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The Religious Formation of Graduate Ministry Students in an Online Wisdom Community

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THE RELIGIOUS FORMATION OF GRADUATE MINISTRY STUDENTS IN AN ONLINE
WISDOM COMMUNITY

A dissertation submitted

by

Michael Porterfield

to

University of Missouri—St. Louis

in partial fulfillment of
the requirement for the
degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Teaching and Learning Processes

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Abstract

Online and hybrid programs are becoming more commonplace in higher education, especially in graduate theological education, but little research has been done in this area. This study helps to add to the body of research on online and hybrid theological programs. In graduate theological education there is a dynamic process of transformation that happens to individuals. In years past, this transformative paradigm could only have happened in a physical location, but now this process of deep reflection and communal interaction can be done in an online wisdom community. When one defines community by what people do together instead of by physical location, online community can exist. This mixed method study used surveys of alumni and current students of a doctoral program in ministry using Dr. Alfred Rovai's (2002) Classroom Community Scale to quantitatively measure their sense of community in a learning environment built on the "wisdom community" model. The response rate for this survey was high; 65% of the alumni and current students responded which improves the trustworthiness of this data set. Results of the survey showed student and alumni connectedness in their high scores in the Classroom Community Scale; their self-assessed learning reveals their deep integration, transformation and formation into a community of preachers. A qualitative analysis was also performed on students' online discussions during the program and their responses to open-ended survey questions on how they would define community and if they were able to transfer their formation and learning in their wisdom community as preachers to their ministry sites. The analysis showed how the online discussions and sharing of video-recorded preaching enabled geographically distributed students to support one another in learning to prepare for and execute preaching more effectively. Surprisingly, alumni males scored higher than alumni females, in contrast to Rovai's findings. Furthermore, the results unearthed two competing views of

covenant statements, which are an important tool for this community. These competing views exposed stages in individual students' communal development. Additionally, participants varied in their transfer of preaching practice and community formation into their ministry sites after the program. Implications of the findings for online and hybrid education in general and graduate theology in particular are discussed.

To my family who gave me love and support to finish this journey.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The kind of learning community that Brown and Campione (1994) describe in the book *Classroom Lessons: Integrating Cognitive Theory and Classroom Practice* is incarnated at Aquinas Institute of Theology's (in St. Louis, MO.) cohort model of theological education. Brown and Campione (1994) set out to describe their theory of first principles of learning which include: multiple zones of proximal development that includes multiple resources, multiple roles and multiple experts; dialogic base which includes a shared understanding of common knowledge and people working together to build new knowledge and shared meaning; legitimization of differences in which respect is the most important element, while fostering community and personal formation; community of practice which states that there is a sense of community, each has a sense of ownership and choice and more importantly community reaches beyond the classroom walls; and lastly that learning is contextualized and situated which means that nothing is done without a reason, theory and practice are put into action and there is a link between current practice and expert practice.

Similarly, Thomas Esselman (2004), former systematic theologian at Aquinas Institute of Theology, writes that after much consideration the Aquinas faculty was able to articulate their pedagogy in regards to their "hybrid-cohort model" of theological education. The hybrid-cohort model they developed refers to a hybrid of face-to-face and distance learning instruction facilitated through web-based technology, in which cohorts of students proceed through the program together in the same sets of courses. The program's pedagogy includes six principles that guide them through incorporating technology into the curriculum:

The principles cited by the faculty included a commitment to: (1) the creation of rapport among learners, (2) experimental learning, (3) self-directed learning, (4) integration, (5) communal learning, and (6) the cultivation of wisdom communities of learning. These principles are characteristics of good theological pedagogy in general of course, and are not unique to distance education and particularly the hybrid model that I have described, these principles suggest some implications about the effective use of technology for teaching and learning. (Esselman, 2004, p. 162)

Many of the ideas from Esselman and Brown and Campione are similar, but the most intersecting point is the community of practice and Aquinas' concept of wisdom community. Wisdom is very valuable in theological education. The idea of wisdom comes from Proverbs 9 (NRSV) in which Wisdom is seen as the Wise Woman. In this passage, "Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars....she calls from the highest places in the town, 'You that are simple, turn in here!' To those without sense she says, 'Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity, and live and walk in the way of insight.'" In this passage the way of the wise, life, consists in laying aside immaturity and living and walking in the way of insight. This proverb is intended for the readers to choose life, the way of the wise. The way of the wise will consist of a life that is successful, rich and happy.

According to Harold Washington (1994), the Book of Proverbs is based on the folk wisdom of the Judean village society (p. 203). The community-based wisdom is found in this proverb. To help illustrate this point, the Wise Woman calls from the highest places in the town and dispatches her servants into the village to invite guests to the banquet. So Wisdom does not eat alone. Contrary to this, the Foolish Woman, also mentioned in the scripture passage, sends no one out but sits at her door; she does not go into the community seeking others to join her in

her banquet. Proverb 9 reveals that when people work together and look out for one another, then the whole community benefits. This is a quality of wisdom, making sure individuals, and society as a whole, strive to live a successful, rich and happy life.

This was embodied for me as a student when I took a Pauline Scripture class at a local seminary in which a veteran professor, who had taught the same material for years, started to become more student centered by engaging students in class and outside class by using the Blackboard course management system. Previously, he would walk into the classroom and start lecturing without any notes; he knew the material by heart. One day, the instructional technologist introduced new teaching methods and Blackboard to him and his whole world changed; he encountered a paradigm shift. He went from a lecture-based model to a student-centered model of education. The students started to be responsible for teaching sections of the class and participating in the online forums. The professor started to engage the students in class and on the discussion board, which is a radical difference. The professor became alive and transformed. Everyone worked together to lay aside immaturity, and live and walk in the way of insight. Although it cannot be concluded that Blackboard caused this professor's experience, it was certainly part of the professor's changed repertoire, and the experience made me want to further study what happens in classrooms such as these attempting to implement online wisdom communities.

Finally in Esselman's (2004) article, "Pedagogy of the Online Wisdom Community", in which he describes Aquinas Institute's journey into online theological education, he states:

The ultimate goal of theological education is wisdom, that deeper kind of learning that takes place through participation in... a wisdom community. In the theological setting, wisdom involves the transformation of the person, a dynamic process that unites heart

and mind in a holistic movement toward maturity in discipleship. The notion of a wisdom community reflects the age-old experience and conviction that no one prepares for ministry alone, that intellectual, ministerial, and spiritual transformation always take place in the context of community. The pedagogy of ministerial formation is committed, then, to nurturing wisdom communities where students and instructors teach and learn from each other. (Esselman, 2004, p. 164)

Again, to state the similarities between the two pedagogical principles, Brown and Campione's (1994) principle of legitimization of differences includes community and personal formation. Also, each member of the community of practice has a sense of ownership and choice. The person is transformed by participating in the community of practice; more importantly, community reaches beyond the classroom walls. Similarly, the wisdom community has an outward focus too while at the same time there is a personal transformation. As the person participates in community, they are transformed. When they take their new learning into the community, they put theory into practice to help the broader community grow.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this mixed methods study is to examine Aquinas' cohort program and observe how they form a wisdom community online and face to face. Also from this examination, it is my hope to unearth what the characteristics of this type of community are from the students' perspective. Esselman (2004) states that ministerial formation does not take place in isolation; my hope is to discover how a wisdom community implemented with technology in the form of an online course management site can help form ministers in the service of the church. If the assertions are correct, students should be transformed and walk the way of wisdom after

graduation. My final hope is to find out how the practices acquired in the wisdom community are appropriated in the graduate's ministerial practice.

This leads me to my research question: How do students experience wisdom community in the program and what is the relationship between that experience and implementation of wisdom community in subsequent professional practice? A secondary question is: How does technology support theological education online with wisdom community?

Hypothesis

According to Brown and Campione (1994) and Esselman (2004), if participants truly take part in either Brown and Campione's learning community or Esselman's wisdom community, the participants should grow in wisdom and be transformed personally and communally.

Learning does not take place in isolation, especially ministerial formation according to Esselman. Community is the place where individuals learn from one another and build new knowledge. As Esselman (2004) states, "The notion of a wisdom community reflects the age-old experience and conviction that no one prepares for ministry alone, that intellectual, ministerial, and spiritual transformation always take place in the context of community" (p. 164). People are transformed if they actively participate; if they do not participate, it is expected that they will not be transformed.

After the ministers graduate and have gone through Aquinas' cohort program, I hypothesize that if the graduate does not find support in the person's quest to form their own wisdom community, they will slowly go back to their old ways. I hope the graduates will appropriate the necessary practices to form their own wisdom community; thus, this study will answer the question, "To what extent do they form their own wisdom community?"

Scope of the Study

The study's main method will be a mixed method analysis of recent and current students' behavior and experiences within and after the program, utilizing online questionnaire data and online discussion board interactions. The online questionnaire will include the Classroom Community Scale developed by Alfred P. Rovai (2002), questions about wisdom community experiences during and after their program, and questions about the role of technology. The survey results and online discussion board interactions from the students' classes will be analyzed utilizing mixed methods techniques to understand the students' experience at Aquinas, see if and how they were able to build their own wisdom community in their ministerial setting, and understand their perspective on the role of technology.

This study would constitute only one small method of assessment for the institution hosting the program. The faculty have gone to great lengths to think about the pedagogy of the wisdom community. But there is no documentation from the student's perspective to see if and how the cohort model of online theological education works. By the time the graduates leave Aquinas, they should have embraced wisdom community and through the online survey, using thematic coding and drawing conclusions from the coding in light of the current literature, I want to uncover the student's perspective of the wisdom community and its implementation in their subsequent professional practice. Or more plainly stated, from the participant's perspective does the wisdom model of theological education work?

Significance of the Study

Aquinas Institute of Theology belongs to the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) "which has 251 members and represents most of the theological institutions in North America. Nearly 30% of its members offer some form of distance learning or online programs, which may

be only courses and not a degree program” (Harris, 2006, p. A17). If 30% of the members of ATS use technology for their courses or degree programs, the study will be valuable for them and the general educational population, too.

Technology has changed the way professors teach; technology has also changed how seminary professors teach clerical and lay students for ministry. In Aquinas’ effort to help understand the distant learning phenomenon, they have collected and written on their programs extensively but they do not have any data or interviews from the students’ experience to see how the theory is understood in practice by the students, and whether it impacts them in their later ministry. Aquinas Institute of Theology has a good deal of data while the students are in school but they do not have any information after they graduate and this is where this study is particularly valuable. This study will include analysis of online discussion board interactions, and questionnaires of students before they graduate to gain their perspective on the wisdom community and see if they were transformed by the experience of using technology to increase their wisdom experience. But perhaps the greatest value of this study is to check in with them after they graduate to see if and how the wisdom skills that they gained in school are implemented in their subsequent professional practice.

Besides theological schools, this study will also have significance for other universities or institutions that engage their students online. It may be helpful to see if the practices that students learn online will be appropriated in their professional practice. Finally, much of the research that I have found in this area is from the perspective of the teacher and how to enhance the learning community, but little is written from the student’s or graduate’s perspective. Hopefully, this study will add to this growing body of research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The quest for religious instruction has a long history that even is documented in the Bible by Jesus and St. Paul. Jesus commanded his followers in Matthew 28: 19-20 (NAB): “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” Also St. Paul in 1 Timothy 2:1-10 writes to the pastors of a community on how the adults should pray and conduct themselves in liturgical rituals. In verse 7, St. Paul reminds the readers that he is the teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. So as their instructor, he is instructing the men on how to pray and what the women should not wear during liturgical functions and how they should behave. “First and Second Timothy and Titus... The three letters are addressed not to congregations but to those who shepherd congregations (Latin, *pastores*). These letters were first named ‘Pastoral Epistles’ in the eighteenth century because they all are concerned with the work of forming a pastor in caring for the community or communities under his charge” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2002, paragraph 1).

By starting this discussion with St. Paul, who focused on the formation of pastors and community members, we can see that religious formation has a long history. To help flesh out this topic of religious formation, this chapter will give a definition of religious formation, outline a brief history of religious formation in the Christian faith and then cite some examples today. The second part of this chapter will then move into today’s handling of the religious formation of seminarians, pastors and laity in the service of the church including learning and wisdom

communities. This chapter will focus on the Christian faith and the lived expression of this faith through the Catholic Church.

History of Religious Formation

The term religious formation is confusing; some might think the term refers only to religious education or educating priests or pastors—then, it is solely exercising the mind in the transmission of information. This exercise of the mind is important, but Matthew 22:37 states, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (NAB). God wants the whole person and so with this in mind, “the name of catechesis was given to the whole of the efforts within the Church to make disciples, to help people to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, so that believing they might have life in His name, and to educate and instruct them in this life and thus build up the Body of Christ” (John Paul II, 1979, No. 1).

Also, the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) reminds the faithful, “Catechesis aims to achieve a more integral formation of the person rather than merely to communicate information” (USCCB, 2005, p. 10). Since catechesis is so vital in the life of the Church, the Second Vatican Council in 1963 reinstated the ancient Rites of Initiation, which will be explained later. The Rites of Initiation “is a fruitful blend of instruction and formation in the faith...” (USCCB, p. 614). According to Frank Quinn, OP, former professor of Sacramental and Liturgical Theology at Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, MO., all religious formation is catechesis (F. Quinn, personal communication, December 21, 2006).

Religious formation in the 4th and 5th centuries. In regards to the history of religious formation, the earliest citation that I can find dates back to the 4th century. This was a very dramatic century for Christianity. In 313 A.D. Constantine gave the right to Christians to

practice their religion without persecution; Constantine also convened the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. to handle the Arian heresy that fractured the Christian Church and then in 380 A.D., Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire under the Edict of Theodosius. With the increase of acceptance of Christianity in the Empire, this meant that more and more people were becoming Christian and there had to be a formal way that they were incorporated into the faith.

The process by which people were incorporated formally into the faith became known as the Rites of Initiation. In the 4th century there were three steps that people seeking baptism had to go through before they became members of the Christian Church. These steps were a. acceptance into the order of catechumenate, b. election or enrollment and c. the sacraments of initiation (Yarnold, 1971/1994, p. vii). The acceptance into the order of catechumenate started with a ceremony in which the candidate was signed with the cross, salt was given (as a symbol that they were going to be seasoned with wisdom during this process), hands were imposed on the candidate (as a sign of blessing; also served as a sign to the candidate that they were being dedicated to God) and the candidate was exorcised, not in the modern sense, but the presider would speak words to bind the devil to be gone from the candidate and breathed on the candidate to blow away the devil so that the devil would not tempt the candidate during the process. Once the candidate was ready, the person would be enrolled into the order of the catechumenate and instead of being called a candidate, the person would be called a catechumen from the Latin meaning one that is under instruction.

The catechumenate process sometimes took three years, but could be less. Once the catechumen felt that he or she was ready, the person with their sponsor would petition the bishop for baptism. If the person was accepted by the bishop, the person would then move to the second

step and with each step towards full communion, they would receive a new title. Once the person was accepted, the person was known as the elect or chosen; but just because they were accepted did not mean that the person was going to be baptized. The person only went through a more intense preparation time during Lent. This time was also a time of Scrutiny which meant that the person was scrutinized even more by the leaders and the sponsor to make sure they were ready for baptism. Baptism was a big step for any member in the early church and so many times the leaders would recommend putting off baptism until later in life because the baptized individuals strove to be sinless. If they committed sin, they had to perform some public act of penance or be ejected from the church community if the sin was severe enough. Sin separated them from the community and God.

During Lent, “the candidates would meet for daily exorcisms and instructions on the fast-days of the first seven weeks of Lent. The candidates sit in a circle round the bishop, together with their godparents and any other of the baptized who wanted to attend” (as cited in Yarnold, 1971/1994, p. 12).

The next step actually came at the Easter Vigil, in which the elect would be baptized, confirmed and received their first communion. The Vigil would consist of seven readings, administering the sacraments of initiation and celebration of the Eucharist. The vigil would last all night long. Before each sacrament during the Vigil the bishop would explain to the elect what would happen in his sermon. After explaining the sacrament to the elect, they would then receive the sacraments of initiation. After receiving the sacraments of initiation, they were fully incorporated into the Christian Church.

According to Quinn (F. Quinn, personal communication, December 21, 2006) the candidates were not told what would happen during the actual rites of initiation until the Easter

Vigil because, as he said, how can you teach someone something if they have not experienced it first? It was not until afterwards during the period of mystagogia (the time period from Easter until Pentecost) that the bishop would expand upon their experience in a series of mystagogic catechesis.

As stated earlier, Christianity became the official religion of the Empire in 380 A.D. and so the three year catechumenate program became impractical and the Christian Church began performing infant baptisms with confirmation to accommodate all the people. Eucharist was celebrated later when the child was older.

In the 5th century the Empire was split into the Western and Eastern Empire. The Western Empire was centered in Rome and the Eastern centered in Constantinople. In the West barbarians kept invading the western territories and eventually set up their own kingdoms. The Western Empire eventually disappeared. The West fell into the Middle Ages from the 5th to the 16th century. During this time religious formation and all avenues of knowledge were centered around the monasteries; the monks were the ones who kept education alive during this period. In regards to the religious formation of the laity (those not in religious life or ordained), there were only a few opportunities for them to be educated in the faith. As Theodore Soares (1916) states, The church councils constantly laid emphasis upon the duties of pastors to catechise. There was evidently great laxity on the part of the priesthood.

Religion was largely conformity to the festivals and ceremonials of the common religious life. The most notable education, which was not without its religious character, was that of chivalry. Here the child began a system of discipline which was not acquired from books but from the activities of life. In

due time he learned the duties of a squire. At last, with the most solemn and impressive religious ceremonial, he took the vows of knighthood. (p. 4)

The laity also had the mystery or miracle plays to draw on for religious formation. The mystery or miracle plays were a series of plays dealing with all the major events in the Christian calendar, especially from Creation to Judgment Day. They also had the stained glass windows in the churches that depicted different scenes of scripture. For the most part, the laity were uneducated and could not read. Therefore, these images in the stained glass windows and mystery plays provided visual and oral forms of religious formation. Secondly, books were very expensive and they were not available to the laity but only to the monks whose monasteries had libraries.

Religious formation in the 12th - 16th centuries. As Soares (1916) noted, it was the responsibility of the pastors to catechize but eventually there was a great laxity on their part to make sure that the laity were catechized. There were a few pastors that did care; they were the ones that left the monastery in the 12th century and took the Word to the people. As a result of the priests not catechizing, there were many people falling away from the Roman Church and so St. Dominic and St. Francis in the 12th century went to the cities and streets to preach. They were trying to catechize the faithful and win them back to the faith. Many bishops and monks went to the countryside to preach to the heretics, but the heretics only saw the fine robes and jewels that the bishops and monks wore. The fallen away laity was concerned about simplicity and so these poor preachers of Dominic and Francis came to preach the Word and won them back to the faith because of their simplicity and poverty. But again for the most part the laity went uncatechized.

During this time, the idea of Purgatory was becoming more popular. Purgatory is described in the following way:

All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.

The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned. (USCCB, 1995/2003, No. 1031)

So, those who die in God's friendship and grace are assured that they are not going to suffer the punishment of the damned, but if you were still living, you might start to worry about your relatives who have already died. To reach out to the living on behalf of the dead, the concept of indulgences developed over the next few centuries. "Through indulgences the faithful can obtain the remission of temporal punishment resulting from sin for themselves and also for the souls in Purgatory" (USCCB, 1995/2003, No. 1498).

There were abuses in the granting of indulgences and Martin Luther reacted to the abuses until, finally, he was excommunicated on May 25, 1521. Many others agreed with his teachings and so now he found himself pastor of a new flock. On one of his pastoral visits to Saxony, he wanted to determine the quality of pastoral care and education of his parishes in the area. He responded, "Mercy! Good God! What manifold misery I beheld! The common people, especially in the villages, have no knowledge whatever of Christian doctrine, and, alas! many pastors are altogether incapable and incompetent to teach" (Luther, 1529, paragraph 7). As a consequence, Luther wrote the Small Catechism for the faithful and the Large Catechism for the pastors.

In response to Luther and other Protestants, the Catholic Church responded with the Counter Reformation by calling the Council of Trent in 1545 in the city of Trent, Italy. The Council concluded in 1563, and "Its main object was the definitive determination of the

doctrines of the Church in answer to the heresies of the Protestants; a further object was the execution of a thorough reform of the inner life of the Church by removing the numerous abuses that had developed in it” (Kirsch, 1912, paragraph 1). Some of the major outcomes of the Council were the establishment of guidelines on how to train young clerics, Tridentine Catechism and major reforms in the mass, especially a breviary for the faithful that includes prayers and teachings regarding the mass. According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, “This catechism differs from other summaries of Christian doctrine for the instruction of the people in two points: it is primarily intended for priests having care of souls (*ad parochos*), and it enjoys an authority equaled by no other catechism. The need of a popular authoritative manual arose from a lack of systematic knowledge among pre-Reformation clergy and the concomitant neglect of religious instruction among the faithful” (Wilhelm, 1912, paragraph 1). So, once again the Council entrusted the pastors with the responsibility of catechizing the faithful.

For over 400 years the promulgations of the Council of Trent were still in effect until 1962 when the Second Vatican Council was held to deal with the every aspect of the Christian life— knowledge of the faith, knowledge of the meaning of the Liturgy and the sacraments, moral formation in Jesus Christ, how to pray with Christ, to live in community and to participate actively in the life and mission of the Church, and to have a missionary spirit that prepares the faithful to be present as Christians in society. Instead of trying to rekindle the innovations of the Council of Trent, the Second Vatican Council fathers reached back to the early foundations of the Christian faith for inspiration, especially with the notion religious formation as catechesis.

One of the results of the Second Vatican Council was the reestablishment of the catechumenate as described earlier. “The catechumenate for adults, comprising several distinct steps, is to be restored and to be taken into use at the discretion of the local ordinary. By this

means the time of the catechumenate, which is intended as a period of suitable instruction, may be sanctified by sacred rites to be celebrated at successive intervals of time” (Second Vatican, 1963, No. 64).

Today, the catechumenate has developed into the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA). “The rite in use today consists of four periods: (1) evangelization and precatechumenate, (2) catechesis, (3) purification and enlightenment, and (4) mystagogy” (Yarnold, 1971/1994, p. 2). Basically, today’s rite of initiation is structured differently but contains all the same elements of initiation that were used in previous centuries. For example, the candidates are still called catechumens (those under instruction) and the elect (the chosen ones). Once a person has been educated in the faith, they must live out their faith.

Faith must be known, celebrated, lived, and expressed in prayer. So catechesis (or religious formation as Quinn reminds us) comprises six fundamental tasks, each of which is related to an aspect of faith in Christ. All efforts in evangelization and catechesis (or religious formation) should incorporate those tasks:

1. Catechesis promotes knowledge of the faith.
2. Catechesis promotes a knowledge of the meaning of the Liturgy and the sacraments.
3. Catechesis promotes moral formation in Jesus Christ.
4. Catechesis teaches the Christian how to pray with Christ.
5. Catechesis prepares the Christian to live in community and to participate actively in the life and mission of the Church.

6. Catechesis promotes a missionary spirit that prepares the faithful to be present as Christians in society. (United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, 2005, 60-62)

The Council redefined the Roman Catholic Church. The council fathers gathered to discuss the nature of the church, who makes up the church, what responsibilities each member has in the church, renewal of the sacraments especially the Liturgy (the council redefined how the church prayed by creating a new liturgical calendar—each feast day centered on the paschal mystery of Jesus—and new missal with Scripture readings and liturgical prayers that used at mass), renewal of priestly formation, a renewal, redefining religious life and for the first time focused on the laity and the special gift the laity is to the church. The council even promulgated that its canon law (the laws that govern the church and its members) needed to be overhauled. So, in 1983, 21 years after the first meeting of the Second Vatican Council, the church's canon laws were even revamped in accordance to the Council's request.

To help the faithful lead a full Christian life, both the Council of Trent and the Second Vatican Council focused their energies on priestly training, to help the seminarians be better pastors. Since the time of the Second Vatican Council, the seminary classroom has changed. The lay people are now enrolled in theology classes too and receiving the same degrees as the clergy so that the laity can help pastor the faithful to a fuller Christian life. The Constitution of the Church in the Modern World from the Second Vatican Council hoped “that many of the laity will receive a sufficient formation in the sacred sciences and that some will dedicate themselves professionally to these studies, developing and deepening them by their own labors” (Second Vatican Council, 1965, No. 62).

In 2005, the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops published *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*. In this document the bishops prepared a resource for other bishops, formatters of lay ecclesial ministers and the laity themselves. In the section regarding Formation of Lay Ecclesial Ministry the bishops stated that “lay ecclesial ministers, just like the ordained, need and deserve formation on high standards, effective methods, and comprehensive goals (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005).

The bishops described in this resource write what the framework of formation should look like for deacons, priests and especially lay ecclesial leaders. They stated that the four areas of formation should include:

- *Human qualities* critical to form wholesome relationships and necessary to be apt instruments of God’s love and compassion
- *A spirituality* and practice of prayer that root them in God’s Trinitarian life, grounding and animating all they do in ministry
- *Adequate knowledge* in theological and pastoral studies, along with the *intellectual skills* to use it among the people and cultures of our country
- The practical *pastoral abilities* called for in their particular ministry

(United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, 2005, p. 34)

After the ministers have been formed, the bishops emphasize “ongoing formation, which strengthens ministerial identity as well as enhancing ministerial skills, is not a luxury to be pursued when time and resources allow, but is rather a permanent necessity for every ecclesial minister, lay or ordained (United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, 2005, p. 51).

The bishops have written extensively regarding organized church incorporation, but Jean Vanier, has written extensively on informal lay-Christian communities of faith, especially his

own community of L'Arche which is an inclusive group welcoming those with and without intellectual disabilities to live together in a community of respect, faith and welcoming. He founded the community in 1964 and since then, he and the community have organized to become world wide. He and the community have written about the lessons they have learned regarding community. One aspect of community they have learned is community goes through stages. In Vanier's first stage or as he puts it "the first month," everyone around them seems to be a saint; in the second month everyone seems to be a devil and in the third month people "are neither saints nor devils. They are people who have come together to strive and to love. They are neither perfect nor imperfect, but like everyone else a mixture of the two...This is reality" (Ellsberg, 2008, p. 98). This framework helps to explain people's experiences over time in communities of faith or even secular groups. As living creatures go through cycles, so do living religious communities.

In conclusion, just as catechesis is becoming more organized today on the insistence of the Second Vatican Council, the council fathers also insisted on more formal ministerial training. Today in seminaries and schools of theology, "it has been widely noted that contemporary students come to college, seminary, or graduate theological study lacking fundamental knowledge or formation in the faith. Hence, at least part of the function of theological education, even in higher education is catechetical in scope" (Gresham, 2006, p. 25). This is why Quinn (F. Quinn, personal communication, December 21, 2006) states, "religious formation today is modeled after the rite of the catechumenate and all religious formation is catechesis" in order to properly train ministers. How can you teach someone something if they have not experienced it first (F. Quinn, personal communication, December 21, 2006)?

Learning Communities

Before discussing religious online wisdom communities, we must first review the educational psychology of learning communities and online learning communities. Barbara Rogoff (1994) from the University of California, Santa Cruz, has written an article, *Developing Understanding of the Idea of Communities of Learners*, in which she identifies three forms of education:

1. Adult-run instruction—learning happens when an adult transmits knowledge to children and in turn students have to regurgitate information back to the instructor by means of a test;
2. Children-run instruction—learning happens when children discover new things by themselves or with others; and
3. “Community of learners based on assumptions that learning is a process of transforming participation in shared sociocultural endeavors” (p. 210).

In this article, Rogoff (p. 210) points out the students’ relationship to the information that they are researching. In adult-run instruction, the student has no relationship of ownership with the information. Furthermore, in adult-run instruction the child is only giving back to the teacher what the teacher transmitted to the class. To demonstrate transmission, students take tests to show that they received the information correctly. If the student answered all the questions successfully and to the adult’s satisfaction, then the student learned the information, but the student still has no relationship with the material as stated in adult-run instruction.

In child-run instruction children were allowed to discover on their own or with others new things; there is no direction or method in their discovery. It was up to the children in which

direction they wanted to go. Again, the students may not have an effective relationship with their learning because, as she puts it, there is no connection to the adult world.

Community of learners and communities of practice. In the community of learners model, students learn the information because they are collaborating with other children and adults. In this model “students learn the information as they collaborate with other children and with adults in carrying out activities with purposes connected with the history and current practices of the community” (p. 210). The author is quick to note that in all three models, students learn the information.

Rogoff states, “In a community of learners, both mature members of the community and less mature members of the community are conceived as active...Children and adults together are active in structuring shared endeavors, with adults responsible for guiding the overall process and children learning to participate in the management of their own learning and involvement” (p. 213). She points out that most teachers and parents in the United States have a hard time with this model because they were brought up in the adult-run model (p. 218).

Throughout the whole article she highlights the benefits of the learning community model, but at the end of the article she concludes by writing that there is no one model that will fit all situations. It is important for students to learn all three models and use them in appropriate ways to meet their current circumstance (p. 226).

The experience of a learning community from the perspective of students is revealed in a recent case study by Dirkx and Dang (2009). “Larry” and 24 other workers laid off from their factory jobs entered a community college program to learn new skills with the goal of obtaining a new job. Larry and others have not been in a classroom in a very long time; so, when they were in class for the very first time, they were very scared. But as they worked hard the first several

weeks of the program, they got over their initial shock of being laid off and met other folks in the same situation; they knew they were not alone in the journey. They got over their fear of failing and entered into the program beginning to find their voice and challenge one another and the instructors too. One woman commented on another classmates' behavior by saying, "That's Jack! But what can I say? You gotta love 'em. He's one of us.' They looked out for each other, such as developing a calling tree so that each person had someone to call if they missed class for some reason" (Dirkx & Dang, 2009, p. 110). Dirkx and Dang noted that the students were starting to find their voice.

Dirkx & Dang realized that at the end of the 16 week program, participants felt "a sense of *communitas*," an intense sense of solidarity and togetherness. It represents a leveling of social status within the group, providing members with an opportunity to explore new social roles or self-identities. The cohort, as a container for this sense of *communitas*, significantly contributed to the workers' ability to entertain and engage a learner identity" (Dirkx & Dang, 2009, p. 111). Finally, Larry learned about a possible job opportunity, but the researchers reported that he felt conflicted because he would have to choose between the cohort and his new job. This crisis showed how this communal process changed his life.

