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ABSTRACT

After discussing the church's increasing role in career development activities for youth, particularly high school students, the authors describe the Second Presbyterian Church's (Knoxville, Tennessee) career development program for grades 9-12, involving its ministers, religious education specialists, and laymen. The four steps in the program are described separately and include (1) identifying values, (2) identifying abilities and skills, (3) creating a career based on an understanding of one's values and abilities, and (4) reality testing. (SH)

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ABSTRACT

A Career Development Program for High School Youth
in a Church Setting (EVA)

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Increasingly churches are recognizing that career development activities can complement their existing endeavors to assist youth in exploring values and setting appropriate life goals. A Knoxville church involves its ministers, religious education specialists, and laymen in individualizing career development for its high school students. Church school, youth fellowship, weekend retreats provide the time for youth to learn a reusable decision-making process which includes values clarification, assessment of abilities, development of an "ideal" career description, and testing of the ideal against the reality supplied by published occupational information and contacts with church adults participating in the careers of interest.

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Participants in the most recent periodic survey of a sample of the nation's 30-year-olds pointed to 'the failure of their high schools to help them develop goals and plans for the future' as the most serious deficiency in their high school preparation (School Boards, 1976). In this survey conducted by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) for the National Institute of Education, the 30-year-olds expressed frustration and dissatisfaction with the quality of their lives as a result of their lack of knowledge of their own abilities, interests, and values and their inability to relate these personal qualities to requirements of educational programs and career activities.

The career education concept espoused by many educators, and implemented in increasingly large numbers of schools throughout the country during the 1970s, holds promise for equipping today's youth with understandings which the 30-year-olds did not achieve in their school experiences. But another national survey conducted by AIR revealed that during 1974-75 only about 3 percent of the country's students were enrolled in districts which provided career education programs (AIR, 1976). Most career preparation activities were carried out in high schools, by counselors, except where formal education policies had been adopted, and such policies were found in fewer than one-third of the 860 school districts responding to the survey.

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In a Journal of Career Education article reprinted in Education Digest, L.S. Hansen pointed out that "Individuals at many levels are seeking more help in career planning and development than schools have provided (1976, p. 54)."

Further indications of the limited impact of career education programs were provided by the first survey of career and occupational development conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP Newsletter, 1976). The 17-year-olds participating in the survey apparently had unrealistic career aspirations. Forty-four percent said they wanted to pursue a professional career, but only 20-25 percent of currently existing jobs are classified as professional or managerial. Less than half the 17-year-olds had taken an aptitude test, and only 16 percent had discussed the results with a counselor. More than half of the respondents had difficulty writing a job application and figuring a finance charge. Only an average of about 54 percent could correctly answer five questions concerning the amount of training needed for a specific, commonplace job (p.1).

If, as the evidence indicates, career education is an important need of today's students, but the schools are not able to provide sufficient help in this area, perhaps the time has come to involve additional community resources in the endeavor.

In the 1950s some churches became involved in vocational guidance activities, and were able to provide students with some individualized services the public schools could not offer. Interest in vocational guidance, as conceptualized in the mid '50s has waned, and so has church participation in guidance activities. But now churches throughout the country are beginning to realize that they can fulfill some of the same purposes within the career education movement that initially provided the motivation for church involvement in vocational guidance. During 1976 both the United Methodist Church and

the nondenominational National Center for Christian Studies on Education and Work initiated programs to provide clearinghouses for the collection and dissemination of study papers concerning career education programs for local churches.

Broadly defined, career education is a curriculum thrust designed to equip all students with skills that will enable them to explore, understand, and perform competently in their life roles as family members, citizens, and participants in the work force. Career education may be conceptualized as comprising two sets of activities for learners -- career preparation and career development.

Career preparation includes the acquisition of knowledge and skills in the traditional bases of education: academic, vocational, and technical education. The curriculum designed to provide career preparation also furnishes the vehicle for promoting the concepts included in the second area, that of career development. Career development is that part of career education which enables the individual to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to explore, plan, and establish life roles (Career Education in Michigan - Module II, 1977). According to Hansen, Career development "...stresses the developmental process by which individuals have an opportunity ... to know themselves better, to know their environment (options) better, and to act on that knowledge more purposefully and creatively (1976, p. 54)."

More specifically, career development as used in this paper includes the processes of 1) assessing one's own values, interests, and abilities; 2) acquiring knowledge about various careers which will enable one to make tentative career choices -- or to create an "ideal" career -- based on the self-awareness established in (1) above; and 3) reality testing -- testing one's perceptions of an "ideal" career against the realities of existing careers as portrayed in occupational information acquired from a variety of sources.

