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Student reflection on program outcomes: an example

A. Graduates will form and lead Christian communities gathered around Word and Sacrament for bold participation in God's mission.

(2a) With new urgency you will recognize the Holy Spirit's new opportunities for mission here in ever more diverse North American contexts.

(3a) You will understand the dynamics of systems and institutions and work creatively in the midst of them.

(8a) You will seek out opportunities for encounters and shared projects with neighbors that surround your faith communities.

This reflection responds to program outcome A, and specifically competencies 2a, 3a, and 8a.

I've been through two semesters of education now at Luther, and am finally beginning to get my "sea legs" in this process. Having said that, however, I find this program outcome particularly daunting to imagine achieving. "Forming" a community is itself a challenging task, let alone "leading it," and the more I learn about Word and Sacrament ministry the more humbly I evaluate my skills. The only way I can think about accomplishing this outcome is by an ever deeper reliance on God, and thus an ever deeper reliance on communal discernment aimed towards participating in the *missio Dei*.

This year I have been particularly conscious of the need to work on competencies 2a, 3a, and 8a. The statistics from Pew¹, PRI², and other national surveys³ indicate that the religious group which is growing are those who name themselves "spiritual but not religious." I have found John Roberto's analysis⁴ of this situation compelling, particularly his recognition that many of the people in this group find themselves with a deep hunger for transcendence, but with an equally deep resistance to religious institutions.

I live in a neighborhood in Minneapolis – Uptown – which is full of young adults who are very thoughtful and creative, but who rarely find anything of interest in religious organizations. I think this context is ripe for creative engagement, and I believe that God is "doing something" here. So as part of my effort to lean into learning these

¹ <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise-religion/>

² <http://publicreligion.org/research/2014/02/2014-lgbt-survey/>

³ <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/teens-nextgen/612-three-spiritual-journeys-of-millennials#.UzmjHq1dX6Y>

⁴ <http://www.faithformation2020.net/ff-2020-book.html>

competencies, I've been intentionally spending time in a local coffee shop with my school books (the Bible, commentaries and Greek grammar) spread out around me. After several weeks of doing this, I've started to have a group of "regulars" who often join me, and who bring along their questions about faith, church, spirituality, and so on. I don't pretend to have answers, but I do create a space in which we can ask questions together. Lately we've added another time, a weekly evening meeting held in my neighborhood church, in which we're deliberately inviting people to join us for questions about religion, and particularly about religious institutions. I imagine this kind of space is similar to what constitutes a period of "inquiry" in traditional models of the catechumenate.⁵

The artifact I would like to share with you to demonstrate this work is a cartoon I drew as a "teaser" for this conversation. Note that the primary goal of this cartoon is to be transparent about my own skepticism about religious institutions, while yet inviting people to consider joining us.

For future learning I hope to develop an independent study (or find a leadership division elective) that combines work on adaptive action with learning how to use various social media. I also plan to take one of the systematic theology courses offered, and one of the modern church history courses offered, so that I can trace the trajectory of "seeking" God historically. I am particularly interested in how the *missio Dei* has been understood through time.

⁵ http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article_id=335