

Faith and Education: Asking the Questions

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Greetings! I am thankful that you have come to share in this program as we work together to maintain a sense of the high calling of the community of higher education. It is a great honor to be able to speak here. It is also, a great challenge to be placed in the midst of a great university to discuss and reflect on the power of possibility in the process of higher education.

This afternoon, I will give what I understand to be personal testimony! I understand that this terminology is religious, but I wish to reinforce the idea that personal experience is an important part of what later becomes theory and intentional practice. This opportunity to discuss and experience educational formation with you will be a time to reflect on the continuing mandate to review the possible resources for learning and growth in our various communities.

Again, I thank you for allowing me to reflect on the experience of my own educational process, and the continuing mandate to create and sustain an appropriate and highly responsive environment for the educational experience.

The focus for our presentations and discussions is on a celebration of religion in the Western Reserve. The task that I have taken on is to reflect on the college experience at Hiram, one of the early institutions of learning established here in the Reserve. Early on, formed as the Western Reserve Eclectic Institute in 1849, by the Christian Church, the name was changed in 1867 to Hiram College, as it is known today. For me, the experience of a college education was inextricably tied to, what I understand to be the intention and resolve of a religious community, the Christian Church, part of the restoration movement of the early portion of the nineteenth century. The creation of institutions of learning, and higher education, was a major enterprise of faith communities in the nineteenth century. As the boundaries of the English colonial frontier expanded from the east, so too did the responsibility of the settlers to create the ways and means of survival for the people in the "new world". Whereas churches were an expected outgrowth of the westward movement, so then was the need to create centers of learning to maintain the various centers of life. Ohio was and is a big college state, and in the Western Reserve remain some of the earliest and best examples of institutions of higher education in the United States of America. These dozens of church colleges were created in response to the needs of faith communities and for the purpose of building stable and responsible human communities. Although many of these colleges have drifted from the stated purposes of their various charters, a fine, solid and personal education can still be obtained in the four year, church related liberal arts college.

It is my task to share in the celebration of religion in the Western Reserve by recreating for you a legacy of faith and learning, as the substantive experience provided by the four years at Hiram College, and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Background

I was fortunate to be blessed with the commitment of my parents who provide a sound religious and educational foundation for life. My early years of education were spent in an eight year Episcopal elementary school. St. Edmund's Parochial School emphasized reading, the arts and study of the classics; with substantive religious education. My secondary education was at the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools High School. This fifteen year school was developed in the latter years of the nineteenth century by the educational theorist and philosopher, John Dewey. In both environments curriculum was never ever stagnant, and learning was never ever "normative". The times, the child, the mood were all applicable and relevant considerations for a learning session. In these very formative and non-static places I was taught, from the first grade to; "Ask the questions!". Thus my formation has been informed and shaped by a willingness, even a mandate to investigate.

It is my suggestion that, hand in hand the religious and educational environments in which I was