

The Pastoral Pursuit of Continuing Education

*THE D.MIN. DEGREE
MAY BE ONE SMALL
STEP FOR A PASTOR,
BUT IT ENABLES
MEN AND WOMEN
TO TAKE A GIANT
LEAP FORWARD
IN MINISTRY.*

ANUPARP WICHITNANTANA

Assemblies of God Theological Seminary

The Reverend Anuparp Wichitnantana, the general superintendent of the Thailand Assemblies of God and pastor of the Bangkok Liberty Church, has been a part of the AGTS doctor of ministry program for several years. He found the program's emphasis on leadership to be a strong influence in his life. The stress on rigorous academics in a cohort format had a profound effect: "This made my outlook on the church and ministry more positive, and it gave confidence in my ability to serve more effectively."

The flexibility of the program also appealed to him. Often, Wichitnantana felt that the curriculum was designed for him as if the seminary knew his specific situation. He chose to concentrate in the area of cell church planting, which is in line with his vision to pioneer churches throughout Bangkok and Thailand using a cell model. He says this gave him "the opportunity to read, think, and thor-

oughly reflect, leading to adjustment and increased effectiveness in ministry and fulfilling the vision God has given me.”

Beyond this, the thing that was most influential for “Reverend Anuparp” was the cohort format of the AGTS program. Students are intentionally chosen to create diversity. Each group of students studies together in each core class, creating closeness and lasting fellowship. This format also allows for new perspectives from the experiences of each person, not just from the professor or the textbook.

One of the strengths of the D.Min. program at AGTS is that it chooses churches that have good ministry models where students can go, study, and analyze. Wichitnantana notes that, according to a Thai proverb, “ten witnesses are not equal to having seen for yourself.”

During the course of the program, Wichitnantana’s dream for Thailand began to be realized. In March of 2001 he organized and led the first Church Planting Boot Camp ever conducted in his nation. Church leaders expect 40 new congregations to be planted as a result of training the 50 people who attended.

DOUGLASS P. NORWOOD JR.

Assemblies of God Theological Seminary
For generations, Suriname’s Christian minority has been hampered in areas of evangelism, church planting, and church growth by factionalism and divisions of long standing. Douglass P. Norwood Jr., executive director of Broken Jars, designed his D.Min. project at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary to address the problem of disunity by assembling 14 national church leaders in a first-of-its-kind colloquium to initiate a new focus on the common mission of the church.

Central to the success of the project, according to Norwood, was the dynamic balance in the D.Min. program between the academic and the personal. Cutting-edge contemporary perspectives on timeless biblical truths and rigorous reading schedules both broadened and deepened his theological core. At the same time, the intimacy of the program’s cohort experience encouraged the development of new ideas and methods while challenging him to keep his focus during the many stages of the project’s development.

Among important fringe benefits of pursuing the D.Min. degree is the opportunity it provides for spiritual refreshment and renewal for participants, regardless of focus or study.

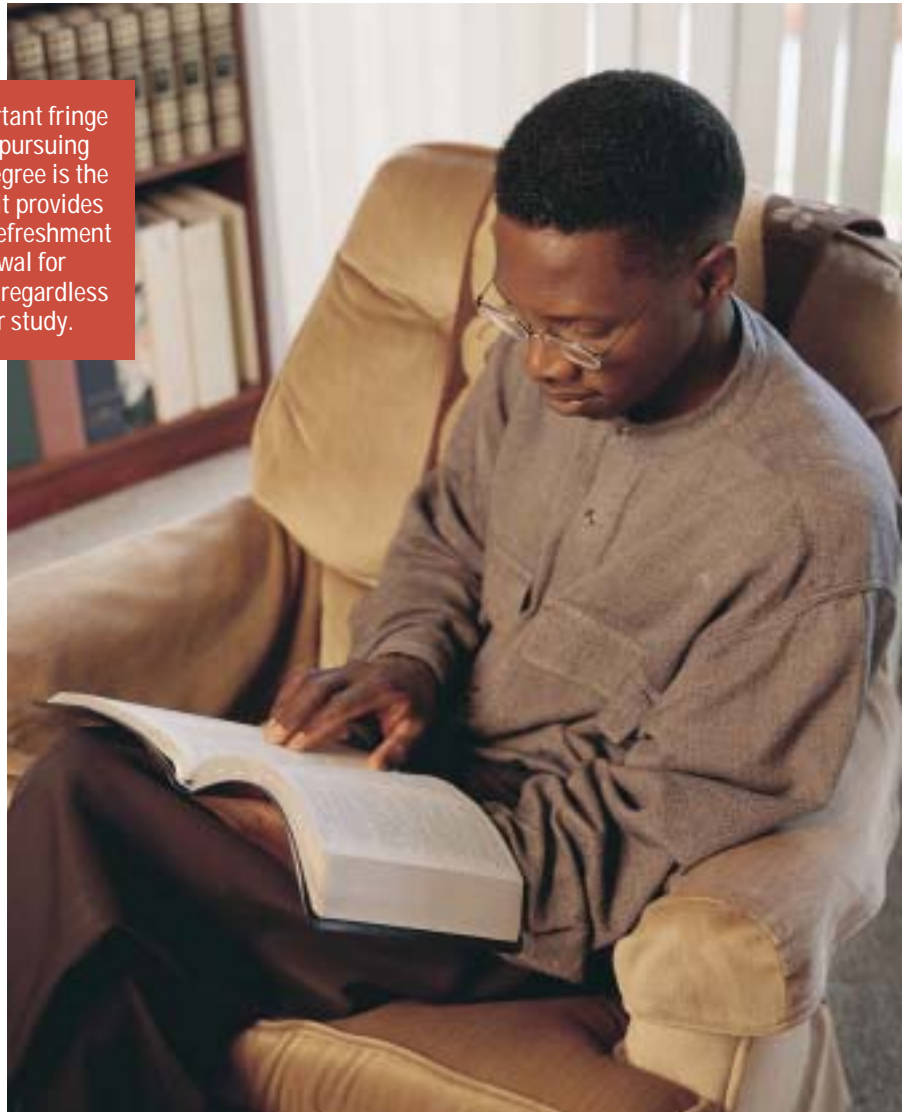


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Weaving biblical principles of unity within the body of Christ together with contemporary understandings of appreciative inquiry, learning organizations, and team building, Norwood arrived at the conclusion that the core of success for any organization in the twenty-first century is a vision of a *common mission*. That common mission for the church, he discovered, is represented within several biblical models that form the core of an integrative conversation, powerfully effective because they provide the language and the landscape of a shared biblical culture.

The colloquium participants included the leaders of all of Suriname’s Christian denominations and parachurch bodies. Through their time together those leaders developed deep personal relationships, grasped an understanding of common mission, and began to focus on developing joint missional strategies. Within weeks of

their initial meeting, colloquium members had already organized an interdenominational prayer rally that brought over ten thousand Christians to pray together in the national plaza.

The above recollections of the D.Min. educational experience are by no means unique. In fact, they represent the experiences of hundreds of men and women who each year graduate from one of the nation’s seminaries with a D.Min. degree. By and large, those who make the sacrifices necessary to earn this degree are very serious about the ministries to which God has called them. And congregations around the country—indeed, around the world—are better as a result. ■

By Randy Frame, writer and acquisitions editor for Judson Press in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania.