

To Teach Others Also

By T.M. Moore

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A Worldview Church Interview

Over the course of the past winter and spring I've been talking and visiting with Pastors Jim Weaver and Josh Guzman at Crossroads Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Middletown, Del. Crossroads is not a large church—perhaps 150 to 200 worshippers on any given Sunday morning. But it has large ambitions, fueled mainly by the vision that Jim and Josh share for church planting and leadership development. Together they conduct a pastoral internship ministry which is part of their vision of encouraging new church development up and down the Delmarva Peninsula. I talked with Jim and Josh about their vision, and the internship ministry that is at the heart of it.

WVC: What prompted you to begin this internship ministry?

Jim: I had been involved in ministry to youth for many years when I first began my seminary training at a non-traditional, church-based theological seminary in the Delmarva region. I had friends who were attending traditional seminaries at the same time, and from what they told me and what I observed, I began to feel as though the model by which they were being trained was not effective in preparing the kinds of pastors, servants, and leaders the church needed.

Josh: Jim and I knew each other before I came to Crossroads, but I ended up here after leaving a large church with a vision for numbers, but not for deep spiritual growth. While I was worshipping here I moved away from the traditional, four-year seminary course, and begin working with Jim. Over time our friendship grew and I became more and more involved in all aspects of pastoral ministry, while, at the same time, finishing my seminary studies. When I finished those, I joined Jim on staff, and we've been working together since.

Jim: Our internship ministry really developed out of our relationship as we learned together how to do the work of ministry.

WVC: Do you still feel the traditional model is lacking?

J&J: Yes, to a large extent. The academic model is just too far removed from the actual work of ministry in the churches, and while many denominations have internship or practical field experience requirements, these don't seem to be sufficient for instilling values and providing real experience in ministry. We continue to hear from many men that they have failed to find true, meaningful mentorship during their preparation for ministry—that involves the whole person growing in the Lord. We also discovered a number of men in our own small church who were actively pursuing a course of ministry preparation, and they expressed a need for more guidance and development than they were receiving in seminary or Bible college.

WVC: How many men are currently involved in your internship program?

J&J: We currently have five men in the pastoral apprenticeship ministry. Each is in a different stage of preparation for ministry, some in seminary, others in Bible college with intentions of seminary work. One of our apprentices will be leaving us next year to take up a call to missions in Peru. This grew out of his short-term missions work with us here at Crossroads. One of our men is working to plant a new church just a little south of Middletown, in Smyrna, Del. Another is a “second career” student. He spent 15 years as an engineer and now is preparing for pastoral ministry. We’re really excited to have men of this caliber working and preparing with us.

WVC: What goals have you established for this internship program?

Jim: Can we use the word “ministry” rather than “program”? The difference in our minds is between creating something that you then work very hard to sustain, and creating something that sustains itself because it encourages vital Christian living in the form of changed lives and power for ministry.

WVC: I like that distinction. Then what are the goals for your ministry?

Jim: We have six.

First, to assist men sensing a call to pastoral ministry in discerning their gifts and true passions, and to provide them with ministry opportunities in which they can test and, hopefully, confirm their sense of calling.

Josh: Second, to become friends and mentors to the men, to help them through their academic work but, more importantly, to love them and lead them into a vital experience of collaboration and community.

With this (third), we want to work personally with each man to help him learn how to practice spiritual disciplines and to sustain a vital spiritual life.

Jim: Fourth, we want to help them become effective “shepherd/leaders” whom we can have confidence sending out to serve in another church or to start a church of their own.

And, in the fifth place, we want them to be committed to expository preaching, the mission of the church—including their own active involvement in mission—and the work of caring for “the fatherless and the widow.”

J&J: Finally, we want to develop a group of friends, men who will be life-long “soul friends” who will care for one another and sustain their commitment to one another throughout their lives.

WVC: So how does it work?

J&J: It’s not really very sophisticated. Instead, we emphasize developing each person according to his stage of growth and preparation for ministry, and the needs that become apparent as we get to know him.

Jim: Of course, there are times when we study things together—shepherding, spiritual disciplines, philosophy of ministry, and so forth—using materials we’re familiar with from a variety of sources, to supplement what they’re getting in their seminary program.

Josh: We meet with the men as a group for sharing, prayer, study, and informal assessment, and we spend time with each man individually, according to his needs and ministry involvement. We also expect them to do some additional reading—materials we’ve found helpful in our work, and that we think are on the cutting edge of developments in local church ministry.

Jim: We don’t have a specific length of time for the ministry. That’s highly individualized. We work with a man until we feel like he’s ready to be sent out.

WVC: But are there some benchmarks for progress and development that you use to measure their growth?

J&J: Yes, of course: the practice of spiritual disciplines, completion of all their academic coursework, management of time and responsibilities, ability to make friends and work with others, particular ministry skills, demonstrated leadership abilities, articulation of an overall philosophy of ministry—things like that. Still, not very specific, but we think we know how to observe these things.

Josh: We’re thinking that we ought to try to formalize some of these a little more—perhaps create a kind of taxonomy of pastoral skills, or something that can provide a little more consistency, and perhaps transferability, over time.

Jim: But we’re still working on that. We regard the men as apprentices, not interns. An intern is someone who performs certain tasks for the pastor—usually those he doesn’t want to do. But an apprentice is someone who learns alongside the pastor in his work. An apprentice has a growing personal and spiritual relationship with the pastor, as well as varied opportunities for ministry. We have regular times of assessment with our apprentices in which we discuss progress in studies, their work in various ministries, and personal spiritual formation. But we need more clarification in this.

Josh: I would add that the distinction Jim mentioned between “interns” and “apprentices” is very important along these lines, because it takes more time to have an apprentice than an intern. Mentoring an apprentice takes a great deal of time, involving every areas of our lives—spiritual, church, families, and all the rest.

WVC: Does your church receive any impact from this? I mean, you are still a fairly small church, and to have six or seven apprentices moving through the body can have either negative or positive effects, it seems to me. Either your guys are taking away ministry opportunities that lay men or women might fill, or they’re creating more opportunities by putting your mentoring model to work in their own ministry settings.

J&J: It’s definitely the latter. Not only do the unique gifts of the apprentices serve the church—leading ministries and drawing others into the work of the church—but their very presence with

us sends a signal to the whole church about the importance of developing leaders for the next generation, church-planting, and the disciple-making work of the pastor. The ministry provides a highly visible model of shepherding that we are seeking to have characterize our entire church, beginning with how our elders relate to the people under their care.

WVC: What's your long-range vision for this ministry?

Jim: Training men who will be church-planting, pastor-training pastors.

Josh: Building a growing network of men who will care for one another's souls throughout the entire course of their ministries and lives.

Jim: Devising some means of making this a transferable work, one that the men we train could put to use in their own setting . . .

Josh: . . . and that we could teach other pastors to use it as well.

WVC: Jim and Josh, thank you very much.

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