

Bresee Institute for Urban Training

Ron Benefiel, Ph.D.

Introduction and History

Bresee Institute is an urban ministry training program that has emerged out of the combination of a pressing need, the availability of the appropriate resource people and institutions at the right time, and healthy doses of dreaming, praying, brainstorming, networking, strategizing and negotiating.

The idea was born out of conversations that took place between Dr. Les Blank and myself while I was teaching Sociology at Azusa Pacific University (APU). When I accepted the call to pastor Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene (four years ago), Fletcher Tink soon joined the staff and negotiations regarding the development of an urban ministry training center began not only with Azusa Pacific but with Fuller Seminary and Point Loma Nazarene College as well. Azusa Pacific showed the greatest initial willingness to sponsor such a program. As a result, our formal lines of accountability have been wired through APU these first three years. However, working agreements have also been negotiated with Fuller and Point Loma. More recently Fuller has established an urban ministry concentration which allows for and, to some degree, requires Bresee Institute course work.

Early on, the viability and credibility of the program has rested on the strength of the individuals and supporting institutions involved. We have been most fortunate to have received considerable interest, direction and encouragement from such key leaders as Paul Person, Paul Hebert, and Bill Panel of Fuller and especially from Les Blank of APU. Both World Vision and the General Church have helped significantly with financial grants. We have also been fortunate to have someone of the caliber of Fletcher Tink to care for the development of the project in the house. Fletcher is uniquely qualified in cross-cultural ministry having served as a Nazarene missionary in Bolivia and the Peace Corps in Brazil. He speaks Spanish and Portuguese fluently and is completing a doctorate in cross-cultural ministry at Fuller. There would be no Bresee Institute without his leadership and commitment.

The number of enrolled students has increased from a dozen to about twenty this year. The Institute basically attracts three types of students: 1) indigenous urbanites who are already in urban ministry; 2) mid-life pastors of churches in changing neighborhoods; 3) recent college graduates called to or interested in urban ministry. The largest group tends to be from category 3. But perhaps I am a little ahead of my story. Why have a Bresee Institute, anyway?

The Need

The rationale for Bresee Institute emerges largely from what we perceive to be real needs of the contemporary church, local, regional and perhaps even national and international. John Palen (*The Urban World*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981) states that the percentage of the world population living in places of 5,000 or more inhabitants increased from 28% in 1950 to 43% in 1980 and is expected to be 55% by the year 2000. The world is becoming an urban world. If

we are going to minister to the people of our world in the next generation we must be willing to minister in the city.

As we begin to examine the demographic changes taking place even within the United States, we became aware that the ministry issues facing the such churches as Los Angeles First Church today will very likely be the issues facing many of our now suburban churches in the South and West very shortly. As immigration and intra-national migration continue neighborhoods will continue to change. Typically, most of our local churches that will be in changing neighborhoods will not anticipate the changes that will take place in their communities, let alone be able to devise adaptive ministry strategies. Some of our pastors will be faced with the frustration of pouring their lives into traditional ministries that have little chance of growing and greater likelihood of diminishing regardless of their commitment and effort.

I have jotted down the following goals of Bresee Institute that have emerged out of the needs we feel in the Los Angeles area:

1. to provide an urban ministry training opportunity to those in and those preparing for urban ministry;
2. to stay on top of current demographic trends and urban problems research;
3. to make the church at large aware of current and emerging trends, problems, and potentials of ministry in the city; and
4. in conjunction with district leaders to work with other churches in the region to devise appropriate strategies for local and regional urban ministries.

The unique problem of ministry in the city currently are such that we believe specialized training is necessary and can be helpful. Who are the people who live in our cities? Why are they there? How can we minister cross-culturally or, in some cases, multi-culturally? With the emotional stresses, crime problems, congestion, and alienation inherent to life in most cities, what does it mean to minister holistically? What about the social issues of homosexuality, alcoholism, homelessness, drug abuse? How can the church respond when those issues regularly walk in with the people who come in the front door? What about networking with other churches and agencies? The problems are numerous and complex. We do not pretend to have answers. But we do hope we are asking some of the right questions and beginning to develop some viable ministry strategies.

Furthermore, this is an age of opportunity for urban ministry. With the apparent current interest on our college campuses in urban and cross-cultural ministry, it seems crucial to us that opportunities for channeling and nurturing some of that youthful zeal be offered. Interest in social and holistic ministries has never been higher, not only among college students, but also among some relief agencies, seemingly refacing the concern of the national popular conscience.

