



The Four Truths that (should) Shape Adult Education in the Church

1. We have been commanded by God to be in study of His Word – no matter what our age. (Matt. 28:18-20; 2 Tim. 3:14-17; Deut. 6:4-9; Psalm 78:1-8; Acts 2:42; Eph. 4:11-16...)

Therefore: 8-10% adult participation in the typical LCMS congregation should be unacceptable to church leaders.

2. The church is an “open system” – that is, it is influenced by factors outside of the church doors.

Therefore: One must adapt how we teach adults to better respond to the variables that we know influence how adults learn and why they participate...while still remaining true to the mission of the church. What is true of the characteristics of all adult learners is true of the adults in the church.

3. Adults have a different approach to learning than children. Malcolm Knowles identified 5 unique characteristics –

- a. They are self-directed
- b. They have a reservoir of experiences that they draw upon to help them learn.
- c. They learn best when they want to and when what they learn is related to their current life situations.
- d. Application to life is crucial, adults are concerned with the usefulness of what they are about to learn.
- e. Adults can only learn what is on their level of development.

Therefore: Adult education must consider an adult’s motivation and learning must be aimed at relevance and immediate applicability.

4. Cyril Houle found that adults are motivated from three possible orientations – and that most adults have one prime motivator –

- a. Learning orientation – they just like to learn and take any opportunity to do so.
- b. Activity orientation – they like being in a social setting – choice of learning is based upon the degree of human interaction available.
- c. Goal orientation – they use education to achieve personal objectives. Houle and subsequent researchers feel that Goal Oriented Learners are the largest single population – comprising a plurality of adult learners.

Therefore: Adult learning experiences should clearly state the overall goals for the learning experience...those with Learning orientations will be attracted regardless; classes should be designed to allow interaction (formal and informal) between learners to accommodate those with an Activity orientation; and Goal Oriented Learners need clarity regarding the desired outcome from the class – and those outcomes must align with their own perceived needs.