



Auburn Studies

# Learning Pastoral Imagination

A Five-Year Report  
On How New Ministers  
Learn in Practice

By Christian A.B. Scharen and Eileen R. Campbell-Reed

Winter 2016



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## About this Issue

To lead with courage and pastoral wisdom in the twenty-first century requires ministers to make a transition from simply imagining ministry to embodying pastoral imagination. The relational and embodied capacity for ministry, what Craig Dykstra first called pastoral imagination, emerges over time and remains indispensable for effective pastoral leadership in congregations and community ministries.

We find through listening to ministry leaders across the country that ministry today is less about exercising the authority of an office or role and more about embodying an authentic contextual wisdom only gained by daily practice of leadership on the long arc of learning ministry. Yet few studies of learning over time have been conducted, leading to this unique, broadly ecumenical, and national study of learning ministry in practice. In this five-year report, we describe the experiences of a cohort of 50 diverse ministers from across the United States, recruited from 10 theological schools ranging from Pentecostal to Eastern Orthodox and coming from many different denominational traditions. This study deepens engagement of Auburn research on patterns of teaching and learning in theological education, offering a dynamic view into the formation of faith leaders for the twenty-first century.

With gratitude for your partnership,

Christian A. B. Scharen

Vice President, Applied Research

## About the Authors

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## A Five-Year Report On How New Ministers Learn in Practice

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**U**nderstanding ministry today is far from a self-evident exercise. Is it a calling? A professional role? A particular kind of identity conferred through licensing or ordination? How is ministry like other professions? How is it unique? How is preparation for ministry different across theological traditions and denominations? What conditions are needed to prepare ministers for the wise practice of ministry? How are schools, classes, and teachers in theological education getting it right? What changes are needed in the schools and curricula of theological education in order to prepare ministers for their work at the intersections of human suffering and divine redemption? How can ministers be prepared for the complexity of mission and ministry today, rather than being inducted into patterns of ministry prevalent in eras now long past?

Such lively questions are at the center of conversations about training wise ministers. In asking such questions, the Learning Pastoral Imagination research project fits within a tradition of the study of theological education in the United States and Canada. These studies, however, have tended to examine seminaries—their campuses, their faculties and administrations, and their curricula and students.<sup>1</sup> Charles Foster led the

most recent of these major studies for the Carnegie Foundation, resulting in the 2006 book *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination*. Like many of its predecessors, *Educating Clergy* focused on seminaries, and especially the faculty's teaching practices. Their key research question shows this focus: "How do seminary educators foster among their students a pastoral, priestly, or rabbinic imagination that integrates knowledge

and skill, moral integrity, and religious commitment in the roles, relationships, and responsibilities they will be assuming in clergy practice?”<sup>2</sup> While their work ranges more broadly than the focus on seminary educators, because the Carnegie Foundation is, by virtue of its mission, focused on “the advancement of teaching,” *Educating Clergy* centered on what Foster and his colleagues called the “signature pedagogies” of theological and rabbinic educators.

The Learning Pastoral Imagination (LPI) project was conceived as the flip side of *Educating Clergy*. Rather than focus on teaching, we focus on learning, and instead of focusing on faculty, the project focuses on students. Furthermore, rather than focusing on the few years of formal studies, which are part of standard seminary degree programs, the project focuses on the learning trajectory of students, including seminary but beginning in childhood and extending into years of ministry leadership beyond seminary. This is not to say these alternatives are either/or. Both attend to teaching and learning, to faculty and students, and to broader contexts of education and formation. Think of a stovetop, with front burners and back burners. Each project has all pots on the stove, but some are in front, and necessarily others are in back.

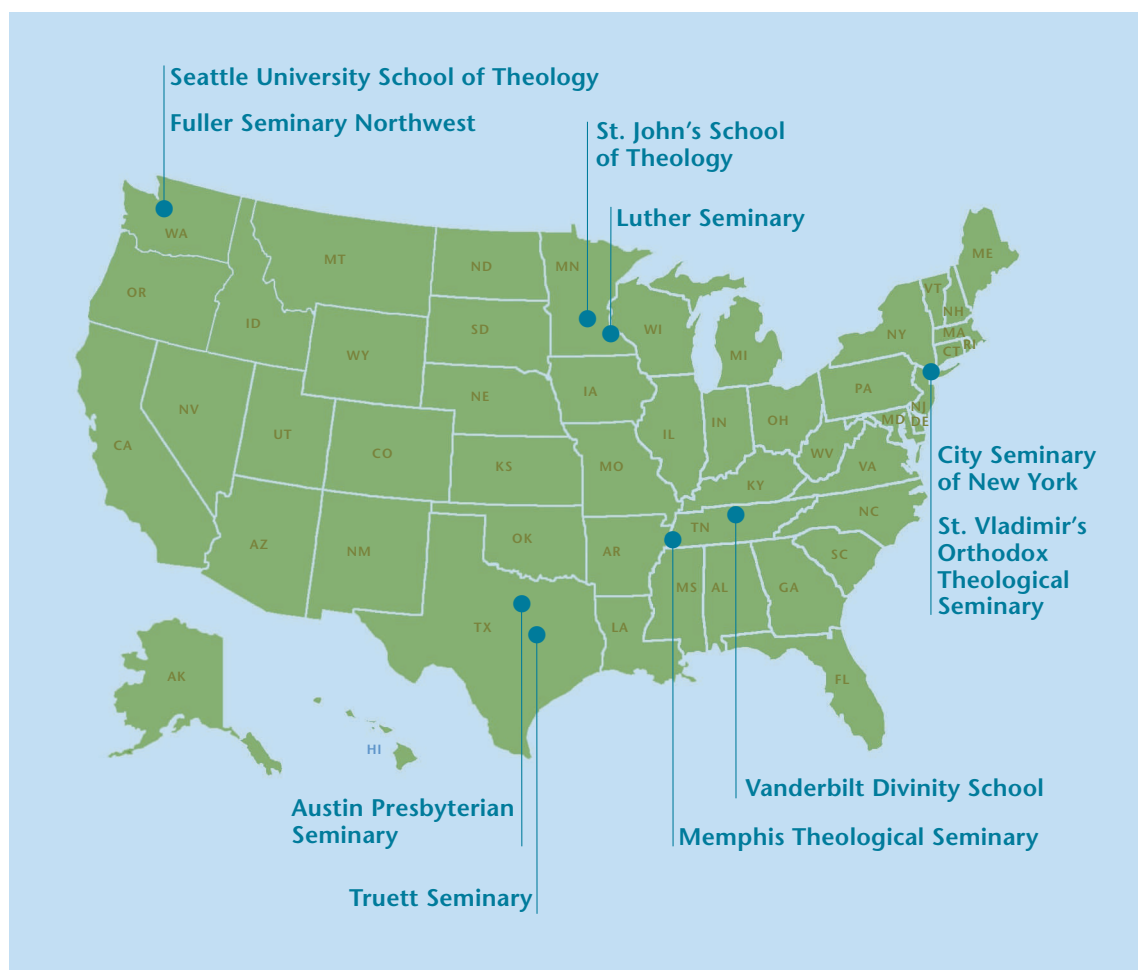
The LPI project, then, pays attention to how clergy learn by doing—that is, how they learn in practice over time. The focus on learning in practice raises a key concern we share with Foster et al. in *Educating Clergy*: investigating how the complex and distinctive intelligence—a pastoral imagination—exhibited by excellent

