



## Going Downhill?

Dr. Winter,

Greetings in our Lord Jesus. I read with interest your article, "The Largest Stumbling Block to Leadership Development in the Global Church" (IJFM, 20:3, Fall 2003, pp.86ff). On p. 91 you state:

Every single denomination in this country that has evolved a required formal, extensive graduate professional training for ordination is now going downhill.

I have three questions for you as I ponder, with some colleagues, how to fine-tune our credentialing requirements in the Evangelical Free Church:

1. What do you mean by "going downhill"—membership decrease?

*Ralph Winter: By going downhill, yes, I mean losing membership.*

2. Is your reference to ordination equivalent to a reference to pastoring *per se*? That is, do you mean the kind of ordination that is required to be a pastor in a given denomination? I'm trying to sort this out with respect to the EFCA. We offer ordination, and we generally (though not exclusively) require an M. Div. But we do not require ordination of those who pastor in the EFCA.

*Ralph Winter: Whether or not you require ordination, it stands to reason that once the congregations choosing pastors get the idea that they need (or ought to want) to choose a person who has gotten a residential M. Div. degree, then they are unwittingly surrendering their range of selection*

*to the registrar's office of the degree-granting institutions.*

3. What is your opinion of the EFCA in this regard? I like to think of our denomination as not going downhill with regard to ordination, but maybe we are. Your article is thought-provoking, and I thank you for it.

Sincerely in Christ,

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*Ralph Winter: I do not know enough about your statistics to hazard a guess as to what is happening in the EFCA. Note, once again, it is not as though an M.Div. experience is bad or harmful. Lots of people have the idea that a seminary harms pastoral candidates! That has nothing to do with it. The finest seminary faculty and curriculum in the world cannot make up for an educational process that does not have a chance to choose any of the truly gifted leaders who are left behind in the congregations with little hope of being chosen as pastors unless the seminaries can enlist them and train them where they are, along with their jobs and families.*

*The last 25,000 new churches in this country are mostly pastored by gifted people who cannot readily fit into the usual seminary routine. Would they be better pastors if they had seminary studies behind them? Certainly. Are they nevertheless better pastors than the usual seminary graduate? Quite likely. Are seminaries multiplying branches and locations and in some cases now catering to this category of leaders, not requiring them to do things they can't readily do? Yes, thankfully. Is this as true by now overseas? No. Is "The largest stumbling block to leadership development in the mission field churches" still there? Yes.*

## New International Orality Network Established

*September Conference Focuses On "Making Disciples of Oral Learners"*

(31 March 2005) Sixty-six percent of the world's population either cannot read or prefer communicating by oral means, according to the newly formed International Orality Network (ION). Dr. Avery Willis, Executive Director of ION, says "These people need a customized strategy delivered in a culturally appropriate manner in order for them to hear, understand and respond to the gospel and then reproduce disciples."

### ION CONFERENCE

To address the challenges and opportunities of sharing the Gospel with an ever-increasing population that learns by oral means, ION will host the 2005 Consultation on Orality, September 13-15, 2005 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Anaheim, California, USA. This three-day conference is entitled "A Story for the Nations: Making Disciples of Oral Learners." The gathering will bring together evangelists, ministry leaders, pastors and missionaries to rediscover principles for reaching the lost by presenting the Bible as Jesus, Peter and Paul did—through oral means. Workshops include: *The Background of Storytelling; Literacy Reality; The Theological Place for Storytelling; Hands on Storytelling; Music and Drama to Present Bible* and more. For registration and hotel information, please go to [www.oralbible.com](http://www.oralbible.com)

Joining together in this strategic partnership are: Campus Crusade for Christ International; Epic Partners; Hosanna/Faith Comes By Hearing; The God's Story Project; International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention; The JESUS Film Project; Progressive Vision; The Seed Company; Scriptures in Use; Trans World Radio; Wycliffe International; and Youth with a Mission.

*For more information on the International Orality Network or the ION September conference, please go to [www.oralbible.com](http://www.oralbible.com) or contact Tom Meiner at [tom.meiner@ccci.org](mailto:tom.meiner@ccci.org) or 407.826.2319.*