



D.MIN. CONNECTIONS

Doctor of Ministry Newsletter

October 2011

Five Questions for Will Willimon

William H. Willimon is a preacher, writer, lecturer, teacher, husband, father, grandfather and a Bishop of The United Methodist Church. He has been leading the North Alabama Conference as presiding Bishop of the Birmingham Area since September of 2004. For twenty years he was Dean of the Chapel and Professor of Christian Ministry at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. He has also served as pastor of churches in Georgia and South Carolina.

1-It's obvious that humor plays a significant role in your preaching and writing. Talk about humor.

God has sense of humor. We see it in the life of Christ, in His use of irony and hyperbole. We as pastors get lots of material, for we have a front row seat into human behavior and intentions. There's usually a gap between what one intends and what one actually does, and this can be the stuff of great humor.

2-You wrote an insightful book on Barth and preaching. What lesson stands out?

Barth emphasized that we must take God more seriously in our preaching. As a bishop, I listen to every sermon of every candidate I place in a ministry, and what I hear tends to be more anthropological than theological. Too much of our preaching is about us, when it needs to be about God.

3-How involved should a pastor be politically?

Maybe a short answer is--like porcupines that make love—very carefully! Even though we may face earthly judges, for example, no one is a final arbiter but God. Our allegiance is to Him. The hope of the world is the church—not Washington, D.C.

Nonetheless, we live in a political culture, so we can not avoid some relationship. At best, we should be ambiguous.

4-You have been a chaplain at Duke, and now you are a Methodist bishop. You also spent some years as a pastor in a church?

I served some eight years as a pastor before I moved to teaching, and then I came back to a pastorate for some more years. In everything I have done, be it a chaplain, a writer, or a denominational leader, at heart I have always been a pastor. Like Eugene Peterson, pastor is my fundamental identity. I don't see myself in any other way. This is why I love to teach a DMin course. I come to be with my peers.

5-How do you see the present state of the church?

It depends upon what day you ask. Sometimes, I can get depressed. The church has always been a bit of a mess; this bride who tends to sleep around. But the church is God's primary means for consorting with the world. Hence, she is worth giving your whole life to.

Study with Will Willimon “Peculiar Speech; Proclamation and Theology”

January 16-19, 2012 | Portland
Class is filling quickly! Contact us as soon as possible to be registered for this exciting learning opportunity with Bishop Willimon and other DMin students.



“Anyone who follows this theologically grounded, deeply practical guide will experience a rebirth of their calling and evolution of their ministry.”

Robert Webber's assessment of Willimon's book, The Pastor



Alumni Spotlight - Ken Wilmot

Recent graduate, Ken Wilmot, D.Min. 2011, is using his degree to further the Kingdom of God in unique and creative ways. Listen to his story...

“When I graduated with an M. Div and Th.M., I looked for a “formal” ministry for five years in Christian Ed. or discipleship, but I received no call. Needing to make a living I and went back into economics having majored in this discipline at Cornell University.

What I discovered was that God was using both my undergraduate and graduate degrees to prepare me for a different Kingdom assignment. I have been assisting people in the area of stewardship since 1984, working through American Express and LPL Financial currently.

I believe that any form of work should be viewed as a sacred trust very much like the more formal types of ministry. God honors Kingdom work in many forms. Even more, our work provides for the gift of giving to be exercised.

I also am convinced that the economic structure of capitalism should be leveraged for the Kingdom. In fact I believe the highest form of capitalism is when God’s people have excess profits that can be used to help others thrive and to provide funding for the advance of the Kingdom.

After doing this ministry for some years, I decided to enter the Doctor of Ministry program at Western to sharpen my focus. I wanted to gain more skills to help believers who work in formal Christian ministry to be better stewards and to become better models of stewardship for those they lead. The D.Min. gave me a platform to really dive into that work.

My dissertation is shaped around that focus. “Thinking Theologically about Retirement and Wise Financial Planning” is the title, and it is a summation of practical Godly wisdom concerning money for people in Christian ministry. The work is a reminder that the world we live in is transitory but the world to come is real. We often confuse the two and need to focus on what really counts in life: investing in eternity.

Western has continued to provide me the skills to live in the world of theology and the world of finance. One could say it has allowed me to be an ethical broker who serves people and represents God. The D.Min program is a reality program for whatever occupation one finds himself. Especially if they have decided to make it sacred.”

Ken continues to be a skilled financial thinker, helping the body of Christ to be better stewards. He is exercising his gifts in his local church and leading study tours abroad.



Upcoming Courses

Chad Hall | Linda Miller “Leading from Gut” (November 14-17)

This course will provide ministry leaders with a clear understanding of coaching as well as equip participants with coaching skills they can put into practice immediately. The instructors will also address how to integrate a coaching approach into the minister’s leading and managing roles.

Will Willimon: “Peculiar Speech: Proclamation and Theology” (January 16-19, 2012)

This course will focus upon a theology of preaching and answers questions such as: How does Christian theology empower, authorize, and sustain Christian proclamation? How do our claims about God inform and give substance to our sermons? Who is the God of whom our sermons preach?

