Emmaus Encounters: Building Community on the Road, Hawaii, 2022
A Case Study on Teaching Future Ministers How to Build Community

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Introduction

Andover Newton Seminary became an embedded unit of Yale Divinity School (YDS) in 2017. Doing so required Andover Newton to move its educational program from one context to another. Some dimensions of its curriculum were easier to move than others. Faculty members who came from Andover Newton to teach at YDS were largely well-received, especially by students seeking formation for ministry in faith communities. Worship and fellowship took shape quickly and, barring the upheaval all communities weathered during the COVID-19 pandemic, the community found itself able to talk about very difficult subjects, including gender ("Me Too") and racial reckoning (Black Lives Matter), more quickly than those coordinating the move might have dared hope.

One program that did not translate well to YDS was called, in Andover Newton's freestanding iteration, "Border-Crossing Immersion." The school had a long history of offering travel seminars that students found transformational. Faculty members led groups to China, India, Ghana, the US-Mexico border, and Nicaragua; students came back changed. The program became a curriculum-wide requirement in 2007, and the school introduced local Border-Crossings to the mix, working with populations previously unfamiliar to students. As for where Border-Crossing fit into the faculty's understanding of goals for student learning, it was clear that Border-Crossing's primary objective was to teach students about social justice.

Even before Andover Newton relocated to New Haven and affiliated with Yale, the program was under strain that surely would have necessitated revision in the very near future. First, built into the program were certain assumptions about who Andover Newton students were. To tell students that they must cross a border to encounter difference was to suggest that they all came from the same background, a background that was shaped by whiteness and all the privileges built into whiteness. This assumption, never uttered aloud, was incorrect and harmful in its incorrectness.

Second, the program suggested that the best way to learn about social justice was to learn about "the other" by becoming "the other." Pedagogically, it is altogether possible that students learned a great deal by experiencing disorientation and needing to reorient themselves (this form of teaching and learning will be discussed in the next section). That said, to suggest that social justice can be taught by instrumentalizing a foreign community, using it as a learning tool, is problematic at best. Using another person or a community to benefit the one who already holds privilege sets up an irreconcilable gap between the teaching method and the hopes the teacher has for the learner.

Finally – and here is the good news – Border-Crossing Immersion's side effects were ultimately its most important asset. Students and faculty members who participated in them bonded with one another and with their various hosts around the world. They overcame adversity together and were able to sustain difficult conversations due to their sense of shared purpose. Ultimately, through investigation and deep discernment, educational leaders at Andover Newton at YDS came to understand that travel seminars are incredibly valuable, especially now, today. But their value lies in their possibilities for teaching students how to build community. By moving the side benefit to the center, Andover Newton discovered that a travel seminar built expressly to focus on community building is directly relevant to preparing tomorrow's faith community leaders. This article will describe how a travel seminar can provide future ministers with the tools, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to effectively bring people together for meaningful envisioning together: an old value – community building – learned in a new way.

Religious leaders today must help communities make sense of a wide range of concerns they have about our world and its future. They seek to bring people together around difficult topics to dream of new directions, yet even persuading people to gather is a challenge today – people are anxious, and differences loom large. Even before COVID-19 shut down in-person gatherings, faith communities were struggling to stay together over growing political, generational, ethical, and racial divides. How can a religious leader build community that enables meaningful conversation and discernment as to what their faith is calling them to be and do?

Individuals who worry about the climate crisis, wars, cultural upheavals, disease, and widespread hopelessness are rational to worry. Gathering in the context of the practice of faith should also be considered a rational response to that worry. To fulfill this societal expectation of faith communities, religious leaders must learn how to build communities strong enough to stay together amidst disagreement, foster dialogue despite difficult topics, and infuse dialogue about the most challenging issues our world is facing with the wisdom we find in faith traditions.

The question for seminary leaders, therefore, is this: How do we teach students to build life-giving community? The simplest answer might be, "We build it, and then reflect on it; and build it up some more." Yet the theological curriculum has worked so hard to establish itself as a viable academic endeavor that some of the structures through which community can be built, and then reflected upon theologically, have fallen away. Today's theological educators must rebuild them.

