CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY AND NEIGHBORLINESSE: 
A WESLEYAN-PENTECOSTAL MINISTRY PARADIGM 
FOR THE MULTI-FAITH CONTEXT

Pentecostal Theological Seminary
Sang-Ehil Han

I. Project Activities
To describe it in a nutshell, this particular project sought to provide formal opportunities for dialogue among the faculty, students, alumni (i.e. ministry practitioners in various places) of Pentecostal Theological Seminary (PTS) to discern together and rightly Christian practices of hospitality and neighborliness as we envisage and/or engage variegated issues and challenges associated with the present ministry context of religious pluralism. The invitation to dialogue was also extended to our colleagues at the neighboring institution, Lee University, as well as their students. As the project sought to facilitate dialogues, the principle concerns at hand were best ministry practices and curricular implications.

On one hand, the project’s focus was placed on mapping out the issues and challenges that the de facto reality of religious pluralism presents while discerning and encouraging best ministry practices in response to them. On the other hand, the project also sought to instigate and stimulate dialogical assessment on the effectiveness of PTS curriculum in preparing ministry practitioners both for the present and the future for the tasks before them. In pursuing the project, the participants were encouraged to approach the theme of Christian hospitality and neighborliness from what they understood to be particularly characteristic of the Wesleyan-Pentecostal theology of ministry. The project activities were phased in three periods:

A. Pre-Conference: Informal Faculty Dialogues and Planning for the Conference
B. Conference: Presentations, Panel Discussions, Open Forums, Curricula Consultation
C. Post-Conference: Sustaining the Progress and Cultivating the Future

From the start, one of the more important goals for the project was to create an open space that would allow heart-felt dialogues on the theme of Christian hospitality in the
context of religious pluralism. Keeping this in mind, the project began with the pre-conference activities that included a couple of informal conversations among the PTS faculty who showed interest in the project. Moreover, as the pre-conference activity went on, the project made available copies of Christine Pohl’s book, Making Room, to all ranked and adjunct faculty in order to facilitate pre-conference dialogues among them. The project has also intentionally sought to get students involved throughout the duration of the project. Several students were involved from the beginning as we planned and prepared together for the conference. Student participation in the entire process of the project would turn out to be quite significant.

There were also informal conversations with some PTS alumni as we sought to encourage their participation in the dialogue. At the time of hosting the conference, the Office of Institutional Advancement at PTS worked with the project in sending out an invitation to all alumni and took advantage of the opportunity to plan some alumni activities around the conference. After several months of pre-conference activities, the project hosted a three-day conference on campus, April 17–19, 2012. The conference activities included eight paper presentations, one faculty consultation on curricular implications, and two panel discussions with subsequent open forums for all conference participants.

For the conference, various faculty members from PTS and Lee University gave presentations, focusing on the topics listed below:

- **Christian Hospitality and Neighborliness in a MultiFaith Context:**
  *Toward a Wesleyan-Pentecostal Paradigm*
- **Old Testament Foundations for a Wesleyan-Pentecostal Theology of Hospitality**
- **Congregational Hospitality: Developing a Missional, Pentecostal Perspective**
- **Pursuing Hospitality with Neighbors of Other Faiths:**
  *A Wesleyan-Pentecostal Theology for Ministry in a Multi-Faith World*
- **Social Ethics and Hospitality**
- **The Cosmopolitanism of Divine Welcome:**
  *The Hospitality of God, Justice, and the Other*
- **Hospitality in the Johannine Literature—Its Extent and Limits**
  *A Wesleyan Pentecostal Engagement*
- **Setting a Hospitable yet Charged Table**
In addition, there were two open forums held in conjunction with panel discussions. The first forum began with testimonial sharing by four panelists—two missionary educators, a hospital chaplain, and a former military chaplain. Their stories were meant to open up and catalyze an engaging discussion among all conference participants. The second forum began with a group of student panelists sharing their experiences of hospitality and neighborliness in the midst of religious pluralism. As they went on to articulate their stories, they have also brought up critical questions and concerns about what it means and/or how to be hospitable and neighborly as a Christian in light of the increasing trend of religious pluralism amongst us. Incidentally, for the younger students among them, the 9/11 event with all of its implications on religious pluralism was one of the most, if not the most, defining moment in their life journey as a Christian growing up in the U.S.