## The overarching research question for the study is thus: *How is pastoral imagination formed through practice in ministry over time?*

pastors is taught and learned. Our conviction is that this capacity for wise pastoral leadership is often sparked early in life, and only comes to fruition through years of learning in the daily practice of ministry.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, to focus on the specific experience of formal theological education in academic programs is both necessary and limited. Understanding more fully how clergy learn to exercise such a pastoral imagination requires attending to the long arc of learning ministry.<sup>4</sup> Attending carefully to that arc in a wide diversity of lives in ministry will significantly strengthen the work of persons who care deeply about excellence in ministry and who seek to shape future leaders for ministry.

This report comes at the five-year mark of our study. The LPI Project started in 2009 with a plan to follow a diverse group of ministers from seminary into ministry—or wherever their paths took them. In addition we planned to interview clergy already many years into their ministry careers (most between 15 and 25 years) to give us a fast-forward glimpse of the destination towards which the seminary graduates are headed. We included selected visits to congregations served by these ministers, including conversations with members. The overarching research question for the study is thus: *How is pastoral imagination formed through practice in ministry over time?* To get at this question we needed a sample of participants who could represent the vast array of diversity embodied in the leadership of the twenty-first

**Figure 1: Map of Schools**



century church in the United States. Mirroring diversity in ministry leadership meant we wanted to include as many denominations, traditions and regions of the country as we could. We approached ten schools across five geographical regions. We chose to expand beyond the more studied centers of theological education (Boston, Chicago, and Berkeley), and we invited faculties to nominate students who showed promise in ministry (See Figure 1).

In this report we want to introduce you to the cohort of 50 ministers we met while they were finishing seminary and who we have been following and learning from over the last five years. These women and men have graduated from seminary. Many received ordination or certification for ministry. Some of them continued in pastorates—begun long before seminary—with renewed vitality. After graduation most of them began to practice ministry in churches, while some found themselves working in non-profit agencies, health care facilities, and other non-traditional settings. A few went to graduate school, and

## All the ministers in the study are continuing a learning process that began long before they arrived at seminary, shaping them in significant ways.

another handful, for various reasons, do not yet have places to serve in ministry leadership. All the ministers in the study are continuing a learning process that began long before they arrived at seminary, shaping them in significant ways. Based on our interviews with more experienced ministers, we anticipate complex and profound itineraries of learning to continue for the newer seminary graduates as well.

### Conceptual Context

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We designed our research on learning ministry knowing full well this is a time of great spiritual and moral unrest. To name all the trends and social dynamics giving shape to life in the United States (and in interconnected ways, the whole globe) goes beyond the scope of a compact report such as this. Yet minimally we must gesture to a few of the large, complex issues such as the sharp growth in economic inequality, exacerbating racial and other divides; the fast-growing percentage of the general population not affiliated with a faith community or tradition; the coming shift in the United States population toward a majority of persons of color; and the increasingly powerful impacts of climate change. The broad social trends have local impacts, of course, and shape the lives of individuals and their faith communities.

Complex problems require particular sorts of leaders and methods to study leadership. In their book, *Getting to Maybe: How the World is Changed*, organizational change theorists

Frances Westley, Brenda Zimmerman, and Michael Quinn Patton distinguish between simple, complicated, and complex problems. Simple problems are like baking a cake, which one person can do with a recipe, a little coaching, and some practice. Complicated problems are like sending a rocket to the moon. It is like baking a cake, but with a much longer, more technical recipe and many highly trained workers needed to make it. Yet in both, the challenge is known, the result can be predicted, and technical expertise can be applied to achieve the desired outcome. A complex problem is like raising a child. There is no recipe, and while coaching may help, it will inevitably fall short of the myriad of circumstances in which parents must interact with children. Further, children grow and change, so even if success is achieved at one stage, it by no means assures success at the next.<sup>5</sup>

What is needed in facing complexity, then, is not technical expertise but what Harvard leadership scholar Ronald Heifetz in his classic book *Leadership without Easy Answers* called “adaptive capacity.”<sup>6</sup> It means we do not know the answer, and thus must be open, experimental, and willing to learn from experience as we go. Given the context of ministry today, leading communities in responding to the cries of a beautiful and hurting world is just such a complex challenge, requiring an adaptive rather than technical expertise.

Craig Dykstra, a noted practical theologian, took up just this challenge by seeking to move theological education and ministry away from a “harmfully individualistic, technological,

ahistorical and abstract” notion of practice.<sup>7</sup> In his view, the technical notion of practice portrayed it as merely action or technique. Drawing on Alasdair McIntyre, Dykstra offered a richer understanding of practice that entails communal context, historical grounding, and substantive theological meaning.<sup>8</sup> Such engaged practice is formative, offering embodied wisdom, and one who dwells in the practice learns its depth and breadth. Practices—such as prayer or singing—have goods internal to them, he argues, and these shape participants in a particular wisdom about God, themselves, and the world.