Review of Relevant Literature

In his book *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, large-group dynamics theorist Peter Block writes that associational life in communities is both an end and a means.[1] It is an end, in that communal leaders consider cohesion and strong identity to be worth striving for as an inherent good. It is a means, in that cohesive communities can bring about social change for the better. Any person who endured social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic can tell you that they came to understand the importance of community in new ways, and now is the time to harness that learning, rather than continuing to assume that building community is as simple – and learnable through osmosis – as it ever was. Block writes that the effectiveness tomorrow's leaders will result from their capacity to convene.[2] Convening is the outward action of the community-builder, and in a diverse and complex society, none of us was born knowing how to do it.
The creation of a new kind of travel seminar with the educational purpose of teaching future ministers how to build community requires educators, as Block writes, to "treat as important many things we thought were incidental."[3] Rather than skim over the surface of what a travel seminar might do to teach community building, it is important to take the question down to its essentials rather than operate on assumptions about what community is, why ministerial leaders ought to build it, and how they might do so well. The following questions will guide that deconstruction that predicates reconstruction.

What is Community Building?

Block writes that connectedness is not the same as belonging.[4] Human beings have never been as interconnected as they are now due to the wonders of technology, yet their sense of meaningful, mutual, life-giving relationships might never have been so thin. The options that exist for gathering are so numerous as to overwhelm the one charged with convening people. Block writes that selecting options must now begin with the question, "How are we going to be when we gather together?"[5]

Answering that question relies on both intentionality and a goal orientation often looked down upon in religious circles. "We come together to worship God," or "We come together to build the Kingdom" are of course reasons in themselves to get together. But leaders must also think strategically about gathering. Block writes that social fabric is not woven accidentally; rather, "[W]e choose the people and the conversation that will produce the accountability to build relatedness, structure belonging, and move the action forward."[6] Perhaps that relatedness, structure, and action will happen organically, but the leader must be able to curate such experiences through convening people skillfully. Someone must teach those skills.

Although one would think the expectations Block places upon the skillful convener-as-leader are very high, he argues that healthy communities are not codependent with their leaders. He in fact describes dependence on leaders as a mark of a sick system, or a "retributive context."[7] He believes that the formation of citizens takes place through leaders convening people well and pointing them toward possibilities rather than encouraging them to ruminate on problems. He writes that "citizen" is the opposite of "consumer" or "client."[8] Those who depend on their leaders expect to be treated like clients, and they forfeit the growth in them and their communities that comes from intentional community building through coming together. Here is the value-added proposition Block makes: "Every time we gather becomes a model for the future we want to create."[9]

Where Block focuses on building community within populations, convening those in the leader's care to imagine a new world together, others write about connecting beyond communities. In his *Joining God in the Great Unraveling*,[10] scholar on the emergent church Alan Roxburgh writes about previously insular faith communities getting out into their neighborhoods. Rather than expecting the wider community to come into the sanctuary, the new way of thinking about church Roxburgh describes relates to coming to understand the deeply held hopes and dreaded fears of those in the church's neighborhood.He writes that getting into the community and forming relationships with those around us

is the only way that human communities will find the new hope they need when old structures – like the conventional Christian congregation – falls away. Those from the congregation do not bring God into the neighborhoods, but rather they follow God, who is the primary agent,[11] already presenting and bringing about transformation all around us. Roxburgh writes, "We need simple practices that unbind us from the Siren song of 'it's all falling apart' to help us see where the Spirit is fermenting God's future right in our neighborhoods."[12]

How Is Community Building Taught?

A variety of scholars from different fields offer advice as to how to teach community building, and all pay special attention to the "how" of educating. To transmit information about community building without building community among learners would, of course, seem ironic and awkward. Imagine a course on community building in which none of the teachers nor learners seemed to care about one another? That said, a sense of community among learners is not a by-product, according to those who write about educating community-builders, but it is the primary and foundational. Beyond that one common thread, one also finds variety in approaches among authors who write about teaching learners how to build community.

Posing questions. Theological educator Letty Russell relied on travel seminars as an important teaching tool as a member of the Yale Divinity School faculty. She wrote that Christian theology is all about asking questions: seeking to understand the world (logos) in the mind of God (theo).[13] She describes education as partnership in learning. She points to education-for-liberation pioneer Paolo Freire's model of teaching through posing questions as the most effective way to teach theology. She argues in *The Future of Partnership* that seminaries must model teamwork and teach students how to be good partners.