It is the career development component which offers the most appropriate avenue for the involvement of churches in career education. Traditionally churches have been interested in helping their members develop values and moral principles that will guide their conduct throughout life. As Hansen points out, career development offers "...experiences which help individuals examine the meaning they want work to have in their lives in relation to their other values in family, community, and leisure (1976, p. 54)." Thus it appears that the addition of career development activities to the church educational program would be compatible with traditional goals for religious education. Such an addition might even increase interest and perceived relevance for youthful participants in the church program.

Churches have unique resources for personalizing career development for youth in ways not possible in schools handicapped by high pupil/teacher ratios and lack of funds for staff development and career information materials. Career development activities can be utilized at a variety of times: in the church school program, in youth fellowship, in special afternoon meetings, or on week-end retreats. Adult assistance can be drawn from several sources: the minister(s), counselors, directors of education, church school teachers, youth fellowship leaders, laymen with counseling skills, indeed any members of the church who are willing to take time to talk with youth about their own careers.

At Second Presbyterian Church in Knoxville, Tennessee a set of career development activities for high school youth (grades 9-12) has been designed, and pilot tested on a limited scale in the church school program. Educational leaders at Second Presbyterian saw in career development an opportunity to strengthen the values clarification aspect of religious education and to forge a new link between youth and adults in the church. Exploration of values,

interests, and abilities could be guided by teaching staff of the church. Then as the high school students began to investigate selected occupations, adult church members involved in those occupations could describe their work and discuss the life style associated with their career, its effect on family life and leisure time, and the application of values in the career.

The kind of career development program being tried at Second Presbyterian can be implemented by laymen without special training in teaching or counseling, but it is desirable for an individual with such a background to supply overall program coordination. Inspiration for most of the program activities came from Howard Figler's work in PATH: A Career Workbook for Liberal Arts Students (1974). Several of the Figler exercises have been modified by the Career Planning and Placement Center at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and it is the modified form which Second Presbyterian is using.

In this approach career development consists of four steps: 1) identifying values, 2) identifying abilities and skills, 3) creating a career based on an understanding of one's values and abilities, and 4) reality testing. Passive listening to results of standardized tests and reading of recommended occupational information is replaced by active self exploration. Career development is characterized as a dynamic, creative process which one can internalize for use again and again to test the reality of the various career choices which may be made in the course of one's life cycle.

The acquisition of decision-making skills is based initially on values clarification. The career development program at Second Presbyterian Church includes five exercises which are designed to help high school students identify their own values. The first four exercises are taken from Deciding (Gelatt et al., 1972): "What Do I Value", "I Am Proud...", "Coat of Arms", and "Exploring Your Values." The fifth exercise "Work Values" is taken from a set of career development exercises developed for college students by the University of Tennessee Career Planning and Placement Center (CPPC).

The values clarification exercises do not consist of structured sets of items. They merely suggest how an individual may look at his/her own experience and begin to identify the guiding principles which shape his or her conduct. In "What Do I Value" students are asked to list 20 things that they really like to do -- things that are fun, that make them happy, that make them feel good. Then they are instructed to classify the 20 items in various ways. "I Am Proud" involves completing the sentence "I am proud that ..." with three statements that are true about oneself. The "Coat of Arms" exercise tells the individual how to make his/her own personal coat of arms by drawing pictures of such things as "two things you do well", "the three people most influential in your life", and "what you would do with one year left to live." In "Exploring Your Values" the student constructs a log showing what he/she did during each hour of the preceding week-end. The log is then examined for what it reveals about one's values. In "Work Values" the student looks at descriptions of various satisfactions that people obtain from their jobs and rates each on the basis of the importance which she or he would attach to it.

Following completion of the values clarification exercises each student reviews all exercises, summarizes the life values discovered, then identifies those values which would have most influence on the choice of a life's work.

The second step in the career development process is assessment of abilities and skills. The first exercise is Figler's "Evaluating Abilities" in which students first write a list of the things they do best, then rate themselves on each of the abilities described in a prepared listing. The next three exercises are CPPC adaptations of Figler's work. In "Achievements" students are encouraged to write or tell about one or more achievements -- something they did well, enjoyed, and were proud of. Then they identify the skills used

or acquired in their achievements. The "Self Inventory of Functional Skills" is a prepared list of "functional skills" and students are asked to identify the things they feel they do well. In the exercise "Employers and Skills" students 1) select the five functional skills they feel they perform best, 2) select from a prepared list of Types of Employers five with whom they would like to work, then 3) discuss how their functional skills could be used in working with each type of employer. Finally, students review all four exercises and develop lists of five or six abilities and skills which they feel are their strongest.

