

PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION – THE FOURSQUARE CHURCH¹

The Foursquare Church focuses its “mission and ministry efforts on multiplying disciples, leaders, churches and national movements” with the aim of full participation in the Great Commission, preaching the gospel and making disciples of all nations. With this in mind, we believe that pre-service and continuing ministerial education and training for credentialed ministers within The Foursquare Church must be holistic, strategic, contextual, missional, pentecostal, and will be achieved through intentional partnerships.

HOLISTIC AND STRATEGIC²

Foundational to the educational task is Christian discipleship. We affirm that discipleship/Christian formation is a holistic and integrative enterprise that involves right beliefs (orthodoxy), right behavior/practices (orthopraxy), and right dispositions/affections (orthopathy).³ We believe that the process of Christian formation begins with authentic conversion that, according to the NT, involves a cluster of experiences, including regeneration, Spirit baptism, water baptism, and full integration into the Christian community. Thus, Christian formation expresses a comprehensive process involving the whole person. Accordingly, Christian disciples, through the indwelling and empowering work of the Holy Spirit, become more like Jesus Christ in attitude and behavior, aligning their lives with the mission of God in the world.

The Foursquare Church believes that all Christians are called to be growing disciples of Christ and that the core of discipleship training is realized through active participation in Christian communities. It is within the local church that Christians receive foundational biblical and theological instruction and nurture that furthers Christian character formation. Christian community provides the primary setting for the development of accountable relationships necessary for mentoring and training. In the local church the believer is guided in the discovery of Spirit endowed giftings and callings and then is given opportunities to serve within those gifts and callings. In this context, Christian formation and education happens intentionally but informally and in the context of daily life.

For those disciples called to credentialed ministry in The Foursquare Church, there are essential aspects of ministry formation and education that are aided and enhanced by more formal educational institutions that include certified church-based institutes and accredited colleges and universities. These institutions work alongside training initiatives provided by The Foursquare Church’s districts and the Central offices all in partnership with the local church. These strategic partners are essential to the formation and education of Christian leaders and pastors. The Foursquare Church affirms the necessity of lifelong learning and ongoing ministerial nurture through continuing education (“in service”) training. Here again, our local churches, teaching institutions, and denominational structures form a strategic partnership in providing opportunities for our credentialed ministers to receive ongoing nurture and professional development.

Church	Teaching Institutions	Denominational Structures
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¹ What follows are a unified set of philosophical assumptions that express our approach to Christian education, particularly focused on the preparation of Christian leaders for credential ministry within the Foursquare Church. This philosophy of education addresses the implications of these assumptions for the education enterprise. A Christian educational philosophy must coherently address the total process necessary for the formation of Christian disciples and leaders. This document is considered a “living” document open to review and revision as necessary.

² We are using the term strategic with the adjectival sense that identifies essential and long-term objectives and the partnerships necessary for their realization.

³ See Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993, 41-47.



CONTEXTUAL/MISSIONAL/PENTECOSTAL

Rooted in the pentecostal community, we wish to affirm a “systemic” approach to ministerial formation and education that avoids privileging the cognitive over the practical, recognizing that praxis is as important as a sound knowledge base. Accordingly, we believe that formal education should be tied closely to the practice of ministry in particularized contexts. By locating formal education as closely as possible to actual mission, church practice, and daily life, we aim to avoid the fragmentation and professionalization that sometimes occurs in formal theological education.

Moreover, we affirm the “transrational” dimensions of human knowledge and learning, realizing that knowledge of God always exceeds human reason and its explication through rational discourse. We likewise affirm that knowledge in Scripture is relational in character, rooted in relationship with God and with the Christian community. As such knowledge cannot be reduced to facts and propositions alone. We see this as an important epistemological issue that makes pentecostalism distinct from many expressions of contemporary evangelicalism. For pentecostals, the Holy Spirit is essential to true knowledge, speaking in Creation in multifaceted ways that include reason but we also recognize the place of imagination, intuition, and other non-rational avenues of knowledge.

Finally, The Foursquare Church affirms the importance of God-called, nonprofessional pastors and Christian leaders while affirming the value of formal education for ministry formation. We want to avoid the anti-intellectualism that has at times plagued classical Pentecostalism while avoiding the over professionalizing of Christian ministry that can accompany an overemphasis on formal theological education.

Practical Expressions of The Foursquare Church’s Ministerial Educational Philosophy:

- The centrality of the local church in Christian formation and education.
- Teaching institutions and denominational structures operating as educational partners in service of the local church.
- The importance of intentional apprenticeship and supervised internships to the formation and education of the Christian leaders.
- Foster specific partnerships between formal Foursquare educational institutions and key local churches and districts within The Foursquare Church.
- Intentional, regular dialogue among identified, Foursquare educational leaders with the intention to:
 - avoid *unnecessary* duplication of educational resources.
 - the formation of synergistic partnerships.
 - learn from each other regarding creative and successful educational initiatives and programs—shared resources.
- Maintaining multiple avenues of entry into Christian leadership and ministry.
- Establish Christian formation and biblical/theological education standards for Foursquare credential ministers.
 - Baseline assessment and standards (core competencies) for incoming ministers.
 - Pre-service minimum standard = 1 year certificate or its equivalence in biblical/theological training.
 - Regular assessment and coaching for first three years of credentialed ministry.
 - Distinct standards necessary for ordination.
 - An A.A or B.A. or its equivalence of biblical/theological/ministerial training is recommended.
 - A record of proven fruitful service in ministry coupled with evident Christian character formation.
- Informal and formal continuing education a requirement for all credentialed ministers.
- Ongoing assessment of all credentialed ministers.
- Educational practices that reflect a distinctly pentecostal epistemology.
- Ministerial education centered in the mission of God.



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