The keenly aware small group. Block echoes Russell's thoughts when he writes that, if we want to change a community, we have to change the conversation.[14] He argues that the small group is where transformation in a community starts: "the small group is the unit of transformation and the container of the experience of belonging."[15] Block describes these essential building blocks for a small group that can bring about transformation by engaging in life-giving conversation:

1. Accountability and commitment
2. Learning from one another
3. Bias toward the future
4. Intentionality regarding how individuals in the small group engage one another.[16]

Acknowledgement that all need transformation. Ann Curry-Stevens is an education scholar who writes about education for those with privilege.[17] Whereas many educational models seek to provide space for those who come to the learning environment with certain deficits related to their resources, Curry-Stevens emphasizes that students learn better when all are treated as though they have some privilege, some disadvantages, and promise for change. Her writing has important implications for travel seminars as an instructional strategy, in that everyone is out of their element when traveling, taking away the home-team advantage from any one learner.

Curry-Stevens refers to the pioneering work of Jack Mezirow, who wrote about education for transformation and how it begins with a disorienting dilemma and then continues as students reorient themselves. Mezirow does not take into account, writes Curry-Stevens, that everyone – not just the comfortable – are privileged in some part of their lives. When classrooms of learners sort themselves into categories of "oppressed" versus "oppressor," the possibilities for building community are limited from the start.

Curry-Stevens argues that education for the privileged calls on all to embrace confidence-shaking and confidence-building activities without reference to whose confidence started in what position. She writes that transformational education for the privileged is important to the whole of society, so finding educational options that make such transformation possible – rather than withholding transformation in an attempt to level the playing field – has widespread benefits for whole communities.

Following God into the neighborhood. As mentioned previously, Alan Roxburgh writes about the emerging church. He advocates connecting with neighborhoods as a first step for building or rebuilding community. He writes that engaging communities comes with risk, and it leads to a sense of relationship and groundedness through experience that cannot be achieved any other way.[18] When a community connects with its neighborhood, participants empty themselves of the power one finds when in their comfortable space.[19] This act of letting go of comfort simultaneously melts away assumptions, and it causes a person to give themselves over to God. "Knowing is ultimately about revelation," writes Roxburgh.[20] Knowledge is not to be conquered, it is to be revealed by God.

Dialogue. Education scholar Peter Rule writes that dialogue is "a socially situated practice that is linked to a transformative agenda."[21] Although often referenced in casual conversation as an inherently positive form of human engagement, dialogue has its critics among educators. Rule writes that dialogical pedagogies' critics say its results are not measurable, and that power inequality causes dialogue to break down into manipulation. Some question whether dialogue can lead to new understandings, given how different people are from one another.

> Within a liberal paradigm, with its emphasis on the individual as the source of meaning and value, dialogue could be divorced from a "liberative praxis" and retained in the context of interpersonal classroom relationships. [A post-modern critique] would interrogate the assumptions about language and communication that underpin dialogue: the possibility of reaching common, stable meanings when language is, in post-structuralist terms, an infinite play of signs that endlessly defers meaning.[22]

In other words, Rule writes that critics say dialogue can become circular quickly without participants in it changing in any deep way. Rule, however, disagrees. He writes that dialogue requires a mutual commitment to learn from one another, and such a commitment can lead to continual breakthroughs among dialogue partners who come to understand themselves better as they learn about each other.

Whereas Peter Block writes that the small group is the primary unit of community, Rule drills down deeper to the one-on-one dialogue. "What is at stake in this dialogue is not only the individual project participant but also the nature of the educational project itself and, in microcosmic form, the broader society in which it is situated."[23] Rule refers to the kind of learning that can take place in dialogue as "diacognition," and he describes it as both a means and an end to further learning about self and other.[24]

Partnership. Letty Russell writes that partnership is one way in which we build community, and the creation of a partnership teaches community building. Russell writes that partnership, and becoming a true partner, is a way in which leaders learn to build community. She names the following attributes of a partnership as its essential ingredients:

1. Commitment that involves responsibility, vulnerability, and trust.
2. Common struggle involving risk and growth in pursuit of a goal.
3. Contextuality that takes into consideration a wider array of relationships and makes room for corrective feedback when values do not overlap.[25]

She writes that partnerships include synergy, serendipity, and sharing that leads to an increase in knowledge and wisdom for all.[26] The kind of learning about community building made possible through partnership is as different from learning alone as the difference between an object and an animal. Russell writes, "Partnership is always growing and dying, for it is a human interrelationship that is never static."[27]

What Challenges, Perennial and Emerging, Complicate Building Community?

