



Faith Builders

Discipling the head, heart, and hands

ISS. 148 ∞ SUMMER 2023

Cultivating Faithful Presence

BY MATTHEW MAST

Matthew Mast, administrator of the Training Institute, describes the vision that motivates our work to train people to bring their gifts and skills to their communities in humble, joyful service.

Every rising generation desires to make a difference, to make the world a better place, and to leave their mark. Students who come to Faith Builders Training Institute are no exception.

But most are not in positions of formal leadership, and they may never be called to it. In this context, how does the Training Institute prioritize which skills to cultivate? How do we resist the mindset of self-promoting influencers and ladder-climbing leaders?

In our times, we offer “faithful presence” as a compelling alternative to influence. By faithful presence, I mean showing up in one’s congregation or community and joyfully contributing to the good of the community, day after day, week after week, year after year.

Faithful presence means accepting the gifts that Christ has given to us and using those gifts for the good of the body (1 Cor. 12:12–31). Faithful presence recognizes that we fill different roles, and we are called to faithfulness (1 Cor. 3:7). Some indeed will be called to fill public or organizational leadership positions. To those, Paul says they should lead “with diligence,” which implies gaining skill (Rom. 12:8, NKJV).

Whether called to public leadership or not, all followers of Jesus are called to cultivate personal habits, capacities, and postures that enable them to contribute to the flourishing of the body. Toward this end, at Faith Builders we work to nurture five capacities that enable followers of Jesus to practice faithful presence as they serve.

Coming to Scripture

Faithful presence recognizes that followers of Jesus participate in God’s story. When we embrace Jesus as Lord, we join God’s people and share the anticipation of His fulfillment of all His promises to His people.

But how do we know how God’s people conduct themselves? How do we find our place among God’s people?

In Scripture, we see that through Jesus, the Father plans “to reconcile all things to Himself” (Col. 1:19–20, NKJV). We learn that Jesus is the pattern after which our lives should be formed, and that the goal is that “we all come . . . to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13, NKJV). As we place ourselves under Scripture, our individual experience finds

fulfillment in the larger story of God’s grand work spanning eternity. As participants in this story, we learn faithful presence from Joseph, Ruth, Boaz, Daniel, Jeremiah, Barnabas, Aquila and Priscilla, Lydia, Eunice—truly a cloud of witnesses.

Offering faithful presence in our congregations and communities requires us to orient ourselves and our fellow believers in God’s story. It means seeing how our times and places can find similarities and connections with other times and places in the story of God’s people. While our society urges us to “find ourselves,” when we come to Scripture, we are found.

All students at the Training Institute take Old Testament Survey. We ask students to practice the habit of reading Scripture and reflecting on what they read. Students teach Sunday school, requiring them to immerse themselves in a passage of Scripture and then lead others in coming to it.

Offering faithful presence requires us to come to Scripture in order to anchor our reality in its reality.

Listening and reading attentively

Our world is noisy and frenetic. Distractions abound!

But faithful presence requires attentiveness. Whether listening or reading, we must slow down and pay attention. We listen for the assumptions, questions, and emotions behind the words.

Attentive listening and reading includes response. We ponder what is true in the situation, and then we speak. Attentive responses communicate compassion, bring clarity, offer insight, and address error.

In mentoring groups at the Training Institute, students listen to each other talk about their past, their present, and their walk with God. Class assignments that involve book reviews or responses to an author’s views require students to read attentively.

Men and women who listen and read attentively bring faithful presence to discussions and decisions.



While our society urges us to “find ourselves,” when we come to Scripture, we are found.

Working within authority

When Jesus was asked by a Roman centurion to heal a sick servant, He encountered an understanding of authority that caused Him to marvel. In stating his faith, the centurion revealed a crucial insight: he was under authority while also exercising authority (Matt. 8:8–9).

In the same way, followers of Jesus recognize that we are under God's authority as well as that of human leaders. Many times, like the centurion, we both come under authority and exercise authority.

The Apostle Peter, in his instructions to elders, illustrates this. The elders have authority to exercise, but they need to remember that their authority comes from the chief Shepherd who would one day hold them accountable (1 Pet. 5:2-3).

Students at the Training Institute enter a program of study that dictates 75-80% of the courses they will take over two years. Each course includes assignments with expectations to which students must submit.

Simultaneously, students are given roles which invite them to exercise authority. They lead groups for course projects. They direct the annual canoe trip or activities for an evening. They monitor the work of cleaning their dorm pod.

It is vital for faithful presence that we learn to come under the authority of God and His people. This provides the foundation for filling roles of authority. When we learn to work within authority, we can offer faithful presence.

Taking initiative and collaborating

Working within authority does not mean that one relinquishes personal initiative. Rather, working within authority provides a framework in which initiative can flourish.

We must train our eyes and hearts to see the opportunities around us. Then, we can consider how we can offer our particular gifts.

Rarely, if ever, does an individual provide all that is needed to address a need. A lasting solution to a need typically requires the collaborative labor of multiple people. Each of us must learn how to contribute our insights and ideas to a group effort, without regard to who will receive the credit. When we join our skill to the skills of others, the result will be more effective, more lasting, and more beautiful than any individual's work.



While the core courses at the Institute are prescribed, students may consider their interests and propose an independent study to go deeper in a topic of interest. In the Christian Ministries and General Studies tracks, students develop plans for two weeks of service projects in their home community. Students work in

groups to complete certain course projects, giving them practice in bringing their insight and skill to a group.

