

## Is it Even Possible? 3: Phase II, Doctoral Coursework by Rev. Dr. Corey Minatawi

Getting things done in prison is extremely difficult. Getting things done in prison during COVID-19 is a hundredfold times more difficult. Trying to finish coursework towards a Doctoral program in Ministry is a trying affair: lost mail, lost books, missed emails, payments lost, pandemic restrictions for the State, and price gouging. Although the difficulties were great, I can now safely report finishing 45 credits in Theology courses at Covenant Bible Seminary. I don't truly know how it all came together, but I'm glad it did. Some might call it a miracle, which, I would agree. Maybe after this essay, you might think so, too!

Talking about preparation, there is much to do. In our facility, we are allowed a tablet that does simple things. One of the programs, or apps, is a calendar program. I heavily use the calendar program to set up my schedule, record dates of correspondence, and when my assignments were completed. The program uses a title section with a place for a longer description of the event. A need-to-do task is labeled at the end of a title with "////". Once complete, I remove the "////" to let me know a goal has been completed. As a major procrastinator, this goal-setting is necessary for me to stay on task.

Another thing in preparation is postage and supplies.

I have to make sure I have enough envelopes, 9x12" envelopes, postage forms, money transfer forms (e.g. to pay tuition), pens, pencils, scotch tape, etc. Literally, I have a full office. Many inmates do not buy these supplies, and usually have to beg, borrow, or steal when they need them. I always have 20 envelopes, 4 9x12" envelopes, 1 roll of tape, 5 pens, and my ruler. In prison, all of these items are currency for food, drugs, or other illicit behaviors. So, one needs to be vigilant in not loaning or giving out one's supply!

For money, I've had to do without. Anything not related to school, I simply didn't purchase. No sweets, no soups, no meats. Although I did work as a clerk and now a legal clerk, most of the money when saved, went to seminary, books, and supplies. If I wanted extra, I managed to do legal work since I was also working on my paralegal studies. Now that I've graduated legal assistant/paralegal school, I do most of the legal work for the men: writing motions, grievances, argument construction. The point is, going to seminary is difficult in prison if you don't work extra hard in managing money. To my knowledge, there isn't much in the way of financial aid for seminarians in prison.

As for the pandemic, this causes all kinds of troubles. My mentor, Dr. Dan Holcomb, came down with COVID-19

and had to be hospitalized. Thank God he came out of it OK. Another issue is price gouging. The seminary is kind enough to order books on my behalf online, and bill me. Sometimes, a textbook retailed at \$19.95 became \$56.50 during the pandemic! Outrageous. Some books, I paid for, simply did arrive. So, I had to buy them again! Now, to put in perspective, a whole month of work in our prison nets me exactly \$52.25. I simply cannot afford to buy books twice, or pay double because of greed. Luckily, I saved in preparation for such nonsense.

Then there is the issue of counselors. The counselor must authorize (via transfer form), any money pulled from one's account. Many times, over a 6-month period, counselors would be quarantined for two weeks, if, they were around someone with COVID, or out longer, if, they contracted COVID. So, the operation could halt there. Our mailroom personnel was put on furlough to save state resources, thus contributing mail loss or hindrance. Often-times, legal mail took priority; this means, for the mailroom, books could wait, including my seminary books!

Adding to all this is money accounting. Sometimes the Seminary would lose track of my tuition payments. Sometimes I would not get receipts. Sometimes books were not ordered, or, the wrong books were ordered for the course. However,

I'm happy to report, Dr. Joseph Schultz, the Registrar, took everything in good stride. I completed 45 credits of Doctoral-level courses in one year with the pandemic going on. All-in-All, about a 3-month delay.

Once the Doctoral Candidate finishes the coursework, they move into the project and dissertation phase. That is a whole different animal than the coursework. In a future essay, I hope to describe those challenges.

My goal in writing this essay is not to brag. The goal is to extend the limits of what prisoners may do on the inside. However, what one can do on the inside, is only half of the equation, so-to-speak. It requires some work as well, on those citizens on the outside to help those of us on the inside. For that, all of you who dedicate your time and energy, I salute you. A special dedication goes out to the following:

APWA Staff - For all your support.

Dr. Joseph Schultz - Humble and Godly help.

Dr. Danny Halcomb - My Doctoral Advisor

Mrs. Faydaye Curtis - Academic help in Statistics

Dr. William Krieger - Advisor in Myth + Folklore

Mr. E. Medutis + Mr. D. Desmond - Inmate Counselors

God Bless, Rev. Corey Minarani