Besides the community of learners model, Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermott and William M. Snyder have written a book called *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge*. Communities of practice are set in the workplace in which people come together around common interests or expertise. Their book highlights ways companies can foster these groups so that they can reach their full potential. One innovative concept these authors highlight in their book is the natural cycle of a community of practice. "As members build connections, they coalesce into a community. Once formed, the community often grows in both

membership and the depth of knowledge members share. When mature, communities go through cycles of high and low activity; just like other living things” (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p. 68).

Vygotsky and the zone of proximal development. Embedded in the community of learners model and the community of practice model is L.S. Vygotsky’s (1978) notion of the zone of proximal development. He defines the zone of proximal development as, “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

Vygotsky notes that human learning assumes that “learning has a social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them” (p. 88). He goes on to write:

...an essential feature of learning is that it creates the zone of proximal development; that is, learning awakes a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child’s independent developmental achievement. (p. 90)

He continues:

From this point of view, learning is not development, however, properly organized learning results in mental development and sets in motion a variety of developmental processes that would be impossible apart from learning.

Thus, learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing organized, specifically human, psychological functions. (p. 90)

He concludes this section by writing that higher order functions are socially formed and culturally transmitted. He also gives some attention to human speech. Human speech allows the child to break free of the environment; in a sense it is a sign of freedom. Human speech allows the child to express what he/she already has internalized, organized and integrated (p. 126).

James V. Wertsch's article, "The Zone of Proximal Development: Some Conceptual Issues," (1984) delved into some of Vygotsky's notions from *Mind in Society*. In the article Wertsch uses the term intersubjectivity. He explains that "intersubjectivity exists between two interlocutors (one who takes part in a dialogue) in a task setting when they share the same situation definition" (p. 12). He goes onto write, "intersubjectivity is often created through the use of language" (p. 13). Language has the power to bring people together if they share the same context.

For Rogoff, Wertsch, and Vygotsky, learning is a process and set in social context. No one learns in isolation, nor is learning defined by transmission. Learning is directed and organized; as Rogoff wrote and Vygotsky would agree, "both mature members of the community and less mature members are conceived as active" (Rogoff, p. 213) and once the material has become internalized, the student has a relationship with it and the material is part of the child's independent developmental achievement. These ideas are widely accepted in the education community, as signified by the prominence of active learning in communities of learners in the recent National Research Council's report *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School* (Bransford, Brown, and Cocking, 2000).

Online Learning Communities

Many post-secondary schools, colleges, and universities have started to incorporate online learning to reach out to more students. Once learning goes online, the process of learning looks totally different because the participants usually do not see one another. Most often, they communicate entirely through email, threaded discussions or in real time text chat. As Rogoff highlights, education can take the form of adult-run instruction, children-run instruction or community of learners. As in a face-to-face classroom, online education can also mirror these three types, but the preferred style articulated in most of the literature is the community of learners or an online learning community. Rovai cites Wellman, saying “when one views community as what activities people do together, rather than where or through what means they do them, community can exist independently from geography, physical neighborhoods, and campuses” (as cited in Rovai, 2002, p. 199).

Constructivism and online learning. Rena Palloff and Keith Pratt (2007) recently completed *Building online communities: effective strategies for the virtual classroom*. As one of the highlights, Palloff and Pratt write about the gap between the tech-savvy youth and Luddite adults. To help bridge this gap, learners become more active in the learning; they become more active participants in the learning process:

Learners actively create knowledge and meaning through experimentation, exploration, and the manipulation and testing ideas in Reality. Interaction and feedback from others assist in determining the accuracy and application of ideas. Collaboration, shared goals, and teamwork are powerful factors in the learning process. (p. 16)

Palloff and Pratt also cite Jonassen and other constructivists in this text. Jonassen and others state that the preferred learning process is the one in which the students set the direction of the work and the flow of the class. The learning environment “that fosters personal meaning making, as well as the social construction of knowledge and meaning through interactions with community of learners, is preferred...” (as cited in Palloff & Pratt, 2007, p. 16). Also, Riel and Polin state learning happens when learners engage authentic experiences which involve the “active manipulation and experimentation with ideas and artifacts” (Riel & Polin, 2004, p. 17). Through the learner’s interaction with one another, they construct knowledge together by building on the ideas and contributions of other members (Riel & Polin, 2004, p. 19).

Community building does not happen automatically in an online environment; learners do not just start forming a community of learners on their own. Online learning needs facilitation and the tone set by the instructor or facilitator is very important (Collison, Elbaum, Haavind, & Tinker, 2000). According to Collison et al., the instructor or facilitator must strive to keep the students moving forward in the dialogue and keep his or her own voice from being the central voice in the conversation:

As the “Guide on the Side,” a moderator facilitates the forward movement of the dialogue and helps participants, both individually and collectively, see their own ideas in the new combinations and at new levels of significance. This process has been described in the literature as facilitating a community of learners who are engaged in inquiry. (Collison, et al., 2000, p. 10)

Collison et al. add, skilled facilitators of inquiry need to make sure the questions are open-ended, leaving room for further inquiry or discussion. “Their goals are to focus and deepen the thinking of participants, individually or as a group, without shutting down the inquiring work

of the participants themselves” (Collison, et al., 2000, p. 37). With more discussions and activities surrounding inquiry, this makes for a stronger community of learners.

Smith and Dirkx suggest learners who are new to the “guide on the side” model and expect a traditional instructional environment are in for a rude awakening: “The need for traditional instruction in an environment which required the students to shift their view of knowledge construction from the teacher to themselves created a vacuum of authority” (Smith & Dirkx, 2006, p. 356). With this vacuum of authority, “savior” students will fill this void and come to the community's rescue trying to move the group forward (Smith & Dirkx, 2006, p. 356), but eventually, the group begins to resent these “saviors” (Smith & Dirkx, 2006, p. 355). Finally, Smith and Dirkx suggest “the guide on the side” needs to help learners through this paradigm shift of knowledge construction as a group. Then help move the group to learned-centered instruction instead of traditional instructional models. Sometimes the learners move slowly or painfully, but the “guide on the side” needs to gently force the group to move forward or they might never move to where the learner sees himself or herself as an “active creator of knowledge” (Smith & Dirkx, 2006, p. 357).

Also, Palloff and Pratt (2007) make the connection between communication and seeking community. The authors wisely state that rooted in communication is the need for community. “Many of our attempts to communicate are, at the core, attempts at community building—a search for the community that connects us” (p. 35).

To reiterate, when new learners take their new learning into the community, they put theory into practice to help the broader community grow; and again from the introduction, Brown and Campione (1994) state that nothing is done without a reason. Therefore, it is important to focus a bit on the connection between the online learner and his/her workplace.

Conrad explored the connection between online learners and the workplace. The study revealed learners benefited from participating in a learning community with online peers, but “scant evidence of establishing, or being a part of, a robust community of practice among their workplace colleagues” (Conrad, 2008, p. 21). The study also showed co-workers generally respected their peers for taking classes, but could not share in their experience and excitement because it was foreign to them (Conrad, p. 19). When the learners held learning lunches once a month for their co-workers to share their “learning stories” (Conrad, p. 20), they started to cultivate a richer learning environment. With these learning lunches, co-workers could understand and enter into their stories; while at the same time, the co-workers could communicate their own learning stories. With shared storytelling of new learning, they were building community.

Lastly, Conrad suggests a strong sense of community is vital for a successful online learning program (p. 10). This is reiterated by Riel and Polin who suggest learning is embedded in community; they state, “learning is a process of identity transformation—a socially constructed and socially managed experience (p. 19). The question arises when new members enter an online learning community, what happens? Reil and Polin again state when an online community brings in the novice member, the community instructs the newcomer from their communal wisdom and experiences. “Over time, the residue of these experiences remains available to newcomers in the tools, tales, talk, and traditions of the group. In this way, the newcomers find a rich environment for learning (p. 18). Furthermore, Salomon states:

Moreover, effects *of* technology can occur when partnership with a technology leaves a cognitive residue, equipping people with thinking skills and strategies that reorganize and enhance their performance even

away from the technology in question. (Salomon, Perkins, & Globerson, 1991, p. 8)

Religious Online Learning Communities

Aquinas Institute of Theology, owned and operated by the Order of Preachers, embraces a version of the community of learners. The wisdom or learning community model is ingrained into the culture of the school. This model goes back to St. Dominic in the 13th century; community is one of the four pillars of the Order and good preaching is an outgrowth of community living.

Early foundation of wisdom community. An example of this took place in 1511 in the New World when a group of Dominicans on the island of Hispaniola wanted to fight for the indigenous people's freedom. It was the practice for the Spanish establishment to enslave and oppress the indigenous people. As a community, the Dominicans of Hispaniola discerned that slavery was a crime against humanity. So, on the fourth Sunday of Advent in 1511, a famous Dominican preacher, Antonio de Montesino, in the name of the Dominican community, condemned the Spaniards for their crimes from the pulpit. He "publicly thundered damnation from the pulpit against all Spaniards who held assigned Indians in encomienda (the system, instituted in 1503, under which a Spanish soldier or colonist was granted a tract of land or a village together with its Indian inhabitants), saying that the natives must be freed or their holders had no hope of salvation" (Farina, 1992, p. 16).

In the congregation was a future and great Dominican, Bartolomé de las Casas; he was so transformed by the preaching that he later joined the Dominicans and fought for the Indians' freedom in the Spanish court.

Before Bartolomé de las Casas came to hear Antón Montesino's fiery sermon in 1511, he was ordained as a parochial priest in Rome on March 3, 1507, and went back to Spain to finish his bachelor's degree in canon law at Salamanca, which was run by the Dominicans. After he finished his degree, he set sail with Diego Columbus to Hispaniola where he celebrated the first High Mass in the New World. Most of the settlers were on hand for the mass and presented him with gifts and money. He also took on the newly created role as catechist to the Indians.

The Dominicans arrived in Hispaniola in 1510 and heard their leader, Pedro de Córdoba, preach a sermon to the Indians. Las Casas was so moved by their preaching that he befriended Córdoba as his mentor and spiritual guide.

Las Casas was also a land owner and part of the encomienda system, but he felt he was kind to his Indians helping them prosper as well as him. "He had been an effective priest on the island, preaching through an interpreter to the Indians and in his own eloquent voice to the Spaniards" (Farina, 1992, p. 17).

But when he went to confession to the Dominican friars, since he was part of the system, he was refused absolution.

He served as the catechist to the Indians, but he did not internalize yet the message he was preaching. He was doing all this wonderful work with the Indians, but he himself needed to be catechized and transformed.

As the catechist to the Indians, he set forth for Cuba to catechize them. He was successful in the beginning, but the army approached Caonao, where 2000 unarmed Indians waited for the Spaniards. The army came through and slaughtered them. He tried to save some, but he was unsuccessful.

Once Cuba was taken over, the Spanish governor gave Las Casas land and Indians to work the land.

Within a half-year, however, Cuba, once a tropical paradise, became before his eyes a hell on earth. Las Casas, the dedicated farmer, watched the fields abandoned and the native economy destroyed—both men and women dragged off to be worked to death, digging, panning for gold, with the younger women taken to the cities to serve the pleasures and households of the Spaniards. Soon no one was left in the deserted villages except children and old people. (Farina, 1992, p. 19)

After seeing this annihilation, he finally realized he was wrong; he could not catechize the Indians while the encomienda system was still intact. The message he was preaching was one of freedom in the life of Christ, but the Indians were not physically free and the land owners kept the Indians in bondage. “Now he understood that he had been wrong and that the first Dominicans had been right. There was no other answer, the whole encomienda system was damnable. He had to preach against the encomienda system...he would have to give up his own encomienda” (Farina, 1992, p. 21). By himself, he preached to the land owners that damnation awaited them if they did not stop what they were doing, but no one was converted. Four Dominicans came to help him in his preaching.

At the age of 38, he entered the Dominicans who had been influential in his life in the New World. After his initial formation as a Dominican, he set out to catechize the Indians, the work he so loved but now he was not alone in his work. Bartolomé de las Casas was part of a larger group that sought freedom for the Indians.

About the year 1530, he started one of his foundational works, *De Unico Vocationis Modo*, or *The Only Way*. This book was about preaching the gospel. He never published this work, but he quoted it many times in his later writings. According to Gustavo Gutiérrez, Las Casas's "central thesis of that book is... There is only one way to evangelize: by peaceful means, that is, by persuasion and dialogue. All use of force is radically to be excluded" (Gutierrez, 1993, p. 154).

In a later work, Las Casas writes that if a person is to instruct another person in faith, they must be like Christ's disciples who first taught by their examples on how to live with one another and then they used words (Gutierrez, 1993, p. 161-162); their actions spoke louder than their words. Las Casas's way is respect for the Indians. He realized they should be able to be allowed to choose their own religion freely (Gutierrez, 1993, p. 164) and not have the gospel enslave them as in the *encomienda* system. Preaching the gospel message is based on freedom, not violence.

With this in mind, he realized the only way to fight for their spiritual freedom, was for the Indians to be physically free. He went back to the Spanish Court after being away for 20 years to fight for their freedom. Before he got to the Spanish Court, Pope Paul III issued the encyclical, *Sublimis Deus*, on June 2, 1537, which became the Magna Charta for the Indians (Farina, p. 38). Armed with this new, ecclesial document in hand, he went to the Spanish Courts fight for their physical freedom.

After much work, The New Laws of 1542-1543 were passed and signed by the Emperor. The New Laws were called, "The Laws and Ordinances Newly Made for the Good Government of the Indies and the Preservation of the Indians." This was the greatest achievement of his life. Because this was such an undertaking, he was made a

bishop on March 31, 1544 (Farina, pp. 40-41). These New Laws were very hard to enforce in the New World with all the judicial corruption, but he kept fighting for their freedom till he died at the age of 82. His work has lasting effects; his legacy can now be seen in the United Nations and U.S. laws.

Modern development of wisdom community. In a modern reflection of this experience, Brian Pierce, O.P. (1992), wrote, “Truth is not something known by a person, but something discovered, received by a group” (paragraph 32). Pursuing truth and sharing this with others so that they might be saved was what St. Dominic instilled in his community of preachers. In Hispaniola, Montesino’s preaching on behalf of the community helped free las Casas from his sin as a slave owner and he in turn fought for the slaves’ freedom in the Spanish court. As Lehner (1964) said, “it is known that (our) Order was founded, from the beginning, especially for preaching and the salvation of souls...” (paragraph 9). So the wisdom or learning community model of Aquinas’ preaching program parallels St. Dominic’s vision.

Mary Margaret Pazdan, OP, faculty member at Aquinas Institute, states that “wisdom communities respond to a need in theological education, i.e., adult formation for ministry that includes rigorous intellectual efforts as well as deepening and expanding the faith of individuals who will be entrusted with the mission of the church” (Pazdan, 1998, p. 25).

Dr. John Gresham, from Kenrick-Glennon Seminary & Paul VI Pontifical Institute of Catechetical and Pastoral Studies, proposes another perspective of religious online learning pedagogy. The pedagogy he proposes is called divine pedagogy which is an ancient model of education. St. Irenaeus of Lyons, bishop in the 2nd century, is said to have used the concept of divine pedagogy (USCCB, 1995/2003, No. 53). Gresham has taken this principle and wants to incorporate it into online religious education, especially for theological education. He says, “The

phrase ‘divine pedagogy’ describes the manner in which God teaches the human race. Several Roman Catholic catechetical documents propose this divine exemplar as a model for catechesis or religious education” (Gresham, 2006, p. 24).

Gresham states that the central principle of divine pedagogy, especially for online use, is the idea of adaptation. In his article he quotes Kovacs citing Clement of Alexandria, who directs the teacher, who is imitating God, who teaches the human race, to adapt his message to the needs and capabilities of his students (Gresham, 2006, p. 25). Adaptation allows students to learn without having to travel or inconvenience them by having to leave their work or ministry.

Behind the principle of adaptation is the concept of condescension. Gresham explains this term in light of online theological learning as:

God condescends, lovingly stoops down, to our human level, and graciously adapts the divine wisdom to our limited human capabilities. Perhaps, online education might be seen as reflective of a similar “academic condescension.” The theologian, from her or his lofty ivory tower with its time honored traditions of classroom lectures and seminars, rather than demanding that students leave home and hearth to climb that tower and join him or her there, condescends to stoop down, via the tools of computer mediated communication, to the student’s own humble home. Accommodating oneself to the new digital environment, one adapts one’s teaching style to communicate one’s wisdom into the student’s world. (Gresham, 2006, p. 26)

Thus, there seem to be two distinct online pedagogies for religious online learning communities, the wisdom community model and divine pedagogy, but the spirituality is common to both. For religious institutions conducting online learning, spirituality is encouraged to be

present online, but for secular/private institutions, Palloff and Pratt state that it is a concern to incorporate spirituality or rituals in online courses. Palloff and Pratt described a situation in which one student started to cite Scripture in his online discussions. They did not want to stifle his input; they realized it was important to accept and accommodate this in the group. Through this, Palloff and Pratt realized spirituality and rituals are part of human communities. They state:

Our spirituality helps increase our level of openness and awareness. The increasing openness with which participants communicate in an online class is spiritual. We find the power of groups...intensely spiritual. For us, the experience of spirituality goes back to connectedness. The connection between people, however that may happen, touches a spiritual core. (Palloff & Pratt, 2007, p. 59)

To sum up this section on learning communities, certain themes were consistent in all three sections and it warrants mentioning them. The themes included: active participation, relationships, communication, the importance of process, shared culture and testing ideas in reality.

Theological Education in the United States

For the most part, theological training has always been face-to-face in seminary classrooms in which the professor stood up front lecturing and the students feverishly took down every word the teacher said. Eventually, the students were tested on the material to demonstrate their knowledge of the material. This paralleled Rogoff's classic adult-run instruction.

Modern development of theological education in the U.S. In the 1970s, the question arose in the Association of Theological Schools (ATS)—which currently has 251 members and represents most of the Protestant and Catholic theological institutions in North

American—of whether or not theological education could be done in an extension format. This discussion continued until 1980 when ATS adopted its first formal standard on extension education.

Extension education, at this time, was understood exclusively in terms of off-campus courses or degree programs in which professors and students worked together in classroom settings. A dominant theme of the 1980 standard was that an extension program needed to be ‘demonstrably equivalent’ to the seminary’s on-campus programs in a range of characteristics. Extension education was acceptable, for accrediting purposes, as long as the member school could demonstrate that education in extension was comparable or equivalent to education on campus (ATS, 1999, p. vii).

In 1992, ATS once again came back to this discussion and realized that there were many different types of extension programs. One of the options was “distance learning” which referred to “instruction for individuals outside the context of the classroom setting” (ATS, 1999, p. vii); this was the first time that ATS used this term in regards to an extension program.

Once again, ATS decided in 1996 that “as much as one-third of the credits counted toward an ATS-approved degree program to be earned by taking ‘external independent study’ courses” (ATS, 1999, p. viii). As a result of ATS’s action, they formed a commission on accreditation and approved two programs: “(1) a Master of Divinity at Bethel Theological Seminary that uses intensive on-campus study and distance learning courses and (2) extension site course work conducted by the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary by means of interactive video” (ATS, 1999, p. viii).

According to Louis Charles Willard (2005), in 2003, the Lilly Endowment funded 71 theological schools in its Information Technology for Theological Teaching program. Lilly wanted the schools to help others develop best practices, skill enhancement, and create resources to help other schools in the advancement of implementing educational technology in the theological classroom. As a result of this grant and other opportunities, nearly 30% of its members now offer some form of distance learning or online programs (Harris, 2006, p. A17).

Roughly 40 schools of theology use a service provider called Fisher's Net, <http://fishersnet.net/>. The service provides hosting services for Blackboard and Moodle software which are online course management sites. In Blackboard or Moodle, professors can post documents or multimedia files; they can also use the discussion board to engage the students in an asynchronous discussion. If the professors want to, they can even have synchronous chat with the students in the "virtual lecture hall." In the "virtual lecture hall" the professor can control a web browser that will appear on each of the students' computer screens. If the professor wants to have "virtual office hours," the professor can engage students in a private chat room to discuss their work. Also within the Blackboard and Moodle, users can email one or all the participants. For Aquinas, a key aspect of online learning seem to be the discussions held online which I will discuss below. They can connect with one another asynchronously to read questions or comments posted by the members of the class. To reiterate Palloff and Pratt (2007), "Many of our attempts to communicate are, at the core, attempts at community building—a search for the community that connects us" (p. 35).

Theological education in the mid-west. Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis is one of the schools that uses the Blackboard option through Fisher's Net. Aquinas Institute offers four masters degrees, one doctorate of ministry degree and two certificate programs focused on

health care leaders and mission leadership. The students in these programs engage material posted by the professor for a number of weeks and then come to St. Louis or the professor goes to the extension site to engage them in a face-to-face session.

As noted above, a strength of online learning for Aquinas seems to be that students bring their ministerial or professional experience to the online environment. The students are situated in their ministry or work place and are able to bring that experience and expertise to the online environment and share it with others. The online tools of Blackboard help facilitate conversations. Also, through the online tools in Blackboard, they are given feedback and encouragement by the professors but also from their peers. Students are also able to submit their written work for feedback and post video from their preaching in Blackboard or other online tools. Students learn from one another, but they also get to know more about each other through their dialogue online. They are communicating and, as Palloff and Pratt remind us, involved in community building.

To help in their discussions, Blackboard has the capability of dividing the students into groups. Within each group is a group discussion board and email feature too. The way Aquinas structures the group learning is by dividing the students into groups and then each student takes a turn leading the discussion. The lead student posts their comments first and then the others have to comment on the first posting. Also, the lead student is the facilitator for the week. As the facilitator, the lead student is the first responder in the discussion board. The lead student posts their comments in response to the readings or instructor's question and then sums up the week's conversation with their own summation to all the responses. The students engage each other on certain topics or primary sources that the professor posts. After a number of weeks online, they

meet with the professor face to face for an intensive weekend for the masters' classes or week for the doctoral program.

At other schools in St. Louis, Kenrick-Glennon Seminary and Eden Theological Seminary, they use Blackboard through Fisher's Net too. They use it as a companion to their on-campus classes. Aquinas uses it for their on-campus classes too, but it is slow implementing it for this purpose.

The latest instructional technique being used at Aquinas is the creation and sharing of audio files, but some of the professors are taking this to the next level by using a free program called Photo Story 3 by Microsoft. Normally, this program is used to create moving picture story with audio or music, but the professors are taking their PowerPoint slides and exporting them out as picture files. They are then importing the slides into Photo Story 3 as picture files and then narrating the slides using an external microphone. Then they upload the multimedia file to Blackboard so that the students can hear and see that week's lecture. The students are able to see the complex terms printed on the PowerPoint image and hear an explanation of it in the professor's own voice. Richard Mayer (2001) states that students can remember the concept better if you put narration and images together in a multimedia file. Also, the students can even go back and review it at their own pace.

Recent online learning developments. Recently, ATS has begun to emphasize the importance of assessment systems to graduate programs in divinity which is discussed in Section Eight of ATS's Handbook of Accreditation. The Masters in Divinity (M.Div.) is the professional degree most ministerial students achieve when they graduate. Ministers need to know more than just facts; this is why ATS is interested in ministerial students being able to integrate what they learn intellectually and affectively (ATS, 2007, p. 14). ATS is interested in the various schools of

theology collecting quantitative and qualitative data to demonstrate that students are integrating what they learn. ATS is also interested in the various schools reflecting on the data to identify important institutional resources and how they are successfully deployed in the educational system (ATS, 2007, p. 14). If the data collected demonstrates outcomes are not being achieved, ATS warns schools not to jump too hastily to make changes without investigating the root cause of the problem (ATS, p. 40). The purpose of collecting data is to ensure the school is making needed improvements across its' whole curriculum, not in a specific program. ATS wisely realizes assessment in higher education often drives incremental change, but not systemic and innovative change throughout the entire school and curriculum (ATS, p. 43). "Innovation—large scale change—is more often driven by crisis. Furthermore, assessment strategies are usually designed to identify needed improvements, not collect information that questions the program itself" (ATS, p. 43).

In conclusion, the future is bright for distant learning among the schools of theology. In October 2006, a number of Catholic schools of theology gathered in Chicago, Illinois, for a meeting to talk about best practices and the future of distant learning in Catholic seminaries. One of the outcomes of this meeting was the foundation of the Catholic Distance Learning Network (<http://www.catholicdistance.org/>) in 2008. Member schools are able to offer courses online and receive enrollments of students from other member schools at no tuition cost to the students or member institutions since students already pay one price for being full time. One other function of the network is to train professors on how to teach totally online.

This group's vision expanded and truly sees the diversity and nature of the church. In essence, students would be catechized, formed in the Christian life so that they can engage the tasks of the Christian life. Once formed in the Christian faith, they can later pastor the faithful

fully in the Christian life: “Catechesis aims to achieve a more integral formation of the person rather than merely to communicate information” (USCCB, 2005, p. 10).

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

This study will work with Aquinas Institute (AI) of Theology in St. Louis, MO., owned and operated by the Province of St. Albert the Great based in Chicago, IL. The Province is part of the world-wide Catholic Order of Preachers, with their international leader in Rome, Italy. The Order of Preachers is also known as the Dominicans, which is named after their founder St. Dominic. Dominic founded the Order in the early 13th century.

Aquinas Institute was founded in 1925 in River Forest, Illinois, but moved to Dubuque, Iowa, in 1954; during that period they only served the Catholic Dominicans. But in 1968 Aquinas Institute “collaborated with the Wartburg Theological Seminary (Lutheran) and the University of Dubuque Seminary (Presbyterian) to form the first ecumenical consortium in the country ... In 1968 AI welcomed its first lay students” (Aquinas Institute, 2009, p. 3).

In 1979 AI relocated to Saint Louis, MO to improve recruitment, and in 1981 the school entered into a formal relationship with St. Louis University. In 1993 AI inaugurated the first of its kind Catholic doctoral program in preaching to respond to the 1982 call by the (US Catholic) Bishop’s Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry for such a program. Distance learning master’s degree programs commenced in 1995 in Oklahoma City, OK and over time in several locations. (Aquinas Institute, 2009, p. 3)

For many years Aquinas had a residential doctoral program in preaching, but in 2000 they transitioned to a hybrid doctoral program. As their website states:

From its inception, the Aquinas D.Min. in Preaching was virtually unique among American D.Min. or PhD homiletics programs in having a core curriculum of doctoral

courses organized around the integrating discipline of homiletics rather than a more loosely organized set of masters courses with add-on doctoral assignments-thus allowing doctoral students to experience together what we have come to call wisdom community. To the best of our knowledge, we believe ourselves to be unique in implementing technology programmatically across all the courses of our D.Min. curriculum. Our distributed learning (or hybrid) mix of intensive seminar (25 hours in the classroom) and online dialogue (12.5 hours) over the course of each four-month, semester-long course allows student cohorts to work in the integrative context of full-time ministry while taking semester-long doctoral courses. Our students, who, in large part, can no longer be spared from ministry for a residential degree, are grateful and highly motivated.

Doctoral level excellence in preaching is characterized by the student's ability to integrate an operative theology of preaching with sound biblical, congregational, and cultural hermeneutics and contemporary homiletic and liturgical theory. The communal ethos of the school is conveyed by an orientation and a cohort covenanting process early in the program. As a learning community, students and faculty engage in classroom and internet instruction, discussion of readings, and peer evaluation, in conjunction with regular preaching, writing, and self-directed learning projects, to attain further competency and direction in their ministerial vocation. (Aquinas Institute, 2006, paragraphs 7 & 8)

Currently, Aquinas Institute offers seven masters and one doctoral degree. There are four programs that are internet-enhanced degrees including their Doctor of Ministry (D.Min) program in preaching. Still, Aquinas is the only Catholic school of theology in the world to offer a doctoral degree in preaching.

The students who participate in the D.Min. program at Aquinas are multi-lingual, multi-racial, multi-cultural and interdominational. They are men and women of faith; some are ordained and others are lay students, but they bring all their diversity, lived wisdom and ministerial expertise to participate in an online course management site called Blackboard that is commonly used in higher education. Blackboard is a proprietary system (<http://www.blackboard.com>) that Aquinas leases from a third party called Fisher's Net (<http://www.fishersnet.net>). Within Blackboard, the professor is able to post primary sources or any other documents that he or she wants the students to read. The most used tool in Blackboard is the threaded discussions. The professor or students are able to post on this website a question and then people reply to the question by clicking on the link for the question, typing their response to the question into an input box and then clicking submit which adds their posting to the discussion. The answering post is indented from the original posting, and thus creates a "threaded" discussion. Individuals can reply to other postings besides the original posted question.

Some professors divide their class into groups and each member of the group takes a week and leads the online discussion. In these cases, the student leader adds the starting question and others have to reply. After the week is over, other students take responsibility to lead the discussions.

Just as the threaded discussions are a valuable tool for online learning at Aquinas, the intensive face-to-face weekends are the heart of the cohort wisdom community. For the Masters programs the faculty member is with the students face to face on Friday night, all day Saturday and part of Sunday. For the doctorate in preaching, the intensive period is different; students arrive on Sunday afternoon of the intensive week and stay until Friday noon. The doctoral students spend a

whole week together during every course. The intensive is held in a facility that can house and feed the students and staff so that they can focus on learning.

Before a course starts, the faculty member is with students face to face to set the academic stage. Then the students meet online for the next five weeks and in the midst of the session, the professor is again with them face to face for the intensive. At the end of the course, the professor wraps it up in the post study and ends with an exit survey in case there needs to be changes made in the program.

This format is convenient for the students who are already working part- or full-time in ministry, and students who have families or other family commitments. Because of the flexible online format, they can do their work when it is convenient for them and it does not interfere with ministerial or family commitments.

Research Question

Based on the communal experience of the Dominicans of Hispaniola mentioned in Chapter 2, my research question is: How do students experience wisdom community in the program and what is the relationship between that experience and implementation of wisdom community in subsequent professional practice? A secondary research question follows: How does technology support theological education online with wisdom community?

Data Collection

To help answer the research question, the study will be a mixed method study utilizing an analysis of Likert and open-ended responses to a survey of current and former D.Min students, as well as discussion board data from university classes. The survey includes a 20-item instrument called the “Classroom Community Scale” written by Alfred P. Rovai, Ph.D. As Rovai (2002) stated:

The 20-item Classroom Community Scale measures sense of community in a learning environment...It was concluded that the Classroom Community Scale is a valid and reliable measure of classroom community and that this instrument yields two interpretable factors, connectedness and learning. (p. 197)

The Classroom Community Scale survey items were adapted to meet the needs of the study (see Appendix A and Appendix B). Besides the Likert items, there will be twelve opened-ended questions for participants to fill in depending if they are current students (see Appendix A) or alums (see Appendix B).