Part of any effort to bring faithful presence to a community is learning to express personal initiative and to collaborate with others.

Taking the long view

Many of us bemoan the instant gratification our culture loves while we simultaneously access the resources our culture offers. With a few clicks or taps, we order diapers, shoes, books, electronics, and groceries—and they appear at our home within a few days.

But perhaps the opportunities of our time have only amplified a human tendency that has always been present: the desire to have exactly what we want and to have it now. In contrast, faithful presence requires the capacity to take the long view, to recognize that change takes time. Scripture calls this patience.

Taking the long view requires looking beyond our present moment to the future. A practice attributed to the Iroquois illustrates this: their leaders were expected to make decisions with consideration for seven generations to follow.¹

Learning to consider the past is equally important. We must anchor our present deliberations in the examples of historic Christianity. In considering what choices to make today, we should consider the ways in which believers in the past faced the issues of their time.

Students at the Training Institute take courses in world history and worldviews, tracing the events and ideas that have shaped the world today. Students study the Old Testament and Anabaptist history to gain understanding of how God has worked with His people in centuries past. They study historical theology to see how the church has answered important questions at key times.

When we consider the future, we remind ourselves and our students that personal and community growth take time. We urge faithfulness in small actions.

Faithful presence requires the capacity to take the long view, looking into both the past and the future when we make today's decisions.



Conclusion

Not everyone is called to public or organizational leadership roles. However, all followers of Jesus are called to grow in maturity and to become persons who can serve. We are all called to faithful presence, to offer our gifts for the flourishing of the congregation and community.

Toward the goal of faithful presence, we want to help our students cultivate the capacities of coming to Scripture, listening and reading attentively, working within authority, taking initiative and collaborating, and taking the long view. These habits of persistent faithfulness enable us to live into Jesus's description of His followers as salt and light—people who make a lasting difference in their world through their faithful presence.

Footnote

¹Indigenous Corporate Training, Inc., "What Is the Seventh Generation Principle?", https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/seventh-generation-principle_05/30/2020, accessed 05/22/2023.



Training Institute Expansion

The FBTI Expansion will create spaces that facilitate interaction between instructors and students and will provide additional spaces for classes and study.

Reconstruction is in progress. We anticipate using some of the new spaces in the next year.

RAISED: **\$2,567,935** REMAINING: **\$932,065**

Planned Giving

There are various ways to give from non-cash assets, both during and after one's lifetime. With careful planning, non-cash gifts can benefit both a donor's estate and Faith Builders.

For more information contact Kelly Kauffman: fbep@fbep.org or call 814-789-4518 ext 220.

Personnel Needs

We are seeking applications for these staff openings:

- houseparents
- mentoring coordinator
- ministry apprenticing coordinator
- graphic designer
- student recruitment coordinator

For information about these job descriptions or to request an application, contact Steven Brubaker: srb@fbep.org · (814) 789-4518 ext. 239



Upcoming Events

Summer Term · JUNE 26–JULY 28

This five-week course equips teachers in K-12 settings. We are full to capacity for single women and families. FBEP.ORG/ST.

College Student Weekend

JULY 7-9

This weekend supports conservative Anabaptist college students. Register to attend at FBEP.ORG/CSW.

Teachers Week · AUGUST 1-4

This week provides practical tools for new and experienced teachers. This event is full with a wait list. FBEP.ORG/TW

Two-Year Studies Begin · AUGUST 21

Invest two years of preparation for a lifetime of service! Several student openings are still available. Download an application at FBEP.ORG/ACADEMICS/SEMESTER.

Winter Term ·

JANUARY 1-FEBRUARY 2, 2024

Registration opens early September. FBEP.ORG/WT



Faith Builders

28527 Guys Mills Road
Guys Mills, PA 16327
(814) 789-4518 | fbep.org
Address Service Requested

Non Profit Org
US Postage
PAID
Erie, PA
Permit #227

The Faith Builders newsletter is published quarterly and serves to inform, inspire, and equip its readers. Subscription is free upon request.

Congratulations, Class of 2023!

May the grace and courage of Jesus go with you!



Graduates, from left to right: Avery Amstutz, Matt Hoover, Wayne Oberholtzer, Nevin Atkinson, Larry Kurtz, Josiah Stoltzfus, Laurie Beachy, Hannah Landis, Ryan Stoltzfus, Carita Beiler, Brian Lapp, Shelly Troyer, Ben Burkholder, Kent Martin, Brent Frey, Aaron Waldner, Monica Miller, David Zook, Sara Miller, Abigail Heatwole

Faith Builders Training Institute offers rigorous course work, apprenticeship, and discipleship in our two-year study programs. In an increasingly fragmented society, we commit ourselves to contributing to flourishing churches, effective schools, and joyful homes.

Students choose from three study tracks to develop skills of service:

- » Teacher Apprenticing
- » Christian Ministries
- » General Studies

Limited spaces remain for students to join us this August! Find more information and begin applying at [FBEP.ORG/ACADEMICS/SEMESTER](https://fbep.org/academics/semester).

We'd love to hear from you! Browse options for scholarships and apply at [FBEP.ORG/ADMISSIONS/SCHOLARSHIPS](https://fbep.org/admissions/scholarships).