We believe that the day of offering in context training for urban ministry has come. We are hopeful that the beneficiaries include not only the local and regional church who receive the trained leaders and workers, and not only the students who are better equipped for urban

ministry, but also the city dwellers who are ministered by churches in their neighborhoods that have developed viable strategies of urban ministry.

The Model

The Bresee Institute program is designed to be a one year full time graduate level urban ministry training program in context that combines strong academics with ample practical experience. (While this is the design, many students elect to go part-time and/or to take the course work on a non-credit basis.) The program is formally an extension of Azusa Pacific University, however, the course work is applicable toward an urban studies/evangelism concentration at Fuller Seminary as well.

We believe that the contextual nature of the program is essential. Courses are taken at L.A. First Church of the Nazarene in the heart of the Mid-Wilshire District of Los Angeles. The city is the laboratory for the course work. Individuals who live and work and patrol and govern in the city are brought in to participate in topical discussions. The students do much of their course work out on the streets and in city agencies. Classes are likely to convene at city hall, County General Hospital, Union Rescue Mission, Rampart Police Department or the Scientology Center. The fact that the program is closely tied to an active multi-cultural urban church is a great strength. While Los Angeles First does not serve as "the" model for the students, it provides a hands on illustration of a church attempting to address the needs represented by the people of its particular urban community.

Another key component of the Bresee Institute program is the integration of academia and practicum. All professors have completed or are near completion of PhD's in relevant fields. In addition, all professors to date have concurrently served in pastoral leadership positions of urban churches.⁽¹⁾

Students are required to take courses that provide a strong academic base for developing strategies of ministry. The courses that have been or will be taught this year are: 1) Christian Ministry and Urban Anthropology; 2) The City in Theological Perspective; 3) Urban Social Problems and Christian Ministry; 4) Cross-Cultural Ministry; and 5) History of Urban Ministry.

Students are also required to take Field Education in Urban Ministry both semesters of the program. This offers an opportunity for the student to integrate class content with practical on-the-job problems. Each full-time student is required to put in twelve hours per week in ministry in an urban church or para-church. (Internships are available requiring thirty plus hours per week of practical ministry experience.) Field Education is a personal development and process component. It builds in an accountability for personal growth. Typically, students thrust into an urban ministry situation must deal with issues of culture shock and the frustration of city living on top of normal ministry stresses. Finances, personal relationships, spiritual development, the overwhelming need of the city, the relatively little difference that can be made in the overall picture, all present issues that need to be faced and processed. To be responsible with an educational model that requires a practical commitment necessitates the accountability structure for personal processing that we have included in the form of Field Education.⁽²⁾

Integration is a key concept in the Bresee Institute model. We have discussed the integration of academics and practics. We also believe that the integration of theology with Social Sciences is beneficial. We feel that the social sciences, particularly Sociology and Anthropology, help us see the city as it is. Looking at the city through sociological lenses helps us be aware of demographics and of culture and of implications for cross-cultural interaction. It helps us view the urban work from a different perhaps more objective perspective. If theology tells us what ought to be perhaps Sociology and Anthropology tell us what is "is". The integration of the two, we believe, can assist us in the development of Christian community in the city, moving from what is toward what ought to be. Two of the professors are near completion of PhD's in the Social Sciences, one in Anthropology and the other in Sociology.

Conclusion

Our cities are growing. The problems are multiplying. The potential is unlimited. The church has little option. We have a Kingdom mandate. We must bring a Kingdom presence into the heart of our cities. Bresee Institute is one option for the church in our region to help prepare people for ministry in the city.

1. Incidentally, all professors serve in churches that are dealing effectively with ethnic/immigrant populations. Also, all professors to date have been elders in the Church of the Nazarene.

2. This model is consistend with the requirements of Azusa Pacific University's Graduate School of Theology.

Academic Afilations and Faculty

The Bresee Institute for Urban Training is affiliated with Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, California. It is recognized as an extended facility of the University and semester credits awarded to students are received from the Graduate School of Theology at APU. Fuller Theological Seminary and Point Loma Nazarene College have agreed to accept transfer credits awarded by APU toward graduate degree programs.

The training staff at the Bresee Institute for Urban Training is actively involved in urban ministry and is well equipped academically for its various teaching duties.

*Ronald P. Benefiel, Lecturer of Urban Ministry; B.A., M.A., Pt. Loma Nazarene College; Ph.D. candidate, University of Southern California; Pastor.

*Wes Balda, Lecturer of Urban Ministry; B.A., University of Washington; M.A., Fuller Theological Seminary; Ph.D., Cambridge University.

*Charles E. Crosby, Lecturer of Urban Ministry; B.A., Pasadena College; M. Div., Nazarene Theological Seminary; Ph.D. candidate, Fuller Theological Seminary; Pastor.