Dykstra’s further development of his work on practice helped him see and name “pastoral imagination” as short-hand for the adaptive, wise leadership capacity excellent pastors exhibit. *Pastoral imagination* refers to an individual’s capacity for seeing a situation of ministry in all its holy and relational depths, and responding with wise and fitting judgment and action.<sup>9</sup> We have extended this understanding by drawing upon the notion of *phronesis*, which is practical knowledge and judgment derived from experience in practice over time.<sup>10</sup> Through connecting *phronesis* with the gifts and work of the Holy Spirit, we argue, pastoral imagination emerges as an integrative, embodied, and relational capacity.<sup>11</sup> It is a capacity for situational perceptions that are skilled and make use of multiple kinds of knowledge about self, context, relationships of power, and ritual practices of ministry (pastoral care, preaching, presiding, teaching, leading) to take risks and act with responsibility.<sup>12</sup> Pastors need just such a capacity for the complex work of leading today’s churches and other religious bodies. Learning pastoral imagination can lead to greater integration of complex layers of knowing, a keen perception which sees situations as spaces of God’s presence and

work, and intuitive judgment regarding fitting responses required in the moment.<sup>13</sup>

Pastoral imagination can only be learned—and therefore studied—over time. Dykstra, for instance, has written that “Life lived long enough and fully enough in the pastoral office gives rise to a way of seeing in depth and of creating new realities.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, any study seeking to show such qualitative learning over time must attend to the long arc of learning ministry. Here, we have found specific help in two key sources. First, we draw upon a framework for developmental learning over time developed by two University of California, Berkeley professors: Hubert Dreyfus, a philosopher, and his brother, applied mathematician Stuart Dreyfus. Adapted for studying learning in the professions by University of California, San Francisco nursing scholar, Patricia Benner, the insight about the journey “from novice to expert” describes in phenomenological terms the remarkable integration of intellect, emotion, and embodiment in practice over time.<sup>15</sup> Second, we have drawn inspiration as well as methodological vision from the landmark Grant Study of Adult Development begun at Harvard in 1938. George Vaillant, director of the study for decades, has continued to write beautifully about the wisdom only such a life study could provide.<sup>16</sup> With continued funding and good health, we, too, intend to follow this cohort through their careers. Given the kind of capacity we claim pastoral imagination to be, no other sort of study would help us to understand as well how it is learned.



## Historical Context

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The questions which open this report culminate with this: “How can ministers be prepared for the complexity of mission and ministry *today*, rather than being inducted into patterns of ministry prevalent in eras now long past?”

This suggests the distinctiveness of our present moment, with both continuity and discontinuity from the past. To further set the context for our report on findings and their implications for theological education, we want to briefly evoke the historical context for theological education in the United States.

In colonial America theological education took the form of “reading divinity,” in which aspiring ministers typically took up residence with established ministers to study scripture, learn ancient languages, and read doctrinal texts, learning other tasks of pastoral ministry through observation and eventual practice alongside mentor pastors who directed their protégés.<sup>17</sup> Yet soon after the Revolutionary War, sweeping religious revivals and a migration toward the western frontiers of the new Republic altered the patterns of preparation for ministry. Settled regions and churches continued to idealize a theologically educated ministry, but a new group of uneducated men, and a few women, largely Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians, shunned education and embraced God’s divine call as sufficient preparation to preach.<sup>18</sup> This tension between textual and experiential formation for ministry leadership is an enduring influence in American theological education.

Formal education for ministry was rarely available to freed black men in the nineteenth century, but many freed and enslaved black preachers benefited from the widespread populist idea that divine calling was enough

**Twenty-first century seminaries are deeply shaped by centuries-old patterns: the four-fold organization of theological studies, heavy dependence on texts as the basis of knowledge transmission, and a lack of attention to practical ministry experience.**

for the preparation and sustenance of a minister.<sup>19</sup> Populist movements of Baptists and Methodists held more openness for women and black men to preach to mixed audiences based on the authority of call, but by the time churches were splitting the nation North and South, varieties of Baptists and Methodists were also seeking more respectability and opening colleges to train ministers at a rapid pace.<sup>20</sup> The Civil War changed ministry in several important ways. The biggest social change was the secession of black Christians from white-controlled churches and into new churches and denominations of their own. Black preachers emerged as the cultural and political leaders of black communities, particularly in the South. Despite the growth in the number of schools, most ministers still received little or no formal education.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile the schools that educated ministers, both Catholic and Protestant, felt the influence of the European university patterns of education, especially through theologians and biblical scholars trained in German schools.<sup>22</sup> In the early nineteenth century theology’s place in the university had solidified around a four-fold pattern that continues to shape theological education curricula even today: the so called

“theoretical” areas of biblical exegesis, dogmatic theology, and church history became standard along with the so-called “practical” or “applied” areas of theology including the pastoral work of preaching, teaching, and care.<sup>23</sup> Not only were modern, scientific approaches to the study of theological topics growing, new disciplines were forming all across the university. Numerous new professions including psychological counseling, social work, and teaching, were also emerging in the marketplace and competing for the best students.<sup>24</sup> Existing professions like medicine and law were increasingly specializing their knowledge, formal study, and experience through advanced practice and internship. The president of Harvard, in a survey of ministry in America, was among the first to call for internships and field education for seminary students in 1899.<sup>25</sup>

In the early twentieth century the pressures of modernism and the expanding university ideals of academic disciplines, research, and specialization continued to exert a shaping force on the structure of theological school faculty and curricula. Several studies of ministry and theological education highlighted the professional deficits of ministry preparation.<sup>26</sup> Out of the studies came the American Association of Theological Schools (AATS), which immediately began to standardize academics and call for greater professionalism in ministry training.