Before I began the data collection, I met with Dr. Ann Garrido, the D.Min. program director at the time for Aquinas Institute of Theology, and shared with her my intentions and hopes to answer the research question. I had already met with the president of Aquinas and he had assured me of his support and acknowledged that this study would be good for the school because it would give them another form of assessment for the program.

I first applied for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to work with adult individuals, current students and alums, as they participate in the wisdom community as students and alums as they work as ministers. I asked over 100 individuals to take an online survey through Blackboard which is password protected (Appendix A is for the current students and Appendix B is for graduates—each is adapted to meet their context); the students' identities were not collected, but certain biographical information was sought in the questionnaire. Also, as part of the survey, participants were asked if I could analyze their threaded discussions as part of the study; this portion was totally optional. Participants had to input their name in this question and click a subsequent Yes or No question authorizing the investigator to analyze their threaded discussions throughout the various courses. If their material was used, their name was kept

confidential. IRB approval was sought to ensure their protection and well being of participants in this study. Once any individuals gave informed consent for me to access their threaded discussions in Blackboard, access to this data was not a problem, since as the Director of Instructional Technology at Aquinas I was listed as an instructor on all of Aquinas' Blackboard sites including the D.Min. program sites; I did not need any special permission technically to gain access to this material, only the participants' consent.

After IRB approval was obtained, the second part began. This part included sending current cohort members and alums an email eliciting their participation in the study. In the email the investigator outlined the procedure of filling out the online survey. The survey included the consent text which outlined that the participants were reassured that their identity would be confidential and the right to refuse to participate in the survey without being penalized and to refuse to answer any question during the survey. They also had the option to exit the survey at any time by just logging off from Fisher's Net/Blackboard. Besides the consent text, the questionnaire included a few biographic questions, the adapted Classroom Community Scale questions and several opened-ended questions.

When the participants logged onto the secure site, they were presented with two survey options. The first option was for current students (see Appendix A) and the second option was for alums (see Appendix B). Each survey was adapted to meet the participant's stage of education.

Data Analysis

The last portion consisted of the data analysis. The previous stages resulted in the following two data sets: quantitative data—two interpretable factors, connectedness and learning,

and qualitative data—the answers to the open-ended questions from current students and alums and threaded discussions.

The quantitative data was interpreted according to Rovai's (2002) raw scoring guide for the Classroom Community Scale (p. 202) (the Classroom Community Scale has been found to be valid and a reliable measure of classroom community). The raw data was categorized in light of gender, cohort year, connectedness and learning. The investigator then interpreted the data and brought it into conversation with the qualitative information.

The qualitative data was coded. Coding is defined as, making note of the same sorts of things you pick up, either implicitly or explicitly, when you pay attention to unfolding events in the world...Coding in the final analysis, is an act of selective attention. When you code, we mark those things in our data that we need to revisit. Not only are we going to revisit them, but we are also to reconsider these pieces of data from a particular perspective. (Shank, 2006, p. 147)

Once the open-ended questions and discussion board threads are coded, these codes were analyzed to see if certain patterns or themes arise.

Shank (2006) suggests that any thematic approach involves a refinement or a change in these themes arising from the qualitative data. So, the data was refined by looking for the similarities and differences, the beginning of theories can start to arise (p. 150).

Verifying the meaning of the data is vital. The investigator took into account the issues of reliability, validity and generalizability. "In order to make sure your research is generalizable, [experts] recommend that it be evaluated in terms of its representativeness. Have you sampled a

broad enough spectrum of informants? ... Are your conclusions supported by a large enough body of data?" (Shank, p. 153)

Each revelation was brought into dialogue with one another to hopefully to see the relationship between wisdom community during theological education and implementation of wisdom community in subsequent professional practice.

CHAPTER 4

QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

In the next two chapters I am interpreting the data described in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I will provide a quantitative analysis and interpretation of these data sets:

1. Current student survey (quantitative interpretation)
2. Alumni survey (quantitative interpretation)

To interpret this data set, the first part of the chapter will concentrate on the quantitative data using the Classroom Community Scale developed by Alfred P. Rovai (2002). Once the student/alumni data is scored according to Rovai's scale, quantitative interpretive tools were used to analyze the data and to reach some conclusions based on the numbers. The following section of this chapter will focus on the last four data sets employing qualitative research methods.

The survey was deployed according to the protocol to current students (Appendix A) and alumni (Appendix B). The survey was sent to 74 people with 26 current students and 22 alumni completing the anonymous, online survey through Survey Monkey. This was a high rate of completion; 65% of respondents filled out the survey. The survey also included qualitative questions and finally asked participants their permission to analyze their threaded discussions in Fisher's Net/Blackboard. One last source of data were the instructors teaching in the doctoral program. Permission was sought in the IRB to have them sign a permission form to also analyze their facilitation and interaction with the students in the discussion boards. This chapter will focus on analyzing these sources of data.

The raw survey data was categorized and analyzed in light of gender, cohort year, connectedness and learning subscales. For the current students 26 participants took the online

survey. Participants were: 17 male and 9 females; 9 students from 2004 cohort, 6 students from 2006 cohort and 11 students from 2008 cohort. Out of the cohorts the participants were: 2004 cohort-7 male and 2 female students responded; 2006 cohort-3 male and 3 female students responded; 2008 cohort-7 male and 4 female students responded. Figure 1 illustrates the numbers of respondents:

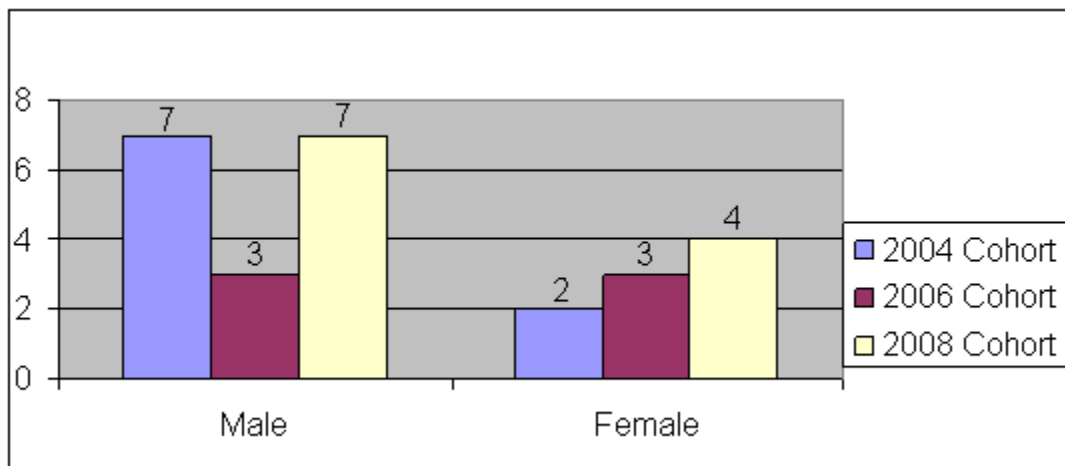


Figure 1. Current student respondents by gender & cohort (n=26)

To calculate the overall score for the Classroom Community Scale, one has to add the weights of all 20 items. Figure 2 illustrates the individual scores for each of the current students. The total raw scores range from a maximum score of 80 to a minimum score of 39.

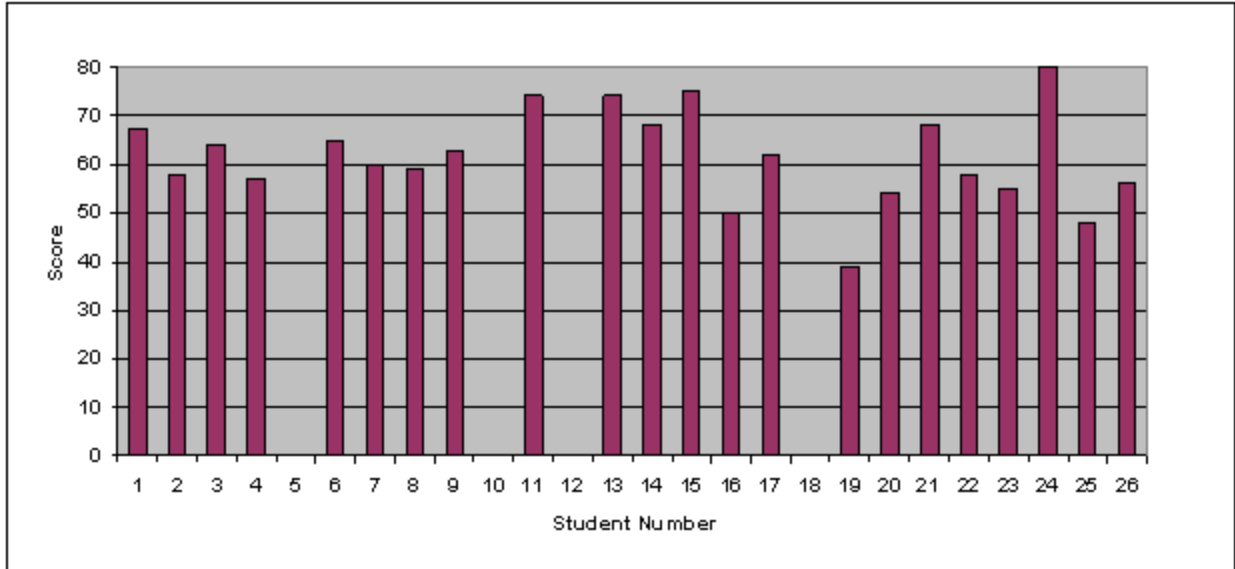


Figure 2. Independent total scores for current students

In Figure 2, students 5, 10, 12 and 18 failed to answer one or more of the questions. Therefore, their scores were not tabulated in the overall score. Even though these scores were not tabulated in the overall score, they will be mentioned later in this section.

The overall average score for the 22 students who completely filled out the survey is 61.5 out of 80. Rovai in his study just states the Classroom community score for his 375 participants; he states the minimum score is 14 and the maximum score is 80 with a mean of 56.62 (M=56.62) (Rovai, 2002, p. 203). He never ranks his results as low or high on the Classroom community scale. In this study for current students the raw scores range minimum score of 39 with maximum score of 80 with a mean or average of 61.5, which is higher than Rovai’s results but with fewer participants. The following scatter plot (Figure 3) points out an interesting similarity

between the individual scores; Figure 3 illustrates $\frac{3}{4}$ of the current students scored around 60 and above (16 students).

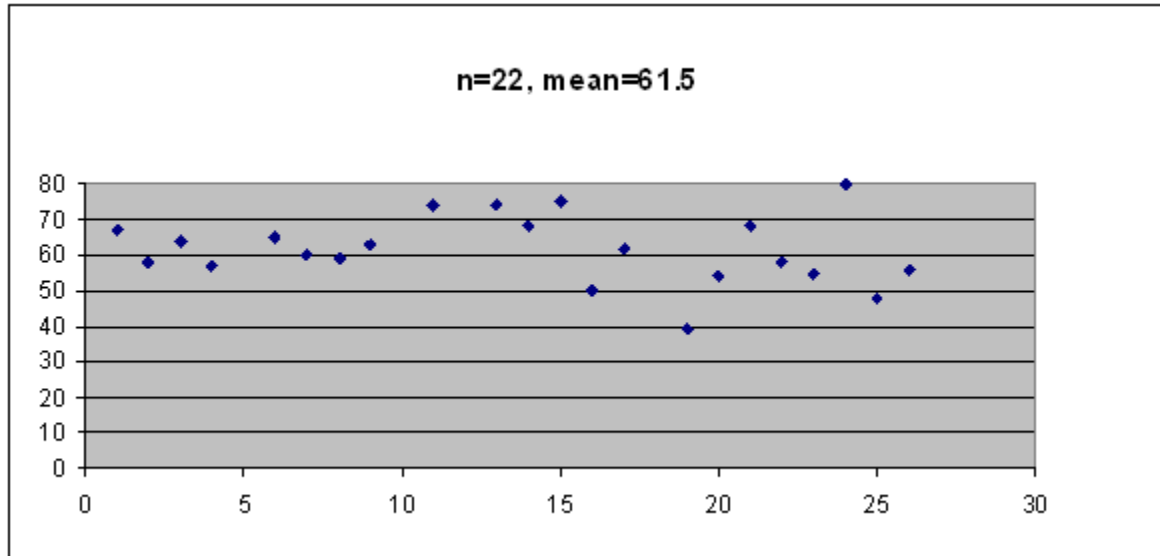


Figure 3. Scatter plot for individual totals

The Classroom Community Scale is divided into two sub-scales: learning and connectedness, each of which is between 0 and 40. In Figures 4 and 5 you will see the graphical representation of both sub-scales. In Figure 4 (Learning Sub-Scale) the scores resulted in a range between 24-40 with a mean of 32. In Figure 5 (Connectedness Sub-Scale) the scores resulted in a range between 15 and 40 with a mean of 29.5. Figure 6 is a side by side illustration of the participant’s sub-scale scores.

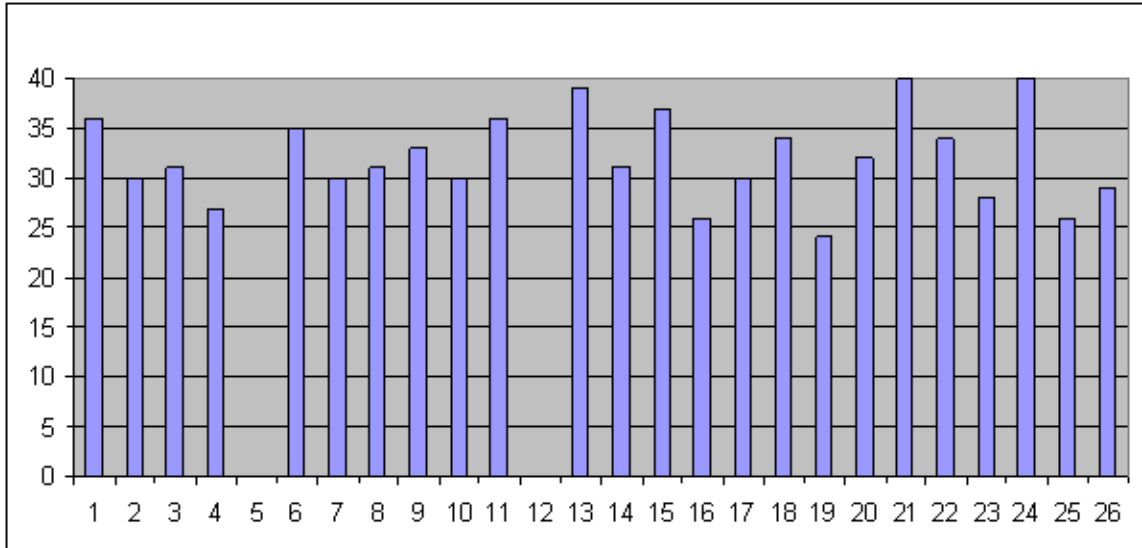


Figure 4. Individual scores for learning sub-scale

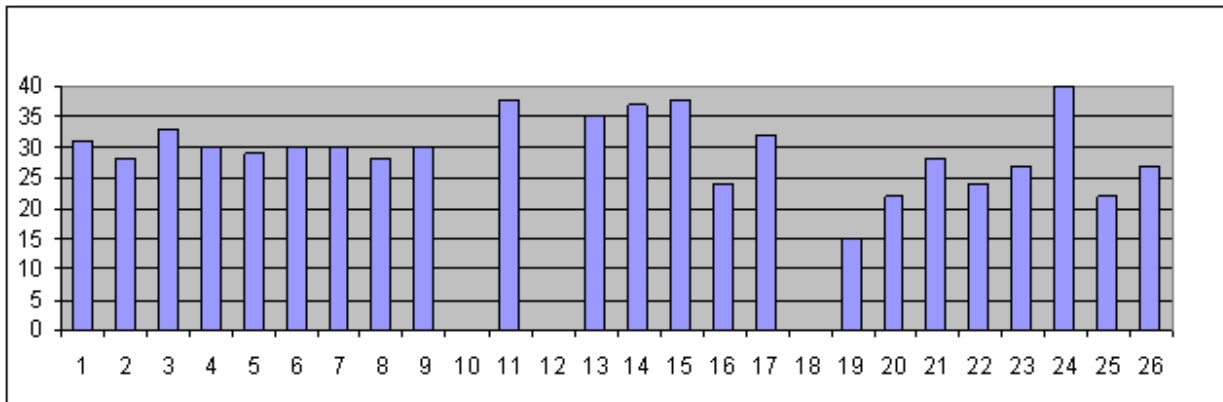


Figure 5: Individual scores for connectedness sub-scale

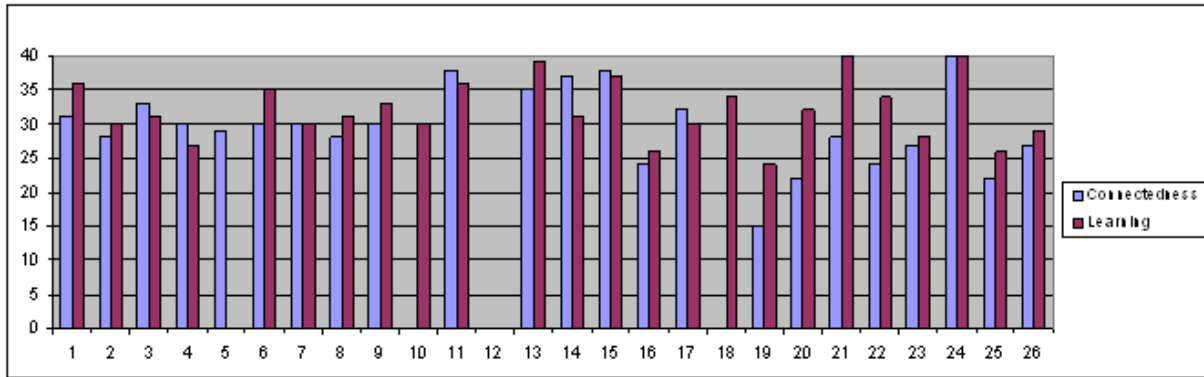


Figure 6. Comparative scores for connectedness vs. learning sub-scales

In Figure 6 (Connectedness vs. Learning chart), Participant 5 answered all Connectedness questions so this participant’s answers were used to tabulate the overall Connectedness Sub-Scale, but did not answer one or more of the Learning Sub-Scale questions to be tabulated in the overall sub-scale results. Also, Participant 10 answered all the Learning Sub-Scale questions and did not answer one or more of the Connectedness Sub-Scale questions. Therefore, participant 10’s Learning Sub-Scale results were used to score the average of the Learning Sub-Scale. Participant 12 failed to answer one or more of the questions for both sub-scales; therefore, Participant 12’s results were not used to tabulate either sub-scale results. Participant 18 answered all the necessary questions to tabulate the overall Learning Sub-Scale, but failed to answer one or more of the questions to be used in the overall Connectedness Sub-Scale. Participant 18’s results were used to score the average of the Learning Sub-Scale.

In his original work Rovai (2002) “conducted studies in online learning environments and reported finding a difference in sense of community by gender, with females manifesting stronger sense of community than males” (Rovai, p. 207). Since Rovai noted the variance between females/males and their sense of community, the following tables demonstrate gender-

and cohort-specific classroom community scale and sub-scale scores to note a difference between this study and his original findings. Tables 1 and 2 with Figures 7, 8 and 9 show the means and standard deviations for all the current students and sub-groups, which include male and female and cohorts starting in 2004, 2006 and 2008.

Table 1 *Classroom Community Scale Scores*

Individual Total Average and Standard Deviation for Current Students	
Average for All Students (n=22)	61.5
Average for Males (n=14)	63.7
Average for Females (n=8)	57.8
Standard Deviation for All Students	9.7
Standard Deviation for Males	11.3
Standard Deviation for Females	4.3
Connectedness Sub-Scale Average and Standard Deviation for Current Students (Male vs. Female)	
Average for Males (n=15)	30.3
Average for Females (n=8)	27.9
Standard Deviation for Males	6.9
Standard Deviation for Females	3.3
Learning Sub-Scale Average and Standard Deviation for Current Students (Male vs. Female)	
Average for Males (n=15)	33.1
Average for Females (n=9)	30.3
Standard Deviation for Males	5.1
Standard Deviation for Females	2.6
Individual Total Average and Standard Deviation by Cohorts	
Average Total for Cohort 2004 (n=9)	66.7
Total Standard Deviation for Cohort 2004	6.8
Average for Cohort 2006 (n=5)	63.6
Standard Deviation for Cohort 2006	9.7
Average for Cohort 2008 (n=8)	54.5
Standard Deviation for Cohort 2008	9.0

Table 2 *Comparative Sub-Scale Results by Cohort*

Individual Cohort Totals by Sub-Scale	
Cohort 2004 Connectedness Sub-Scale Average (n=9)	33.2
Cohort 2004 Connectedness Sub-Scale Standard Deviation	3.8
Cohort 2004 Learning Sub-Scale Average (n=9)	33.4
Cohort 2004 Learning Sub-Scale Standard Deviation	4.0
Cohort 2006 Connectedness Sub-Scale Average (n=6)*	31.2
Cohort 2006 Connectedness Sub-Scale Standard Deviation	4.8
Cohort 2006 Learning Sub-Scale Average (n=5)	32
Cohort 2006 Learning Sub-Scale Standard Deviation	4.6
Cohort 2008 Connectedness Sub-Scale Average (n=8)**	24
Cohort 2008 Connectedness Sub-Scale Standard Deviation	4.6
Cohort 2008 Learning Sub-Scale Average (n=10)***	30.8
Cohort 2008 Learning Sub-Scale Standard Deviation	4.8
T-Test Results (Two-tailed, Two-sample equal variance)	
Current students Males vs Females	p=0.62
Current students Cohort 2004 vs. 2006	p=0.17
Current students Cohort 2006 vs. 2008	p=0.54
Current students Cohort 2004 vs. 2008	p=0.02

Notes

- *Participant 5 did fill out necessary questions to figure out connectedness scale, but not enough questions to answer total or learning sub-scale
- **Participants 10, 12 and 18 did not fill out necessary questions to calculate connectedness sub-scale
- ***Participant 12 did not fill out necessary questions to calculate Learning sub-scale

To help illustrate Tables 1 and 2, Box and Whisker Plots (Figures 7, 8 and 9) have been provided to help visualize these complex numbers. To help read the plots, box and whisker plots are based on medians, which is the exact center of the number of the data range. Once the exact center is known, it is used to divide the data range in half. Next, the lower data numbers are used to calculate the lower median. The upper half of the data range are used to calculate the higher median. Visually, the lower and higher medians are represented by the upper and lower limits of the box; the center line of the plot is the overall median. The whisker lines are the lower and

higher numbers of the data range. The diamond in the diagram represents the average (i.e., mean) of the data.

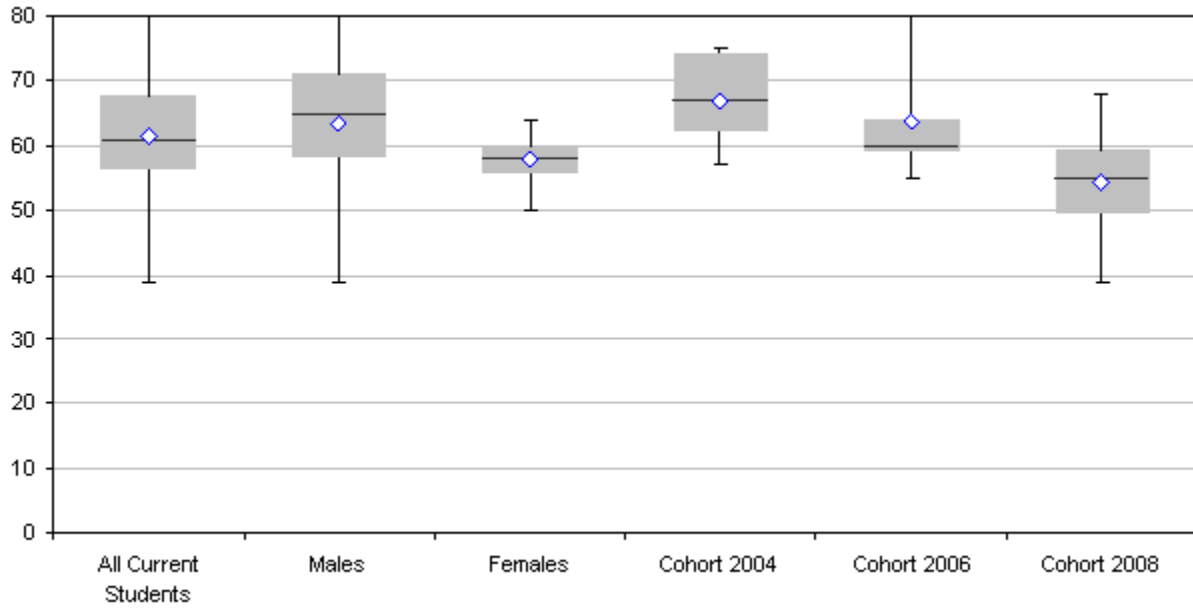


Figure 7. Box & whisker plot for overall score

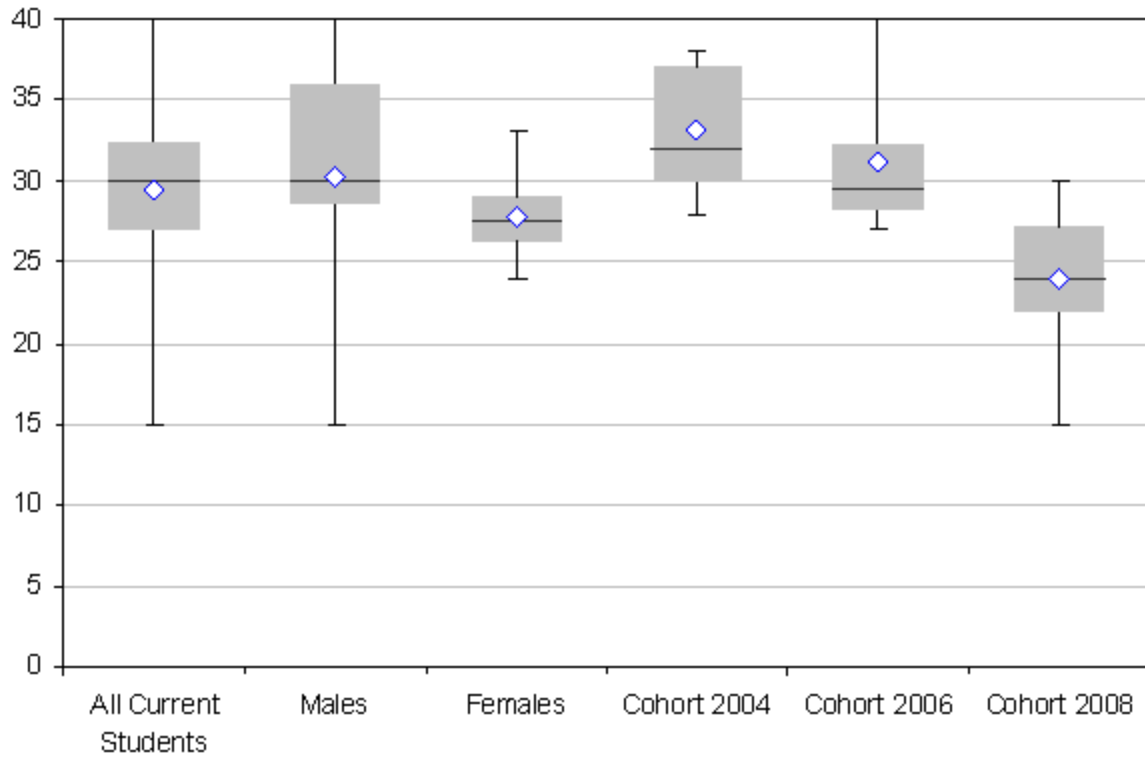


Figure 8. Box & whisker plot for connectedness sub-scale

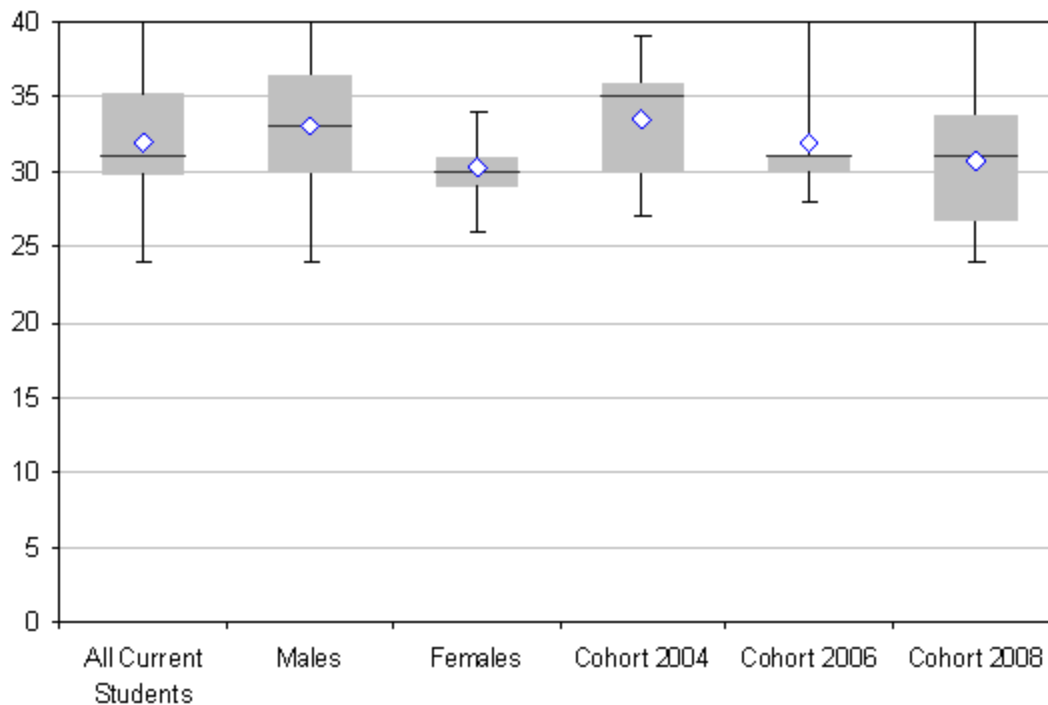


Figure 9. Box & whisker plot for learning sub-scale

In Rovai's (2002) original study of 375 subjects, he reported the following: Classroom Community $M=56.62$, $S.D.=12.30$; Connectedness Sub-Scale $M=26.45$, $S.D.=7.23$; and Learning Sub-Scale $M=30.17$, $S.D.=6.51$. He also reported "female students possessed a higher classroom community ($M=57.60$, $S.D.=12.47$) than male students ($M=54.73$, $S.D.=11.79$)" (p. 203). While in this particular study of 26 current students, males ($M=63.7$, $S.D.=11.3$) possessed a higher classroom community score than females ($M=57.8$, $S.D.=4.3$); this is the opposite of the trend Rovai reported. Finally, Cohort 2004 scored higher ($M=66.7$, $S.D.=6.8$) than Cohorts 2006 ($M=63.6$, $S.D.=9.7$) and 2008 ($M=54.5$, $S.D.=9.8$). The t-test results show the only significant cohort comparison is Cohort 2004 vs. 2008.

