be able to defend it. My other favorite classes were all the exegetical courses in which we translated and wrestled with various books from the Old and New Testaments. Dr. Battle and Rev. Lensch had the ability to lead us through the studies with a very practical and thorough approach that challenged our often presumptuous perceptions of the texts with which we were dealing. We learned to be more than commentary preachers, and that training has stood me well in all the years of ministry since.

It took me five years to finish my three-year Master of Divinity degree, during which time I was able to work in the local churches of the Northwest Presbytery and at Heritage Christian School. The seminary's classes were thorough and helpful, and the willingness of the administration to work with a working husband's schedule was a genuine blessing. I had ample opportunity for ministry in all aspects of church life, and the coursework gave me the tools I needed to do that ministry, especially the theological tools. Since I already had degrees in Bible and speech, and an advanced degree in public speaking, the seminary worked with me to help me pay my school bills by allowing me to redesign the homiletics training the school was doing and then teach those and other classes in the practical theology department, which was expanded while I was there. While I hope that my students learned a great deal and profited from those classes, I know that I did, as the teaching opportunity helped to hone my thinking and practice in order to stay current and useful to my students.

When I had the opportunity to pursue my doctoral studies in preaching a few years after graduation, the seminary further demonstrated its commitment to its students by assisting me financially to undertake the studies so that I could be a more valuable professor to the students; and along the way my own ministry was blessed as well. I will always be grateful for the heart of the seminary administration to improve what it offers to its students—and for its support of its faculty. I have been thankful to be able to continue my teaching to the present, and look forward to it for many more years to come.

It is not possible, even in a three-year degree like the M.Div., for a school to cover everything that a man may want or need to know. But WRS gave me tools that stood me well, even when I went on for doctoral studies at Westminster Theological Seminary in California. There, the classes and examinations and procedures were nothing new to me. Papers, oral examinations, extensive reading, discipline to accomplish much in a little time, evaluations, lectures—all played their part. The training that I had received at Bob Jones and Western Reformed had prepared me very well for the advanced studies. And in the trenches of church life, as a church planter and pastor, I knew how to search the Scriptures and present the whole counsel of God; knew how to find answers to previously unanswered (or unthought-of!) questions; knew how to address the needs of the people in my congregation; knew how to work within the context of a connectional church in Presbytery and Synod; and knew, also, how to tap into the fellowship of the men with whom and under whom I had studied when I ran into a problem beyond my ability to immediately grasp or surmount (the greatest blessing of a dedicated seminary education, in my opinion). Of course, I have since found out that as much as I knew, it was not enough. I had to keep growing in my walk and wisdom. I think that one of the greatest blessings of my seminary work must be that it forced me to realize that there was so

much more that I did not know, and therefore I had to face all the duties and opportunities that faced me with humility and dependence upon the Lord.

The wealth of course material, practical wisdom, and the bonds of Christian fellowship and fraternity I obtained through the course of my training have stood me well through my ministry, due to excellently planned and executed training programs at these wonderful schools. But it has been the seminary education provided by WRS that has been the bedrock of my ministry. I am grateful for the dedication of the faculty of WRS to training ministers and laborers for the church, especially the Bible Presbyterian Church to which the Lord has called me. May God grant that WRS flourishes and grows as she serves the BPC for many years to come, supporting not only this denomination, but all the church of our Lord as he ordains.