

A resource of the Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education (SCUPE)

SCUPE Welcomes Hans-Peter and the Swiss (Chocolate) Connection



It's our pleasure to welcome Hans-Peter Geiser, Ph.D., M.Div. Hans-Peter is a Swiss Reformed pastor and a visiting scholar at SCUPE for the 2008-09 academic year. He is here as a team member in a collaborative project designed to set up an International Reformed Churches Project for an urban ministry exchange program between Swiss and U.S. pastors.

Hans-Peter grew up in Switzerland in Biel/Bienne, a bilingual city at the border of the Swiss, German, and French part of Switzerland. With a population of 60,000, it is a small city compared to Chicago. "It was an amazingly vibrant place to be with all of the youth movements that were taking place in the 1970's. That's when I decided to become a Christian, and later a pastor and a theologian," he comments.

His theological journey has been a global one. He has traveled from Switzerland to New York City; Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky; and Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. He fell in love with the city of Pasadena while watching the Rose Bowl and pursuing his Master of Divinity at Fuller in 1985. It was also at Fuller that he met and married, Janice, a native of Santa Cruz, California, who was studying family and marriage counseling. Since 2006 he has traveled to Washington, D.C., Argentina, San Francisco, Los Angeles, back to Switzerland, and now to Chicago.

He has pastored churches in Geneva, Aargau, and Zurich, Switzerland. Hans-Peter completed his Ph.D. At the University of Lausanne with faculty from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston on his dissertation committee.

In discussing Switzerland's church landscape, he says that there are regions where the Swiss Reformed Church is government-sponsored, so pastors in these areas do not worry as much about finances. But in other areas, where churches are private and not state-sponsored, they are preoccupied with financial survival, reaching out beyond their membership to the local communities, and ministering to communities with increasingly diverse international populations. He notes the development of regional ministries in Geneva, where for example one local congregation is the primary provider of Youth Ministry for a designated region which includes many churches.

"My mission here is to make connections with denominations and churches that would help facilitate the development of a pastoral exchange program which focuses on urban ministry," says Hans-Peter. "We would like to send Swiss pastors to Chicago churches and Chicago pastors to local congregations and new city projects in Zurich, Basel, and Geneva, Switzerland. I think we have much to learn from one another."

Seminary Students Explore Chicago's Changing Neighborhoods

SCUPE held a "Seeing the City through Prophetic Imagination" community tour weekend for seminary students on Saturday and Sunday, November 1st and 2nd. Designed to introduce students to SCUPE's Graduate Theological Urban Studies program and the wonders of the city. The two-day event also sought to introduce students to the challenge of community development at the neighborhood level. Students explored different community development models as they visited the Cabrini-Green and Auburn-Gresham neighborhoods, two different African American communities.

Cabrini-Green is a public housing area that is being redeveloped by outsiders who are economically displacing residents by the high cost of the new housing that is being built there, while Auburn-Gresham is a middle class neighborhood that being developed from the inside-out by residents living in the area with help from congregations like the Faith Community of St. Sabina, Catholic church leading the way.

Overall, 16 Master of Divinity students participated in the urban community exploration weekend. Students came from Western Theological Seminary (Holland, MI), Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary (Louisville, KY), and Luther Seminary (St. Paul, MN). The seminary students gathered at the Walter Payton High School parking lot on a chilly Saturday morning and walked to nearby Cabrini-Green. Their community guide, Cynthia Stewart, a community activist and educator, who

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Economic reflections by Art Lyons

Seminary Students Explore Chicago

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wrote her graduate thesis on the comparisons of community transformation between the top-down approach in Cabrini Green and the bottom-up faith-based approach of the Auburn Gresham community. She was informative, personable and very well connected with the churches in both communities. Dave Frenchak and Carol Ann McGibbon of SCUPE, also joined the group on their journey and helped to guide student reflections.

After touring Cabrini, the students visited with Rev. Chuck Infelt, pastor of Holy Family Lutheran Church, a local church located in the Cabrini Green neighborhood. Pastor Infelt gave a great historical overview of the community's change from a high-crime, low-income, public housing to a quickly changing high-income, townhouse and homeownership-based (\$300,000 and up) community. Students were exposed to each community's history, as well as solid sociological, political, and theological analysis as they walked through the two neighborhoods.