Given that community building is largely assumed to be a good thing to do, one wonders why doing it is difficult for leaders. Part of the challenge lies in widespread denial of how power dynamics affect communities coming together. Another difficulty lays in the demand that all involved in building community must be ready to engage in mutual servanthood, where everyone gives something up in order to gain something more. To teach tomorrow's leaders how to build community, those learners must be prepared for challenges, rather than underestimating the steepness of the climb or losing hope in the face of it.

Russell acknowledges the difficulty of building the partnerships that lead to building community, and to teaching community building, when she writes, "Partnership as a meaningless platitude is to be seen all around us. Women have been unequal partners [to men] for centuries." Russell therefore names the fact that the term "partners" has long been used not to describe a pairing of equals, but as a euphemism for the one-way service of a helpmeet to the one who is helped.[28] Russell cofounded an organization called Partners in Mission that will be described later in this article. She names that calling first- and third-world churches "partners" did not change the dynamics of financial control between them.[29]

In addition to the challenge of building community amidst power inequalities, Peter Block names another obstacle: the way in which individuals who have their own issues to work on tend to play them out in the community rather than taking responsibility for resolving them. Block writes specifically about projection, whereby participants in a community attribute their own poor qualities to others rather than facing them.[30] He also names the tendency to label others, rather than truly get to know them, as an obstacle to building community.[31]

In writing about education for the privileged, Curry-Stevens writes that another challenge in building community relates to identity, and how identities fluctuate depending on the context in which an individual is located. Whether a person is privileged or marginalized depends on who is around them.[32] For instance, in a setting like an Ivy League graduate school, a student who is a person of color might experience discrimination and oppression from those who represent dominant groups, but that same person might themselves be viewed as dominant in a setting where others are less educated or culturally influential. Building community among those who are different from each other can be difficult, but doing so amidst fluctuating identities is harder still.

In an article about the benefits of travel for leveling playing fields in building community, Alun Morgan writes that travel helps communities to set aside assumptions about who has and does not have power, who is to be assigned what label, and who might be understood as privileged or underprivileged. He writes, "[O]veremphasizing cultural Otherness over commonality runs the risk of exoticizing, romanticizing, essentializing, and superficializing the lived experience of people encountered through travel which is more likely to reify than transform existing frames of mind and consequent power asymmetries."[33] Group travel, when carried out thoughtfully, blurs frames of mind within groups and among groups and those they encounter on the road.

How Might Travel Catalyze Learning?

Travel in and of itself does not bring about transformation in learners, but the space it creates is conducive to lowering barriers and, therefore, building community. Morgan describes three qualities that make travel seminars an ideal setting for discovery regarding self and others. First, he notes that travel is inherently multidisciplinary.[34] Encountering a new setting calls all senses to alertness: sounds, smells, sights, touch, and flavor stimuli all stoke imagination for learning. The thoughtful traveler engages in different forms of thought that include religious studies, philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and geography as well as history, literature, and biography.[35] In addition to these disciplines for thought, travel brings together many different ways of knowing into a "transrational" understanding of being and knowing. Amidst a sense of knowing beyond cognition, groups open up to the possibility of transformative learning processes beyond disciplines, beyond words.[36]

Methodology

Andover Newton Seminary at Yale Divinity School approached the question, *How can a travel seminar teach seminary students how to build community*? as an action research project. The seminary endeavored to create a travel seminar for future ministers whose express purpose was to teach students how to build community. As stated in the introduction, the school had a long history of offering travel seminars as a means for learning, but the learning goal associated with the travel related to competency for social justice ministry. The assumption was that, by becoming "the other" in a new setting, students would learn what that felt like, and they would lead with greater compassion. As the intersectional identities of students expanded and became more complex, the idea of "otherness" did, too.

Discernment of Need for Change

It became clear that the Border-Crossing Immersion style of travel seminars needed to be reevaluated when students came away from two subsequent trips with negative feelings about the experience. Students reported feeling like they had been exposed to "poverty pornography," voyeuristically engaging others rather than meeting partners through a sacred encounter. They did not feel like they were building relationships, but rather witnessing uneven transactions. Andover Newton suspended the program, and just a few short weeks later the COVID-19 pandemic shut down global travel.

The school assembled a task force to discern the future of Border-Crossing Immersion. Its first meeting took place simultaneously with the school's first emergency meeting to discuss pandemic possibilities. Of course, it was not known at the time how long shutdowns would continue. After a three-month suspension of activity, the task force resumed its work, connecting with stakeholders and learning about options for travel seminars in the future.