Also, Rovai in his original study never gave a rating scale for the Classroom Community Scale; he only used the outcomes in the test to compare numbers as cited previously between males and females. The only conclusion this study can draw is that the overall score for the 22 students who completely filled out the survey ($M=61.5$) is higher than what Rovai reported in his original survey for the Classroom Community scale ($M=56.62$).

Rovai also reported “the minimum male connectedness score was 1 out of 40 possible points and for females the minimum score was 7 out of 40 points. For both genders, the maximum score was 40” (Rovai, p. 207). In this particular study the minimum male connectedness score was 15 (with the next two lowest scores are 22) out of 40. The female minimum score is 24 out of 40. Rovai in his observations concluded “this large variability in feelings of connectedness suggests that male students, or perhaps students manifesting the separate voice, do experience weaker feelings of community than females, or students with the connected voice, in online learning environments” (Rovai, p. 207). In Rovai’s observations, females had a stronger sense of community than males, but in this study of online students in a preaching doctoral program the opposite is true, males had a stronger sense of connectedness. As in Rovai's study, males in this study had a wider range of responses from 15 to 40 while the females had a smaller sampling ranging from 24 to 33.

Now turning to the alumni survey, the raw data was categorized and analyzed in light of gender, cohort year, connectedness and learning subscales. For the alumni survey 22 participants took the online survey. Participants were: 19 males and 3 females; 7 participants from 2000 cohort, 9 participants from 2002 cohort and 5 participants from 2004 cohort. Out of the cohorts the participants were: 2000 cohort-7 male and 0 female participants responded; 2002 cohort-8 male and 1 female alums responded; 2004 cohort-3 male and 2 female alums responded.

Figure 10 illustrates the individual scores for each of the alumni participants who completed the online survey.

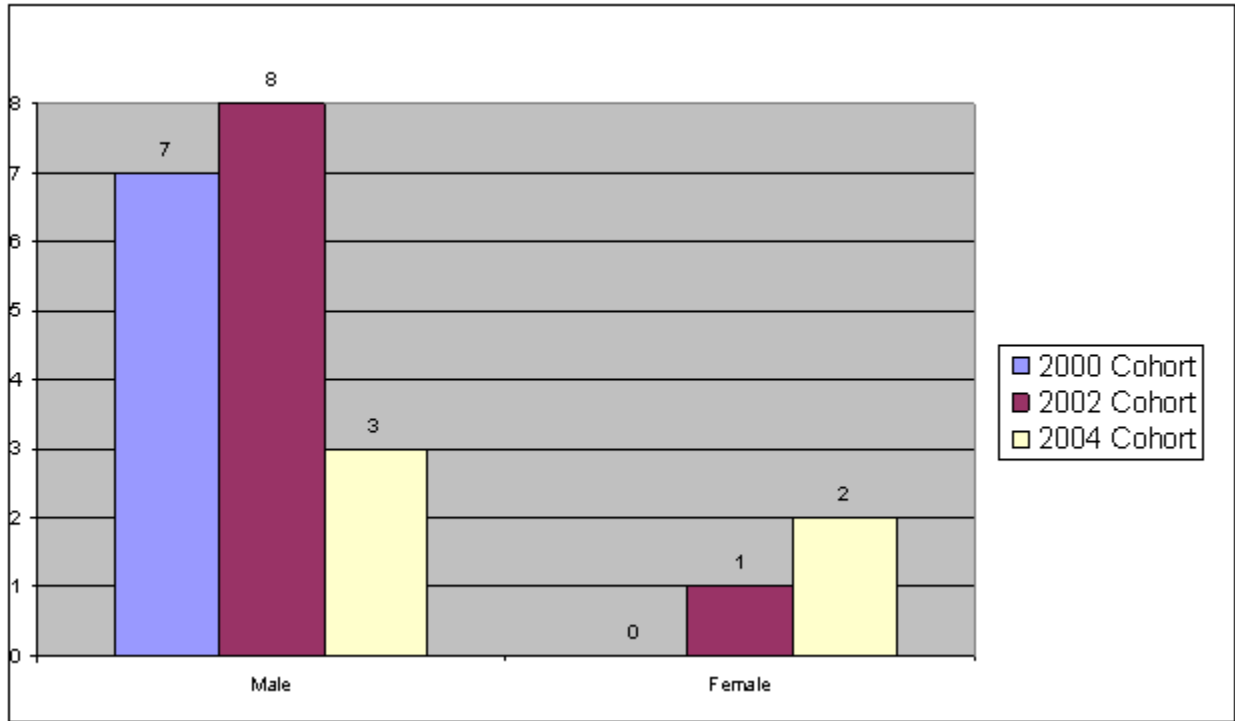


Figure 10. Alumni respondents by gender & cohort (n=21)

Figure 11 illustrates the individual scores for each of the alumni. The total raw scores range from a maximum score of 80 and a minimum score of 42.

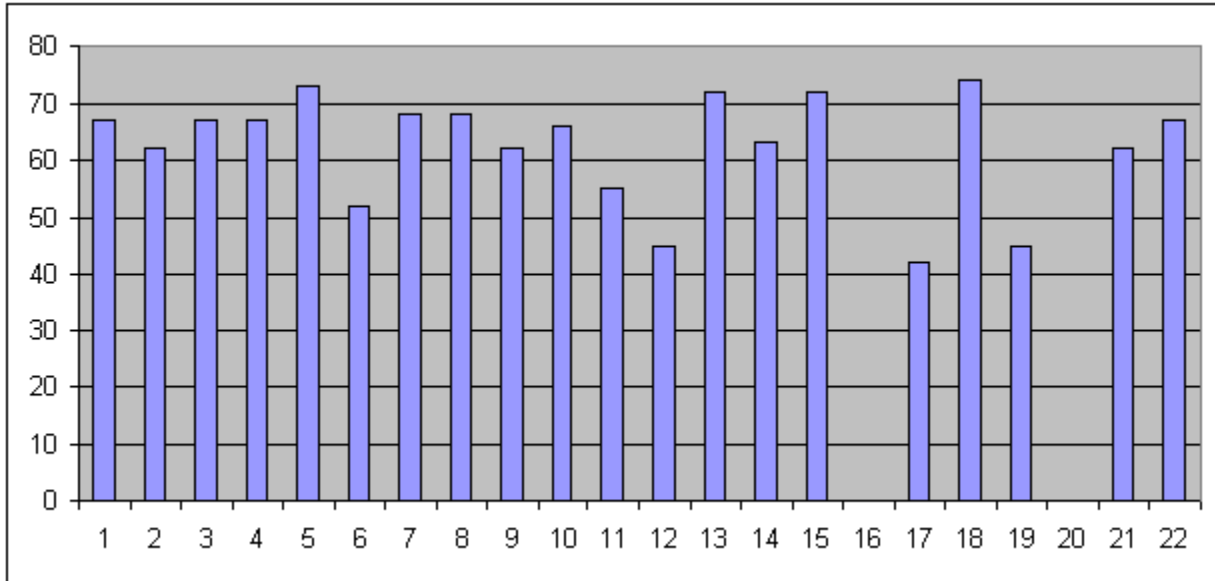


Figure 11. Independent total scores for alumni

Participant 16 only reported his sex as male, but never started the survey nor reported his cohort year; this is why in Figure 10, 21 participants were used to create the graph. Participant 20 did not complete the answer to Question 5; therefore his score was not used in the overall score and connectedness sub-scale, but used to calculate the learning sub-scale. So, the individual overall scores were only calculated using 20 scores, not 22, as seen in Figure 12.

The overall average score for the Alumni Respondents is 62.45 (S.D.=9.67) out of 80. The following scatter plot (Figure 12) points out an interesting similarity between the individual scores; Figure 12 illustrates $\frac{3}{4}$ of the alumni scored around 60 and above (15 students).

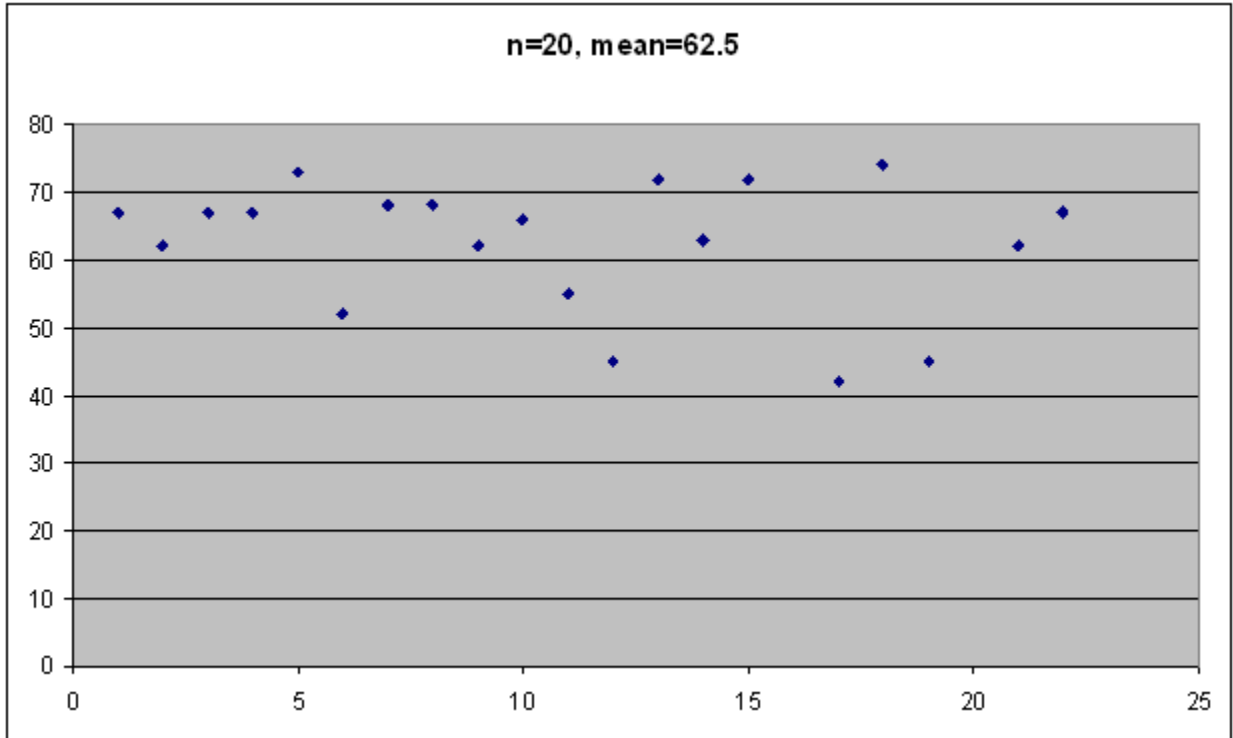


Figure 12. Scatter plot for individual totals

Again, the Classroom Community Scale is divided into two sub-scales: learning and connectedness, each of which has a range between 0 and 40. In Figures 13 and 14 you will see a graphical representation of both sub-scales. In Figure 13 (Learning Sub-Scale) the scores resulted in a range of between 20-39 with a mean of 32.05. In Figure 14 (Connectedness Sub-Scale) the scores resulted in a range between 31-37 with a mean of 30.95. Figure 15 is a side by side illustration of the participant’s sub-scale scores.

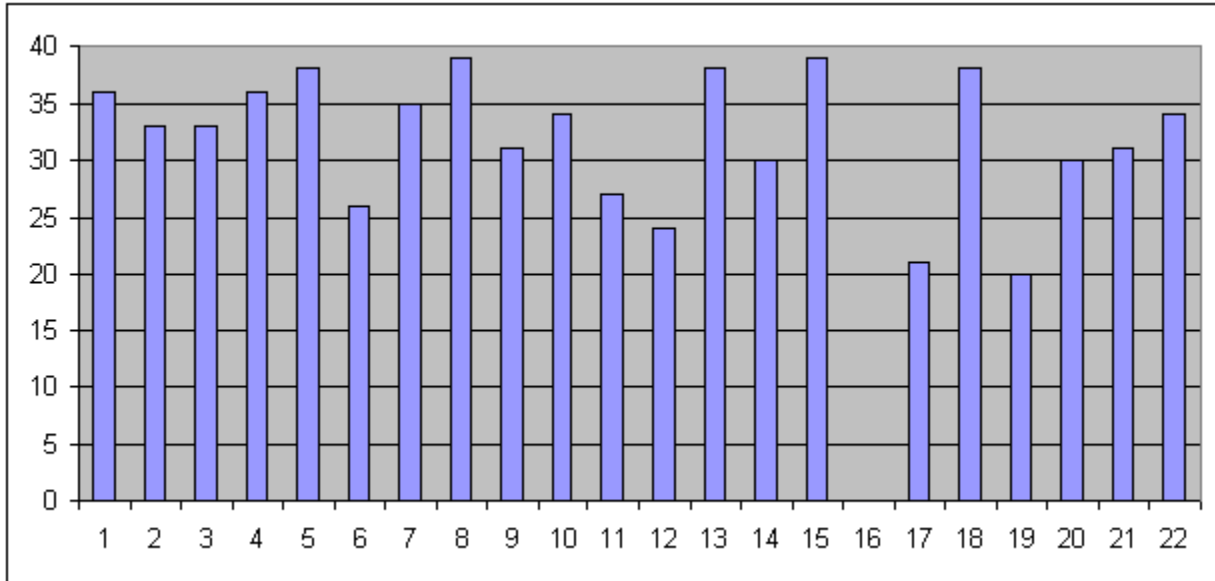


Figure 13. Individual scores for learning sub-scale

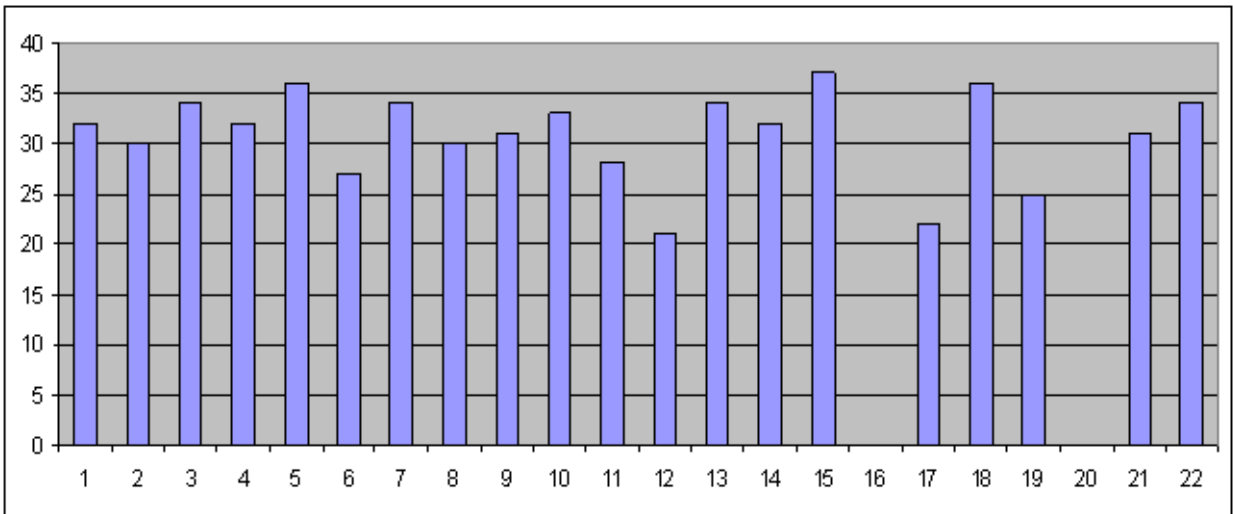


Figure 14. Individual scores for connectedness sub-scale

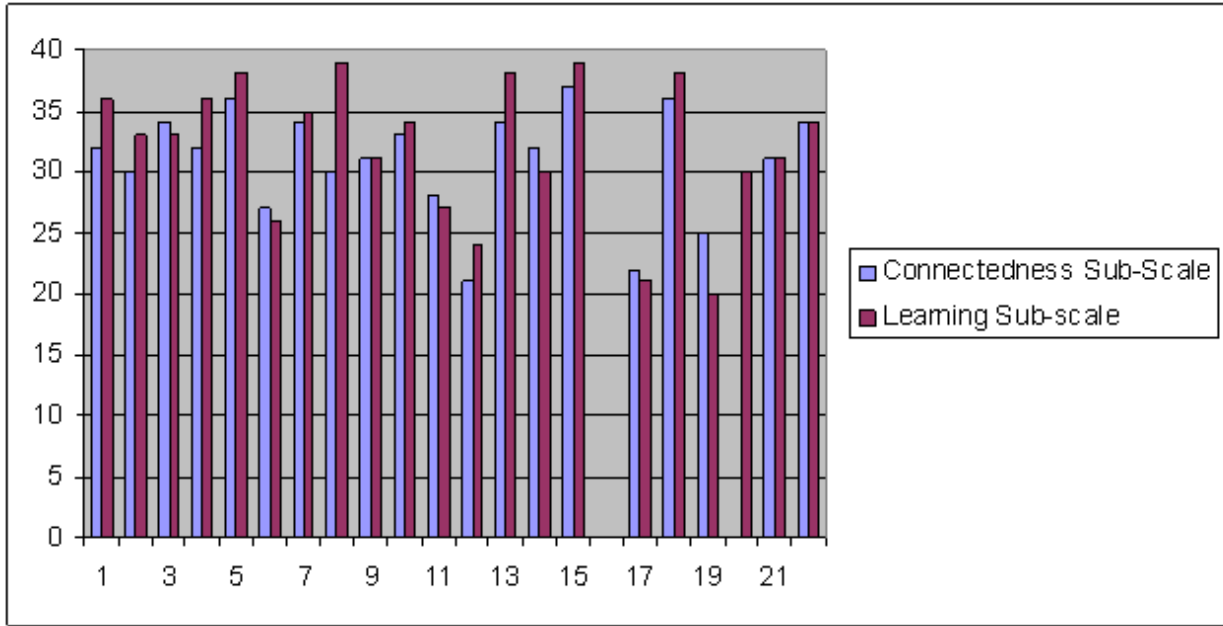


Figure 15. Comparative scores for connectedness vs. learning sub-scales

Tables 3 and 4 with Figures 16, 17 and 18 show the means and standard deviations for the alumni respondents and sub-scales, which include male and female cohorts starting in 2000, 2002 and 2004.

Table 3 Classroom Community Scale Scores

Individual Total Average and Standard Deviation for Alumni Respondents	
Average for All Alumni (n=20)	62.5
Average for Males (n=17)	63.6
Average for Females (n=3)	55.7
Standard Deviation for All Alumni	9.67
Standard Deviation for Males	9.3
Standard Deviation for Females	11.0
Connectedness Sub-Scale Average and Standard Deviation for Alumni Respondents (Male vs. Female)	
Average for Males (n=17)	31.4
Average for Females (n=3)	28.3
Standard Deviation for Males	4.5
Standard Deviation for Females	3.5

Table 3 *CCSS (continued)*

Learning Sub-Scale Average and Standard Deviation for Alumni Respondents (Male vs. Female)	
Average for Males (n=18)	32.8
Average for Females (n=3)	27.7
Standard Deviation for Males	5.2
Standard Deviation for Females	8.0
Individual Total Average and Standard Deviation by Cohorts	
Average for Cohort 2000 (n=7)	65.7
Standard Deviation for Cohort 2000	9.8
Average for Cohort 2002 (n=7)	63.1
Standard Deviation for Cohort 2002	10.2
Average for Cohort 2004 (n=6)	57.8
Standard Deviation for Cohort 2004	8.7

 Table 4 *Comparative Sub-Scales Results by Cohort*

Individual Cohort Totals by Sub-Scale	
Cohort 2000 Connectedness Sub-Scale Average (n=7)	32.57
Cohort 2000 Connectedness Sub-Scale Standard Deviation	5.35
Cohort 2000 Learning Sub-Scale Average (n=7)	33.86
Cohort 2000 Learning Sub-Scale Standard Deviation	5.40
Cohort 2002 Connectedness Sub-Scale Average (n=7)*	30.43
Cohort 2002 Connectedness Sub-Scale Standard Deviation	4.24
Cohort 2002 Learning Sub-Scale Average (n=8)**	33
Cohort 2002 Learning Sub-Scale Standard Deviation	5.81
Cohort 2004 Connectedness Sub-Scale Average (n=6)	29.67
Cohort 2004 Connectedness Sub-Scale Standard Deviation	3.56
Cohort 2004 Learning Sub-Scale Average (n=6)	28.67
Cohort 2004 Learning Sub-Scale Standard Deviation	5.43
T-Test Results (Two-tailed, Two-sample equal variance)	
All Alumni Males vs Females	p= 0.20
Current students Cohort 2000 vs. 2002	p= 0.64
Current students Cohort 2002 vs. 2004	p= 0.34
Current students Cohort 2000 vs. 2004	p= 0.16

* Participant 20 did not fill out necessary questions to calculate Connectedness sub-scale

** Participant 20 did fill out necessary questions to calculate Learning sub-scale

To help illustrate Tables 3 and 4, Tables 3 and 4, Figures 16, 17 and 18 (Box and Whiskers Plots) have been created to illustrate the different variables.

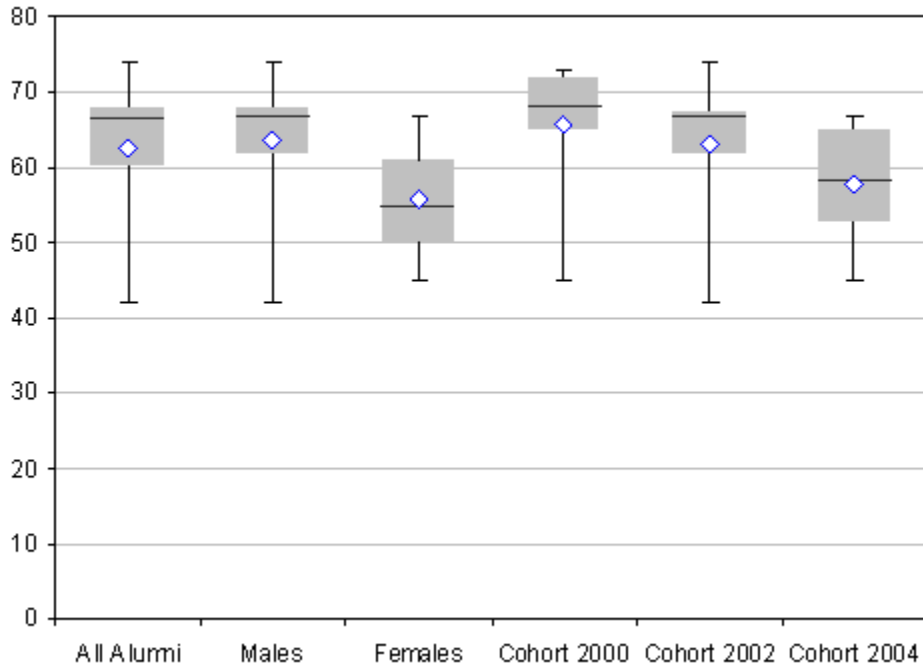


Figure 16. Box & whisker plot for overall score

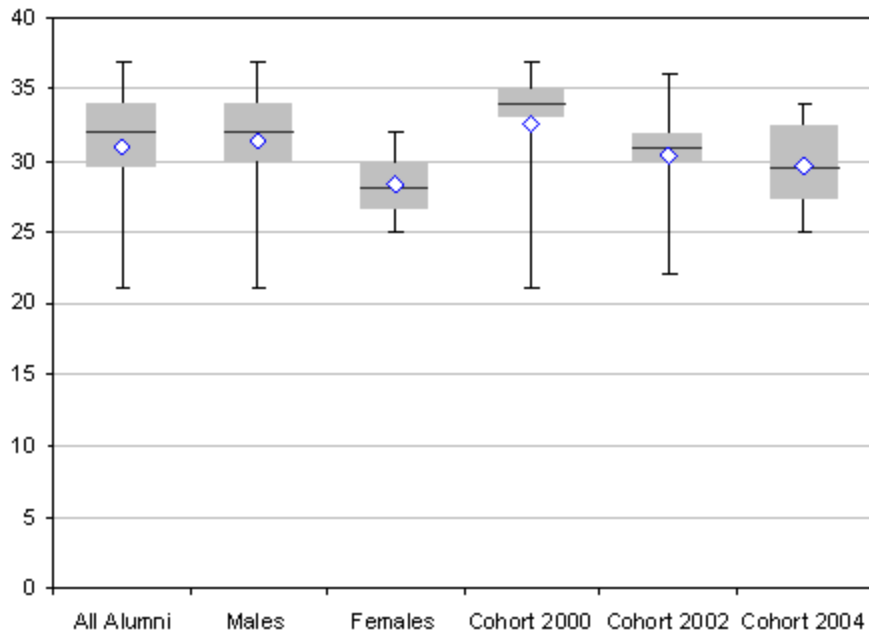


Figure 17. Box & whisker plot for connectedness sub-scale

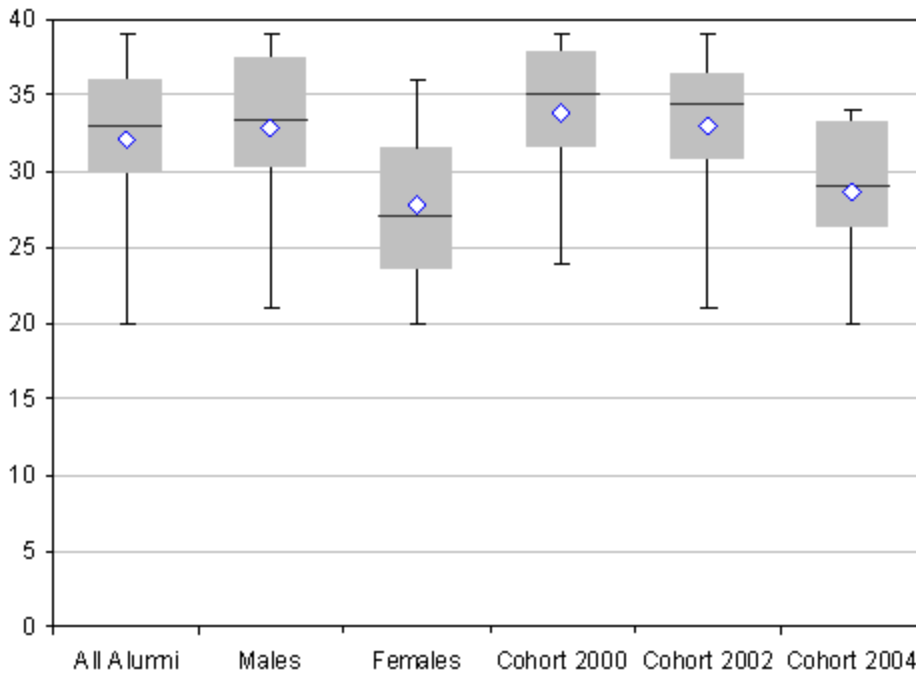


Figure 18. Box & whisker plot for learning sub-scale

In this particular survey the 20 alumni participants scored $M=62.5$, $S.D.=9.67$ in the overall Classroom Community Score. The males scored overall $M=63.6$, $S.D.=9.3$ while the females scored lower with an overall score of $M=55.7$, $S.D.=11.0$. Again, Rovai reported in his original study females possessed a higher classroom community scale than males, but again alumni males scored ($M=63.6$) than alumni females ($M=55.7$), although it is worth noting that the number of alumni females (3) was so small as to make descriptive statistics such as these less useful. Cohort 2000 ($M=65.7$, $S.D.=9.8$) scored higher than Cohorts 2002 ($M=63.1$, $S.D.=10.2$) and 2004 ($M=57.8$, $S.D.=8.7$). None of the t-test results appeared are statistically significant.

To compare the alumni respondents to the current students' results, again alumni male respondents ($M=63.6$, $S.D.=9.3$) scored higher in the overall Classroom Community score than

alumni female respondents (M=55.7, S.D.=11.0). Also, the current student male respondents (M=63.7, S.D.=11.3) scored nearly identically in the overall total Classroom Community Score than the alumni respondents (M=63.6, S.D.=9.3). The current student female respondents (M=57.8, S.D.=4.3) scored slightly higher than the female alumni respondents (M=55.7, S.D.=11.0). Surprisingly, the alumni male (M=31.4, S.D.=4.5) and females (M=28.3, S.D.=3.5) scored higher in the Connectedness Sub-Scale than the male (M=30.3, S.D.=6.9) and female (M=27.9, S.D.=3.3) current student respondents. Next, the current student male (M=33.1, S.D.=5.1) and female (M=30.3, S.D.=2.6) respondents scored higher than the alumni male (M=32.8, S.D.=5.2) and female (M=27.7, S.D.=8.0) respondents in the Learning Sub-Scale.

One final observation is to compare the overall averages by cohort. Table 5 helps illustrate this.

Table 5 Overall Averages by Cohort

Alumni Cohorts		Current Student Cohorts	
Cohort 2000	M=65.7, S.D.=9.8	Cohort 2004	M=66.7, S.D.=6.8
Cohort 2002	M=63.1, S.D.=10.2	Cohort 2006	M=63.6, S.D.=9.7
Cohort 2004	M=57.8, S.D.=8.7	Cohort 2008	M=54.5, S.D.=9.0

One notable similarity is between the overall mean scores between the Alumni Cohort 2000 and Current student Cohort 2004. This might lead one to think the further respondents are away from graduation in the case of alumni or the further they are along in their program in the case of current students, these participants will have higher scores than other cohorts. This leads to a notable difference between the Alumni Cohort 2004 (M=57.8, S.D.=8.7) and Current

Student Cohort 2004 ($M=66.7$, $S.D.=6.8$). The Current Student Cohort 2004 respondents have a higher overall score than their classmates that graduated. One possible reason might be the Current Student Cohort 2004 participants are still in contact with faculty and students; they have a closer connection or community engagement than their graduated peers.