In clinical settings such as medical facilities and psychiatric hospitals, a new “clinical training” for ministry emerged, teaching students and pastors to attend more carefully to the lived experience of religion in others and themselves. Within a decade, the AATS recommended that seminaries add the new Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) to their requirements. CPE, however, was never fully integrated into the curricula of the schools. The larger goal of greater

professionalization for ministry only materialized fully after WWII and with the help of AATS, which worked to standardize many aspects of theological education. The financial, building, and baby booms that followed WWII funded the growth of religion in all its many forms while the Catholic Church experienced revitalization and complication of the priesthood after Vatican II.<sup>27</sup> One powerful effect of these twentieth century changes was a new ideal: the educated and professional pastor. Nevertheless, professionalism in ministry itself became a point of contention for both conservative and liberal thinkers.<sup>28</sup>

In the 1960s leadership in pastoral ministry expanded with dramatic new diversity. Women began pastoring in greater numbers, and ministry expanded to include a greater diversity of vocations open to women.<sup>29</sup> New waves of immigrants to the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s also shifted the make up of churches and leaders, as well as creating different needs for education, training, and support for ministry in America. The women’s movement, the Civil Rights movement, the gay rights movement, and anti-war protests, reshaped both the participants in and the substance of ministry. In the final decades of the twentieth century the growth of Evangelicals and Pentecostals accelerated in the U.S. while Mainline churches moved into slow numerical decline.<sup>30</sup>

Twenty-first century seminaries are deeply shaped by centuries-old patterns: the four-fold organization of theological studies, heavy dependence on texts as the basis of knowledge transmission, and a lack of attention to practical ministry experience. Although seminary training now includes field

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education, contextual components of learning, spiritual formation for ministry, and continuing education for pastors beyond seminary, the basic approach is not so much integrative as change by addition. Faculty themselves, especially with the post-1960s growth of religious studies departments, were trained at greater distance from the horizon in which ministry took place. Increasingly the university ideal competed for faculty attention and rewarded their efforts at research, publishing, and supporting their disciplinary guilds: the game of the academy often reigned over the game of ministry.<sup>31</sup>

Early in the twenty-first century William Sullivan noted the fragmentation of both ministry and theological education and called for a new contextual paradigm centered on practice-based, integrative apprenticeship for learning ministry. Following in the Aristotelian wisdom tradition, Sullivan urged an education for ministers requiring multiple apprenticeships of knowledge, skill, and character formation.<sup>32</sup> His call, offered as the preface to Foster et al.’s *Educating Clergy*, sets up the study’s portrayal of pedagogies that integrate the three apprenticeships with disciplinary rigor and new habits of mind. The goal of the teaching and learning is a visionary, integrated and discerning pastoral imagination.<sup>33</sup> Both the current fragmentation in theological

education, and the new paradigm Sullivan references call for learning that is contextually situated in communal practice and integrated across the range of pastoral practices.

Both the history and contemporary challenges for theological education identified by Dykstra, Sullivan, and others, highlighted key issues to pursue with this research project. First, we need a better understanding of ministry as a practice, so that we can see how learning for ministry happens from the student’s experience over time. Second, and closely related, we need to see how the practice of ministry is inhabited. We need to see with more clarity how it is that new ministers, through grace and grit, learn to exercise pastoral imagination in Christian community in and for the sake of God’s beloved, broken, and beautiful world. In pursuing these two questions, as Justo Gonzalez reminds us, we must keep in mind the demographic revolution in the United States in which ethnic minority populations will soon make up a majority of the total population. While previously dominant white mainline denominations are declining, most ethnic minority churches are growing, and some are growing very rapidly. We are, he claims, facing “a total reorientation and redefinition of theological studies and ministerial training.”<sup>34</sup>

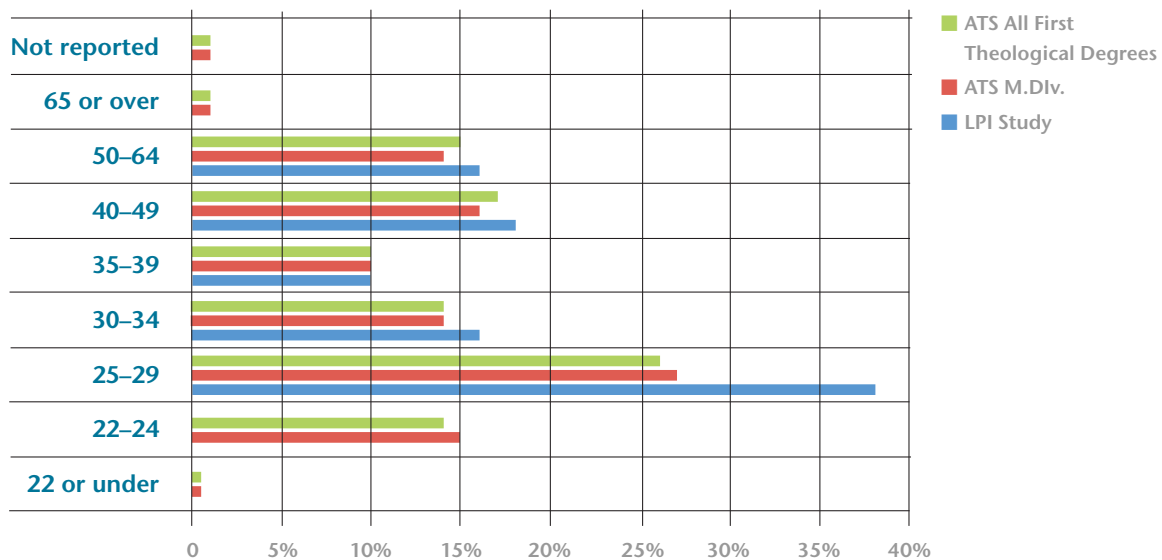
## **Methodological Context**

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The Learning Pastoral Imagination Project is a longitudinal, national, and ecumenical study of ministry in practice. The study follows 50 pastoral leaders from ten schools as they transition from seminary into a wide variety of ministry contexts. The primary research method includes day-long group interviews with cohorts of five graduates from the same schools. The study also includes ongoing contextual observations of study participants, interviews

## Figure 2: Age: ATS and LPI Study

(shown as percentage)



Source: 2010 ATS Annual Data Tables of Current Students

with lay people in their churches, brief surveys, and individual conversations. The first round of interviews was conducted in participants' final year of seminary (2009-2010). A second round was conducted 18-24 months later (2011-2012). The third round of interviews meets participants at four to five years after graduation (2014-2015).