This first task force made the recommendation that travel seminars should resume, as all who participated in them described them as extremely valuable. That said, they should no longer focus on social justice, which requires a different kind of teaching and learning; Andover Newton is now tackling that topic through a colloquium that includes community organizing training. The task force recommended that travel seminars should instead do what participants said they did best: teach students about building community within groups and with new, previously unfamiliar partners.

New Program Design Process

Once teaching future ministers how to build community was named as the right goal for travel seminars, and the appropriate authorizing bodies (the Andover Newton trustees' Program and Life Committee, and ultimately the Andover Newton affiliated faculty) affirmed the recommendation, work began on designing how the new travel seminar would function. The first task force worked together from March 2020 through the end of the 2021 academic year; a new group received the baton in the fall of 2021. Their hope was to design a travel seminar focused on community building for March of 2022. The delta and omicron variants of COVID-19 delayed progress, and the group ultimately zeroed in on preparing for a pilot seminar in the summer of 2022.

The group decided from the start that its first foray would be to the great state of Hawaii. This destination made sense on a number of levels. First, Andover Newton has a current relationship with the chaplain to the Punahou School, who taught on the Andover Newton campus in 2018. Second, Andover and Yale have strong historic ties with Hawaiian churches, many of which were founded by missionaries from one of the two schools. Third, the destination was domestic, meaning that there might be fewer restrictions on travel in the immediate post-COVID travel landscape. Fourth, Hawaiian partners presented the possibility of not just visits, but exchanges, which were named by the first task force as a priority, relating to creating reciprocal, rather than parent-child, relationship structures.

The task force divided into three subcommittees. One group would focus on the name for the new program, which of course included discussion about the program's mission and the seminary's identity. A second group was to focus on key current issues in Hawaii that would create docking mechanisms for meaningful conversation. The third group focused on the who and the what of partnerships: who would be our partners in Hawaii, and where might the group identify counterparts that went beyond historic ties from the past?

The naming subcommittee, in consultation with the whole task force, arrived at the name "Emmaus Encounters: Building Community on the Road." The Emmaus story in the Bible (Luke 24:13-35) has served as a gathering theme for Andover Newton since it became embedded at Yale Divinity School. One member of the task force had suggested "Emmaus" as the name of Andover Newton's now-thriving Thursday evening worship experience. The story of the resurrected Jesus becoming identifiable through walking together, sharing stories, and breaking bread was just as powerful for a community-building travel seminar as it was for gathering a worship community around word and sacrament.

The subcommittee focusing on key issues named the following priorities as important to the attitude and affect of the travelers from Andover Newton at YDS:

- Reciprocity and mutuality
- Avoiding voyeuristic behaviors
- Relationship-building toward inclusive community
- Connecting with Hawaiian people on shared areas of concern, such as
    - o Climate change and water issues
    - o Sovereignty and independence
    - o Housing
    - o Cultural appropriation
    - o Language issues
- Reflecting on experiences toward developing transferable skills
- Restorative justice practices
- Mind-body engagement with setting
- Volunteerism
- Networking with historic denominational partners

They also named the importance of being outstanding guests: humble, unassuming, unentitled, and ready to listen. The key issues the subcommittee identified fed into the work of the team considering partnerships. How might the group's priorities intersect with its hoped-for host's priorities? The task force framed a clear statement for its purpose to be shared with partners so that none to whom the group reached out would worry about sub-agendas or ulterior motives. One member of this subcommittee was the chaplain from the Punahou School who had come to know Andover Newton at YDS and was deeply familiar with potential partners on the ground. This group provided guidance for the staff who would ultimately schedule visits with partners in Hawaii.

Through the work of the task force and its subcommittees, a pilot initiative took shape. All were invited to participate, but based on the change of schedule and availability of members, a subset participated and brought back knowledge for the whole group.

Learning From Peers

While the task forces worked to affirm that travel seminars should continue and then designed a new approach to them, Andover Newton staff leaders were keenly aware that other options existed for seminary student travel. Three examples explored follow.

International Partners in Mission (IPM). This organization, connected with Yale Divinity School by Professor Letty Russell whose work on partnership was explored above, was the initial partner with whom Andover Newton Seminary worked when it relocated from Newton, Massachusetts, to New Haven, Connecticut, and partnered with Yale Divinity School. According to its publications, IPM works across borders to promote justice and peace through learning opportunities. IPM works across borders of culture, faith, and economic circumstance with children, women, and youth to nurture partnerships that build justice, peace, and hope through transformational learning opportunities and programs. Founded in 1974 by Lutheran missionaries, the organization became ecumenical in the late 1980s and interfaith in focus in the early 2000s. The group now has partners with whom

it hosts immersions in Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, India, Italy, Kenya, Nepal, Nicaragua, Tanzania, and the US.