Garcia Marco A., Director of the Escuela Biblica Nazarena; A.B. Seminario Nazareno Hispanoamericano, M.Div., Fuller Theological Seminary; Ph.D. candidate, Fuller Theological Seminary; Associate Pastor.

*Krikor Haleblan, Lecturer of Urban Ministry; B.A., Pt. Loma College; M.Div., Nazarene Theological Seminary; M.Th., Ph.D., Fuller Theological Seminary; Pastor.

*Jon Phillip Johnston, Lecturer of Urban Ministry; B.A., Pasadena College; M.A., Los Angeles State College; B.D., Nazarene Theological Seminary; Ph.D. Ohio State University; Professor.

Michael A. Mata, Coordinator of Urban Projects; B.A., M.A., Pt. Loma Nazarene College; M.Div., Nazarene Theological Seminary.

*Fletcher L. Tink, Lecturer of Urban Ministry; B.A., Eastern Nazarene College; M.Div., Nazarene Theological Seminary; M.Th., Luther Theological Seminary; M.La., Harvard University; M.A., Ph.D. candidate, Fuller Theological Seminary.

*adjunct faculty of APU's Graduate School of Theology

The Bresee Institute for Urban Training
3401 West Third Street
Los Angeles, California 90020

Write for further information and applications or call 213-385-6345
Fletcher L. Tink
Director of Bresee Institute

Statement of Purpose

In any city there is notable imbalance between the spiritual needs of the city and the Christian resources available to meet them. Many "downtown" churches are under equipped to minister effectively to people with problems peculiar to residents of urban areas. The challenges of a city may include differing language-based or cultural groups, transiency, high crime rates, high employment and poverty rates, inaccessibility of health care, and lack of shelter, food, and clothing for many city residents. The city hosts a concentration of the elderly, of youth, of single adults, of non-traditional families, and a spectrum of religious ideas and spiritual attitudes.

How does the Church, a minister, or any Christian reach out to people facing one or many of these conditions?

The gospel of Christ is realized in the lives of church members and ministers as they understand and meet specific needs in the city. The purpose of the Bresee Institute is to train Christian men and women, lay and clergy, to minister to people in the city by equipping them to recognize and solve urban problems in the context of Christian community.

Location

The Bresee Institute for Urban Training is located in Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene on Third Street near Vermont in downtown Los Angeles. The church houses five different congregations: English speaking, Spanish speaking, 2 Korean congregations and a Filipino ministry. The is only partially representative of the many languages spoken in the Mid-Wilshire area.

The Bresee Foundation

The Bresee Foundation has adopted the spirit of care which was embodied in Phineas Bresee when he began reaching out to the people of Los Angeles over eighty years ago. The foundation was incorporated to raise and distribute funds for urban training projects and creative ministry programs. The funds received from the Bresee Foundation allow the Bresee Institute for Urban Training to offer stipends to selected interns and lowered tuition rates to lay workers and clergy.

APU's Curriculum at the Bresee Institute

Course titles include:

- Christian Ministry and Urban Anthropology
- The City in Theological Perspective
- Urban Sociology and Christian Ministry
- Cross Cultural Ministry
- Field Education in Urban Ministry, I and II

These courses can be taken for credit or non-credit, as part of a degree program or independently. Final course offerings are based upon sufficient enrollment.

Graduate Studies and Internships

A nine month internship program is designed to be part of a Master of Ministry or Master of Divinity degree offered by APU's Graduate School of Theology with a concentration in urban ministry. Students may also enroll in the course of studies independently of an internship program. In addition to class work, the student will be able to choose an area in which to concentrate his or her ministry in an internship relationship or as a participant in the Urban Ministry Practicum, while working with trained and experienced staff. Students will have the opportunity to regularly observe, identify, and discuss sociological, political, and anthropological structures peculiar to urban centers and to grapple with their resultant theological implications for God's people and the church.

Undergraduate and Internships

The ten week summer internship is designed for college juniors and senior s who indicate interest in urban training. The ten weeks will provide the intern with an introduction to the city

and the opportunity to learn about and participate in the ongoing body life and outreach of Los Angeles First Church and the Bresee Institute. This summer internship is structured to be an active learning experience.

Additional Programs

The Escuela Biblica Nazarena is also located at Los Angeles First Church. Its relationship with the Institute makes a wide variety of Spanish language courses in Bible, theology, homiletics, church history, Spanish language, and music available to Bresee Institute students. EBN has received tentative approval to offer courses accredited through Nazarene Bible College located in Colorado Springs, CO.