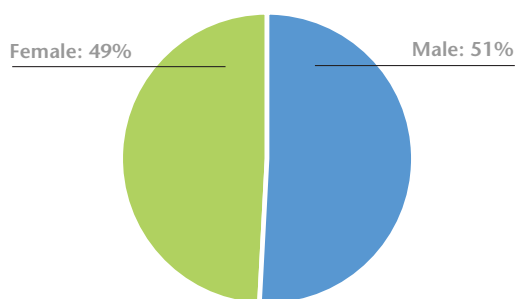
The project, generously funded by Lilly Endowment, Inc., has been based at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota since 2008.<sup>35</sup> This project includes ministers serving in a range of traditions including Orthodox, Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Mainline Protestant, non-denominational, and Roman Catholic. The ministers, split evenly between male and female, live in every region of the U.S. The group includes ministers who are African-American, Hispanic, Asian, and Caucasian. The cohort includes those who identify as straight,

gay, single and partnered. At the study's inception, participants ranged in age from the mid-20s to the mid-60s, with a median age of 34. (See Figure 2.) We recruited seminarians from these schools: Fuller Theological Seminary, Seattle University School of Theology and Ministry, Luther Seminary, St. John's School of Theology and Seminary, St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, City Seminary of New York, Memphis Theological Seminary, Vanderbilt University Divinity School, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, and Baylor's George W. Truett Theological Seminary. (See Figure 1.)

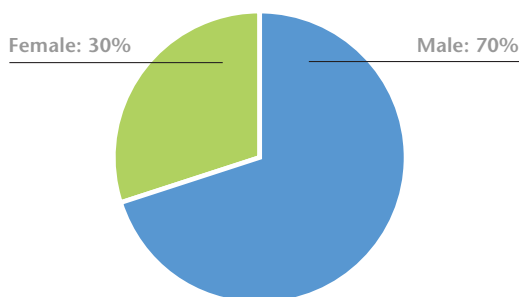
When we first met the seminarians in the LPI study they were nearing seminary graduation in 2009-10. In the following comparisons we offer demographics of the LPI pool and the demographics of Association of Theological Schools in the U.S. and Canada (ATS) students in 2010, when most of our study participants completed their master's degrees. The LPI Study includes a greater number of females by design because of the rapid changes to ministry

**Figure 3:**  
**Gender ATS and LPI Study**

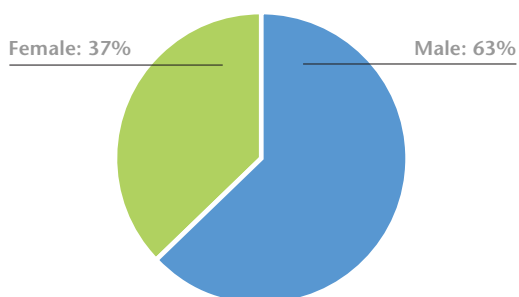
*LPI Study*



*ATS—M.Div. Students, 2010*



*ATS—All Masters first degree, 2010*



Source: 2010 ATS Annual Data Tables of Current Students

in the last five decades in which the number of women leading congregations grew from negligible to between 20 and 30 percent in Mainline Protestant churches. (See Figures 3, as well as Finding five below).<sup>36</sup> The LPI Study's racial-ethnic make-up broadly mirrors the ATS students, with the four largest identified groups each present in the cohort. (See Figure 4.)

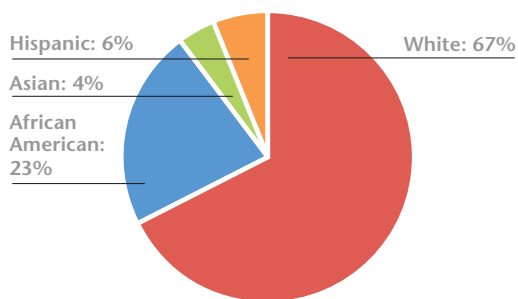
Over twenty different denominations are included in the LPI study cohort. Compared to the overall ATS demographics, we have a larger number of historic Black churches (AME, CME), Pentecostals, mainline Protestants (especially Presbyterian and Lutheran) and Orthodox, and fewer Southern Baptists. Our sampling method took account of the desire for denominational diversity, but we did not seek a denominationally representative sample. Further, the simple fact of recruiting a cohort from St. Vladimir's (five priests) meant oversampling the Orthodox, and not recruiting a cohort from one of the main Southern Baptist seminaries meant undersampling that group.<sup>37</sup>

The question of denominational affiliation is a good deal more complex in the stories of minister's lives, however. For example, two of the Orthodox priests we interviewed were raised Southern Baptist, and among the Presbyterians, some are decidedly Evangelical in their orientation while others are part of the progressive end of the Mainline.<sup>38</sup> (See Figures 5 and 6.)

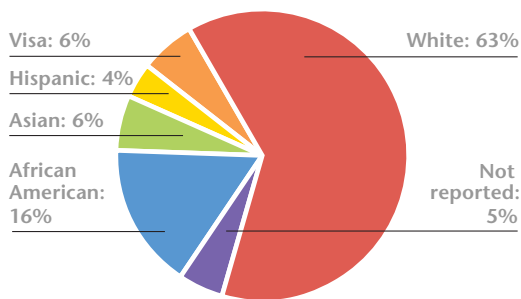
Approximately half of the LPI Study participants currently have places of ministerial service in congregations. Another thirty-five percent of the participants are in chaplaincy, non-profit ministry positions, or serving part-time in congregational ministry. While the study is ongoing and open-ended, the five-year mark is regarded as an important point in

**Figure 4: Race & Ethnicity: ATS and LPI Study**

*LPI Study*



*ATS—M.Div., 2010*



Source: 2010 ATS Annual Data Tables of Current Students

ministerial careers, so it seemed fitting to pause at this juncture to take stock of key findings.