It carries out its work through forming connections with community organizations on the ground and then bringing learners to visit partners. IPM currently boasts 320 different Project Partners. One reads on the IPM Web site,

> IPM's Project Partners are independent, community-based organizations around the world that accompany women, children, and youth who are working for social change and justice. IPM collaborates with these organizations on accompaniment, advocacy, bilateral and multilateral sharing, funding, meditation and prayer, micro-loans, regional gatherings, solidarity, technical assistance, and training programs. Together we leverage local assets to address the self-identified needs of each community, working together for societal transformation and sustainable change.[37]

International Ministries of the ABC(USA). The American Baptist Churches (USA) is a Christian denomination that is known for its unusually diverse history, membership, and leadership. Its "International Ministries" work cross-culturally to provide short-term missions ("Discovery Trips") and virtual immersions in foreign countries. The purpose of the immersions is to teach learners about the histories, struggles, and social realities of contexts beyond their own. Like other faith traditions with a strong, historic commitment to overseas missions, the American Baptists sent disciples of Christ overseas to spread the Gospel, adopting Matthew's language that God want all people to have life, and have it abundantly (Matthew 6:10). Today's virtual immersions connect US-based Baptists with 250 international partners in 70 countries including South Africa, Haiti, South Sudan, Congo, Yemen, and Japan.

Founded in 1814, at the high point of the Second Great Awakening's fervor for revival and mission in the US, the American Baptists' missions adapted their approaches to different contexts and different times. Whereas their original purpose was to evangelize, their goals expanded to include theological education for future clergy from all nations, support for immigrants and refugees, the abolition of human trafficking and enslavement, the promotion of health and wellness, and enrichment for youth and young adults around the world.[38]

Overseas Adventure Travel (OAT). This organization, headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts, offers personal educational opportunities whose purposes include spiritual and emotional growth. In that way, their objectives resonate with those of Andover Newton's Emmaus Encounters, as they relate to transformational education more than to learning content or promoting social change. Trips offered by OAT invite participants to leave the well-trod paths of tourism to engage communities through cultural connections and meaningful interaction with those who inhabit the countries visited.

Founded in 1978, OAT takes travelers on immersive trips in teams of eight to twenty-five, sometimes by small boat. They intentionally provide travelers with flexibility and freedom and provide lodging in intimate settings, such as family-run hotels. The intended participant pool for trips includes adults over fifty years of age. Destinations include Vietnam, safaris in Botswana and Namibia, and desert excursions in Nevada.

Findings and Implications for Practice

Those redeveloping Andover Newton's travel seminars understood, based on experience, that a trial run would be crucial to planning a trip that would result in new learning about building community. The normal stressors of travel, combined with unfamiliarity with contexts, might cause group leaders too much anxiety to focus on creating an environment conducive to exploration and discovery. Therefore, from the beginning, the second task force charged with new program design knew it would put together a trial-run trip.

The Pilot Emmaus Encounter

To plan the pilot, the Andover Newton staff relied on the findings of subcommittees that looked at issues and potential partners and on the literature explored earlier in this article. That literature offered up these implications for practice:

a. From Peter Block: the small group is the primary unit of community
b. From Ann Curry-Stevens: all need transformation, whether they come from privileged or underprivileged backgrounds
c. From Alan Roxburgh: community begins with following God into the neighborhood
d. From Peter Rule: relationships build through dialogue that contains no agenda for changing the other
e. From Letty Russell: partnership is the shape of community building
f. From Alun Morgan: travel produces multidisciplinary experiences

Using these guidelines and relying on the collective wisdom of the planning group, Andover Newton staff members divided up the work of planning a pilot journey. One, TRE, focused on logistics. Another, SBD, focused on connecting with partners, so as to build community in an outward-facing way. A third, JKB, focused on designing experiences to build inward-facing community. The three groups met three times in the weeks leading up to the trip, but most communication took place asynchronously between meetings.