The group began with Cabrini-Green in the morning and then traveled south by public transportation to Auburn-Gresham, where they dined at the Perfect Peace Café, an economic development project of St. Sabina Church. After a tour of the housing, senior complex, school and church, students returned to SCUPE for Chicago deep dish pizza and a time of theological reflection on the experience. Students were inspired by the community development work in Auburn-Gresham and several students expressed interest in learning more about urban ministry and SCUPE's programs. Sunday morning, students had the choice of worshipping at

one of several SCUPE internship sites - Bethel Lutheran Church, Fourth Presbyterian, the Faith Community of St. Sabina, New Life Community Church, LaVillita Community Church, Faith Tabernacle Baptist Church, and Trinity United Church of Christ. The weekend ended with lunch and a final debriefing before they headed home. The experience was such a good one that SCUPE will plan another community tour in the spring.



Cynthia Stewart (2nd right w/back to us), orients students to the history of the Cabrini-Green housing development, as students stand outside one of its few remaining public buildings. Carol Ann McGibbon (far right) and Dave Frenchak (left) add comments.



Seminary students take a walking tour of the nearby churches in the Cabrini Green neighborhood.

"I saw God in the faces of the people in the streets, the neighborhoods, and on the train . . . God revealed something very special to me saying, 'Young lady, urban ministry is what I am calling you to do.' My life is changed forever . . . I long to work with the people I encountered where I saw the very face of God."

Jennifer Wentz,
Luther Seminary, St. Paul MN



A billboard advertises new condos at \$300,000 and townhomes at \$499,000 and up in Cabrini Green.

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Summer Urban Ministry Institute (SUMI) responds to local church leadership development needs

Over the last 30 years, the Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education has worked with a number of denominations to provide training and educational programs to help congregations flourish in our modern world. We have found that churches, especially those in urban areas, are in transition coping with a variety of changes or crisis situations. These challenges impact the church's identity, leadership, organizational development, ministries, and/or finances. At the core of crisis thinking and behavior is the inability of congregations to clearly articulate and embrace their purpose and mission in the community outside of the church building. Denominational leaders want to prepare church leaders to reach out and connect more with the people in their neighborhood and to take part more fully in the in-breaking of God's kingdom in their city. Often denominational leadership must wrestle with the stewardship question of how to best invest their financial resources for these transitional congregations.

SCUPE offers a *Summer Urban Ministry Institute (SUMI)* that equips congregations in transitional contexts with the single most relevant attribute for their situation: shared leadership. Through a collaborative effort involving several denominations and congregations from around the country we have developed a curriculum and process that is accessible to lay members of congregations, because we know that ministries that rely solely on the ordained leaders cannot be effective. Effective ministry requires teamwork.

This training expands the necessary ministerial perspectives and develops leadership skills and competencies while also recognizing that individuals have different levels of formal education. SUMI prepares participating congregational teams (usually 3-4 laypersons and the pastoral leader) for their most important task: mobilizing other leaders from their congregation and community to implement their ministry plans when they return to their congregations. Over the past several years, we have received positive feedback from the denominational officials, church pastors, and church lay leaders who have participated in the week-long institute.

While in the past we have had participation from a variety of denominations, this past summer's Summer Urban Ministry Institute was offered in partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and focused on the following objectives: 1) helping participants to identify their God-given talents and leadership skills; 2) clarifying each congregation's purpose and mission, 3) leading participating church teams in developing a strategic plan which addresses their organizational and community contexts, 4) learning about the importance of building consensus for the plan from the church membership, and 5) teaching participants to become more aware of the larger social, political, and economic systems which impact the quality of life for the increasing diverse individuals and families who live in our neighborhoods and cities. The institute also sought to equip congregational lead-

ers with the tools and skills they need to analyze their specific ministry contexts and to build and develop their financial and human resources. Participants also learned how to identify key stakeholders and actors in their communities and how to map the assets such as the financial and organizational resources available within their community.

The SUMI session was attended by 70 participants from 18 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America congregations from across the United States. Each participating church sent a pastoral/lay team comprised of 3 to 5 persons. The 2008 SUMI was led by a diverse team of faculty members from around the country. Each of these handpicked practitioners has extensive experience in one of the specific content areas listed above and has worked with communities of faith in a variety of contexts. Faculty included: Dr. Ruben Duran, Dr. David Frenchak, Rev. Carol Ann McGibbon, Cynthia Milsap, Dr. Ron Pate, Rev. Cheryl Stewart Pero, Dr. Mary Nelson and Dr. Katie Day. Participants worshipped and met with leadership from six Chicago congregations: St. Pius V, the Faith Community of St. Sabina, Bethel Lutheran Church, Lakeview Lutheran Church, Progressive Community Church and Trinity United Church of Christ.