CHAPTER 5

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Now that I have presented the quantitative portion of the surveys of current students and alumni, I turn to qualitative analysis and interpretation of the following data sets:

1. The final 11 open-ended questions from the survey of current students
2. The final 15 open-ended questions from the survey of alumni
3. Student/alum threaded discussions from their current/previous online course work, including instructor comments

As stated earlier, the survey was deployed according to the protocol to current students (Appendix A) and alumni (Appendix B). The survey was sent to 74 people with 26 current students and 22 alumni completing the anonymous, online survey through Survey Monkey. This was a high rate of completion; 65% of respondents filled out the survey.

The survey also included qualitative questions and finally asked participants their permission to analyze their threaded discussions in Fisher's Net/Blackboard. One last source of data were the instructors teaching in the doctoral program. The IRB protocol included asking instructors to sign a permission form to also analyze their facilitation and interaction with the students in the discussion boards. These two sources of qualitative data will be analyzed in this section.

There were a total of 15 opened-ended questions asked of the participants; 11 of these questions were asked to both the current students and alumni. The questions were put to the current students in the present tense to gauge their current situation; while the alumni were asked similar questions, but adapted to gauge their past situation. Four of the 15 open-ended questions

were posed to the alumni to gauge their sense of community and how they found and implemented community into their present community.

I analyzed each question looking for common themes. Through the process I identified seven common themes in the current and alumni open-ended questions. The common themes from the current and alumni open-ended questions are as follows:

1. Defining community
2. Wisdom
3. Transfer
4. Transformation
5. Learning is social/What a community does creates community
6. Diversity
7. Tools of community building

After looking at all the open-ended questions, coding the answers looking for broad themes, one statement summarizes these findings: In defining community participants also described the qualities of community, for example, what community is like and what its' strengths and weaknesses are. In these terms I could see evidence of participants' ideal definition of community and also their lived reality of community. This results in two competing views of the covenant statement which is the symbol of the community (to read Cohort 2004, 2006 and 2008's Covenant Statements, please see Appendix C). There are two views of the covenant statement which I could see evidence of in the survey responses:

1. The verb of writing the covenant statement (once you write the covenant statement, we are a wisdom community) and

2. The idea that covenant makes us bonded (just because we wrote the covenant, does not mean we are a community in covenant; it takes time to develop and needs to be fostered. Or simply put, we grow into it.).

Among the open-ended answers from both the alums and current students regarding the verb of writing the covenant statement, there are three groupings in the answers. The first was that the covenant statement was too idealistic or not taken seriously:

- Some honor it. Some make fun of it. It was idealistic. Some do not have the maturity to honor it. (Current Student 16)
- In some ways, it seems to be a document that our community hasn't yet fully embraced. Nevertheless, I think of the covenant as something to which we all agreed and to which we could turn when we need to refocus, resolve conflict, or engage in ongoing disc (Current Student 18)
- As a foreigner I found it very American—a sincere solemn ritual statement of what should have been very obvious to anyone with any sense of moral responsibility! (Alum 05)

In contrast to the above small group of naysayers, most of the students were positive about formulating a covenant. For instance:

- It meant that we set out our agreement on how we [were] to work as a cohort. We bound ourselves to each other regarding this process. (Alum 15)
- In reflection, it was a commitment to do what we were asked to do, when we were asked to do it, in support of one another with accountability to one another for "doing what we said we would do." (Alum 20)
- I was the co-writer of the covenant. While I didn't read it often, the communal process that we underwent as a cohort was very sacred and helpful in bringing us together as a community of learners. This was very instrumental in creating such a close and tr ... [not complete word] (Current Student 14)

Two current students commented the following:

- It seems less applicable in this independent writing stage (Current Student 08)
- It was very meaningful at the time, but has become less as we now individually work on the project thesis. (Current Student 17)

I interpret these last two comments to mean as students start to work on their own during the writing phase of their thesis project and get farther away from their online-covenanted community, current students become less reliant on the wisdom community for strength and support which the covenant statement represents.

One last current student recalls one passionate remark at the start of their cohort and working together as a wisdom community: “First meeting - Greg Heille – ‘You are now doctoral students, there will be no titles, no clerical dress. We are colleagues on a journey together. My name is Greg.’”

Next, some of the open-ended answers from both the alums and current students regarding the idea of covenant stressed that writing the covenant did not mean cohort members were a covenant community; it took time to develop and the needs of the community to be fostered. Or simply put, students had to grow into it.

Some of the respondents contributed the following developmental statements regarding the covenant statement:

- The process of the covenant [writing] was for me more important than the covenant itself because it was an early opportunity to get to know people around a common project. (Alum 21)
- It meant much when we developed it. I think it was an important step in us becoming a learning community. (Alum 1)
- It means one could not live in isolation. There is a strong need for mutual respect, consensus building and beauty to help one another and succeed as a team. (Alum13)
- Commitment to each other to achieve the end of growing deeply in knowledge of God and sharing the benefits of learning in Pastoral Ministry. (Current Student15)
- I felt the covenant process should have been in the limelight early, developing gradually over more time. I refer to the covenant occasionally, regarding it as a nice idea not fully realized and implemented. (Current Student 25)

The “Verb of writing covenant statement” focuses on the concept of the wisdom community instead of the actual members of the wisdom community. “The idea of covenant makes us bonded” focuses on the opportunity to get to know people in the learning community around a common project which needs to be developed over time. To the latter approach Vanier (1992) writes in *From Brokenness to Community*:

Dietrich Bonhoeffer says: “He who loves community destroys community; he who loves the brethren builds community.” A community is not an abstract

ideal. We are not striving for a perfect community. Community is not an ideal; it is people. It is you and I. In community we are called to love people just as they are with their wounds and their gifts, not as we would want them to be. (p. 35)

Using Bonhoeffer as our lens of reflection, the two views of the covenant statement are clearly focused even further. My coding category of the “Verb of writing covenant statement” focuses on the idea of the wisdom community, which in Bonhoeffer’s view destroys community. Bonhoeffer’s claim is that a focus on the abstract idea of community can detract from focusing on the concrete reality of community members, to the detriment of community building. My coding category of “The idea of covenant makes us bonded” builds community in Bonhoeffer’s view.

Finally, after examining the current and alumni open-ended questions and identifying seven common themes from these open-ended questions, I observed certain similarities between these seven broad themes and the themes that surfaced from the student/alum threaded discussions from their current/previous online course work, which also included the instructor comments. I distilled even more integrated themes from open-ended questions and threaded discussions. The following integrated themes became the primary themes for this chapter’s qualitative examination. These themes include:

1. Students Experiencing Wisdom Community
2. What is a Wisdom Community?
3. Who Can Preach? (Identity, Authority, Diversity and Transformation)
4. Reading Great Masters

5. Learning is Social/What a Community Does Creates Community
6. What is Good Preaching?
7. What is the Content of Good Preaching?
8. Eat the Word
9. Incarnational Nature of the Word to the Community

Once again, these integrated themes became the section titles for the rest of this chapter.

Students Experiencing Wisdom Community

Reading the threaded discussions of the alumni and current students, I started to reach saturation and noted the previous groups of statements, but also started to be aware these statements gave evidence of students' experience of the wisdom community, which is the first part of my primary research question: "How do students experience wisdom community in the program?"

Furthermore, noticing a wide range of emotions and reactions were found in the previous open-ended statements, I was reminded of the time many years ago when I belonged to a face-to-face lay Christian community and our group studied Jean Vanier's book *Community and Growth*. Vanier described many feelings and reactions as a community starts, grows and eventually is reborn. As Vanier described his own situation in his book, we noticed many similar feelings and reactions in our own group. As I read the alumni and current students' threaded discussions and open-ended comments, I am reminded once again of Vanier's words as he describes the stages of community from "saint", "devil" and reality. I turn now to Vanier's distinctions, and their relation to the students' experiences.

According to Vanier, “People who have lived alone normally find their first month in community a great joy. Everyone around them seems to be a saint; everyone seems so happy” (Ellsberg, 2008, p. 98). Everyone is infatuated with the idea of the community. Two current students exemplified this stage by writing in the open-ended questions: “You are now doctoral students, there will be no titles, no clerical dress. We are colleagues on a journey together. My name is Greg.” Another student commented: “My cohort believes in the covenant we created and it has allowed us to live in an environment of trust, allowing each of us to lower any barriers we may have initially brought into the process.”

In the second stage of community or as Vanier refers to it as the “second month,” everyone is a “devil” (Ellsberg, 2008, p. 98). Following are some of the responses which reflect this “second month” phase:

- Some honor it. Some make fun of it. It was idealistic. Some do not have the maturity to honor it. (Current Student 16)
- [In response to the question, “In the beginning of your course work, your cohort went through a covenant process and created a covenant statement. What does this covenant mean to you today?”] Very little. It has become more of a joke than a serious commitment to one another and to the program. (Current Student 19)
- As a foreigner I found it very American—a sincere solemn ritual statement of what should have been very obvious to anyone with any sense of moral responsibility! (Alum 05)
- The covenant came too fast and was too flowery and convoluted to be genuinely applicable. The fact that I went through the motions with reacting to and signing the covenant was a genuine expression of my desire to participate, but in truth I was not able. (Current Student 20)
- We lost so many members of our Cohort. I feel that our covenant was broken. We had all worked on that covenant and I am not sure that the covenant is still significant. (Current Student 23)

The statements made by Alum 5 and Current Students 16, 19 and 20 focus on the covenant instead of the community. These four statements have underpinnings of anger and assumptions of their community members. These participants only see their classmates as “devils” instead of human beings; it should have been obvious to the rest of the cohort members

how serious the covenant statement was. In contrast, Current Student 23 focuses on the members of the cohort instead of the actual statement. This participant seems to lament the loss of community members over time. Since people have been lost, people do not own the statement. If members were allowed to go back and make revisions based on the current members, then the covenant statement could be a living document guiding the members as they work to make the document significant to the wisdom community.

According to Vanier, in the third month people “are neither saints nor devils. They are people who have come together to strive and to love. They are neither perfect nor imperfect, but like everyone else a mixture of the two...This is reality” (Ellsberg, 2008, p. 98). Part of “reality” is that “the radical transformation or death of a community is just as natural as its birth, growth, and life. Even the healthiest communities come to a natural end” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 109). Wenger et al. continue:

To close a community with a sense of resolution, like closing any relationship, requires both letting go and finding a way to live on—in memory or in the form of a legacy. Closing a community has an emotional component. Officially closing a community gives its members an opportunity to decide what parts of the community to let go of and how to let other parts live on. (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 110-11)

At the end of their course work, each D.Min. cohort self-organizes their own closing event. Some of the cohorts go out for a long relaxing dinner, while others observe this momentous occasion with a closing prayer service. Whatever they choose to do, they observe the transformation of the wisdom community as they move into the writing stage of their thesis.

Dr. Ann Garrido, former director of the D.Min. Program at Aquinas Institute, was asked to preach at the closing prayer service of Cohort 2006 at their last face-to-face intensive seminar. She used the Scripture reading from Jeremiah 31:31-34 in which the prophet Jeremiah writes about the covenant God will make with the house of Judah, the covenant in which God will put the law in their minds, but God will write it upon their hearts.

She preached the following at the closing ceremony:

Last fall, observing the Theology of Preaching class, I had my first opportunity to watch a new D.Min. cohort draft, edit, re-craft, and then sign their group covenant. I was asked to add my own signature to the document as it was signed in chapel, and I have to say that the experience left me quite uneasy, honestly. Can people really make a commitment to a group that they have just met? And, should we be calling it a covenant? It was such a magnificent, grand claim for frail, newborn friendships....

I don't really like signing things or asking others to sign things that we might not be able to keep. Is covenant really the right word for what we are about?...

And then, I've had the experience of this intensive, of living with you for the past nine days, of hearing your preaching to each other, of eating shrimp etouffee and drinking wine and devouring an entire bag of margarita shot potato chips. An experience of walking and praying and carpooling and enduring Dan's jokes [one of their professors]. Of shoveling dead flies out of my shower and borrowing shampoo, having my skin scale from the erratic dry heat gusting out of the bedroom unit, and eating my very first piece of the Bible. And, I'm not sure

when it happened exactly, but suddenly it did seem like covenant might be the right word, and that the 2006 cohort was strong enough to bear the weight of it.

In your care and compassion and patience with Dan and me and each other, I have known something of the one truest covenant...

Every time that you have gathered as a cohort over the past three years, you have re-read and reflected on the covenant your group crafted at the very beginning of its time together. The signed document has happily lived in its frame in my office in between intensives. But this is the last time that we'll all be together to read it aloud. From hence forth, it will have to live in a different way, if it is to go on living at all. No longer on paper, but in our hearts. It will have to become a new kind of covenant. (A. Garrido, personal communication, May 10, 2012)

Recalling Frank Quinn, OP (personal communication, December 21, 2006), in Chapter 2, how can you teach someone something if they have not experienced it first? He went onto explain it was not until afterwards during the period of mystagogia (the time period from Easter until Pentecost) that the bishop would expand upon their experience in a series of mystagogic catechesis. Similarly, how can you ask people to really make a commitment to a group that they have just met? And, should we be calling it a covenant? The answer is “Yes” to both questions. One has to first live it to truly know what it means.

Two students reflected what the covenant statement represents to them as they move away from face-to-face intensives with their cohort into the writing stage of their thesis. Current Student 08 states, “It seems less applicable in this independent writing stage,” and Current Student 17 adds, “It was very meaningful at the time, but has become less as we now individually work on the project thesis.” The optimal word in the last comment is “individual.”

This time is filled with work between the advisor and student only. The wisdom community seems to be less important during the thesis stage.

The following students have decided to let parts of the covenant statement live on in their lives as they continue their individual writing:

- At the time it was a good process. I have look[ed] at it several times in this D.Min. process. In answering this question it propels [me] to return to it as I write my thesis. (Current Student 01)
- The content is not terribly important to me, but I do carry a fragment of it and it does provide some encouragement. (Current Student 03)
- The covenant still has importance in my life and my relationship with others in the cohort. (Current Student 05)
- I haven't been in regular contact with members, but the covenant still represents to me the need to finish the program successfully with new learning. Those who have finished provide finish materials to look at from which to learn. (Current Student 13)
- Guide post to keep us on a smooth path for learning and helping others learn. (Current Student 21)
- Others will support me if I have trouble, need prayer or want to give up. (Current Student 22)

Most of the previous students only look to finish the program successfully, but Student 01 looks beyond graduation and transfers his learning to the future: "Sometimes parish life gets so busy that the life-long learner within takes a break. My work at AI reinforced for me this cannot happen if I am going to preach the Good News well. I am delighted that AI allows and encourages room for vernacular theologians." Student 01 looks to the purpose of his learning at Aquinas; Student 01 must always continue to learn if he is going to continue to preach the Good News. He must continue to hone his craft of preaching. He cannot remain stagnant in his learning because being a life-long learner is what he learned while engaged in the wisdom community.

As the course work comes to an end, I, personally, have a bias and wish the wisdom community experience would continue to provide strength, support and learning, but the current students' statements above demonstrate they are on their own, but they do have the support of their advisor for support and continuing work. I am biased; I wish this communal learning

experience would continue beyond their coursework, to allow students know they are not on their own during this “solitary” step towards their degree. We will see how this develops as we move to integrate the threaded discussions into this research and see how this is “written upon their hearts”.

The instructors used targeted and integrating questions in the threaded discussions to make the students reflect on areas of their personal and ministerial life as preachers. These questions also helped them reflect on how these areas of their life affected their preaching. The instructors asked the students to reflect on questions of content and context of the preaching, plus their own identity as a preacher and authority to preach. What were evident were the questions of identity and authority as a preacher affected the content and context of the preaching. My analysis of students' and alumni open-ended survey questions as well as their threaded online discussions led me to identify seven key questions which students developed responses to in the course of their studies. The set of related questions the program helped them answer were:

- What is a wisdom community? How do we live out this covenant statement?
- Who can preach? Wrapped up in this question are questions of identity, authority, diversity and transformation.
- How are we going to learn from one another/great master preachers or be formed as preachers in a wisdom community? (This relates to learning is social/what a community does creates community).
- What is good preaching?
- What is the content of the preaching?
- How do students see the link between study, prayer, community and preaching to be the Holy Preaching?
- How are students taught proper preparation to preach and help to see the connection between prayer, study and embodiment of the Word?

In the following sections I will review how the students and alumni responded to these questions drawing from data in their open-ended survey responses and online threaded discussions.

Before a cohort in the D.Min. program can start to answer these questions in their course of study, they must first reflect how they are going to live out the covenant statement which they

first signed at the start of the program. This reflection helped them start to learn what it means to be the Holy Preaching/Sacra Praedicatio; thus starts the journey of the community and written on their hearts.

What is a Wisdom Community?

As Dr. Garrido said, “you have re-read and reflected on the covenant your group crafted at the very beginning of its time together” (A. Garrido, personal communication, May 10, 2012) which compelled alumni and current students to ask the questions: How is this covenant statement relevant in my life? And how would I define and work with others in this wisdom community? To find out the answer to these questions, alumni and current students were asked in the online survey the question, “How would you define wisdom community?” By answering this question this gave me a fuller sense of “wisdom” and community” in their own words. It also gave me an idea on how they birthed, grew and lived out their covenant statement as a wisdom community.

The answers varied in answering this question, “How would you define wisdom community?” The current students who answered the question gave positive answers replying to this question. They wrote of growing together in wisdom; using the word “intentional” a number of times in their description of the wisdom community (Current Students 14 and 18); and if they disagreed with one another, they described how they would respect one another (Current Students 03, 23 and 25) and listen to one another (Current Student 9 and 23). Two comments are worth noting: “Wisdom is shared commodity. I never seem to find one person who knows everything and can act wisely alone.” (Current Student 13) and “A wisdom community is an intentional group who desire to grow, learn, be challenged, practice honesty, and seek God together.” (Current Student 14)

When the alumni answered this question, their answers varied both positively and negatively. What was surprising in the alumni answers is they were able to make the integration of the cohort's covenant statement to individuals' background, knowledge and experiences.

- Bringing together of varying backgrounds, knowledge, [experience] (both professional and lived experience), perspectives for an integrated experience of learning. (Alum 20)
- a serious recognition and valuing of the experience, knowledge and opinions of others that are useful in uncovering pearls (Alum 21)
- Throughout the program, we were seeking wisdom as [we] grew in knowledge and appreciation for the preaching ministry. (Alum14)
- A community of persons seeking wisdom together - gathered around a "great idea" (Parker Palmer) and relying on each other in keeping with the truth claim that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. (Alum 17--does not cite Parker Palmer quote)

Two alumni did not have a positive reply to this question, they answered: "means nothing" (Alum 12) and "other than sentimental value, little. There is no real point of connection post coursework." (Alum 18). Alum 12 in his answers to the online survey did give contrary answers to most of his fellow alumni who took the survey. In one answer, he was asked, "How has your experience of wisdom community impacted you? Please give some examples." and his response was, "I found just another example of the [Church's] hypocrisy." This parallels Vanier's second "month" in which "everyone is a hypocrite" (Ellsberg, 2008, p. 98). On the other hand, he was asked, "How have you been impacted by engaging in the program's online wisdom community (learning community)?" and he answered, "Strongly impacted--but nothing now." From his mixed answers, he seemed to have a good impression of the online wisdom community, but reflecting upon it after graduation, he has a negative notion of the wisdom community. Most of his answers to the adapted Rovai's questionnaire were "Neutral."

There was one answer which represented a realistic answer to the question, "How would you define wisdom community?" Alum 2 replied:

A wisdom community is a group of persons who intentionally connect/meet to tackle/address/discuss relevant issues/concerns in a specific field of study, e.g., preaching. Each brings to the community his/her "wisdom" which then elevates/adds to the whole's awareness. Each member and therefore the whole community remains engaged with one another and the larger community/world. Members do not necessarily have to agree on every issue but there is/are underlying "core belief(s)" that [tie] each member to the group. For example, every member sees the importance of preaching. This common, fundamental belief then allows the group to explore areas of interest. End result is the community contributes positively to the field and at the same time makes each member better preachers.

Current Student 16 had an insightful answer to the question, "According to the Dominican model of preaching, good preaching comes from community. How have you found community when you are not engaged in the online wisdom community?" She stated, "I came in with much stronger community than I have found in this 'wisdom community.' Many of the laity with whom I live and breathe are wise in life experience. I am not isolated. Education and ordination do not of themselves necessarily create wisdom. Some of the isolation in some of my cohort members seems a little sad." She reveals wisdom is not created or found from external factors, for example education and ordination, but from life experience. True wisdom comes from within; true wisdom is an outward expression of an internal reality.

Who Can Preach? (Identity, Authority, Diversity and Transformation)

One limitation of this study was when I collected the data for the online survey, I failed to ask the participant's denomination or whether or not they were ordained. This information would

have been helpful to know because Catholic lay women, as well as Catholic lay men, are limited where they can preach. According to the Canon Law governing the Catholic Church, Catholic lay women, as well lay men, are only allowed to preach in certain instances (specifically Canon 766) (United States Catholic Bishops, 2001). Normally, the right to preach is limited to the ordained within the context of the homily at Mass.

Wrapped up in the question, “Who can preach?” are questions of identity, authority, diversity and transformation. The threaded discussions reveal several enlightening answers to this question:

Current Student 05, who happens to be a male Catholic ordained priest (I know he is ordained because he identified himself in the online forum) stated in the threaded discussions of the HOM-D605 CORE HOMILETIC SEMINAR I course:

Who Preaches? According to the Code of Canon Law, bishops, priests, and deacons have the faculty to preach everyone. The code also states that the baptized and confirmed share in the ministry of the word with bishops, priests and deacons. The code also states, “Lay persons can be admitted to preach in a church or oratory...” So who preaches? All the baptized and confirmed. The homily, on the other hand, is restricted to the ordained. The homily is a form of preaching which takes place within a liturgical gathering. It seems that the principal value supporting this concept is the fact that the ordained, through ordination, have received a special grace to fulfill this ministry within the gathered community (Assembly). Preaching can take place anywhere and in any situation; the homily can only be given within a liturgical gathering of the church. So when I was invited to preach during an ecumenical gathering at a Protestant Congregation, I

did not give a homily because I did not speak within a liturgical gathering of the Catholic Church. Even though I have the faculty to preach in any location, my preaching is called a homily when done in a liturgical gathering. Although the action and definition of a homily is very restricted only to the ordained, preaching the word of God is the obligation and duty of all the baptized. So, according to the readings the baptized have the obligation to preach.

In contrast, Current Student 03 (who is a lay Catholic woman-I know because she identified herself in the permission section of the online forum) stated in the threaded discussions of HOM-D605 CORE HOMILETIC SEMINAR I course:

In the broadest sense "preaching" is the obligation of all the faithful, and all baptized are empowered to preach. However, the bulk of FIYH [*Fulfilled In Your Hearing*] is a document from the USCCB [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops] addressing the question of the Sunday homily] concerns preaching at the liturgy of the Eucharist, at the moment reserved for the homily, after the Gospel reading. That sort of preaching is restricted to the ordained in the Catholic tradition. There are some loopholes...preaching to children for example.

I recognize there is some wisdom to the values it seems this intends to uphold. For example when the presider preaches it emphasizes the continuity between word and Eucharist. It ensures an educated homilist, so the congregation can have some confidence in the legitimacy and authority of the preaching.

I don't write this with a tone of bitterness or hostility, but I really think it's somewhat disingenuous to pretend that preaching at any other gathering is the same as preaching at the Eucharist. For many people that is the most significant

encounter with scripture they have. We've read a lot about the role of the identity of the preacher—his or her situation, social location, personal history—in shaping the preaching event. I think we're really missing the value of hearing preaching by women, and preaching by a married people or parent rarely, when it is a deacon. I do think there have to be restrictions and I am sincerely interested in trying to understand what the real values—beyond the politics—are that we're tryi[n]g to uphold.

From the Protestant perspective, Current Student 23, who is an ordained female from the Protestant tradition (I know she is an ordained minister in the Disciples of Christ because she identified herself in the permission section of the online forum) she stated in the threaded discussions of HOM-D605 CORE HOMILETIC SEMINAR I course:

In A.T. DeGroot's *Disciple Thought: A History* written in 1965, Thomas Campbell's thoughts from 1812 were quoted. Thomas was an ordained clergy in the Presbyterian Church (Old Light, Anti-Burgher, Seceder branch). Campbell broke away with his congregation in 1810 and ordained by the congregation in 1812. The objection by the Presbyterians was "it tends to degrade the ministerial character... and it opens the door for lay preaching. Campbell responded in a sermon to the association by discussing the clergy and laity as follows: Both these terms are used in scripture to denote God's people. Trace them to their origin and we find no difference. We would be obliged to some person of exquisite keenness of distinction to point out and define the difference between laical and clerical preachers. Campbell's biographer, Robert Richardson added a comment regarding the sermon: Laos signifies people; and is constantly applied to God's people.

Kleros signifies lot, inheritance; and is applied to the tribe of Levi in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, it is used of the antitype, the people of God, as in 1 Peter, verses 3, ‘not as lords over God’s heritage, clergy or kleros, so that the term is here applied to the whole brotherhood, and there is not on Scripture; the slightest ground for distinction between clergy and laity. On the contrary, all the disciples collectively are denominated a ‘royal priesthood,’ a ‘peculiar people.’ 1Peter,2:9. Campbell was convinced of the ‘purely functional character of the church’s ministry, as distinguished from any sacerdotal or priestly nature, he was just as fully impressed with the need for a set apart and a recognized leadership.’ Campbell reported that all of the early founders of the movement agreed that it was the responsibility of every Christian to bring people to Christ by preaching the Gospel and share the Good News. Campbell stated a “Christian may of right preach, baptize, and dispense the supper, as well as pray, when circumstances demand it.”

When the students read the threaded discussions, they certainly do read the official norms and regulations about preaching which gives them authority to preach depending on their tradition or circumstance, but they are also exposed to other diverse voices, traditions and primary sources. With so many diverse voices, traditions and sources, students have to ask themselves this integrating and applicable question, which Current Student 08 reflected on in the threaded discussions, “How does the preacher image self as on[e] who proclaims Christ but also helps the congregation appreciate the doctrine contained in the word?” She answered:

I would answer by saying: By living what I preach and knowing what I speak.

Before a word is uttered from the pulpit, the people know me. They know that I

have authentically, not perfectly but along with my own brokenness and sin, embraced the way of Christ. The image of a woman who proclaims Christ is known by the many hours spent in settings outside of a pulpit. In the moment of preaching it is the image already known that also speaks and allows them to be “escorted” (as they have already experienced in hospital rooms and classrooms, in funeral homes and fraternal planning) to the “dance” where the steps are theirs to choose. It is my responsibility to draw out the meaning behind the word and, if you will, play that song on the jukebox. Individuals choose to join the dance or not. And let’s be quite honest, some songs are better than others! (Current Student 08)

Current Student 08’s words are reminiscent of how the Dominicans of Hispaniola discerned slavery was a crime against humanity. So, Antonio de Montesino, in the name of the Dominican community, condemned the Spaniards for their crimes from the pulpit. He publicly damned all the Spaniards who held slaves as property, saying that they must free all natives to have any hope of salvation (Farina, 1992, p. 16). In the congregation Bartolomé de las Casas was so transformed by the preaching that he “joined the dance” and fought for the Indians’ freedom in the Spanish court. The Dominican community became the Holy Preaching; they lived what they preached and knowing what they spoke, they were transformed first by the Word of God and then they preached to save others. Current Student 08 follows in the line of the Dominicans of Hispaniola by becoming the Holy Preaching.

As Bartolomé de las Casas was transformed by the preaching so that he “joined the dance,” Current Student 15 describes one moment of transformation, “One of the cohort [members] literally was transformed before the cohort in the process of the intensive on

Hermeneutics with Mary Margaret Pazdan [professor of this class]. He was like a light for all of us in the darkness.”

Students come from diverse faith traditions, sexes and backgrounds, so respect is important in the wisdom community so that others might be “escorted to the dance where the steps are theirs to choose” (Current Student 08). Current Student 03 added, “Individuals engaged in a learning process where personal knowledge, stories, and reflections are shared with honesty and respect” leads to a fruitful blend of instruction and formation.

Social learning occurred within the cohort’s threaded discussions and face-to-face encounters. To this point, Current Student 08 shared, “An [acknowledgement] and living out of the fact that even as students we all have experiences from which we can share and draw from each other to enrich our learning.” Rev. Dan Harris, C.M., instructor in the DMIN-06 Core-Homiletics’ Seminar 1 added to the Group 2-Forum 3 threaded discussion, “One of the things I most valued when I studied at Aquinas (long ago!) was learning more about the preaching traditions of my peers in ministry.”

Current Student 23, who is an ordained female from the Protestant tradition, shared the following information about her own preaching tradition with the rest of her cohort:

Alexander Campbell was concerned about some of the preachers that were preaching in the early days as settlers were moving westward in the 1800’s.

Campbell started a college for preachers. However Elders selected by congregations were frequently used as preachers because of a lack of trained ministers. Today the churches use licensed ministers, students and the ordained to serve congregations on a more permanent basis. However, worship committees in our congregations can ask anyone to preach.

Current students in the online questionnaire were asked, “How would you describe your experience of wisdom community?” Two current students answered:

- I appreciate the diversity of ministries and states in life represented in our cohort. I found that enriching. (Current Student 06)
- The experience has been very good even though I am coming from a totally different background than the majority of the cohort members. (Current Student 23)

With so many students coming from diverse faith traditions, sexes and backgrounds, this can lead to tension and conflict. Alum 19 (who is a Protestant, ordained clergywoman) answered the question, “How would you describe your experience of wisdom community?”, this way:

[T]he experience was always ... stronger when we were in St Louis (face-to-face). [I] often doubted folks commitment to the covenant - and often wondered about how many of the priests really felt about women being in the program – [occasionally] felt some sexism (or at least paternalism) toward me. When we finished our coursework, my experience of wisdom community ended - with the exception of my relationships with two others in the cohort.

Conversely, Current Student 24 from Cohort 2006, an ordained, Catholic male valued feminist preaching; he stated in one of the forums for his Core Homiletic Seminar I:

Feminist preaching caused me to pause and consider the questions laid out by Christine Smith [referring to Christine M. Smith, whose work is included in *Fulfilled In Our Hearing: History And Method Of Christian Preaching* by Guerric DeBona] in and re-examine my view concerning the masculine prejudice in the Bible. I remembered reading somewhere about all the masculine references in the

Bible that were inserted by St. Jerome as he worked on translating the Bible. This will be something I re-visit regularly and dialogue with women about. Over the years, I have been [privileged] to hear excellent women preachers, our own cohort members included, that spoke to my soul on a level that no man [could] even consider.