SBD, who scheduled conversations with partners, brought to that work a commitment that days should be rich and full, but not grueling as related to exhaustion. All agreed that two to three engagements per day would be ideal. SBD had to reach out to workers in various settings in Hawaii beyond the identified partners, as some initial recommendations led to dead ends. Ultimately, the pilot travelers met with a wide range of partners, making the most of the multidisciplinarity travel provides. Partners included leaders from schools and churches with historic ties to Andover and Yale, partners doing meaningful work and ministry in Hawaii, and partners in settings bringing about post-colonial social justice.

The staff member who focused on planning to bring about community in the group, JKB, thought carefully about building time for worship and reflection into every day on the road. Each morning began with a devotion, and each setting visited included a time of introductions and greeting. Each traveler committed to leading two or more of these community-building tasks.

As for introductions and greetings, while planning logistics TRE learned of a tradition in Hawaii known as offering an Oli (oh-LEE). When a guest arrives in someone else's home in Hawaii, they offer a greeting and ask for permission to enter, and the hosts return with an Oli of their own. TRE suggested that this practice be undertaken not just in the one place that suggested it, but in all settings visited. This gesture of respect, which acknowledged hospitality rather than hinting at a sense of entitlement, bore dividends in the form of grateful reactions from Hawaiian hosts not used to such conscientiousness.

Daily devotions ranged widely, from singing to movement to reflections on scripture. Reflection time followed a suggested model from the book Another Way: Living and Leading Change On Purpose. That book, which came out of the Forum on Theological Exploration, offered the acronym, CARE, as a mnemonic for guiding life-giving conversations.

C = Create a hospitable space
A = Ask self-awakening questions
R = Reflect theologically
E = Enact the next most faithful step

A daily discipline of reflecting using the CARE model gave a shape not just to the day, but to the group as they interacted in all settings.

Learnings to Reinvest for the Future

The following findings from the planning task force and Emmaus Encounters pilot will inform Andover Newton's future travel seminars. The hope is that they might also help theological educators and those who care about teaching leaders to build community within and beyond groups.

How is community built? Leaders can best learn how to build community through an action reflection process where they first build community and then shine light on what they have done.

How does one build not just any community, but a life-giving and liberative community? To achieve the goal of building a community that does not reify

oppressive structures of the past, sometimes dismantling must precede building. That said, once a group is ready to build equitable and respectful community within and beyond its bounds, some endorsed practices are available; one need not reinvent the wheel. As was the case earlier, these best practices emerge from the review of literature above.

From social sciences:

- Engage on equal footing, avoid parent-child dynamics
- Emphasize possibilities over problems
  - From adult learning theory:
- Expect that all take responsibility for their learning
- Maximize possibilities for agency and choice
- From education-for-transformation theory:
  - Disorient and reorient; shake *and* build confidence
  - Universalize: all have some privilege, some pain, something to learn

In building community, it is useful to bear in mind that one is never entirely rebuilding community. A liberative and life-giving community requires creating something new.

Key components. The following values guided the design of the pilot initiative, which had followed the work of two task forces and a review of available, relevant literature:

- Shared leadership within groups
- Humility when entering new spaces, meeting new people
- Hospitality when encountering opportunities for exchange
- Engaging array of activities balanced with reflection
- Privileging presence amidst, rather than quantity of, activities
- Dialogue, not dialectics: nobody trying to prove anything, cause another person to change
- Asking and answering questions, listening, sharing

After the pilot initiative took place, two additional practices emerged as important for future planning:

- Creating space for atonement for what has happened and where harm has been done
- Including a service component where travelers volunteer in settings where those who reside in the host setting also volunteer
- Building an evaluation and survey tool into the trip itself so as to gather process-evaluation data in real time
- Making a practice of sending an advance leader or team to sites to be visited, as relationship building requires a primer

Selecting settings conducive to an Emmaus Encounter. Perhaps the most innovative discovery emerging from the task forces and pilot initiative described in this article relates the criteria for selecting a place to take participants for a community-building travel seminar. Churches and schools that have sought out life-giving travel have often skipped the step of discerning what was to be taught and learned and rushed ahead into selecting a setting.

