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Adult education

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FOREWORD

Adult Education is regarded as an integral part of lifelong learning. It is noted, for example, that UNESCO defines adult education as:

the entire body of organized educational processes... whereby... adults... develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction and bring about changes in their attitudes or behavior in the twofold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic, and cultural development.¹

Literature on Adult Education notes further that "one of the aims of adult education is to enable persons to develop the 'aptitude for learning to learn' ".² In a time when there is so much to learn, and when no one can keep up with the information explosion, it is imperative that in all sectors of society, including church bodies, there develop a keen aptitude for learning to learn.

Church educators see education of the adult Christian as a necessity and as a challenge. "Adult education, *per se*, needs no apology. Millions of Americans [Canadians] are engaged in continuing education,... vocational upgrading and cultural expansion. The church, however, seems to lag. Voices are raised to protest this state of affairs, but the progress is unspectacular."³ One such voice is that of Douglas John Hall who states: "Part of the reason for the decline of the Sunday School, especially in recent years, is that our attempts to educate the young have seldom been backed up with serious adult education in the congregation. How can we expect the children to study the faith in earnest when they are surrounded by adults who apparently aren't the least interested in studying?"⁴

This edition of *Consensus* is devoted to this important dimension of ministry in order to underscore the need for authentic adult education in the parish and to address some of the challenges basic to a qualitative adult education process.

As this area is highlighted within this edition, we should note that there are fundamental principles which undergird adult education and adult learning. These are stated by James J. DeBoy as:⁵

- ¹ Adults learn best when they are treated with respect, as self-directing persons.
- ² Adults learn best when the learning situation is related to their past experiences.
- ³ Adults learn best when they have participated in the planning of the learning activity and set their own goals.
- ⁴ Adults learn best when they are physically comfortable and can socialize with those in the learning group.
- ⁵ Adults learn best when they are with their peers, freely learning in groups.
- ⁶ Adults learn best when there are opportunities for a variety of learning activities.
- ⁷ Adults learn best in a problem-centered situation, when a question needs resolving or when a task needs doing.
- ⁸ Adults learn best when they can see progress, immediate results and some rewards for the time they put into learning.
- ⁹ Adults learn best when they evaluate themselves.

In this edition, William D. Lord, himself a developer of Adult Education opportunities within the Toronto School of Theology, presents "a metaphorical perspective" to Adult Education and explores how varying metaphors impact on our educative and learning perceptions and processes. Eleanor Snyder, a creative voice within Adult Education not only for the Mennonite Church but for Christian churches, basing much of her article on an exploration of the Lukan Emmaus story, emphasizes "journey" and "hospitality" and "community" when it comes to fulfilling and wholistic experiences of Adult Education in the parish. The educative graceful power in befriending is underscored as indicative of the gospel thrust in Luke 24. Lawrence W. Denef, a Luther scholar who has done extensive and intensive research on Luther as an educator, and a leader in Adult Education in the Evangelical Lutheran Church

in Canada, delineates noteworthy insights which Luther held on the art and the practice of learning. Norma Cook Everist, an adult educator in seminary education and a pioneer in alternative approaches to adult education in the parish, describes and examines a particular experiential model in Adult Education which has been developed as "Connections". Arnold D. Weigel, having involvements in varieties of adult education within his seminary responsibilities, explores some aspects of "adult membership instruction"; in his article, he reviews dimensions of an "Adult Catechumenate".

Malcolm Knowles is highly regarded as one of the "patriarchs" in Adult Education. In 1973 he referred to the "adult learner" as "a neglected species".⁶ In many respects, such is still reality—especially in far too many ecclesiastical institutions and communities. Maria Harris is expressing a concrete hope and a call for reality when she says that "the participants in educational work are increasingly not only children but all in the community."⁷ Let's hope that her descriptive words hold a prophetic truth!

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Notes

- ¹ Linda Jane Vogel, *The Religious Education of Older Adults* (Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1984) 192.
- ² Ibid. 192.
- ³ Henry J. Boettcher, *Adult Education in the Parish* (New York: Vantage Press, 1975) v.
- ⁴ Douglas John Hall, *Has The Church A Future?* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980) 118.
- ⁵ James J. DeBoy, Jr., *Getting Started in Adult Religious Education* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979) 75-79.
- ⁶ Malcolm Knowles, *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species* (Houston: Book Publishing Company, 1973).
- ⁷ Maria Harris, *Fashion Me A People* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989) 49.