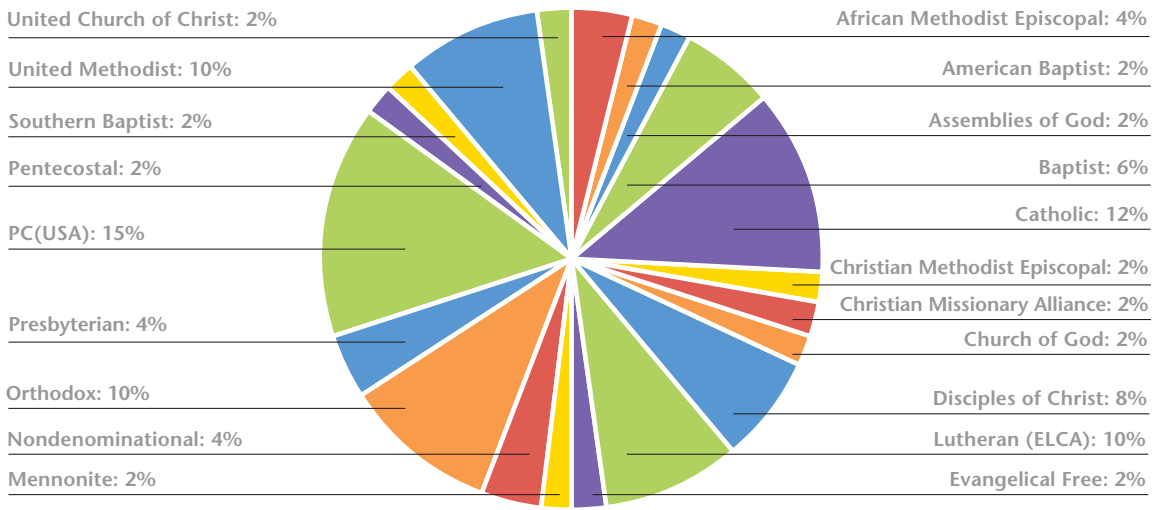
In some respects the LPI Study follows traditional social science standards for research. It draws, for instance, on both quantitative and qualitative data gathered through traditional research methods such as survey, participant observation, and interviews. We lament, however, the division between theology and social science, and especially the “borrowing” of social science methods, while bracketing the theological.<sup>39</sup> Instead, from the beginning we have tried to develop and practice a fully practical theological method of empirical research. This has a variety of implications that make our work distinctive. It bears briefly mentioning here some of the distinctive approaches here in order to set better expectations for those unfamiliar with this newly emerging mode of integrating theology and social science.

First, we have from the start engaged the research as practical theologians, conceiving of the “data collection” through observation and interviews as work standing on holy ground

(Exodus 3:5). We intentionally inhabit the hybrid roles of theologians and researchers, for instance, beginning group interviews with prayer, and making explicit to our participants that we, too, are pastors who have heard a call to ministry and served congregations as well as other church-related roles. Among other things, this has heightened our respect for listening deeply, and allowed a crucial place for silence in the midst of our work as the space in which God holds us in love, and out of which God hears us into speech.<sup>40</sup>

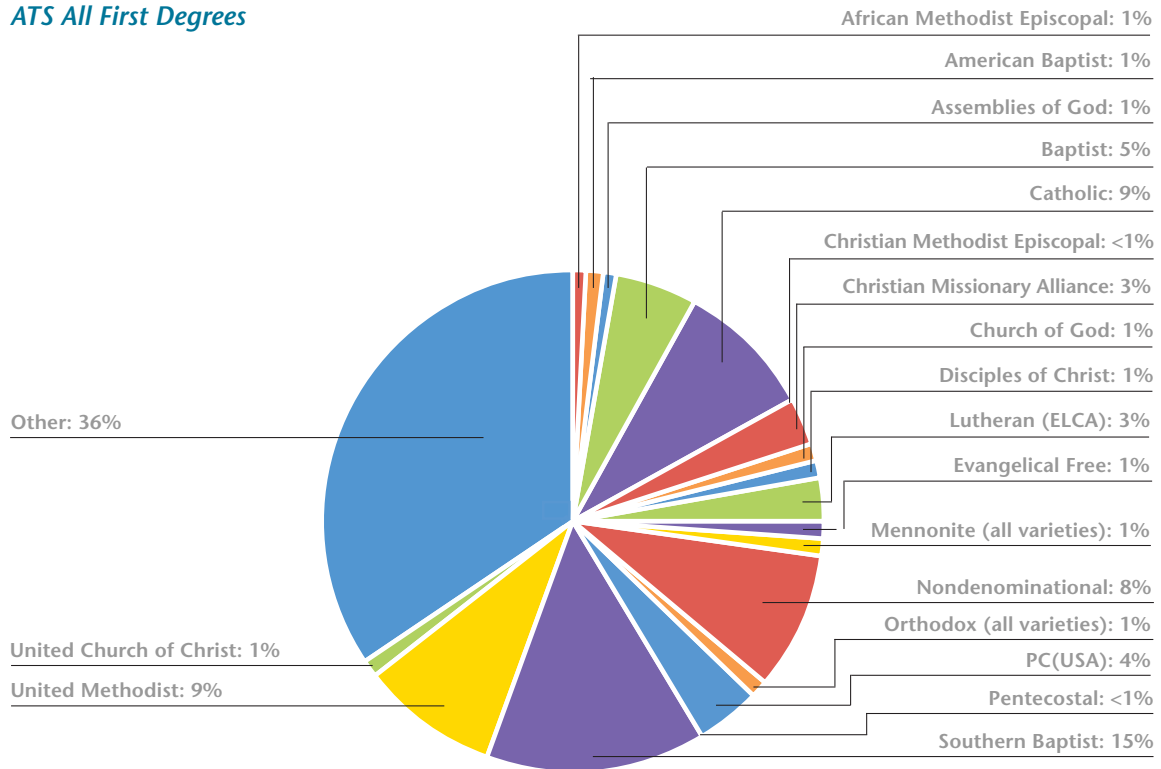
Second, we follow an action-oriented case study method that explicitly rejects the standards of natural science as inappropriate to the subject matter (human social life). Influenced especially by Dutch social scientist Bent Flyvbjerg (as well as others), we seek to “restore social science to its classical position as a practical, intellectual activity aimed at clarifying the problems, risks, and possibilities we face as humans and societies, and at contributing to social and political praxis.”<sup>41</sup> While natural science aspires to general, theoretical, context-independent facts (such as the molecular structure of water—composed of two molecules of hydrogen and one of oxygen) that are therefore generalizable (water everywhere has this structure), social