In the section of DeBona's book which the student referenced and which was used in the class, Christine Smith asked challenging questions. She asked:

What authority do I give the bible in my own life of faith and spirituality? What is the nature of this authority? How do the scriptures intersect with my own life as a contemporary woman, a contemporary man? How do the scriptures serve to perpetuate my own oppression and the oppression of others? How do they serve as sources of liberation? Are there texts that simply should not be proclaimed or preached, texts that are not able to be redeemed in terms of feminist bible critique? (Smith, 1989, p. 92, as cited in DeBona, 2005)

For the most part students and alumni valued these deeply reflective questions, either in the texts or asked by the instructors. Through answering these questions, students and alumni were liberated, as with Current Student 24, and learned to be better preachers.

These types of questions are safe to answer in the midst of a well-functioning community, especially questions of diversity. These type of questions asked within the context of their cohort community creates a safer environment which leads to deep reflection and transformation.

But diversity can also cause tension and conflict as demonstrated in Alum 19's remarks. Vanier reminds us "in the second month, everyone is a devil. Everyone has

mixed motives for whatever he does....In the third month...[t]hey are people who are growing, and that means good is in the growth and the bad is what prevents growth” (Ellsberg, 2008, p. 98). Alum 19’s quote demonstrates people can be devils and Current Student 24’s answer demonstrates how people can grow or even be transformed when exposed to diverse voices.

Reading Great Masters

The experience of Current Student 24 discussed in the previous section demonstrates that being exposed to different voices is vital to growth, especially by reading the great masters or past preaching practices as cited in DeBona. This transformation was set in the context of community and only by being in community was he transformed. Only by hearing female cohort members and other great female preachers was his heart changed. Being exposed to great preachers and having a chance to dialogue with guiding questions about what they learned helped transform preaching students. Current Student 24 states again in one of the forums for his Core Homiletic Seminar I:

In the foreword to FIOH [*Fulfilled In Our Hearing: History And Method Of Christian Preaching* by Gueric DeBona], Fr. Sloyan tells us that congregations have been complaining about the quality, of lack thereof, of preaching since Apostolic days. He sums up the foreword by telling why...preaching matters profoundly... This sets the tone for this book as DeBona takes us on a tour of preaching from Exodus to the present. DeBona begins by stating explicitly that preaching is the expression of God's saving power in our language and that preaching begins with the initiative of God. In other words, God wants to

converse with humanity and God puts his Word on the heart of those selected to be preachers of his Word.

Reading past preachers is an integral part of the D.Min. course of study. Each cohort takes HST-D602 HISTORY OF PREACHING in which they read past masters and have a chance to integrate the information into their own lives. Dr. Ann Garrido taught this course in the Spring 2008 semester and in her course syllabus she stated the following course objectives:

- To familiarize students with resources for the history of preaching and biblical interpretation.
- To re-engage Biblical and Church history specifically through the lens of Judeo-Christian preaching.
- To search together for what aspects of Christian preaching have been enduring and persistent over time while at the same time noting the role that culture, politics, gender, and location have played in creating a rich diversity of approaches to Christian preaching.
- To identify historical “partners in preaching” who still have something to offer preachers today in their own vocational journey.
- To further research in one particular area of the history of preaching that interests the student (perhaps with an eye toward the student’s thesis project).
- To reflect upon the state of preaching today (contemporary models, concerns, approaches) from a historical consciousness.
- To practice new styles and voices in preaching, broadening one’s range in preaching
- To practice living in a wisdom community as articulated in group covenant.
(HST-D602 HISTORY OF PREACHING Course Syllabus, Spring 2008, p. 1)

Looking at these course objectives demonstrates integration is imperative in the D.Min. course of study. As part of this class Dr. Garrido had the students create a timeline of all the great preachers they were reading. This served as a way of synthesizing the vast amount of information/great masters they read. They read the great masters including: Gregory the Great, Luther, Calvin, Henry VIII, Jonathon Edwards, John Wesley, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Karl Barth, John Paul II and many other great preachers from various time periods. They also read great amounts of information/teachings from the Council of Trent and Vatican Council II. In the pre-intensive online threaded

postings, students had to answer the following integrative responses: “Choose one preacher that we have covered since the course began who particularly intrigues you. Write a letter to this preacher letting them know why you are fascinated by them and what you wish you could ask them. (In the writing of the letter, demonstrate that you have some knowledge of the person and their preaching.)” (HST-D602 HISTORY OF PREACHING Course Syllabus, Spring 2008, p. 5)

Furthermore, integrating what they read, the students were asked in the same class to pick a famous preacher that they identified with and they had to preach in the style of this preacher. According to the syllabus, the students were given a list of preachers in the first part of the semester. Then the students had to submit their choice to the instructor and throughout the semester, they had to study this person, the person’s preaching style and manner in which they preached. The students had to learn the great preachers preaching style or “voice”. To help them in their study of their great preacher, they had to prepare a short biography of the preacher including their time in history and selected sermons. This integrating exercise culminated during the intensive when the students had to preach a 10-15 minute sermon, not an actual sermon their great preacher preached, but a sermon the student wrote and deliver the sermon in the style or voice of the great preacher.

For several students, this assignment was transformative because students were able to embody the great master’s story and preaching into the sermon the student wrote and deliver the sermon in the style or voice of the great preacher.

When asked “What is one moment during your studies that will stay with you for the rest of your life?” Current Student 17 responded, “Preaching as an historical character.”

After reading Jonathon Edwards, Current Student 01 asked:

I too was moved by the conversion story of [Jonathan] Edward’s sacred story. How he was so attuned to the presence of God’s love in his life. I was struck by the way use the Native American cosmology in regards to Edwards. One of the questions that I would raise is the cosmology of the Native American an inclusive one that would be true for all the Native American tribes. Is the Sioux or the Lakota cosmology different from the Apache or the Mohawk? I am not sure why I thought of that but I did so I thought I would share this thought [sic].

Current Student 01, who is a Catholic priest, ended his thread by asking a question because he was curious and wanted to see if anyone knew the answer. Unfortunately, no one answered his question in the forum. This does show how questions are important in the pursuit of learning and integration.

The professor, who taught HST-D602 HISTORY OF PREACHING in 2006, gave her students a set of guiding questions to help the students focus and quickly digest the sheer amount of preaching text they had to read for the semester. Before the students delved into these questions, the students were asked to read the text aloud taking note of the preacher’s words, emotion and images so that they could “hear” the preacher. Then the students were asked to “consume” the text by using these guiding questions to look at the master preachers from a variety of perspectives—especially worldviews, mind-set, historical periods. The instructor suggested they think about who the audience the preacher was speaking to, what was their

historical context, and how their historical context influenced the preacher and the preached message. To help the students situate the preaching for their time and relevance, they were asked: what does this preaching have to say to today's contemporary preachers/listeners and what can you, as modern preacher, learn from these great masters? To reiterate Rev. Dan Harris, C.M., "One of the things I most valued when I studied at Aquinas (long ago!) was learning more about the preaching traditions of my peers in ministry." This experience perhaps allowed him and his peers to go one further, learning the preaching of the great current and past masters.

Learning is Social/What a Community Does Creates Community

Besides looking at the great masters, learning also happens while engaging one another in the wisdom community. In Chapter 2, I mentioned that "community is built upon what activities people do together instead of being based on geographical location" (Wellman as cited in Rovai, 2002, p. 199). So, learning becomes social and what a community does together helps to create community.

As part of the community building experience in the D.Min. cohorts, students take more responsibility for their own learning by critiquing other classmates' preaching. Throughout their program students preach and have this preaching recorded. The recording is then put online and other students offer helpful comments. Current Student 14 stated, "The feedback was so helpful from others who were seeking to grow in the same..."

Sharing experiences in the online forums or during the face-to-face intensives was at times a learning experience. Current Student 06 stated, "An [acknowledgement] and living out of the fact that even as students we all have experiences from which we can share and draw from each other to enrich our learning." Students learned from one another and enhanced the wisdom community. Also, they "Learned from the experience of others and helped to see how the Holy

Spirit is alive and active in a group that lives honestly” (Current Student 21). In regards to the face-to-face intensives, Current Student 20 commented, “The online community is less effective than the in person community during the intensive seminars. I have learned from the community online, but it is no [replacement] with real contact.”

Most students saw learning as stronger when based in community. Current Student 14 further commented, “I have seen the benefit of learning as a communal/social phenomenon. Learning is not an isolated project but happens in a richer way when it happens in partnership with others.” In response to the question, “How has Blackboard/Fisher’s Net enhanced your wisdom community?” Current Student 17 replied, “Greatly, when active in coursework.” To another question, “Are there any specific ways Blackboard/Fisher’s Net was used that enhanced the wisdom community? Please explain?” she replied, “Certainly online discussion.” In contrast, Current Student 17 was asked, “According to the Dominican model of preaching, good preaching comes from community. How have you found community when you are not engaged in the online wisdom community?” She answered, “I have been very isolated and do not have a wisdom community or good support system.” When further questioned, she commented, “I am floundering to find a wisdom community.” Thus, Current Student 17 experienced positive community during her formal coursework, but in contrast after her formal coursework she was lacking a mechanism of connecting and felt isolated.

Furthermore, communication is vital in building community. Current Student 21 stated, “Communication is crucial for the wisdom community to thrive.” Again to connect to an earlier concept in Chapter 2, Palloff and Pratt (2007) make the connection between communication and seeking community. The authors wisely state that rooted in communication is the need for community. “Many of our attempts to communicate are, at the core, attempts at community

building—a search for the community that connects us” (p. 35). Since Current Student 17 is not currently in community or communicating, she is not finding a community to connect with.

As also related in Chapter 2, Riel and Polin (2004) state, “individuals learn from their interactions with others, with objects of the effort, and from their own participation” (2004, p. 19). In agreement with this, Current Student 16 stated, “Some cohort members are very wise. I have learned from them. Others do not contribute as much and hence do not make as much impact.” Furthermore, Current Student 18 added, “A good small group is a marvelous learning tool, as I learned during this last course, while a bad small group is an enormous obstacle to learning. The best community discussions tend to be those that are carefully set up, with clear expectati(ons).”

Thinking more broadly, Current Student 25 made this critique of the wisdom community, “The learning community is one facet of a broader learning community sustained by the parish and [its] ministries. I sometimes wish there was an additional direct link between these communities rather than my being the filtering conduit of information trying to make sense of it all.” This comment implies that instructors need to more intentionally connect students' learning with their lived reality. This makes the learning more real and lasting.

What is Good Preaching?

Before examining the great masters and studying their words, the rhythm, emotion, emphases, and images employed by the preacher, preaching students must first answer “What is good preaching?” The HOM-D605 CORE HOMILETIC SEMINAR I is taken before students' HISTORY OF PREACHING course. There are two core homiletic courses in the D.Min. program. These two core courses are the third and sixth courses. The seminars provide students the ability to “familiarize themselves with significant academic and ecclesial literature regarding the practice of

preaching and to integrate new learning into their own preaching.” The content of the first seminar is guided by the question: “What is good preaching and how can we practice it consistently?”

(HOM-D605 CORE HOMILETIC SEMINAR I Course Syllabus, Fall 2009, p. 1)

In a course forum Current Student 05 answered “What is good preaching?” by writing:

As I reflect upon the question presented to us, I began to recall all the ‘good’ preaching I have experienced. I have had the wonderful opportunity to hear good preaching not just with the Roman Catholic tradition but within Protestant tradition as well. First, Good preaching must be about the Good News—about the Gospel of Jesus Christ—his life, death, and resurrection. Good preaching must be effective, believable, and joyful! Good preaching delivers the message with precision and clarity. I appreciate the image about the stained glass wi[n]dow presented by [another student]. But I believe the light shining through the stained glass splatters all over, going wherever. But preaching is much more directed and aimed more carefully. With the choice of words, phrases, images, voice, gestures, etc., preaching is delivered with a target, a purpose, an aim. Good preaching is about the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Current Student 05 added in the same forum:

I also want to add that within the Roman Catholic tradition preaching flows from what has preceded, namely: the gathering, preparation of mind and heart, and the readings; and then leads into what is to follow after the preaching event—confession of faith, and the Eucharist. The preaching event stirs within the listeners a choice: To love him or not; to follow him or not; to trust, hope, believe in him or not. There are too many events which impact our lives that we cannot

continue with ‘business as usual.’ We are too broken and frail that after listening to the word and the preaching (powered by the Holy Spirit), we have to be able to say, ‘there is hope, there is life, that I too am still loved, that God has not abandoned me!’ There have been a few times during my own preparation to preach I had to pause and wrestle with my own shame for the times I have not chosen to follow and really love Jesus through my love and work with the poor and people around me. The gospel for this weekend (22nd Sunday of OT, Lk. 14:1, 7-14) about humility and being humble, presents a challenge to the follow[er]s of Jesus. I am personally challenged by this gospel because I am full of myself, and it is hard to move myself out of the way to allow generous space for God. Can I do it? Yes, with the help of the grace of God. I have to make the choice for humility in my life.

To regularly preach, preachers, as evident in the Current Student 05’s previous response, must reflect, take to heart and be challenged by the gospel. Current Student 05 stated it is hard to move his ego out of the way so that God may enter into his life. He realizes it is only by the help of God that he is able to do this.

Current Student 03 further stated in the same forum:

It seems that in the most pragmatic terms “what constitutes good preaching” has to be measured by the effect on the hearer. Minimally, good preaching is able to hold the listeners attention for at least 75% of the sermon/homily/reflection. This is the first test a preacher has to pass with me: am I paying attention, do I want to pay attention, or have I already zoned out 60 seconds into it and entered a pleasant day dream about post-mass donuts. I do not mean to say the congregation should

be “entertained” but good preaching demands the basic rhetorical skills to effectively communicate and draw the listener in. Take it up just a notch, and not only has the congregation listened to most of the sermon, they can remember and articulate its focus. Finally, in the ideal, preaching transforms the listeners on some level, and results in even a subtle change in thought or action. Good preaching makes the world of the text, the gospel, (yeah, I just finished Bibl. Herm.) present and alive. In the ideal, there would be visible signs to a community continually inspired by good--really, really, really good—preaching. All the above require certain elements and number one is understanding the language and culture of the community that hears it and speaking to their situation.

Current Student 03’s statement also highlights the impact of good preaching on the community that is listening to the message. Good preaching is not for the preacher alone, but the message crafted is for a particular community at a particular time in their development. This is brought home when the students study and dissect the great masters by answering the question, “Preaching always takes place in a unique cultural milieu, in a particular historical epoch and is therefore culturally formed. How does the cultural context and historical period shape and inform the preacher’s method of interpretation, imagery and intentions?”

In HOM-D606-08 CORE HOMILETIC SEMINAR II, “students continue to explore significant academic and ecclesial literature regarding the practice of preaching, exploring strategies to integrate new learning into their own preaching...Topics this semester include: use of imagination in preaching, doctrinal preaching, practices to sustain the preacher, and the teaching of homiletics (HOM-D606 CORE HOMILETIC SEMINAR II Course Syllabus, Spring 2009, p. 1).

In the Group 2, Forum A, Rev. Dan Harris, C.M., contributed to the conversation as to what is good preaching?:

I have read each of your posts with great interest. I thought I might add to the discussion with a few observations about the proclamation/instruction tension I have seen in preachers over the past 35 years of teaching homiletics.

First, there is a HUGE group of preachers who would be very confused if we asked them to distinguish between teaching doctrine and preaching; they could not articulate the distinction as well as Levada and Smith [readings from the course] have (and you have in your posts). So we need to hone our thinking in order to help them have a richer sense of their ministry of preaching.

Second, there is a growing tendency to replace preaching in a worship setting (in my tradition, Liturgical Homily) with catechesis because "the people no longer know the Catholic story." Replace "Catholic" with your denomination. Granted there is a growing pastoral need for instruction in many of our denominations, but why do so many preachers want to end preaching and replace it with catechesis? This is a mystery that eludes me.

When students reflect on the question, "What is good preaching?", they also consider the content of the preaching because they go hand and hand. Good preaching must speak to a particular community and the message is vital, but the message varies and even gets confusing, as Rev. Dan Harris highlights above. Is good preaching teaching or catecheses? Or is good preaching more about the Good News, as stated by Current Student 05 quoted above.

What is the Content of Good Preaching?

The students in the D.Min. program study various forms of preaching. In the History of Preaching course, students study the visionary preaching of St. Hildegard of Bingen; she was a 12th century mystic and Doctor of the Roman Catholic Church. Students also studied liturgical preaching which can happen inside and outside of the mass of the Roman Catholic Church. Students also studied doctrinal preaching in Core Homiletics Seminar II.

In the Liturgy and Preaching course students also studied kerygmatic and mystagogical preaching. Kerygmatic preaching focuses on the public ministry of Jesus and to take the gospel message to those who are poor, suffering and imprisoned. Mystagogical preaching focuses on the catechumens (those under instruction) and the elect (the chosen ones), as described in Chapter 2, to live out their experiences on Holy Saturday Night. Mystagogical preaching also bolsters the faith the whole community during the time after Easter.

To help clarify what these two types of preaching are, Catherin Vincie states:

We know the great mystagogues of the Patristic era (Ambrose, John Chrysostom, Theodore, Cyprian) used mystagogical preaching to great effect. Remember it is about opening the mysteries so that one might participate more fully in the mystery. The aim is encounter and transformation in Christ. I think this is well within the aims of preaching. (DMIN-08, Liturgy and Preaching, Group B, Post-Intensive Week I)

In the same course students studied funeral homilies as well. Students also studied the difference between preaching and homilies in the Roman Church's primary sources on preaching; homilies are preaching but the context is different and who can preach the homily makes it a homily. In regards to this, students study *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* by the United States Catholic

Bishops. This primary text examines the various components of the Sunday homily, which is different from liturgical preaching. As the reader can see from these examples, it can be confusing. This is why students examine the various elements of the different types of preaching in depth.

Current Student 01 was even confused when he read Hildegard's visionary preaching. He said, "To be honest I have not read much visionary preaching in my ministry. I thought it was interesting in how Hildegard uses Luke 21: 25-34 and gives the text four different spins all the way from a literal/historical sense to psychodrama of the individual soul...Hildegard is one of the few medieval exegetes to interpret this parable and connecting it to the end times." Students in the History and Preaching course are exposed to various preachers and how they interpret the Scriptures.

Also in the History and Preaching course, students studied various primary sources including one written by Alan of Lille. He was an early theologian in the 12th century who wrote a manual on the art of preaching. For the first time in history Alan Lille in his preaching manual offered a definition for preaching. Edwards cites Murphy, saying Allan's work is the "first formal definition (of preaching) in the 1200-year history of the church." (as cited in Edwards, 2004, p. 178). Alan defines preaching as, "an open and public instruction in faith and behavior, whose purpose is the forming of men; it derives from the path of reason and from the fountainhead of the 'authorities'" (Edwards, 2004, p. 178). According to this definition, the purpose of preaching is the formation of the listeners which has to be open and public. Alan states:

Preaching should be public because it must be delivered not to one, but to many; if it were given to a single man, it would not preaching but teaching—for that is

where the distinction lies between preaching, teaching, prophecy and public speaking. Preaching is that instruction which is offered to many, in public, and for their edification. Teaching is that which is given to one or to many, to add to their knowledge...By means of what is called ‘preaching’—instructions in matters of faith and behavior... (Alan of Lille, 1981, p. 17)

Preaching is to help others grow in faith, but teaching only adds knowledge. Knowledge only adds familiarity; while preaching is about improvement of the whole person, not just adding knowledge. “Alan shows himself to be committed to the moral improvement of Christian people of all ranks, and both his sermons and his textbook on preaching are means to that end (Edwards, p. 182).

Again, Alan of Lille defined preaching as an open and public teaching in faith and behavior. but Rev. Dan Harris commented in the DMIN-06 Core Homiletics Seminar II, Group 2 Forum A, about the growing tendency to replace preaching during worship with catechesis, in order to fill a need for catechesis not being met elsewhere. Is a homily at mass catechesis or instruction? Or is it something different?

To this very question, students studied *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* (FIYH) to figure out what exactly is a homily. Rev. Dan Harris in D.Min. Cohort 04-Core Homiletics Seminar I-Group 2-Forum2 stated: “FIYH-the homily presumes faith in the listeners. The document authors were trying to nudge post-Vatican II preachers away from reducing liturgical preaching to catechesis.” Current Student 08, from D.Min. Cohort 06, in the Core Homiletics Seminar I, Group 2-Forum 3, reading FIYH, concluded that “good preaching must be formational.”

In the same forum Current Student 08, who is a lay-Catholic woman, later stated:

“Liturgical preaching is reserved for the ordained. Current Student 08 showed a lack of understanding in this thread of the difference between liturgical preaching and homiletic preaching. Because it was a homiletics seminar instead of liturgical class, the professor decided to concentrate on other points of the discussion.

Later in her course of study, Current Student 22, (who is a lay-Catholic woman) stated:

The 1917 Code of Canon Law (CCL) seems clear, a lay person can be admitted to preach in a church (766) as long as it is not during a liturgy (766:1A). My pastor interprets that to mean any liturgy not just the Eucharistic liturgy. The Canon Lawyer of the Archdiocese supports that interpretation.” (DMIN 08 Liturgy and Preaching Fall 2010: Group B, Pre-Intensive Week II forum)

To clear up the confusion between liturgical preaching and who can preach at a liturgical function, Sr. Catherine Vincie, the instructor for this course, replied to Current Student 22’s thread:

There are exceptions when lay preaching is allowed in the liturgy (not meaning the eucharist). For example, a lay person can preside and preach at the Liturgy of the Hours and at the Vigil for dead. There are also other liturgies, such as Advent Word services when lay presiding and preaching is allowed.

Liturgical preaching is open to the laity as well. According to Vincie’s comment, students are able to distinguish the difference between liturgical preaching and a homily. Wrapped up in this difference is the identity question; only the ordained are able to preach a homily at mass. But if Current Student 08, who is a Catholic-lay woman, and Current Student

22's pastor are confused, one can imagine what the general Catholic population is asking. They could be asking: Who can preach at a liturgical function? Only the ordained can preach at liturgies? What are liturgies? Where can the laity preach? To help clarify these questions, students progress through the sequence of classes and are asked about questions of content, context, identity and authority to help educate and empower them as preachers and strengthen their preaching vocation.

Eat the Word

Current Student 08 made this comment, "Eat the Word," when she was asked, "What is one moment during your studies that will stay with you for the rest of your life?" in the online survey. By "eating the Word" it is meant that students consume what they learn, but furthermore, they must realize there is a link between what they study to prayer, community and preaching so that they can become what they eat. They must become the Holy Preaching as described in Chapter 2.

Mary Margaret Pazdan, O.P., who teaches BIB-D601: Biblical Hermeneutics and Preaching Course, stated, "Preaching is not a solitary effort. We rely on the Spirit and others to give us a Word that is freeing and convincing to our people" (D.Min. 10 Group 1-ALPHA Group Discussion Board Forum, March 13-19: Discussion of Narrative Criticism/Preaching). Furthermore, in this course Pazdan teaches students the connection between what they study to prayer, community and preaching by teaching *Lectio Divina*.

Lectio Divina (Holy Reading) is an ancient style of prayer with Scripture. A monastic practice in its origin, it is well over 1500 years old. It is a process that encourages multiple encounters with the Word and invites its participants into a prayerful dialogue with God. This particular presentation of *Lectio Divina* is

offered to the DMin Cohort of 2002 as a point of entry into the process of contemplō, studēo, and praedico. (M. Pazdan, personal communication, April 6, 2012)

According to Pazdan, this reference tool was created by a D.Min. student who she did not reference (M. Pazdan, personal communication, April 6, 2012). Even though this reference was developed for the D.Min. Cohort 2002, she still uses this valuable tool year after year. At the end of this resource the student stated, “Lectio Divina is offered...as a point of entry into the process of contemplō, studēo, and praedico.” In other words, Lectio Divina is an entry point into the process of contemplation, study and preaching, which are hallmarks of the Order of Preachers, as referenced in Chapter 2 with the example of Antón Montesino and the Holy Preaching. Furthermore, *Lectio Divina* is an integral part of preaching. A strong support for this conclusion is that the term *Lectio Divina* is mentioned 70 times in the qualitative sources.

The process of Lectio Divina is a four step process. The first is *Lectio*, which is reading the word in which one answers the basic questions of who, what, when, what’s the main event? This step also involves reading the text a number of times. The next step is *Meditatio*, which is “chewing the Word.” In this stage relies upon the Holy Spirit to bring to mind images, concepts or words. Part of this step is also to ask the Holy Spirit how these images, concepts or words touch my life and the community I live in? This is a step in which one dialogues with the word; what action is the word calling me to do? After these questions are presented to God and the next step is to listen for a response. This listening is called contemplation. *Contemplatio* is a resting with the word. Contemplation is waiting for a response back from the Word. Sometimes this response is

momentous and other times God responds in a light silent sound (1 Kings 19: 12 NABRE). The conclusion of *Lectio Divina* is *Oratio* which is a prayer of thanksgiving for whatever encounter comes from God. Sometimes this encounter with the Word is challenging, confusing or affirming. Whatever is the answer to this prayer, one must thank God for the encounter.

Pazdan reminds students that preaching is not a solitary event. Students rely on prayer through *Lectio Divina* and study of Scripture and coursework, but they must also rely on community to “eat the Word” to be the Word for others, to be the Holy Preaching.

Current Student 24 commented in D.Min. 08: Liturgy and Preaching Group C-Pre-Intensive, Week I forum:

I was meeting with my homily prep group tonight at the Church. It was discussed that the Word (readings, Psalm, Gospel & homily) were the first course of the meal that God had prepared for us when we attend Mass. The Eucharist was the second course. One of the ladies in the group said the Word proclaimed should always give us something to chew on during the week that follows, just as the Eucharist feeds us with the Body & Blood of Jesus.

Besides learning *Lectio Divina*, students also learn to form homily/preaching prep groups, otherwise known as Partners in Preaching.

Current Student 23, who is an ordained female from the Protestant tradition, described how she conducted her Partners in Preaching session in DMIN 06: Core Homiletics Seminar I, Group 1, Forum 8:

Every month on the last Sunday of the month, the nine elders of the church and the Associate Pastor and I gather at table in my home. We enjoy dinner (hopefully

they like my cooking) and we discuss the scriptures for the next month. I pair the elders up and each team discusses the meaning of the text. Each team is asked what is the good news, how does the text reflect on the life of the congregation and what does the congregation need. Each Elder is also a shepherd of at least 10 members. Each Elder should know about what is happening in the lives of their flock...Also each Monday, Joshua [pseudonym] who is our new associate and I discuss the sermon for the upcoming week and we choose the songs for worship. Joshua [pseudonym] is attending seminary and he serves as our choir director and organist.

Both student examples show the power of community to find out what is the good news surfacing from the community. Also, how does the text reflect on the life of the congregation? and what does the congregation need? These questions are important for the preacher to chew on so that the preacher can offer through community, study, prayer and preaching the congregation of hearers something to chew on during the week that follows.

Incarnational Nature of the Word to the Community

10 Yet just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down
 And do not return there till they have watered the earth,
 making it fertile and fruitful, Giving seed to the one who sows
 and bread to the one who eats,
 11 So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth;
 It shall not return to me empty, but shall do what pleases me,
 achieving the end for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55: 10-11 NABRE)

These words of the Prophet Isaiah demonstrate how the word of God goes forth, but does not return after first empowering the hearers to blossom and grow. In turn, the hearers carry the word forth to others. Besides being taught proper preparation to preach and help to see the connection between prayer, study and their personal embodiment of the Word, students next see the connection between their preparation and the salvation of souls of the community they serve through their preaching. This is demonstrated in the Montesino story of Chapter 2. Antonio de Montesino in the name of the Dominican community preached the Word of God to the people in the congregation and condemned the Spaniards for their crimes from the pulpit. He publically said that the natives must be freed or the Spaniards had no hope of salvation. Bartolomé de las Casas was so transformed by the preaching he later joined the Dominicans and fought for the Indians' freedom in the Spanish court. After studying and embodying the word through the local Dominican community, Montesino preached for the salvation of souls; this is an example of how his personal, internal development of study and prayer joined with his partners in preaching, the local Dominican community. The preaching goes forth, with the hope that the word will be planted in others and take root in their lives, which will cause them to be liberated.

Current Student 24 stated:

Once again, I heartily concur with that which has been written. However, I bele[i]ve we have missed a very important part of the preacher's responsibility to properly prepare. As important as proper [exegesis] of the Word, Lectio, and other prep tools we have at our [d]isposal are, we must not forge to also listen to the voice of the community in which we preach. Whether this happens by use of a preaching group from the faith community, astute listening during the week in [t]he coffee shops, barbershop or beauty salons, or being aware of happenings in the community

from the local media. We must be aware of what is on the minds & burning [i]n the hearts of the community as they gather for worship. If we don't allow ourselves to be used as the voice God uses to speak to the needs of the community in our preaching, our voice may not be heard. This past weekend we honored those who sacrificed all in the terrible tragedy of 9/11. Yet, there was a priest on FaceBook in the days leading up to 9/11 who publicly spoke out wondering why people "just can't get over it & move on." This is an example of a preacher who is so out of touch with his community that I doubt his words are heard or have a transformative power because they are his words, his alone. (D.Min. 08 Liturgy and Preaching course, Group C, Pre-Intensive Week I forum)

Current Student 05 added to this regarding the incarnational nature of the word to the community:

I enjoyed reading *Fulfilled In Your Hearing* (FIYH). This is probably one of the best kept secrets in the Church. The document begins, neither with the preacher nor with the liturgical action of the homily, but with the assembly--the gathered community. This is the first section of the document. It seems that the importance has shifted from the preacher/ordained to the people gathered for prayer and worship. My own concept of preaching was challenged in the area presented in the document on listening. This section reminds all preachers to listen to the Spirit of God and to the people of God. This challenged me on a personal level because I am not a good listener. The listening called for by this document is not just 'fact finding' about the lives of the people and events but, to use words from the Vatican II documents—Active, Conscious, Participation among those whom we serve. I am

involved in many ways with the people of the parish, but I have never thought of it in terms of preaching preparation. The document is clear: for effective preaching, we must listen to the Spirit of God and to the people. (D.Min. 06 Core Homiletics Seminar I-Group 1, Forum 2)

In conclusion, as Current Student 24 said above, preachers have many tools and techniques to prepare to preach, but if they do not start by listening to the community they serve, the preacher will not be heard. If the preacher does not hear the needs of the community, there is no reason to preach. So, the preacher should embrace this communitarian, incarnational and transformative cycle to prepare for preaching because this cycle is necessary for “giving seed to the one who sows and bread to the one who eats.” Once again, the preaching goes forth, with the hope that the word will be planted in others and take root in their lives, which will cause them to be liberated.