Our next SUMI will be held in summer 2009. For more information contact Carol Ann McGibbon at (312) 726-1200.

UPCOMING SCUPE GTUS COURSES:

SCUPE M 305

DIMENSIONS AND DYNAMICS OF URBAN MINISTRY

Organized as a sequence of city-wide experiential learning opportunities, the course introduces students to congregations and faith-based organizations that bring good news through prophetic ministry. Students have the opportunity to engage in dialogue with urban ministry leaders who offer vision, courage and hope. Course methodology includes contextual experience, theological reflection, social analysis and dialogue with significant church leaders and the instructor.

Credit: 3 semester hours

Faculty: Dr. Yvonne Delk

Course Schedule: January 5-9, 12-16 (9 a.m.-5 p.m.)

MS I. Nature and Practice of Ministry

SCUPE B-Th 302

URBAN PRINCIPALITIES AND THE SPIRIT OF THE CITY

Drawing from the ground-breaking theological work on the biblical language of "principalities and powers," this course examines the spiritual realities foundational to understanding and transforming the social, economic and political structures of our urban world.

Credit: 3 semester hours

Faculty: Rev. Bill Wylie-Kellermann

Course Schedule: February 6-7, 13-14, 20-21

(Fridays 1 p.m. - 9 p.m. ; Saturdays 9 a.m.- 5 p.m.)

TS III. Topics in Theology (Cross list MS I, RSS)

To Register contact: Dody Finch 312-726-1200

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“WAS IT too good to be true?” **A Few Reflections on the Recent Economic decline** by Arthur Lyons

In reflecting on the recent financial woes of the housing and stock market, an old wise adage comes to mind. *“If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.”* In the financial world, no investment can forever provide an annual rate of return higher than the economy-wide average.

In recent years, housing and several other commodities (defined broadly to include not only tangible goods but also financial assets), especially financial instruments based on housing, had rates of return above the average. These commodities attracted ever larger sums of investors' money.

Universities diverted parts of their endowment from long-term average investments to the above-average commodities. Wealthy and not-so-wealthy individuals, often using borrowed money, committed huge sums to fancily constructed financial instruments returning above-average rates. Insurance companies, seeking high returns to pay corporate expenses plus customer claims, invested accumulated premium reserves in financial instruments promising above-average rates. Banks did the same with an increasingly large fraction of depositors' money.

Individuals borrowed heavily to buy homes. Even if traditional lending criteria suggested borrowers' incomes were insufficient to support the debt, lenders didn't worry. Buyers managed because home prices were rising at above average rates. This allowed them to refinance their properties every year or so and borrow ever larger amounts based on their home's rapidly increasing price. People borrowed and bought two or three houses, held them for a few months, and re-sold them at a handsome profit, sometimes without even making improvements. As long as new money kept flowing in, the system fed on itself. Later investors increased the demand for, and the rate of return on, commodities purchased by earlier investors.

But, alas, the material world is finite. Universities reached the limit of endowment funds they were willing to invest in products they knew to be risky. Insurance companies reached the limit of their premium reserves. The rate of homeownership reached an all-time high, and the number of households remaining dwindled. Without new money to keep pushing above-average rates of return up, the gap between them and other rates stabilized. Some investors, sensing a reversal on the horizon, sold what they had previously purchased. This increased the supply of investment products and caused the above-average rates to drop. Homeowners could no longer refinance because, with declining demand, prices were no longer increasing. Some defaulted, accelerating the drop in the rate of return on investment products tied to their loans. Just as the upward spiral had fed on itself, so did the downward spiral.

Among the many questions that can be asked, one of the most important is the role of personal and social responsibility. Many investors knew that high rates of return correspond to a high risk of loss. What is their ethical, and what should be their legal responsibility, to absorb the losses resulting from their own investment decisions? What is our responsibility to allow them, and people who relied on them, to suffer a financial loss and learn from their mistakes? Who was duped and who was blinded by greed? What is their personal responsibility? What is our responsibility to step in with support? Precisely, which taxpayers should pay more and who should receive these additional taxes? Now that we have approved a \$700 billion bailout for the financial industry, should we, do the same for the auto industry? . . . and other industries already lining up? There is one certainty, religious congregations and community organizations will receive the human casualties from our personal and collective financial failures and no one will bail us out.

Arthur Lyons, Ph.D., is Director of the Master of Arts in Community Development (MACD) Program, a joint program of SCUPE and North Park University, Chicago. He is also the Director of the Center for Economic Policy Analysis (CEPA), a Chicago-based agency providing high-quality, affordable research and analysis for community groups throughout the United States.