**Figure 5: Denominations**



**Figure 6: Denominations**

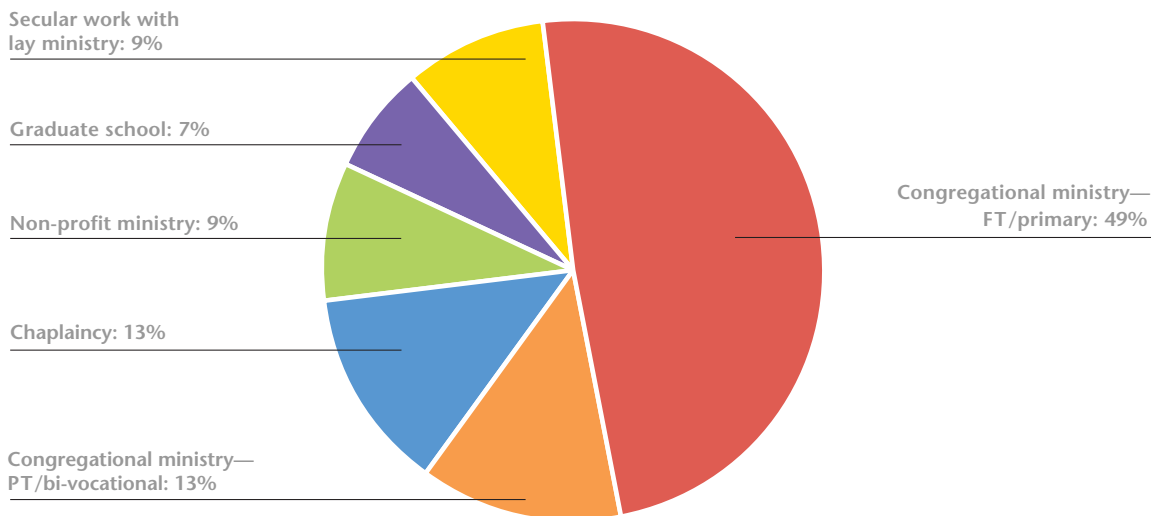
*ATS All First Degrees*



Source: 2010 ATS Annual Data Tables of Current Students

## Figure 7: Ministry Placements

### LPI Study



sciences attend to human social life in which values and judgments situated in distinctive concrete circumstances are paramount. The concrete, practical, and context-dependent knowledge provided by qualitative research, and especially case studies, provides exactly the type of knowledge most conducive to the development of wisdom in human personal and social development. While the findings of case studies are not therefore generalizable in the natural science sense of that term, they do have implications for many situations beyond the specific case.<sup>42</sup> Here an example might be the paradigm case, illuminating a whole range of phenomena such as Michel Foucault's case study of the Panopticon, which provided insight into the social architecture of power and surveillance in modern society.<sup>43</sup>

Third, while case studies are driven by research hypotheses, as are all methods in scientific research, they are often critiqued as susceptible to the problem of finding evidence to support preconceived notions. While some suppose the subjective character of qualitative

research, and case studies in particular, leaves an open door for bias, recent writing about methods shows all research is liable to this fault. It requires rigorous self-reflexivity—in theological terms, humility—to account for these biases and preconceived notions.<sup>44</sup> Because of our research hypotheses, including the notion that pastoral imagination is crucial to wise ministry and that it can only be learned over time, our project works to find the distinctive dynamics of learning pastoral imagination in particular cases. We also aim to see connections between cases, which point to common themes among cases of ministers who are learning in practice.<sup>45</sup> Use of what Clifford Geertz called “thick description” is essential here, offering as it does rich narratives of particular trajectories of learning.<sup>46</sup> Many more insights can be gained from these narratives than the ones we point to in our writing. Yet



even the findings we name and elaborate upon below could not have been gained through quantitative surveys, making the point about the context-based and socially complex knowledge this kind of research produces.

This report outlines six major findings about what leads to pastoral imagination and how it grows over time in practice. These particular findings are especially relevant to those engaged in the enterprise of theological education. After naming them here, we will unpack each in turn. They are, in a way, like overlaid transparencies in an anatomy and physiology book, one showing the circulation system, another showing the bone structure, and a third showing the nervous system. Together, the various pages show the key systems of the whole body in its complicated interconnections. So, too, with aspects of learning pastoral imagination, many interconnections and implications flow between sections even if each is distinct.

- Learning pastoral imagination happens best in formation for ministry that is integrative, embodied, and relational;
- Learning pastoral imagination centers on integrated teaching that understands and articulates the challenges of the practice of ministry today;
- Learning pastoral imagination requires both the daily practice of ministry over time and critical moments that may arise from crisis or clarity.
- Learning pastoral imagination requires both apprenticeship to a situation and mentors who offer relational wisdom through shared reflection and making sense of a situation;
- Learning pastoral imagination is complicated by the intersection of social and personal forces of injustice;
- Learning pastoral imagination is needed for inhabiting ministry as a spiritual practice, opening up self and community to the presence and power of God.

## Eve's Story: Articulating Pastoral Imagination in Practice

**E**ve's story embodies all six of our major findings. Reading her story gives a synthetic overview of one case of "learning pastoral imagination," while aspects of her story help to introduce each finding, providing a common thread through them all. In the following stories drawn from Eve's move from seminary to pastoral leadership in a community of faith, we focus upon two crises in her learning. These sorts of crises highlight the crucible of learning represented by diving into the practice of ministry. Such learning in practice, over time, and with key peer and mentor support, opens the possibility of growing into

pastoral imagination. This capacity, as we have described it, is literally an embodied, relational integration of all one has learned in life to that point, including the years of formal theological education. In her embodied action as a ministry leader, Eve shows a growing capacity to make wise judgments in the moment, adjusting in response to her sense of God's presence and word to a particular person or family. In one sense, learning in crisis is nothing but a concentrated version of the challenges to live daily and faithfully with God's people. There, in the day-to-day activities of life together, the rich capacity to respond wisely, with pastoral imagination, is born and grows.