The third step in the career development program involves creating an "ideal" career by relating self awareness of values, abilities, skills to perceptions about the world of work. Several of Figler's exercises facilitate this process. In "Skills X Trial Occupations" each student creates a two-way table by 1) listing along the left margin of the table all the personal skills and abilities he or she has identified, 2) entering across the top of the table at least five "Trial Occupations" selected from a prepared list of approximately 80 occupations, and 3) filling in the cells of the table with an estimate of the importance of each skill in each trial occupation selected. "Values X Trial Occupations" is a similar exercise in which the student lists his/her primary values along the left margin of the table. "Creating a Random Career" involves several steps which help students see how a hypothetical individual's values, abilities, and skills can be combined to characterize a "creative career." In the last exercise, "Creating My Own Career" students are asked to consider all their prominent values, abilities, and skills and then construct a description of a career which they would find most satisfying. This career description usually encompasses several specific occupations.

The final step of the career development process is reality testing. The student must utilize a variety of resources to test his/her expectations regarding the "ideal" career. Reality testing can take place in school courses and extracurricular activities, and through reading occupational information, talking with persons in occupations of interest, doing volunteer work, or taking a job after school or during the summer. Reality testing can confirm or challenge the student's perceptions of the relationships between his or her values and abilities and the requirements of the "ideal" career. The testing experience may suggest a return to the first steps and revision of the career description initially created. Theoretically reality testing continues throughout one's life. When it reveals incongruence between self and occupation, the entire career development process may need to be repeated.

Reality testing has become part of the high school curriculum in Charleston, West Virginia where Experience-Based Career Education (EBCE) has been tried (EBCE, 1976). In an alternative program for juniors and seniors, the students explore careers by assuming a position beside someone already in the field. Instead of regular high school classes EBCE students work at "experience sites" in the community for periods varying from a few days to 13 weeks, earn academic credit for their work, then return to high school to graduate with their classes. "Participating employers and other community resources provide the special interest and attention that allow students to ask questions, try out their skills and explore career values (p. 5)."

In the career development program at Second Presbyterian Church the reality testing component is provided by adult members of the congregation and the professional staff of the church. Students identify careers which interest them, and panels are formed of adult church members engaged in careers within the occupational clusters in which most interest is expressed.

Panel members discuss their jobs, the preparation needed for entry, their life styles, and the application of their values and religious principles in their work. In the future it is hoped that arrangements can be made for students to visit the job sites of adult church members and perhaps to try out various jobs through volunteer or paid work.

The church itself is a site for reality testing in the areas of teaching (in church school or vacation Bible School), recreation (supervising sports or crafts programs for younger children), social work (with the disadvantaged in the community mission of the church), and management (serving on board of deacons or religious education committee).

The church can also assist in the reality testing process by providing occupational information in print or on film. Adults in the church willingly furnish information about their own fields, but additional materials can be obtained free or for a small charge from sources mentioned in Career Education News and other sources. The Occupational Outlook Handbook, Chronicle publications, and a system such as the University of Tennessee I.N.F.O.E. materials (Cameron, 1975), for providing current occupational information should also be acquired. (Project I.N.F.O.E. -- Information Needed for Occupational Entry -- is a system for disseminating localized information on over 400 careers through the medium of microfiche aperture cards.)

The pilot test of the career development program at Second Presbyterian took place during an eight-week segment of the church school class for high school students. The one-hour classes were too brief to allow the discussion and depth of self-exploration desired, so the program outlined above had to be abbreviated. Values clarification was emphasized at the expense of identifying abilities and functional skills. When students had identified careers of interest to them, the adult panels provided limited reality testing through

first-hand information about their work, their lives, the application of their values in their daily activities. While the students found the values clarification exercises novel and stimulating, the post-program evaluation revealed that the adult panels were considered the most valuable component of the program.

Since the church school hour was insufficient to permit accomplishment of all program objectives, plans are under way to supplement the time on Sunday mornings with additional career development activities at Youth Club on Wednesday nights, Senior High Fellowship on Sunday evenings, and week-end retreats.

Change is so rapid in our society that nothing seems permanent; not even values are absolute, they may be adapted to fit various circumstances. One of the most significant contributions the church can make to the lives of its members is to help them cope with impermanence and uncertainty about the quality of moral standards. Second Presbyterian Church considers career development to be an important part of church efforts to foster in its members the confidence to confront uncertainty, the ability to make decisions based on the best data available, and the capacity to adapt creatively to change.

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