

T' is for Transformation

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Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary" – that's quite a mouthful. Occasionally, faculty members have phone answering duty for the entire campus. By the time I say, "Hello, Asia-Pacific Theological Sem -," the caller has gotten impatient and hung up. So I try to shorten it to APNTS as much as possible.

However, more important than the name itself is what APNTS is really about. I have decided that the "T" could stand for "Transformational" just as well as it does for "Theological." Asia-Pacific Nazarene "Transformational" Seminary _ has a nice ring to it! Eight years of ministering here have taught me that transformation is at the heart of this school's mission. To understand why, you need to know something about its character.

APNTS is an international, graduate-level seminary training leaders for the Church of the Nazarene in the Asia-Pacific Region, where well over half of the world's people live. To say that is multi-cultural is an understatement. In a typical classroom, I'll have students from as diverse backgrounds as Korea and Australia, Japan and Papua New Guinea, India and Samoa, Taiwan and New Zealand. Unfortunately, my educational background of seminary missions classes taught me how to adapt to 1 new culture _ not 10 different cultures simultaneously!

Studying for two or three years in a place like this may not always be comfortable, but it is almost always life-changing. Let me give you some examples. Several weeks ago David, a Korean student, admitted to me, "When I was growing up, I was taught to hate Japanese students here at APNTS. They are some of the most outstanding Christians I know. God has changed my attitude. Now I think of Japanese believers as my brothers and sisters." That's transformation.

I had a privilege of visiting Peni, a former student, in the South Pacific, where he serves as a pastor and Bible college president. In his home country, pastors are traditionally treated as chiefs. They sit in the grandest chair and are given the largest portions of food. Church members are expected to wait on them and even to give them financial gifts when the teachers and church leaders who lived out a different model. Rather than chiefs, they were servant leaders. As a result of his training and experience, God changed Peni's concept of ministry. Pastors visit their homes. During his time at APNTS, Peni began to notice teachers and church leaders who lived out a different model. Rather than chiefs, they were servant leaders. As a result of his training and experience, God changed Peni's concept of ministry. Even though it is difficult, he is determined to exemplify servant leadership to his students and fellow ministers. Living and learning outside of his own culture enabled him to perceive more clearly how the gospel works within his culture. That's transformation.

Recently at the luncheon following our seminary commencement, I sat at a table with four of our outstanding alumni. Each represents a unique part of our vast educational zone. The Samoan and Indonesian alumni are now serving as Bible college presidents. The Australian is a pastor, a teacher, and an innovative NYI leader for the entire region. The graduate from India has just been appointed as a regional missionary to the South Pacific. I observed how they were able to share mutual concerns and dreams through their common second language because of the bonding they experienced at APNTS. I remembered the transformation that took place in each of their lives during the time they lived and studied and worshiped in our culturally diverse milieu.

I wondered if any of them would have been as effective in their present ministries without having had that opportunity to spend time away from their own societies and church settings in a supportive learning community, a place where they could interact with teachers and classmates and perspectives from contexts so different from their own and be transformed in the process.

I am convinced that through the Spirit's guidance there are some things that can happen only in a place like APNTS. I know that because I, too, have been transformed. I praise God for the vision of the Church of the Nazarene to establish a "transformational" seminary in this strategic part of the world.