Because of two consecutive travel seminars not leading to good feedback from participants, followed by the COVID-19 pandemic's travel restrictions, those redeveloping Andover Newton's travel seminars had no choice but to think deeply and intentionally about where to take and send groups. That which emerged as important to selection seemed counterintuitive at first, but after the pilot's success, seems useful and sensible. Here are the criteria that will guide site selection for Emmaus Encounters: Building Community on the Road into the future:

- Access: group can visit without insurmountable obstacles to meeting people
  - "Talking to strangers" not fraught by power differentials
  - Manageable language barrier
  - Partners already on the ground
  - Few or no restrictions for international students, participants with differing abilities
- Grist for the mill ("What things?" asked Jesus): settings provide opportunities to engage complex questions
  - Shared history (i.e. Hawaii)
  - Shared mission (i.e. overseas Christian seminaries)
- Practical feasibility: finances available, pandemic restrictions a non-issue

Successors of missionaries went to Hawaii to meet those whose ancestors' lives were changed by missionaries. They sought to enter dialogue humbly and with deep respect. They were aware of harm done by missionaries as well as their good results, such as diseases introduced and hos-

pitals constructed. The complexity of engaging cross-culturally with such mixed history made for learning far more valuable than previous immersions.

Moving Forward

The Emmaus Encounter Pilot provided opportunities to reckon with the testimonies of Hawaiian siblings on the integration of colonization and worship, learn more about and uplift the legacy of Queen Liliuokalani, who lived out her Christianity by speaking out on injustices, and complicate responses to addressing the environmental crisis of our era. It is in this struggle, as Willie James Jennings names, that communion is found, community is built, and belonging is fostered.[40] This cultivation of belonging is the goal of this community-building seminar. It is a commitment to getting the "full story" as Kahu Kenneth Makuakàne, Pastor of Kawaiaha'o Church, imparted to the pilot participants. This distinction requires awareness as well as openness to rethink each step of the way alongside our siblings, on their terms. Pilot participants shared that their vision of the future of community building in a ministerial context was expanded.

In After Whiteness theologian Willie James Jennings asserts that "theological education [ought] to open up sites where we enter the struggle to rethink our people,"[41] our entangled histories, and our inherited realities. As Andover Newton Seminary prepares to bring their first full cohort of students, seeking new relationality with our people on Oahu, this charge echoes. Acknowledging that building community is strengthened by knowledge of our history, one the student members of the pilot journey exclaimed, "Hawaiian culture cannot be learned, it must be experienced." Another student said that "community building is a practice of listening and then listening some more."

It is unknown where this challenging and edifying work will lead. Nevertheless, based on the reflections from the pilot journey, this travel seminar course has the potential to inspire hope for belonging and collaboration as we create modules and practice building community. The work of the course is fully embodied--you learn about history, listen to one another's stories, and envision together what God is saying about our future – requiring an open mind, heart, and imagination.

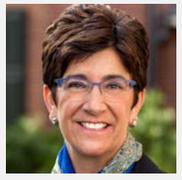
Concluding Thoughts

A word about the "What things?" criterion referenced above: that phrase, "What things?" comes from the story of Jesus on the road to Emmaus in the Gospel according to Luke, 24: 13-19a, 30-31:

> Now on that same day two [disciples] were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?"
> He asked them, "What things?" […]
> When he was at the table with them, [Jesus] took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.

For action-based learning using reflective practice as a teaching tool for building community to work, learners and those they meet on the road have to have a lot to talk about. In Hawaii, Andover Newton's pilot participants had much to discuss. How do we make sense of colonialism and empire while also plotting out a new future path together? What does the environmental degradation and reclamation of Hawaiian lands teach us about addressing the climate crisis? What role might the retrieval of language play in Hawaii's next chapter? The group was aware of some, but not all, of these issues before travel. They provided meaningful – crucial – raw material for deep conversation that gave way to a sense of community.

A consultant who helped planners connect with partners, Hawaiian language and culture educator Debbie Lee, offered perhaps the most helpful advice for building community in a place once colonized and now seeking a way forward: "What you need to understand is that we [Hawaiian Christians] really want to have a relationship with you [successors of Andover and Yale missionaries]. But we need you to understand that there's a lot of pain. Some who don't know the whole history don't want that relationship, but many do."



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JaQuan Beachem (he/they) is a love-centered, joy-seeking, trauma-informed, and justice-oriented interdisciplinary artist, chaplain, and theologian (e.g. gileadalbum.com). JaQuan serves as Andover Newton's Director of Community Development & Spiritual Formation at Yale Divinity School. As the Founder of wellness organization, KEI, Inc., JaQuan consults and curates sustainable spaces for belonging, embodiment, and (re)imagination at the individual and corporate level. In their leisure, JaQuan enjoys jamming out to music, honing his yoga practice, trying out a new recipe, and noticing things bloom.

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