Wisdom Community in Subsequent Professional Practice

The second part of my primary research question deals with students or graduates being able to take what they learn in the online wisdom community and apply these new transformative skills as they start to work individually with their advisor on first their proposal, then their thesis, and finally in their ongoing career after they graduate. As noted in Chapter 1, as ministers graduate and have gone through Aquinas’ cohort program, I hypothesize that if the student or graduate does not find support in the person’s quest to form their own wisdom community, they will slowly go back to their old ways. I hope students or graduates will appropriate the necessary practices to form their own wisdom community; with good community they will have good preaching. Thus, this study sought to answer the primary question: How do students experience wisdom community in the program and what is the relationship between that experience and

implementation of wisdom community in subsequent professional practice? Also, a secondary question: How does technology support theological education online with wisdom community?

In the online questionnaire current students and alumni were asked two sets of related questions which revealed the answer to this question and showed how students and alumni did or did not form a wisdom community in their subsequent professional practice.

The current students were asked:

- According to the Dominican model of preaching, good preaching comes from community. How have you found community when you are not engaged in the online wisdom community?
- What actions have you tried to make your current community more of a “wisdom community” as described in Question 2? (Question 2 refers to the second question in the open-ended questions of the online survey)

Alumni were asked similar questions:

- According to the Dominican model of preaching, good preaching comes from community. How have you found community when you are not engaged in the online wisdom community?
- Since you graduated, you are not engaged in the program’s wisdom community. How have you found community?

These questions uncovered a variety of answers. For the first question, 25 out of 26 current students answered the question. Four current students (06, 07, 10 and 17) answered they currently have not found a community but 21 current students answered they have found community while not engaged in the online wisdom community. For the alumni, 18 alumni out of 22 answered the first question; only two alumni (Alumni 12 and 17) answered they have not found community while the rest stated they have found a wisdom community when they were not engaged in the online wisdom community.

Alum 12 stated for the first question, “It did” and nothing else, but for the second question he answered, “No” he had not found a community. I interpreted this as he did not find community while not engaged in the online wisdom community.

According to the Dominican model of preaching, good preaching comes from community, but some students and alumni stated they have not found community:

- Mainly from reading books and online (Current Student 07)
- I have not really found any other groups where I can speak about preaching in any intensive way (Current Student 10)
- I have been very isolated and do not have a wisdom community or good support system (Current Student 17)
- When I was in parish ministry, we had a small prayer group that included reflection on the Sunday scriptures as part of their time together. This was a great blessing for my preaching. I am no longer at that parish and have no analogous "wisdom community" to which I belong (Alum 17).

Again, most of the current students and alumni responded agreeably to the Dominican model of preaching, which states good preaching comes from community. Several representative quotes follow stating how current students and alumni found community when they were not engaged in the online wisdom community:

- Apart from a wisdom community, preaching is not as good (Alum 09).
- That is a good question. What the wisdom community and the Dmin program taught me so far is to preach well I need to be part of community that opens up the word with regularity. So I engage in Lectio Divina 3 to 4 times a week with different groups in the parish forming a wisdom community that fosters my preaching. To be honest I have dropped the on-line [wisdom] community from my cohort. Although, as I start my thesis proposal several conversations were very helpful to me [from] the cohort behind and ahead of me. In that way I am still part of a broader wisdom community (Current Student 01).
- I preach for and as a member of a faith community. This is the community from which my preaching arises. The online community is an "add-on" community for me (Current Student 20).
- With the development of each sermon, I try to take into consideration what my exegetical team has said. I try to include stories that have deep meaning for my community and I try to bring in personal stories when I can (Current Student 23).

The current students who answered the first question stated they have found community when they were not engaged in the online wisdom community, and learned skills while they were in the online wisdom community which transferred to their current community. Current Student 01 in his answer above stated he needs to be part of a community who breaks open the

word regularly. Also, Lectio Divina was integral in his studies, and he does it now many times a week to help in forming a wisdom community and nourishes his preaching. Furthermore, Current Student 23 demonstrates how she embraced the practice of Partners in Preaching/exegetical team even when she is not engaged in the online wisdom community. She also embraced the practice of bringing personal stories into her preaching when she can. This takes great attentiveness to her community; she has to know her community to share these stories. Alum 02 added:

There is wisdom in our cohort. There is also wisdom found with the congregation one is preaching. In the absence of an on-line wisdom community, I continue to utilize the wisdom of my "partners-in-preaching." Almost every week I meet with a group of inmates and go over the readings for the coming Sunday. I also find that reading, even though not specifically about preaching, provides insights useful in preaching. For example, insights into scripture interpretation, life issues, spirituality, etc.

Lectio Divina and Partners in Preaching were both skills learned while engaged in the online wisdom community. Now, the current students and alumni, their preaching and the communities they serve benefit from these skills while not engaged in the online wisdom community.

Looking at the first question, the current students and alumni answers revealed how they formed a wisdom community in their subsequent professional practice; I noticed there is a corollary between responses to this question and several other responses. In short, how they define "wisdom community" in the online survey potentially affects how they implement wisdom community in their subsequent professional practice. The last part of the current student's first question cites Question 2 of the online survey; Question 2 refers to "How would you define wisdom community?" The alumni questionnaire also asked the alumni to define

“wisdom community”. The second question relates to their actions and how they have tried to make their current community more of a “wisdom community”. The alumni were asked, “Since you graduated, you are not engaged in the program’s wisdom community. How have you found community?” and “What actions have you tried to make your current community more of a “wisdom community” as described in Question 2?” In examining whether or not alumni were able to implement a wisdom community in their subsequent professional practice, I decided to associate the question, “How have you found community?”, as a benchmark whether or not alumni were able to implement wisdom community in their subsequent professional practice. These questions were all related in my analysis. Once students named wisdom community and lived it, they “owned” it; it was part of them. Then they were able to live it out and draw others into the wisdom community.

To help demonstrate this point, Alum 17 stated:

There are a few members of the cohort with whom I keep in contact both personally and professionally. I try to incorporate aspects of a "wisdom community" in my teaching (if at all possible). I made involvement in a "wisdom community" a key part of parish ministry - both in the prayer/homily prep group and in the structure/function of our parish council.

Current Student 07 stated during a course:

Your recommendation of Lectio divina is one that I could not agree more with. This practice is there for the preacher, but it is for all. It is a gift that I try to give receptive inmates before they leave whether for state or home. Daily time with the word and prayer are such a great blessing. (DMIN 06 Core Hom Seminar II, Group 2, Forum A)

The main purpose of discovering whether or not current students and alumni were able to implement a wisdom community in their subsequent professional practice was to ascertain if they were able to have good preaching which comes from being part of a wisdom community according to the Dominican model of preaching. Alum 09 exemplifies this process of establishing a wisdom community in his subsequent professional practice and from this wisdom community flowed his ability to have good preaching according to the Dominican model of preaching. He defines a wisdom community as, “A wisdom community represents the best its members can give to the learning process. Each member benefits and gains from the community.”

In reference to the relationship between community and preaching, the same alumni responded, “Apart from a wisdom community, preaching is not as good.” To the question, “How has your experience of wisdom community impacted you? Please give some examples” he answered, “I have learned to gain wisdom and insight from others for the purpose of preaching.” Since he graduated, he has not been engaged in the program’s wisdom community, but he has found community through his church family and he learned if he wanted to make his present community more of a “wisdom community,” he had to learn to listen to others better. He commented, “Coming up with the time has been the biggest struggle” in bringing wisdom community to his current community. Time is so important in building community.

Even though Alum 17 responded he is currently not part of a “wisdom community,” he still has learned many of the skills necessary to have good preaching. He defines a “wisdom community” as, “A community of persons seeking wisdom together - gathered around a ‘great idea’ (Parker Palmer) and relying on each other in keeping with the truth claim that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” Community is so vital to good preaching. He stated, “When I

was in parish ministry, we had a small prayer group that included reflection on the Sunday scriptures as part of their time together. This was a great blessing for my preaching. I am no longer at that parish and have no analogous ‘wisdom community’ to which I belong.”

When Alum 17 was engaged in the online wisdom community at Aquinas Institute and met face-to-face for the intensives, he commented, “I experienced this sense of community much more so at the intensives [including] late night conversations in the lounges) and in doing the small group work than with the cohort as a whole - especially when we were involved only in electronic communication.” This comment shows that for him, communication was vital in building a “wisdom community.” Other students raised the same point. For instance, Current Student 21 stated, “Communication is crucial for the wisdom community to thrive.” Unfortunately, since Alum 17 graduated, he is no longer engaged in the program’s wisdom community, but there are a few members of the cohort with whom he keeps in contact with personally and professionally. He commented, “I try to incorporate aspects of a ‘wisdom community’ in my teaching (if at all possible). I made [involvement] in a ‘wisdom community’ a key part of parish ministry - both in the prayer/homily prep group and in the structure/function of our parish council.” To the question, “How have you found community?” he answered, “Currently, there is no ‘intentional [community]’ to which I belong.” Even though he has not found a community, he still has learned the essentials of the Dominican model of preaching. In conclusion, Alumni 09 and 17 demonstrate in their stories good preaching flows from community in the Dominican model of preaching.

For a recent example, Current Student 03 from Cohort 2006 defined a wisdom community as, “Individuals engaged in a learning process where personal knowledge, stories, and reflections are shared with honesty and respect.” When asked, “How has your involvement

in the program's wisdom community affected your preaching?", she responded, "I don't preach much presently..." According to the Dominican model of preaching, good preaching comes from community, but she only identifies her "wisdom community" as "with friends and family" but later on she stated, "I do not have a community at present, but I think providing space of open and honest reflection is important." As a lay, Catholic woman, there are not many opportunities for her to preach and build a "wisdom community" to strengthen and validate her preaching vocation except with family and friends. Preaching opportunities are limited for lay, Catholic women, especially Current Student 03, but the Roman Catholic Church does provide some opportunities for lay preaching that are available for lay women. If she is to be engaged with individuals in a learning process where personal knowledge, stories, and reflections are shared, then she must be a part of a larger community. When she was part of the online wisdom community she grew as a preacher. She stated, "The community often offered feedback that I later incorporated into my preaching. I think I became more aware of how things may be perceived by people of different generations and religious traditions." A wisdom community helped her grow as a preacher.

The experience of the lay Catholic woman in Cohort 2006 had an impact on other students. Current Student 24 (in the same cohort), who was mentioned earlier in this chapter as being an ordained, Catholic male, stated he valued feminist preaching. He was changed by considering feminist preaching. He also ended his earlier quote in this chapter by commenting, "Over the years, I have been [privileged] to hear excellent women preachers, our own cohort members included, that spoke to my soul on a level that no man [could] even consider." Also, Current Student 23 from the same Cohort 2006 stated, "I have tried to encourage Catholic women to be faithful to their calling to preach. As a mainline Protestant ordained clergy, I

believe women should have a voice in the church.” Reflecting upon this from the researcher’s perspective this is one lay, Catholic woman’s story, but it “gives me pause and consider” (Current Student 24) and take note if Current Student 03 (a lay, Catholic woman) could preach regularly in her own wisdom community, how she could speak to souls on a level no other man could ever imagine.

In conclusion, this study sought to answer the question, “To what extent do they form their own wisdom community in their subsequent professional practice?” As ministers graduate and have gone through Aquinas’ cohort program, the findings reveal a majority of the students and graduates have found support in their personal quest to form their own wisdom communities once they went off to start writing their proposal/thesis or graduated. In this section current students and alumni shared their stories and challenges incorporating a wisdom community into their subsequent ministerial practice. No students or alumni have cited they have not gone back to their old ways by choice; but some are floundering to find a community. The study did uncover most of the students and graduates, whether they are Catholic or Protestant, appropriated the necessary practices to form their own wisdom community while engaged in the online wisdom community and believe good community is necessary to have good preaching. The study did uncover, however, one isolated lay, Catholic woman preacher, Current Student 17, who apparently did not appropriate the necessary practices to form her own wisdom community because she wrote, “I have been very isolated and do not have a wisdom community or good support system” and “I am floundering to find a wisdom community.” Her answers do not reveal the reason why she has not found a good community to have good preaching. However, this one story is worth highlighting, especially in the Roman Catholic Church where laity have limited opportunities to preach.

Technology Supporting Online Theological Education

Alum 17 defines a “wisdom community” as, “A community of persons seeking wisdom together - gathered around a ‘great idea’ (Parker Palmer) and relying on each other in keeping with the truth claim that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” Since the D.Min. program at Aquinas Institute is a hybrid program, technology served a very important role. Fisher’s Net/Blackboard is the environment in which students/alumni interacted with primary sources and more importantly, each other. This was the environment in which they interacted with each other when they were not physically present with one another.

This study primarily focused on wisdom community and preaching, however there was a secondary question: How does technology support theological education online with wisdom community? In short, how does technology help a community of persons seeking wisdom together gather around the great idea of growing into the “Holy Preaching” for the salvation of souls? And then take this new learning and form their own wisdom community in their subsequent professional practice.

As noted in Chapter 2, Conrad (2008) suggests a strong sense of community is vital for a successful online learning program (p. 10). This is reiterated by Riel and Polin (2004) who suggest learning is embedded in community; they state, “learning is a process of identity transformation—a socially constructed and socially managed experience“ (p. 19). The question arises when new members enter an online learning community, what happens? Reil and Polin again state when an online community brings in the novice member, the community instructs the newcomer from their communal wisdom and experiences. “Over time, the residue of these experiences remains available to newcomers in the tools, tales, talk, and traditions of the group. In this way, the newcomers find a rich environment for learning (p. 18). Furthermore, Salomon

states: “Moreover, effects of technology can occur when partnership with a technology leaves a cognitive residue, equipping people with thinking skills and strategies that reorganize and enhance their performance even away from the technology in question” (Salomon, Perkins, & Globerson, 1991, p. 8).

One cognitive residue is the skill of *Lectio Divina* which Mary Margaret Pazdan, OP, taught the D.Min. students and stressed how important this meditative practice is to preaching. The students did not see the importance of this practice until they started doing it themselves and seeing the connection of the practice to preaching. This essential element was validated by the students in the group discussion boards. Students could not even imagine preparing for preaching without first doing *Lectio Divina*. They believed in the practice so much they started to teach others this valuable practice. *Lectio Divina*, this essential cognitive residue, enhanced their preaching performance even away from the technology.

In this online environment the D.Min. students find tools, tales, talk and traditions embedded in the group’s online learning environment. Fisher’s Net/Blackboard embeds tools, tales, talk and traditions of the wisdom community. Fisher’s Net/Blackboard is the backbone for the wisdom community to be a community. Current Student 01 stated, “During the course work it was invaluable” and “During our core courses, it was the main means of staying connected” wrote Current Student 06. Also, “As a distance learner it was essential” Current Student 07.

Two of the tools available to students embedded in Fisher’s Net/Blackboard are email and threaded discussions, which both allowed the wisdom community members to communicate with one another. According to Current Student 21, “[Communication] is crucial for the wisdom community to thrive.” Current Student 22 added Fisher’s Net enhanced the wisdom community; Fisher’s Net “Paves the way for communication. [I]t is vital.” Current Student 07 added, “It

served as the backbone for online communication.” Furthermore, Current Student 16 added, “We wouldn't have the interaction without it. It has made it technically possible.” Technology allowed the students to interact with one another; Fisher’s Net became crucial. It allowed the wisdom community to grow and share knowledge and moreover, tales, talk, and traditions of the group. Fisher’s Net/Blackboard allowed the wisdom community to share their wisdom.

The main way students interacted with one another was the threaded discussions. The instructor of the hybrid course would post weekly or topical discussions for the students to answer. Threaded discussions have been the primary way instructors have been using to check for comprehension of the course material in the hybrid Aquinas courses since the early start of the D.Min. program in 2000. In very beginnings of the program in 2000, accessing the internet was still in its infancy and so, internet speeds were not what they are in 2012, but they were fast enough for asynchronous communication, namely threaded discussions, and allowed instructors to post primary sources and syllabi. Current Student 15 stated:

- It enabled me to look at and share knowledge, viewpoints, and new information in the process of growing as a preacher.
- The interaction of cohort members sharing on the readings and the applications of knowledge to the pastoral ministry.

Current Student 15 highlighted a very important fact in his statement by writing “pastoral ministry.” What makes this program strong is students share their ministerial experience with the rest of the wisdom community. The students come from all over the world, especially Great Britain, Africa and Canada, but mostly from the United States. For example, in the 2000 D.Min. Cohort one student flew in from Great Britain for every face-to-face session. Furthermore, students come from rural and urban settings. Wherever they are from, near and far, students share their ministerial experience from their local ministry, which strengthens the online wisdom community. This sharing is vital to the success of their learning. Students want to learn more

about their fellow students and the more they share online, the more they get to learn about each other beyond the written text of the threaded discussions. The more students share, the more they see their classmates as human beings and the communities in which they minister.

To enhance this, students posted in certain classes three case studies to the threaded discussions, which included a ministerial setting description and full-text preaching. Besides reading the text in the case study, students also had to have their preaching of this text recorded on video and then posted in Fisher's Net. This was vital because each video shows the preacher in his or her particular community in which they minister. The video also shows the viewing students more than a textual-based conversation. The video shows the viewer a bodily presence of the preacher, as well as, the preacher proclaiming the Word and preaching with words, inflections, and gestures. Once posted on Fisher's Net/Blackboard, members of the cohort, plus the instructor, would critique the preaching and proclamation of the preacher. There is power in having the preaching peer reviewed. In one critique, Current Student 07 (DMIN 06: Core Hom Seminar I, Group 2, Forum6) stated in his critique of a student's case study, "Moving on to the video - You were so much more animated and 'real' than you were when you were reading your text in the prior video at the intensive. It must feel strange and fearful to make this change, but it is so so good. You also made good use of your hands as you preached." Current Student 07 highlights the growth in this student from the intensive to the time of this video posting, with explicit reference to voice inflection and gesture that could only be conveyed by audio and video recordings made in situ at geographically distributed ministry sites and then stored on a networked system like Blackboard accessible to the learning community. Alum 04 also stated, "Swapping video files of preaching" when asked, "Are there any specific ways

Blackboard/Fisher's Net was used that enhanced the wisdom community while you were at Aquinas? Please explain?"

Current Student 14, member of Cohort 2004, comments on his use of Fisher's Net and his use of the threaded discussions and posting of preaching videos, "It was helpful in staying connected. The forums for writing responses was the least life-giving for me. The entries always felt a bit perfunctory. What worked the best was actually watching classmates' homilies online and giving feedback. That was invaluable and very fun too." In comparison, Alum 17 from Cohort 2002 stated, "Since the interactions were written, it seemed that the quality of the posts was usually quite high--members seemed to have put in a lot of time in reflection and in crafting their responses." He also stated, "The video posts were much more effective than simply aud[io]," which they did in the early days of the program instead of videos. As technologies change, so do student interaction, posting audio vs. video.

In July 2009, Fisher's Net upgraded their Blackboard system from version 6.0 to 8.0; there were major problems in this upgrade which caused many courses, especially the D.Min. program, to look for alternative modes by which to deliver primary sources and communication, namely email only. At this time, Current Student 26, member of Cohort 2008, commented, "When it works properly, it's a great way to articulate my thoughts, but in a way that gives me time to reflect and pause before posting" but when Fisher's Net/Blackboard is not working properly, it interferes with the growth of the wisdom community.

As an aside, I managed the Fisher's Net/Blackboard system for Aquinas Institute at this time, and when Blackboard was down in 2009, I had one instructor cry because she struggled so much communicating and posting primary sources with her students. The only way she could communicate with her students was by way of email. At the time, Fisher's Net also managed

their own learning management system, Moodle, and Fisher's Net said she could use Moodle, but in the heat of the crisis, the professor did not want to learn another system, nor did she want the students to learn another system. The reason why she did not want to move to another system is because she was teaching a new cohort of students who barely knew one another and were new to online, theological education. Any slight bump out of the starting blocks could really set the tone for their whole online experience at Aquinas. The new students and faculty were able to regroup and continue, but this crisis impacted the learning community. As I learned as the manager of these systems for Aquinas, these learning management systems are expensive to host and operate; Aquinas has to rely on others for this service and when this service is interrupted, then Aquinas has to scramble the limited resources they have to ensure the impact on the learning community is minimal. The faculty and staff know Fisher's Net/Blackboard because Fisher's Net has been the Blackboard service provider since 2000 and when this long-standing tool is not available, learning is really impeded. As Current Student 21 stated earlier, "[Communication] is crucial for the wisdom community to thrive."

Many students expect their professors to contribute to the online discussions and to let them know how they are doing in their online contributions. Two-way communication between the student and instructor is also vital for the growth of the wisdom community; current students value their fellow peers' conversations, but they value even more their instructor's comments. To this, Current Student 23 stated, "This has been very important because of our discussions, our easy submission of papers, our general conversations and our response from our professors."

For Current Student 18, online education is not as good for her as the week-long intensives. She stated, "The online thing is still not as good for me as the personal thing. But Fisher's Net is being well-used here at Aquinas." Current Student 18's comment reminded me of

Rovai's original work on online learning environments, as cited in Chapter 4, in which he found "a difference in sense of community by gender, with females manifesting stronger sense of community than males" (Rovai, p. 207). To reiterate, in this study there were 21 alumni respondents, 18 males and 3 females (refer to Figure 10), and 26 current student respondents, 17 males and 9 females (refer to Figure 1).

At the core of all this online learning is a computer or laptop; if the computer or laptop does not work, then the user is cut off from the wisdom community. In one such example, Current Student 24 comments to another student in the threaded discussions:

I feel your pain. Wednesday, as I was trying to send in my Case study #1, my computer died a pitiful death. Fortunately, all my stuff inside was able to be retrieved and transferred to the new computer I had to buy. This new computer, while very slick, runs Vista and I am used to XP. Another learning curve!

(DMIN 06 Core HOM Seminar II: Group 2, Forum B)

The student then went on to provide some advice on computer security technology to [his/her] peer.

In conclusion, the secondary question of this study is, "How does technology support theological education online with wisdom community?" The previous student comments and responses show that technology supported theological education online and even enhanced the wisdom community. If it were not for Fisher's Net/Blackboard, the wisdom community would not thrive. For example, the groups in D.Min. Cohort 04 History and Preaching course had to take turns and plan a mid-day prayer service at their next intensive. The instructor emailed the group leaders the task and then Group 1's leader posted to their group discussion board at 3:59 p.m., February 21. The group leader

posted again at 4:17 a.m. and for the next day there were seven posts from 7:51 a.m. to 9:10 p.m. planning how they were going to execute the prayer service while they were geographically separated. In this discussion the group made sure the female and protestant preachers were able to preach at various times during the intensive outside of the Roman Catholic mass, at which only the ordained can preach a homily. The group members were sensitive to the need to make sure everyone was included and able to preach. All this concern and planning was conducted in the asynchronous, group discussion board at different times of day in between busy schedules. Another feature of Fisher's Net/Blackboard was the capability to upload files of any size, especially student preaching videos, and share them with the group. Group members would watch each other's videos and evaluate one another to help each preacher grow. Using the capability of Fisher's Net/Blackboard to share videos with audio including vocal inflection and video including body posture and gesture, all vital to the preaching content of the program's learning goals.

Lastly, it is important to see how the use of technology can leave a cognitive residue, as Salomon, Perkins, and Globerson (1991) remind us. In essence, the effects of the technology can help students with thinking and skills and strategies in forming their own wisdom community in their subsequent professional practice. As shown in the "Wisdom Community in Subsequent Professional Practice" section of this chapter, students carried a set of skills for building communities forward in their ministerial work, as a result of the geographically distributed educational experience made possible by online educational technology while they continued pursuing their careers.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In 2004, Thomas Esselman wrote about the concept of the “online wisdom community” regarding Aquinas Institute’s journey into online theological education. He wrote in the article, “Pedagogy of the Online Wisdom Community”: “In the theological setting, wisdom involves the transformation of the person, a dynamic process that unites heart and mind in a holistic movement toward maturity in discipleship” (p. 164).

In 2007, Esselman left Aquinas Institute to teach in Africa and I had a chance to talk to him before he left. He said:

I originally defined “wisdom community” out of what I saw developing in our cohort programs, i.e., communities of learners committed to transformative learning, developed by face-to-face intensive experiences, which used online learning formats to carry over/continue in virtual time and space the learning process ... Today, I still believe all of this. There are wisdom communities that “arise” in our cohort degrees as well as in our residential courses. But now I find myself using the term less often. The title can seem pretentious or high-blown. It demands a high level of maturity and commitment, and not all students are able and willing to commit to becoming a part of a wisdom community. I think what I find a useful way of speaking today (a phrase that is similar in meaning but without some of the overtones) is that of “communities of inquiry.” (T. Esselman, personal communication, March 19, 2007)

There was a development in his thought over the years. Again, Dr. Ann Garrido as quoted in the last chapter asked the question, “Can people really make a commitment to a group that they have just met? And, should we be calling it a covenant?” (A. Garrido, personal communication, May 10, 2012) and she reflected on the same question of whether a “wisdom community” is possible with people who just met.

I wondered about these same questions and this led me to this research study. I wondered if students could create a wisdom community in a hybrid doctoral program (mostly online, with occasional face-to-face intensive sessions) and take this learning and implement this into their professional practice. This question is vital for a school of theology which offers the only Catholic doctoral preaching program in the world. It is also vital for Aquinas Institute of Theology being operated by the Order of Preachers whose mission it is to save souls, especially by preaching the Word of God to a hungry world. There is a long history of Dominicans preaching and transforming lives by the words the friars preached. Therefore, Dominican instruction must involve community, prayer, study and preaching, which are the four pillars of Dominican life which transforms individuals into the Holy Preaching. Individuals must be the Word of God before they take the Word of God to others. The “ratio” or plan of study for new members of the friars follows the same path of instruction and formation in the faith which leads to communion or discipleship in God.

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine Aquinas’ cohort program and observe how they form a wisdom community online and face to face. Also from this examination, it was my hope to unearth the characteristics of this type of community from the students’ perspective. Esselman (2004) states that ministerial formation does not take place in isolation; my hope was to discover how a wisdom community implemented with technology in

the form of an online course management system can help form ministers in the service of the church. If the assertions are correct, students should be transformed and walk the way of wisdom after graduation. My final hope was to find out how the practices acquired in the wisdom community were appropriated in the graduate's ministerial practice.

This leads me to my research question: How do students experience wisdom community in the program and what is the relationship between that experience and implementation of wisdom community in subsequent professional practice? The secondary question is: How does technology support theological education online with wisdom community?

The study's main method was a mixed method analysis of recent and current students' behavior and experiences within and after the program, utilizing online questionnaire data and online discussion board interactions. The online questionnaire included the Classroom Community Scale developed by Alfred P. Rovai (2002), questions about wisdom community experiences during and after their program, and questions about the role of technology. The response rate for this survey was high; 65% of the alumni and current students responded which improved the trustworthiness of the data set. Finally, the survey results and online discussion board interactions from Fisher's Net/Blackboard, Aquinas' online learning management system, were analyzed utilizing mixed methods techniques to understand the students' experience at Aquinas, to see if and how they were able to build their own wisdom community in their ministerial setting, and understand their perspective on the role of technology.

This study constitutes only one small method of assessment for the institution hosting the program. In 1999, the Lilly Endowment awarded Aquinas Institute with a planning grant to see how Aquinas would study and formulate a plan of action if they were awarded a larger grant for the Lilly Endowment Grant for Information Technology for Theological Teaching. As a part of

this planning grant, the Aquinas faculty went to great lengths to think about the pedagogy of the wisdom community. But there was no documentation from the student's perspective to see if and how the cohort model of online theological education worked. By the time the graduates leave Aquinas, they should have embraced the wisdom community. Through the online survey, using thematic coding and drawing conclusions from the coding in light of the current literature, I wanted to uncover the students' perspective of the wisdom community and its implementation in their subsequent professional practice. Or more plainly stated, from the participants' perspective does the wisdom model of theological education work?

Technology has changed the way professors teach; technology has also changed how seminary professors teach clerical and lay students for ministry. Based on my experience as Aquinas' director of technology and my online teaching experience at University of Missouri—St. Louis, seminaries and schools of theology are years behind secular schools in distance education due to the lack of funding. In Aquinas' effort to help understand the distant learning phenomenon, they have collected and written on their programs extensively but they do not have any data or interviews from the students' experience to see how the theory is understood in practice by the students, and whether it impacts them in their later ministry. Aquinas Institute of Theology obtains a good deal of data while the students are in school but they do not have any information after they graduate and this is where this study is particularly valuable and necessary, since Aquinas and other seminaries and schools are moving to incorporate more hybrid and distance learning into their curriculum. These schools need to know this form of education works and the outcomes are just as good as face-to-face theological education. This study included analysis of online discussion board interactions and questionnaires of students before they graduate to gain their perspective on the wisdom community and to see if they were

transformed by the experience of using technology to increase their wisdom experience. But perhaps the greatest value of this study was to check in with them after they graduate to see if and how the wisdom skills that they gained in school were implemented in their subsequent professional practice.

Besides theological schools, this study should also have significance for other universities or institutions that engage their students online. It may be helpful to see if the practices that students learn online will be appropriated in their professional practice. Finally, much of the research I have found in this area is from the perspective of the teacher and how to enhance the learning community, but little is written from the student's or graduate's perspective. Hopefully, this study will add to this growing body of research.

Discussion of Major Findings

Some of the major findings from this study were:

1. Students and alumni were able to implement a wisdom community in their subsequent professional practice.
2. There are stages to online community
3. There is a developmental aspect to the understanding of covenant
4. The cohort model of online theological education works
5. Appropriate uses of technology increase students' wisdom experience
6. Gender affects online theological education

Implementation of wisdom community. The participants' survey data and threaded discussions showed that most students embraced the wisdom community model in the D.Min. program at Aquinas. The face-to-face sessions helped solidify these relationships, but their use of technology enhanced those times when they were not physically present to one another.

Participants in the program for the most part tended to be full-time ministers already embedded in an active community so the asynchronous nature of this in-between time really served them well. They were able to connect to members early in the morning, late at night or in the wee-hours of the morning. They were able to connect electronically when they had time.