Another significant conference activity was the faculty consultation held over a formal luncheon, to which several representatives from students and alumni, as well as other ministry leaders, were invited to reflect and discern together curricula implications of the conference. This exercise of communal discernment was intended to bridge theological education with ministry praxis, acknowledging what takes place in theological education directly affects the effectiveness of ministry practices in our churches. The significance of this project, and all of its activities, hence lies in the fact that the present PTS curriculum and the theological education it provides should assess its effectiveness in preparing students for best pastoral practices in the multi-faith ministry context.

II. Learning through the Project

Insofar as the overall goal of the project was to provide an open space for dialogue among the PTS faculty, students, and other ministry practitioners—alumni or otherwise, the project was quite successful. What has particularly helped in this regard was an unanticipated opportunity to conjoin the project with the PTS annual event, the Ministers’ Week Conference. As a result, PTS adopted the project and its theme, Christian Hospitality and Neighborliness: A Wesleyan-Pentecostal Ministry Paradigm for the Multi-Faith Context, for the 2012 PTS Ministers’ Week conference. This allowed access to PTS resources (personnel, facilities, and financial) to add to what was already being funded by the project grant. This made it possible for the project to include additional activities (e.g., more plenary sessions and open forums, and an ice cream social for informal conversations) that allowed greater diversity and multiplicity of voices represented throughout the conference.
To speak on the conference activities, the aforementioned plenary sessions were helpful in mapping out Wesleyan-Pentecostal approaches to cultivate Christian hospitality and neighborliness in the multi-faith ministry context. In particular, adding the term, “neighborliness”, to the conference theme alongside “Christian hospitality” provoked healthy discussions and discernment on avoiding regrettable presumptions that often result in relegating the people of different faiths as “others.” As the conference went on, it became clear that Christian hospitality, when and if understood rightly, should carry with it the ideas embedded in what and how one can be neighborly with the people of different faiths.

The panel discussions with subsequent open forums proved to be especially helpful. In particular, the second panel discussion was helpful as the faculty and other conference guests listened attentively to what the selected students had to say about their experiences with people of different faiths in various settings. The stories they shared gave us glimpses of their world of thoughts and perceptions on critical issues and challenges that the de facto reality of religious pluralism presents. For example, a powerful moment came when one female student shared what went through her mind when the 9/11 event took place. She reflected on what it all meant for her at the time as a teenage girl growing up in America. Then, she further commented how perplexed she was as a Christian when she saw news reports of the street celebrations of many Americans (many of her Christian friends among them) at the killing of Osama bin Laden.

Another panelist recounted her experience with a Jewish family whose profound display of hospitality had a lasting impact on her attitudinal disposition toward the people of different faiths. As she went through a seminary education, she was struggling both financially and emotionally. Then, this particular Jewish family took her in and paid her generously as she babysat for their children. Besides their financial generosity, they have received her as a part of their family as they entrusted her with the responsibility to provide care for their children—including the spiritual wellbeing of their children, e.g., teaching them the stories in the Old Testament. This particular experience with the Jewish family has not only affected her attitudinal disposition toward the people of non-Christian faiths but also raised for her a critical question if she could have done the same, displaying such a profound trust in a person of another faith and welcome her/him as a family.
These and other stories that students shared during the conference were indeed quite provocative and inspiring. A substantial portion of great success that this conference had has to do with the student involvement at various levels. With the provision of proper guidelines and a clear direction, students can surprise us in such powerful and unexpected ways making substantial contributions toward a great learning experience for the whole community.