Alex Kulpez | Abbott Smith: “What the Church can Learn from the Corporate World” (March 12-15, 2012)

This unique course will take advantage of the seasoned wisdom gained by leaders in various worlds, from Shell Oil, to HP, to the Church. In this course the elements of effective leadership, administration, and team building will be discussed. Staff recruitment and development, effective organizational management, vision, goals and strategies, measuring success, developing high performance teams, leadership ethics, effective staff and board relationships, as well as negotiation skills and conflict management will be covered.

Register soon for the courses you plan to take in the next few months. Email Cris Comp at ccomp@westernseminary.edu for registration and course details.

Upcoming Instructors

Chad Hall/Linda Miller | “Leading from the Gut”
Nov. 14-17, 2011

Will Willimon | “Peculiar Speech: Proclamation and Theology”
Jan. 16-19, 2012

Roger Ball | “Conflict Management”
Mar. 5-8, 2012 (PHX)

Alex Kulpez/Abbott Smith | “What the Church can learn from the Corporate World”
Mar. 12-15, 2012

Larry Osborne | “Innovation and Creativity in Ministry”
June 4-8, 2012

Andy Crouch | “Culture Making and Creative Power”
Oct. 8-11, 2012

Robert Smith, Jr. | “Pastor/Preacher as Incarnational Leader”
Nov. 12-15, 2012

Gordon MacDonald | Feb. 2013

Bryan Chappell | June 2013

Don Carson | October 2013

Kevin DeYoung | 2014

for full schedule of courses see our website
www.westernseminary.edu/dmin/

Lessons from a Health Bar Dr. John Johnson, Program Director

Behind those nutritional bars on the shelf is usually a story of someone who came up with an idea. I was encouraged to read Gary Erickson's story by a former Villager who did innovative work at Starbucks and eventually shifted and now worked for Clif Bar. After reading *Raising the Bar*, I can see why he made the switch. It sounds like a pretty impressive and inspiring company, one that ministries can learn from. Here are some quick lessons from Erickson's journey--

1 - Embrace Risk. Any venture begins with risk, but then, this is what entrepreneurs do. This is what Erickson did, starting with very simple beginnings. And as I have been around guys in ministry who have done some pretty profound things—risk is what they assume. This is what church planters, what apostles do—they start small and assume the risk of a ministry venture. Paul started from Antioch with a small team and embraced the risk of setting his sights on Rome, and even on to Spain. But in this case, the risk amounts to faith—not in self—but in a great God who can do anything.

2 - Be Willing to Start Small. When Clif Bar first came out, there wasn't any budget for marketing, etc. So they went to athletic events, set up booths in sporting ventures and got to know people. They did the hard work, grunt work of working with people where they are at, staying within their means. For us in ministry, we must always be willing to start small, get low, and stay low. This is where we find God (Matt 18:5).

3 - Catch the Wave. Fortunately for Clif Bar, it was the right bar at the right time. In business, timing is everything. They suddenly found themselves on a ride, growing from three to fifty to hundred employees in no time. For us in ministry, there is something to timing as well. We plant and water, but God causes the growth. We never know where this is all going, where the Spirit moves next (John 3). The important thing is to be ready when the Spirit blows.

4 - It's the Road—Not the Destination. Out of amazing growth, Gary Erickson saw himself thinking more and more destinational--making it big, earning immense profits. He was on a mission, growing from 2 to 5 to 40 million in annual income. But he came to a settled conviction that it can't be about the destination—the bottom line, maximizing shareholder value. It has to be about the journey—not about the most direct and quick route. The road drives the company. As a result, Clif Bar is one of those unique corporations that doesn't just make money—it gives back to the community, to

environmental issues, etc. The older I get, the more I am getting it—that the road is what is important. Destinations are good (Phil 3:12), but when we are too destinational, we can miss the present for the future.

5 - Watch for Drift. Inevitably, things that take off fast slow down. After some early years of growth, things began to flatten at Clif Bar. Gossip and morale loss began to take hold. As Erickson explains, they began to rest on their laurels. The organizational machinery began to transcend the vision. They stopped attending to changes in the market. They were not so careful in listening to their customers. More players entered the field, but those at Clif Bar weren't paying attention, were not launching new products, nor being decisive in their execution. This happens all the time at corporate level. It also happens in churches that grow. The mission, values, and direction can begin to blur. It becomes growth for growth's sake rather than growth to further a vision. We can lose our focus, get caught up in early successes and assume we've reached the summit when, in reality, we are still at base camp. One way to avoid drift is keep to the adage—what got you here won't keep you there.

6 - Remember Who You Are. As Erickson put it, think big, but realize its only health food. He started Clif Bar for one simple purpose—to make a better energy bar. As I noted in an earlier post on lessons from Starbucks, it is important to know who we are in ministry. While corporate entrepreneurs can go after amazing goals and do great things, too many pastors underestimate their purpose as well as the possibilities. We're the church, the hope of the world. We have to think big. Anything less is missing the mark, missing our call, missing this immense challenge to be part of advancing God's kingdom.

7 - Keep It Simple. One of the keys to Clif Bars success is that they have kept this large enterprise as simple as possible. Simple, natural ingredients. Organizational structure simple—few hierarchal layers. Decision making and direct communication happen quickly. Live within your means. Grow at a rate you can sustain.

I reread *Simple Church* this week, and it gives a similar recipe to the church. Ministry creep slinks in. Elder meetings become full of complexities that get off the main thing. Keep it simple really is critical to an effective ministry, just as it is for something as small as health bars. The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing (German proverb).

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