

Third International Training Consultation
Emmaus Bible College
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Workshop 4.1
Hermeneuting the Church – Expressing our Essence with Integrity

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Remit Are we living according to design? How should we integrate Ecclesiology and Ministry today?

Hermeneutics is the bridge from the world of the text to the world today. Just as preachers are called to bring the text into our lives today, church leaders are called to guide the faith community to be a faithful embodiment of the church in today's world. How do we do this?

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1. Common Approaches

Blueprint Approach. This is where a well thought out ecclesiology of the church is constructed and then applied to the local church in any context.

Pragmatic Approach. This is where the shifting needs of the context determines the practices employed in enacting the local church.

Traditional Approach. Not having a well-developed ecclesiology and not being prepared to move with the changing context, that which has always been is the reference for what should be.

2. Blind Theory and Blind Practice

To generalise we are caught between approaches of blind theory and blind practice. The blueprint approach is what we call blind theory. This is an ecclesial theory which has been developed without regard for the context of the faith community. The pragmatic and traditional approaches tend to be both what we call blind practice. This is where the actions of the church are carried out without significant reflection on or connection to a foundational ecclesiology.

3. What should be our approach to the life of the church?

Here we consider how to move beyond the static idea, defensive tradition, or reactionary pragmatic approaches, to a place where there is a dynamic connection between ecclesiology and ministry, between essence, expression, and goal.

4. How do we as a faith community live with integrity?

Here we start with looking at what the essential nature of the church is and what does it mean to embody this faithfully in the world today? That is, how do we ensure that what the church is called to be, the essence of the church, is faithfully expressed in practice in any local church context?

5. What is our goal?

While ministry always has some embedded goal, often the goal of ministry is not connected and integrated to the essential nature and calling of the church. How do we ensure that what we are focussing on in our ministries is directed toward the overall eschatological goal of the church?

These questions are critical for us as historically a reactionary, non-creedal, and predominantly practice driven movement.

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Workshop Questions for Discussion

1. What is your church's and our movement's predominant approach to church life and practice – Blueprint, Pragmatic, Traditional, or Dynamic.
2. What are the potential blind spots, in theory or practice, as a result of the above approach?
3. What are the core components of the essence of the church?
4. What are the core components of the expression of the church?
5. What is the overarching goal of the church?

6. What issues of integration and alignment between essence, expression and goal do you perceive?

7. Regarding the church expression event of preaching consider the following:

a. What is your theology of preaching?

b. What is the goal of preaching?

c. What is the dominant goal of preaching in your church?

d. Is the preaching expression in your church connected to each of the essence categories?

e. Is it directed toward the stated eschatological goals of the church?