The faculty luncheon that focused particularly on the curricular implications of the conference was also helpful as the faculty listened to one another and other invited guests (conference speakers, panelists, chaplains, and other church leaders) around the table and discussed how the PTS curriculum can reflect the learning that has taken place during the conference. To begin with, the consultation has helped the faculty community to come together and share with one another in what specific and significant ways we already address the critical issues and concerns at hand in our present curriculum. The conversation had also surfaced some constructive ways to revitalize, if not revise, our courses in response to the concerns and insights shared during the conference. Another related measure taken, partly due to the faculty consultation, is the addition of a pilot course (one hour credit) on Christian hospitality in our fall schedule of courses.

A significant feature of this consultation was the facilitation of a dialogue between the PTS faculty and the ministry practitioners in local churches. The consultation provided an opportunity for the faculty to hear the concerns and wants expressed by ministry practitioners on where and how theological education really matters in preparing prospective ministry practitioners for best pastoral practices in the multi-faith context. This prompted a further dialogue about some concrete steps that the faculty might need to consider in implementing what we learned into the PTS curriculum.

We should also note, however, a few things about the project (and the conference) that did not work well. To begin with, despite the effort to make clear that the conference’s theme on Christian hospitality and neighborliness was to be discussed with a particular attention to religious pluralism as a pervasive, and hence critical, reality of the contemporary ministry context, some conversations during the conference seemed to deviate from the course. For instance, some would address the theme of Christian hospitality and neighborliness primarily in association with what would count as effective strategy for mission and evangelism. From the outset, it was made clear that the conference was not purposed to provide a venue for inter-religious dialogues.
However, what was equally made clear from the beginning was the fact that the focus on “pastoral practices” within the context of religious pluralism was not meant to consider hospitable and neighborly actions we envision as mere strategies and/or tools for effective evangelism among the people of “other” faiths.

If not erring in this direction, at other times, conversations would lean toward generalizing what Christian hospitality and neighborliness entail. The upshot of this was to conflate Christian hospitality and neighborliness with the broad social and ethical responsibilities to engage the marginalized in society—e.g., the poor, the oppressed, and/or the ethnic other. These instances showed the lack of (if not, the need for) a more precise and direct deliberation on the contextual dynamics of religious pluralism and the challenges they present for contemporary ministry practitioners.

III. Post-Project Considerations
The conference that the project funded has impacted the PTS community in a significant way. It has stirred up further dialogues among the faculty, students, and alumni. The conference had brought not only a rewarding visibility to the project but also an invigorating impetus for continuing dialogues on best ministry practices in the pluralistic context. Cultivating the progress made beyond the project, however, would require ensuing actions that would bring further attention to the issues raised and insights shared during the conference. For this reason, sustaining and furthering the progress made was an afterthought but a vital concern for the eventual success of the project since inception.

A tangible way that the project sought to provide a lasting impact was the effort to publish the presentations given at the conference. As the conference program was being put together, the speakers were advised not only to present their papers but also to interact with the audience afterwards in order to reflect significant questions and insights raised onto the revision of their papers for a possible publication later. Since the conference, the presenters have followed the guidelines and submitted their papers for publication. The project has secured a publisher and plans to produce a book within next few months with the addition of a couple of chapters that will help provide further structure and substance to the entire work.

Another concrete step to further the project’s objectives is to address the need for curriculum revision at PTS. This calls for not only adding a course or two on Christian hospitality but also re-assessing signature courses to ensure that they address the
critical concerns in contemporary ministry practices, i.e., the cultivation of Christian hospitality and neighborliness in the pluralistic religious context. To a great extent, the intention behind getting several PTS faculty members involved in presenting papers at the conference had to do with the project’s anticipated goal to address the need for curriculum revision at PTS.

Lastly, in order to address the aforementioned deficiencies of the project, an effort will be made to apply for other grants, e.g., the Wabash program for consultants, to further the conversation and learning in this regard. If accepted, the Wabash program would provide a grant that would help defray the expenses of the consultant with minimal cost to PTS community. The project has certainly helped to provide a great stride in advancing the Christian spirit of hospitality and neighborliness in ministering among the people of different faiths, but the progress made unveiled how much more work still remains.