The program is successful because faculty and students honor their current responsibilities while still holding one another accountable for the work; having them being able to participate when they can and having them share their ministerial stories validates them as a minister and preacher. Besides validation, participants in the discussion board threads seemed to apply what they learned to their current preaching ministry. They took what they learned from reading and studying the writings of great preachers and other primary preaching texts, the instructor or one another and quickly applied this new learning to their context; thus, enhancing them personally as a preacher and minister. If this new learning enhances them, this new learning also enhances their Aquinas wisdom community and ministerial community. One example is Lectio Divina; students learned this prayerful skill and immediately saw how necessary this skill is to preaching preparation. In the threaded discussions, students outlined their weekly preaching preparation, and Lectio Divina and Partners in Preaching were the two intrinsic parts of their weekly preparation. These wisdom community practices and the wisdom community itself helped most students and alumni implement a wisdom community in their subsequent professional practice.

Calling to mind the wisdom community practices and the wisdom community itself, at the beginning of this chapter, I referred to Thomas Esselman's description of how his use of wisdom community developed into the community of inquiry. The community of inquiry model is:

An educational community of inquiry is a group of individuals who collaboratively engage in purposeful critical discourse and reflection to construct personal meaning and confirm mutual understanding.

The Community of Inquiry theoretical framework represents a process of creating a deep and meaningful (collaborative-constructivist) learning experience through the development of three interdependent elements - social, cognitive and teaching presence. (Community of Inquiry Project, 2011, paragraph 2)

The model has only three elements: social, cognitive and teaching presence. These three elements overlap with the wisdom community model which I described extensively throughout this dissertation. The community of inquiry model is fine for the secular arena, but lacks an essential fourth element of the wisdom community model. This fourth is the theological element of wisdom. Aquinas' wisdom community model includes six elements or principles:

The principles cited by the faculty included a commitment to: (1) the creation of rapport among learners, (2) experimental learning, (3) self-directed learning, (4) integration, (5) communal learning, and (6) the cultivation of wisdom communities of learning. These principles are characteristics of good theological pedagogy in general of course, and are not unique to distance education and particularly the hybrid model that I have described, these principles suggest some implications about the effective use of technology for teaching and learning.

(Esselman, 2004, p. 162)

Esselman (2004) goes on further to describe the theological element of the wisdom communities of learning which is unique because of the locus in a theological context. In his article,

“Pedagogy of the Online Wisdom Community”, he states:

The ultimate goal of theological education is wisdom, that deeper kind of learning that takes place through participation in ... a wisdom community. In the theological setting, wisdom involves the transformation of the person, a dynamic process that unites heart and mind in a holistic movement toward maturity in discipleship. The notion of a wisdom community reflects the age-old experience and conviction that no one prepares for ministry alone, that intellectual, ministerial, and spiritual transformation always take place in the context of community. The pedagogy of ministerial formation is committed, then, to nurturing wisdom communities where students and instructors teach and learn from each other. (Esselman, 2004, p. 164)

Stages to online community. Another major finding was that there are stages to online community. Many years ago, I was part of a lay-Christian community and we read Jean Vanier’s book, *Community and Growth*, and we talked about stages of a face-to-face lay-Christian community. In my analysis in the preceding chapter, I showed how the Aquinas students go through Vanier’s stages of community during their D.Min experience, as evidenced by their threaded discussions. Outside of the Christian realm, I also connected the D.Min experience to Wenger’s (2002) stages of community growth, especially when the community dies out or comes to a natural end.

Developmental aspect to understanding of covenant. As an outgrowth of the previous finding, I found that participants had various ideas of what the nature of their covenant

statement was all about. Some concentrated on the idea of covenant vs. the “verb of writing a covenant statement.” Each concept has different meanings. Those who focused on the idea of covenant stressed that writing the covenant statement did not mean cohort members were a covenant community; covenant community took time to develop and the needs of the community had to be fostered. Or simply put, students had to grow into it. For others, the “verb of writing covenant statement” focused on the concept of the wisdom community instead of the actual members of the wisdom community. “The idea of covenant makes us bonded” focuses on the opportunity to get to know people in the learning community around a common project, which needs to be developed over time.

The cohort model of online theological education works. This study also highlights the successful transfer of skills by the current students and alumni. While they were engaged in the wisdom community, students learned the skills necessary to be a successful preacher. Alum 02 noted:

There is wisdom in our cohort. There is also wisdom found with the congregation one is preaching. In the absence of an on-line wisdom community, I continue to utilize the wisdom of my "partners-in-preaching." Almost every week I meet with a group of inmates and go over the readings for the coming Sunday. I also find that reading, even though not specifically about preaching, provides insights useful in preaching. For example, insights into scripture interpretation, life issues, spirituality, etc.

Lectio Divina and Partners in Preaching were both skills learned while engaged in the online wisdom community. Now, the alumni and current students’ preaching and the communities they serve benefit from these skills they learned in the D.Min. program. A few representative

statements help illustrate that the hybrid cohort model works and new skills and learning are transferred to their subsequent professional practice:

- Apart from a wisdom community, preaching is not as good (Alum 09).
- What the wisdom community and the Dmin program taught me so far is to preach well I need to be part of community that opens up the word with regularity. So I engage in Lectio Divina 3 to 4 times a week with different groups in the parish forming a wisdom community that fosters my preaching. To be honest I have dropped the on-line [wisdom] community from my cohort. Although, as I start my thesis proposal several conversations were very helpful to me [from] the cohort behind and ahead of me. In that way I am still part of a broader wisdom community. (Current Student 01)

As the two previous quotes demonstrate, community takes on a different role.

Community is essential to preaching and the actions of Lectio Divina enhance community, which is necessary for good preaching. Current Student 01 is a part of multiple communities that affect his preaching. What binds them together are the actions they do—breaking open the Word on a regular basis. Therefore, “community is built upon what activities people do together instead of being based on geographical location” (Wellman, as cited in Rovai, 2002, p. 199). What a community does together helps to create community. This is hard for schools and seminaries to comprehend, but when they do, their institution and curriculum are transformed.

Appropriate uses of technology to increase wisdom experience. For Aquinas Institute Fisher’s Net/Blackboard was the learning management system that faculty and students depended upon for teaching and learning when they were not face to face. This study highlighted how the appropriate uses of technology helped the teaching and learning thrive. Two of the tools available to students embedded in Fisher’s Net/Blackboard are email and threaded discussions, which both allowed the wisdom community members to communicate with one another. Technology allowed the students to interact with one another; Fisher’s Net became crucial. It allowed the wisdom community to grow and share knowledge and, moreover, allowed the

wisdom community to share their wisdom. The analysis also showed how the online discussions and sharing of video recorded preaching enabled geographically distributed students to support one another in learning to prepare for and execute preaching more effectively.

This study showed some of the advantages of synchronous interactions for building wisdom community, which were carried out in the cohorts' face-to-face meetings; but advances in widely available educational technologies have made more synchronous communication possible online. Email and threaded discussions were fine at one point in distant learning, but with the advent of free tools like Skype and Google Hangouts, students are able to connect in real time and share their wisdom in different ways. These inexpensive tools allow the students and faculty to work and share experiences; they can see facial expressions and inflections of each other's voice. They become more present to one another.

Furthermore, when I was writing the various sections of this dissertation and learning new things along the way, I realized for years and years the only way faculty were checking for comprehension were assigning end-of-term papers and threaded discussions most of the time in Aquinas' online courses. Sometimes the faculty included a YouTube video or an exercise the students had to do during their face-to-face sessions, but used Fisher's Net/Blackboard to plan this activity. I said to myself, "There had to be more than papers and threaded discussions." I actually asked one faculty member, "Why do you use threaded discussions?" The instructor said, "This is the way we've always done things." This answer was not satisfying to me. I knew there had to be more to online learning.

As I was helping a faculty member design her hybrid masters course in 2011, she wanted to have a physicality or bodily presence to the course. She said she really loves the interaction with the students in the classroom. So, we had a few challenges to work out, but she ended up

having a weekly synchronous video conference for the first half of the course. Then they met for their face-to-face intensive and they decided together to have the rest of the semester discussions on the discussion board in Fisher's Net/Blackboard. Through helping the faculty member and talking with students, I realized in this situation both faculty and students want some sort of physicality in their course, whether it is through a synchronous video chat, synchronous chat room or through the use of VoiceThreads in which students and faculty can comment to a question or primary source in five different ways, but two of the commenting options are to record voice alone or to use a webcam to record video and audio. These commenting options help bring a physicality to the asynchronous, online course. Responders can see and hear one another; this gives them a chance to learn more about their classmates. They can learn more about them than just their words. They can learn what each of their classmates look and sound like. They can see or hear the inflections/expressions on their classmates' faces. This gives the viewer a sense of the bodily presence, which is more satisfying to many people than reading simple text in the threaded discussions. I also realized in this situation both faculty and students were committed to having a personal relationship with one another and each was committed to teaching and learning in this quest for physicality in this virtual space, which helps to create greater social presence (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). Online learning becomes more satisfying or desirable if there is a strong social presence in online teaching and learning. Therefore, any way instructors or course designers can enhance the physicality in the community experience may enhance community, helping students to feel connected and thus have a high level of learning, as Rovai and his Classroom Community Scale uncovers.

Effects of gender on online theological education. This study also highlighted some aspects of how gender affects the wisdom community and theological

education and preaching. The Aquinas faculty does a great job of having the students examine gender in the midst of the wisdom community. The wisdom community has so many students coming from diverse faith traditions, sexes and backgrounds; this can lead to tension and conflict.

Rovai (2002) cites Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) when they identify two different communication styles in textual-based communication:

- Men's communication tends to be "the separate voice, that is the separate, autonomous, or independent path which is typical of the majority of men (and some women)."
- Women's communication tends to be "the connected voice, the relational, connected, or interdependent path, which reflects the majority of women (and some men)." (p. 207).

Rovai (2002) acknowledged: "The connected voice supports classroom community building while the separate voice does not" (p. 207). Therefore, these two varying communication styles can create tension and conflict, but for a wisdom community to blossom, participants need to be relational, connected or interdependent path.

One alum and several current students wrote about tensions and conflicts encountered in their wisdom community. Alum 19, who is a Protestant, ordained clergywoman, wondered in her comments how many of the priests in her wisdom community really felt about women being in the program. She even commented how she experienced sexism or, as she put it, at least paternalism. She experienced separating voices.

Current Student 23, who also is an ordained female from the Protestant tradition, recounts a story of separating voice and connecting voice when she wrote in a threaded discussion about her own faith tradition. She wrote how the founder broke away from the Presbyterian Church, which was not open to lay preaching, with his congregation; he was an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church, but he was later ordained by this new congregation of faith. Current Student 23 goes on to expound on the difference between the laity and clergy, but this founder

and other early founders agreed that preaching the Gospel and sharing the Good News was the responsibility of all the faithful to Christ . By recounting this foundational story, she is communicating to others how her denomination exemplifies a connected voice—relational and inviting of all to preach when it is necessary.

From the Catholic perspective, Current Student 03, who is a Catholic woman, wrote in a threaded discussion that preaching in the broadest sense is the responsibility of all the faithful, but she went on to feature *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*; this document addresses the question of preaching at the liturgy of the Eucharist which is known as the homily. As a lay, Catholic woman, she academically questions why preaching cannot be done by a woman, married people or parent, even if done by a deacon. She states for most Catholics they only encounter the Scriptures on Sunday at mass and so, the preaching should have multiple voices, not limited to a few, separating voices that do not have a wide variety of experiences. These connecting voices can really speak the Word of God to these “Sunday Catholics” and really move their hearts like no one else can and they can really be transformed into being Church.

Building upon this, Current Student 24, an ordained, Catholic male, commented in one of his forum posts how he valued feminist preaching. He described his transformation from being a separating voice into a connecting voice. He wrote how he went back to re-examine his view concerning the masculine prejudice in the Bible. He even recounted how St. Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin, inserted all these masculine references into the Bible. He stated how privileged he was to hear excellent female preachers, even from his own cohort. He ended by stating how female preaching moved his soul on a level like no man could. These connecting voices of female preaching transformed his soul so that now he seeks to be a connecting voice to his congregation and cohort.

This study highlights how gender causes problems and conflicts in the wisdom community. Earlier, Rovai (2002) highlighted how gender normally affects classroom community building. Men and women communicate differently, but each sex can learn to communicate to be either connecting and relational or separate and autonomous. These problems and conflicts can be resolved when communication is connecting, not separating, and realistic. “They are people who have come together to strive and to love... This is reality” (Ellsberg, 2008, p. 98).

Implications

Some of the implications resulting from this study were:

1. Aquinas Institute has greater understanding of students’ perspective regarding online wisdom community
2. Provides evidence of the nature and efficacy of hybrid and online learning to Aquinas, other seminaries, and schools who are moving to incorporate these into their curriculum.

Greater understanding of student’s perspective. Through this mixed study Aquinas Institute has greater understanding of the student’s perspective regarding the online wisdom community and the effects the wisdom community has on teaching and learning. Besides the usual end-of-semester course survey, Aquinas now has more comparative data to use. After graduation and five years after graduation the alumni are surveyed by Aquinas; it might be appropriate to add some of these questions from Rovai’s (2002) survey to the graduation and five years after graduation survey to gauge whether or not students are able to find their own wisdom community.

Although this study focused on Aquinas' D.Min. students and alumni, other research has revealed the experiences of students in widely differing contexts. For instance, a group of students' perspective on their experience in a job re-training online program was revealed in a recent case study by Dirkx and Dang (2009). "Larry" and 24 other workers laid off from their factory jobs entered a community college program to learn new skills with the goal of obtaining a new job. Larry and others had not been in a classroom in a very long time; so, when they were in class for the very first time, they were very scared. But as they worked hard the first several weeks of the program, they got over their initial shock of being laid off and met other folks in the same situation; they knew they were not alone in the journey. They got over their fear of failing and entered into the program beginning to find their voice and challenge one another and the instructors, too. One woman commented on another classmate's behavior by saying, "'That's Jack! But what can I say? You gotta love 'im. He's one of us.'" They looked out for each other, such as developing a calling tree so that each person had someone to call if they missed class for some reason" (Dirkx & Dang, 2009, p. 110). Dirkx and Dang noted that the students were starting to find their voice.

Dirkx and Dang realized that at the end of the 16-week program, participants felt "a sense of *communitas*," an intense sense of solidarity and togetherness. It represented a leveling of social status within the group, providing members with an opportunity to explore new social roles or self-identities. The cohort, as a container for this sense of *communitas*, significantly contributed to the workers' ability to entertain and engage a learner identity" (Dirkx & Dang, 2009, p. 111). Finally, Larry learned about a possible job opportunity, but the researchers reported that he felt conflicted because he would have to choose between the cohort and his new job. This crisis showed how this communal process changed his life. If this process changed

Larry's life, it would behoove Aquinas to understand more this transformation in the lives of alumni and current students.

Provides evidence. This study stresses the importance of quantitative and qualitative data in demonstrating the quality of a program, especially for the D.Min. program. If an institution can quantify and qualify how students are progressing through a program, then they can demonstrate the strength of the program. The strength of a program can only be measured if each course outcome is measurable and aligned with the degree program outcomes. This study highlights the principles set forth by the Aquinas faculty.

The principles cited by the faculty included a commitment to: (1) the creation of rapport among learners, (2) experimental learning, (3) self-directed learning, (4) integration, (5) communal learning, and (6) the cultivation of wisdom communities of learning. These principles are characteristics of good theological pedagogy in general of course, and are not unique to distance education and particularly the hybrid model that I have described... (Esselman, 2004, p. 162)

These principles need to be demonstrated so that they can be declared as achieved.

Many people question the strengths of hybrid and online programs, but this study demonstrated that if it is done well, a hybrid program can be highly valuable to D.Min. students. This finding is in line with research carried out in other contexts by the U.S. Department of Education and Moore and Kearsley. In 2009, the U.S. Department of Education did a meta-analysis and review of online learning and concluded, "Instruction combining online and face-to-face elements had a larger advantage relative to purely face-to-face instruction than did purely online instruction" (p. XV). Furthermore, Moore and Kearsley (2012) cited a case study of learning in a business program in New Zealand conducted by Gerbic (2009) in which online

discussions were added to the Auckland University's face-to-face classes comprised of New Zealand and Chinese students. The researchers examined the online discussions and student comments and concluded "there was evidence of 'deep' learning including asking questions to understand, relating theory to the real world, relating the discussion to the course..." (p. 93).

Recommendations

This study and literature review only scratch the surface of theological online learning. There could always be more research done. This study only examined one theological institution, but a broader study could be done to compare their use of learning communities or wisdom communities. The use of the Classroom Community Scale only gives an overall score with two subscales, connectedness and learning. If this scale were used at multiple institutions, this could be revealing to the broader theological community, as well as academia. Another interesting study would be to compare two sections of the same class, one section taught face-to-face and the other taught online.

Also, if a broader study were conducted, the study should ask the participants' denomination or whether or not they were ordained. One limitation of this study was not collecting participant's denomination and clerical status for this online survey. This information would have been helpful to know because Catholic lay women, as well as Catholic lay men, are limited where they can preach. According to the Canon Law governing the Catholic Church, Catholic lay women, as well lay men, are only allowed to preach in certain instances (specifically Canon 766) (United States Catholic Bishops, 2001). Normally, the right to preach is limited to the ordained within the context of the homily at Mass.

Gender is a very important topic among preachers and denominations, especially for Catholic preachers because this leads to the question "Who can preach?" and this is a very

loaded question that leads to answers of identity, authority, diversity and transformation. So, to conduct further research on gender in online learning environments and examine how or if gender makes an impact on the sense of community would be highly recommended.

Also, a broader study could be done to compare an institution's use of hybrid learning communities or wisdom communities vs. accepting students at any time. The current trend for Aquinas and other schools using the hybrid learning community/wisdom community model, also known as the cohort model, would be to accept students for the preaching program every other year. This way students will be going through the sequence of courses together. With them starting at the same time, they would work together as a cohort and hopefully form a learning community or wisdom community. Another enrollment model is to have students enroll each semester. This way, students will be going through the sequence of courses at their own pace and when the courses are offered by the institution. The students might get to know fellow students, but will have to be intentional to build their own community instead of the learning community/wisdom community being built into the very fabric of the program. The broader study could examine whether or not students benefit differentially from the cohort-based learning community/wisdom community model or the rolling admissions model.

Also, comparing two sections of the same class, one section taught face-to-face and the other taught totally online would be worthwhile. There are those skeptics out there who do not believe online education is appropriate for theological education. They have told me that we lose a sense of our humanity online. I certainly have met enough skeptics during my travels and time at Aquinas Institute. If the results of this type of study were conducted and were able to demonstrate online education had similar results to face-to-face classes, then this would open the door to more quality online courses at schools of theology.

Other studies could be conducted using the Classroom Community Scale across multiple theological institutions and compare the results. The Classroom Community Scale is a powerful survey tool and can be used to compare institutions. Those institutions that did well on the Classroom Survey Scale can be analyzed to see what they “are doing” right and other institutions can learn from their example.

One further recommendation is to investigate how technology can enhance the online wisdom community. As students commented earlier in this dissertation, Fisher’s Net/Blackboard was the backbone of the wisdom community when they were at a distance. Communication is vital in building community. Palloff and Pratt (2007) make the connection between communication and seeking community. The authors wisely state that rooted in communication is the need for community: “Many of our attempts to communicate are, at the core, attempts at community building—a search for the community that connects us” (p. 35). Technology changes all the time and these new technological enhancements could be examined to see how they enhance or distract from the wisdom community.

The final recommendation is for Aquinas Institute. As stated in the first chapter, the program’s pedagogy includes six principles that guide them through incorporating technology into the curriculum:

The principles cited by the faculty included a commitment to: (1) the creation of rapport among learners, (2) experimental learning, (3) self-directed learning, (4) integration, (5) communal learning, and (6) the cultivation of wisdom communities of learning. These principles are characteristics of good theological pedagogy in general of course, and are not unique to distance education and particularly the hybrid model that I have described, these principles suggest some

implications about the effective use of technology for teaching and learning.

(Esselman, 2004, p. 162)

The faculty relies largely on end-of-term papers and threaded discussions for their primary forms of assessment and these simple course assessments are not aligned with these six program principles. They have stated these principles are integral to the program's success, but they cannot demonstrate students are meeting these principles. If Aquinas could find tools to measure these principles, then they can further demonstrate what they already know that they have a quality program, but first they have to quantify these results. Unfortunately, numbers speak louder to accreditors than an institution's word that they have a quality program. As a starting point, the Classroom Community Scale could be used to demonstrate students are meeting the first principle of creating rapport among learners. The faculty should consider how to measure all essential program outcomes.

Final Thoughts

Each of the students and faculty participating in the online wisdom community has a faith in God and desire to preach for the salvation of souls. Recalling what Garrido said,

Can people really make a commitment to a group that they have just met? And, should we be calling it a covenant? It was such a magnificent, grand claim for frail, newborn friendships....

And, I'm not sure when it happened exactly, but suddenly it did seem like covenant might be the right word, and that the 2006 cohort was strong enough to bear the weight of it.

In your care and compassion and patience with [instructors] and each other, I have known something of the one truest covenant...(A. Garrido, personal communication, May 10, 2012)

Matthew 18: 20 states, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Every time the cohort met either during their face-to-face intensives or online, they gathered in Christ’s name, which fulfills the wisdom community model.

As the new cohort signed their covenant statement, they had no idea what was in store for them; they had to experience and learn things first. How can you teach someone something if they have not experienced it first? They had to experience the wisdom community first before the covenant statement lived in their heart. “But this is the last time that we’ll all be together to read it aloud. From hence forth, it will have to live in a different way, if it is to go on living at all. No longer on paper, but in our hearts. It will have to become a new kind of covenant” (A. Garrido, personal communication, May 10, 2012).

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Appendix A

CURRENT STUDENT'S SURVEY INSTRUMENT

1. I feel that students in this cohort care about each other.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
2. I feel that I am encouraged to ask questions.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
3. I feel connected to others in this cohort.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
4. I feel that it is hard to get help when I have a question.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
5. I do not feel a spirit of community.....(SA) (A) (N) (D)(SD)
6. I feel that I receive timely feedback.....(SA) (A) (N) (D)(SD)
7. I feel that this cohort is like a family.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
8. I feel uneasy exposing gaps in my understanding.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
9. I feel isolated in this cohort.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
10. I feel reluctant to speak openly.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
11. I trust others in this cohort.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
12. I feel that this program results in only modest learning.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
13. I feel that I can rely on others in this cohort.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
14. I feel that other students do not help me learn.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
15. I feel that members of this cohort depend on me.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
16. I feel that I am given ample opportunities to learn.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
17. I feel uncertain about others in this cohort.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
18. I feel that my educational needs are not being met.....(SA) (A) (N) (D)(SD)
19. I feel confident that others will support me.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
20. I feel that this program does not promote a desire to learn.....(SA) (A) (N) (D)(SD)

Current Student's Questions:

1. In the beginning of your course work, your cohort went through a covenant process and created a covenant statement. What does this covenant mean to you today?
2. How would you define wisdom community?
3. How are you impacted by engaging in the program's online wisdom community (learning community)?
4. How has your involvement in the program's wisdom community (learning community) affected your preaching?
5. According to the Dominican model of preaching, good preaching comes from community. How have you found community when you are not engaged in the online wisdom community?
6. How would you describe your doctoral experience of wisdom community?
7. What is one moment during your studies that will stay with you for the rest of your life?
8. What actions do you intend to take in your future congregations/communities to create a "wisdom community" as described in Question 2? Please give examples and strategies.
9. How important has Blackboard/Fisher's Net been to your experience of wisdom community in the program? (very important) (important) (helpful) (small impact) (irrelevant/no impact)
10. How has Blackboard/Fisher's Net enhanced your wisdom community?
11. Are there any specific ways Blackboard/Fisher's Net was used that enhanced the wisdom community? Please explain?

OPTIONAL FOLLOW UP:

I am interested in analyzing online discussion board conversations from your courses at Aquinas, to better understand the wisdom community.

If you are willing to have me analyze your contributions to the discussion board, I'll need to know your name.

Do you give consent for me to analyze your contributions to the discussion board?

_____ Yes _____ No

If so, please type your name here: _____

Appendix B

ALUMNI SURVEY INSTRUMENT

1. I feel that students in my cohort cared about each other.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
2. I felt that I was encouraged to ask questions.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
3. I feel connected to others in my cohort.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
4. I feel that it was hard to get help when I had a question.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
5. I did not feel a spirit of community.....(SA) (A) (N) (D)(SD)
6. I feel that I received timely feedback.....(SA) (A) (N) (D)(SD)
7. I feel that this cohort was like a family.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
8. I feel uneasy exposing gaps in my understanding.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
9. I feel isolated in my cohort.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
10. I feel reluctant to speak openly.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
11. I trusted others in my cohort.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
12. I feel that this program resulted in only modest learning.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
13. I feel that I could rely on others in my cohort.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
14. I feel that other students did not help me learn.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
15. I feel that members of my cohort depended on me.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
16. I feel that I was given ample opportunities to learn.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
17. I feel uncertain about others in my cohort.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
18. I feel that my educational needs were not met.....(SA) (A) (N) (D)(SD)
19. I feel confident that others supported me.....(SA) (A) (N) (D) (SD)
20. I feel that this program did not promote a desire to learn.....(SA) (A) (N) (D)(SD)

Alumni Questions:

1. In the beginning of your course work, your cohort went through a covenant process and created a covenant statement. What does this covenant mean to you today?
2. How would you define wisdom community?
3. How have been impacted by engaging in the program's online wisdom community (learning community)?
4. How has your involvement in the program's wisdom community affected your preaching?
5. According to the Dominican model of preaching, good preaching comes from community. How have you found community when you are not engaged in the online wisdom community?
6. How would you describe your experience of wisdom community?
7. How important was Blackboard/Fisher's Net to your experience of wisdom community in the program? (very important) (important) (helpful) (small impact) (irrelevant/no impact)
8. How did Blackboard/Fisher's Net enhance your wisdom community while you were at Aquinas?
9. Are there any specific ways Blackboard/Fisher's Net was used that enhanced the wisdom community while you were at Aquinas? Please explain?
10. How has your experience of wisdom community impacted you? Please give some examples.
11. What is one moment during your studies that will stay with you for the rest of your life?
12. Since you graduated, you are not engaged in the program's wisdom community. How have you found community?
13. What actions have you tried to make your current community more of a "wisdom community" as described in Question 2?
14. What challenges/strategies have you faced in bringing wisdom community to your current community? Please share your story.
15. If you have been able to implement wisdom community into your present community, how has that made the community more meaningful?

OPTIONAL FOLLOW UP:

I am interested in analyzing online discussion board conversations from your courses at Aquinas, to better understand the wisdom community.

If you are willing to have me analyze your contributions to the discussion board, I'll need to know your name.

Do you give consent for me to analyze your contributions to the discussion board?

_____ Yes _____ No

If so, please type your name here: _____

Appendix C

Covenant Statements

Living Covenant of the 2004 Doctor of Ministry in Preaching Cohort

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, Creator of the universe.

In response to You, Father, who speaks creation into being, we pledge to You and one another to surrender ourselves to the Mystery that births this community called to proclaim the Word.

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, Redeemer of the World.

In response to You, Christ, Word made flesh, we pledge to You and one another to live the paschal mystery—forgiving, reconciling, and serving as we are graced.

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, Sustainer of our being.

In response to You, Holy Spirit, whose gift of tongues of fire unites all diversity, we pledge to care for each other trusting the self-giving, loving kindness that You reveal and by which You shape us.

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, Holy Trinity of Love.

We seek to grow together in a spirit of faithful accountability, openness, mutual trust, and prayerful encouragement.

We place our trust in You, God, whose grace is the source of our hope and the cause of our joy, knowing that our journey will not be without confusion, risk, and trials.

We offer this covenant and our lives to You, Lord, asking that You bless this community of preachers and send us anew as sacred preaching to the world.

Amen.

2006 Doctorate of Ministry Preaching Cohort Covenant Statement

WE THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY IN PREACHING COHORT OF 2006 are a diverse group of ordained and non-ordained men and women from the North, South, East, and West, whom God has called into community at this time in our lives to study, to learn, and to live as *Sacra Praedicatio* in a multicultural church and society.

We covenant together:

- to share and receive the unique gifts with which we have been blessed with honest openness, humility, and vulnerable generosity.
- to receive the blessing of sacred space, attending to one another in truthful transparency, affirming and supporting each other with charity.
- to temper one another in loving accountability and to engage in dialogue with integrity.
- to celebrate the gift of diversity, to listen with respect and acceptance, and to be open to the possibilities for growth that our “otherness” is offering to us in our ministries, our relationships, and our preaching.
- to share the gift of learning, diligently applying ourselves to the sacred task of study with intentional commitment to enhance each other’s growth in mutual collaboration, to sustain academic excellence to our fullest measure, and to encourage one another through risks and challenges.
- to pray diligently for one another and for our communities and congregations, in thanksgiving for the blessings offered to us in this gift of God’s call to us as a cohort.

HOLY GOD, open our eyes to your wisdom as we share the gifts you have so generously bestowed upon us that we may preach Gospel, and be Gospel to one another and to your people, glorifying you. Merciful Shepherd, open our hearts to your grace that we may love one another as you have loved us. *Amen.*

2008 Doctorate of Ministry Preaching Cohort Covenant Statement

WE THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY IN PREACHING COHORT OF 2008 recognize that God has called us together as preachers, diverse but nevertheless united, to embrace the task of responding deeply to God's voice within us. We further recognize that our very coming together provides a witness to the wideness and inclusivity of God's people, and we affirm our desire to embrace a passion for the ministry of the Word within ourselves, in our communities, and in the world.

Responding to God's Spirit, therefore, we covenant with one another to create a safe environment to deepen the preaching charism within ourselves so that the transformative power of God can flourish. As a group, staying faithful to our purpose with the help of the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to this mission as it is made incarnate in our shared human experience.

We will accomplish these goals while respecting each voice and by listening to and challenging one another with charity and humor. We will study reflectively—engaging the curriculum with a concern for mutual accountability and for gratefully using the wisdom of our leaders as they shepherd us.

As we undertake this journey, we pledge that we will not limit these objectives and practices to our scholarly endeavors but that we also will apply them to our lives. Together, we accept the challenge, cost, joy, and blessing of this graced call, as we work toward manifesting a vision of preaching that is prophetic, ecumenical, inclusive, vibrant, and transformative.