### Nascent Pastoral Imagination

When we interview Eve, her voice is quiet yet packed with humor and intensity. She is in her early 30s, Caucasian, living in the Midwest, and married to another minister. Raised in the suburbs, Eve shuttled between homes of her divorced parents when she was very young. She was baptized in a Lutheran church but didn't attend church growing up. A basketball player, she found in her teammates both friendship and an evangelical Christian faith. The combination sustained her through high school and college. During college, Eve experienced a life-changing trip to Mexico. She came face to face with extreme poverty and learned how the theology of liberation emerged as a response to the social sources of such poverty. After graduating from college with a degree in religion, she took a job as Lilly Vocations Fellow, working in a program on "Vocation and Global Citizenship." During that year she began a master's degree in pastoral studies and later transferred to the M. Div. program. In quick succession she completed Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) and a year-long internship. We first interviewed Eve during her final year of seminary.

When seminarians describe early forays into ministry, their stories routinely include three key themes: tensions between concepts and lived practice, experiences of being overwhelmed, and the risk of responsible action. Experience with each of these themes aids movement from imagining ministry to pastoral imagination. In a pivotal CPE experience, Eve describes all three.

Eve was on call one weekend for a hospice facility. Just after going on a run, she was called in. She had to clean up quickly, and drive 20 minutes to the care facility. The crisis was with

an elderly couple Eve knew from prior visits. The wife was suffering from severe dementia, and the husband, a hospice patient, had a stroke that afternoon and was dying. The couple's daughter, Nancy, a Methodist minister, had not yet arrived. Their son Jim asked Eve: "What should I do? Should I bring Mom in? Will that make her worse? Will she go into a panic attack?" Eve helped Jim clarify his desire to help his mom be with her husband. They wheeled his mom down and gathered in dad's room. Eve prayed at the bedside. As she remembers it, the man died just as she said, "Into your hands we commend his spirit." "He died right there," she told us in the group interview. "It was a definite growing moment, like, holy cow, this stuff is real!"

Reflecting on the experience, Eve remarked that she had to shift from worry about what her role was, to confidence that she could actually step in and be a resource for the family, helping with a concrete decision to take the wife in and leading a prayer around the dying husband. Nancy, the daughter, arrived shortly after the death. She went in to the room with her dad and sobbed in grief. Eve recalls, "To stand outside that door and witness that was kind of beautiful, but just really hard, too. I was there for like five hours while we were waiting. It was a long day."

While in seminary Eve studied pastoral care for the dying and theologies of death, but that day she had to put them to use in a chaotic and tension-filled moment. Pastoral ministry in this situation required situated use of pastoral and theological knowledge in actual practice. Exactly because of her inexperience in the role of minister, and the messy situation itself, Eve felt overwhelmed at each step, wondering if she knew the fitting

thing to do. Despite her hesitation, the family needed her to be with them as their minister. She risked acting with initiative to lead the family in ways she thought were contextually appropriate. The power of such learning has everything to do with the fact that it is not hypothetical; real lives are involved and real consequences are at stake.

We asked Eve what the experience taught her, and she expressed gratitude, “a feeling of thankfulness just to be in those moments. Just what a gift it is. And the gravity of the situation.” In the weeks that followed, Eve’s CPE supervisor and peer group helped her to appreciate the gift and gravity of the moment. With the help of mentors, Eve claimed and assimilated such moments, forming her nascent pastoral imagination. She was beginning to bear an embodied sense of the sacred in concrete situations.

### **Maturing Pastoral Imagination**

Eve married and finished seminary. After graduation, with the help of a generous fellowship, she and her husband took time to travel in Africa, the Middle East and Europe including two weeks in the ecumenical community in Taizé, France. Upon returning to the United States, Eve was ordained and installed at a rural congregation near the city where her husband served as pastor in another congregation. When we met with Eve and her seminary colleagues for a second group interview, she was finding her way in the new congregation and coping with a variety of congregational struggles and conflicts. Young families commuted to the city for work, living “very chaotic, busy, full lives.” Older farmers in the congregation took life at a different pace, preferring to keep things “basic and

plain,” yet they held a “deep and profound” faith, according to Eve.

Just four months into the new pastorate, tragedy struck. She was ready to travel for Thanksgiving when the call came: Joseph’s 24-year-old grandson, Luke, had died in a farm-machine accident while clearing snow. Eve drove out to the farm and found Joseph and others still dressed for morning chores. Joseph said, “I can’t believe . . . I know this isn’t the will of God.”

Eve echoed his words: “You know, I don’t think so either.” As she talked with the family, she recalls recognizing the grief as theirs and trying to keep an appropriate emotional distance. She was thinking, “How I can enter into it and have sympathy, and yet still not be so lost in the tragedy of it, and be able to speak words of life, even in the midst of it?”

After leaving the family, Eve began thinking about how the death would impact her preaching on Sunday. In light of the tragedy, Eve could no longer “wrap her mind around” the image of turning “swords into plowshares,” the lectionary text from Isaiah 2 that was the basis of Sunday’s sermon. She changed course, deciding on Psalm 122: “I was glad when they said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord.” She wanted to ask, “Why do we go to church?” And she hoped to make the point that “nothing really that amazing really ever happens here. Honestly, in my life, it’s never like the sky opens up [to say] this is what I’m supposed to be doing. But it’s the sustenance.”

She wanted to talk with the congregation in her sermon about what she and her farmer parishioner said to each other. “This isn’t the will of God, but God’s will is still done. Even in death . . . God is on the side of life, and when that tractor closed in on Luke, God’s heart was

the first to break.” She wanted to echo all she had learned from a favorite seminary professor, Hebrew Bible scholar, Terry Fretheim, and his course on God and human suffering as well as from a powerful sermon preached by William Sloan Coffin after his own son died.<sup>47</sup>

As Sunday drew closer, Eve decided against preaching a theology of death and tragedy. She worried that not everyone in the small church and community had received news of the death. She says, “I wanted to be responsible about all the emotions.” She recalls “deliberating the whole time,” and even posting to her Facebook friends that she was “really anxious about the sermon’s ending.” In the midst of preaching, rather than concluding that we go to church for sustenance, she says, “I flipped my sermon over when I got to that point and said, ‘I go to church because I need to be reminded of resurrection.’” Her sermon ended with a recollection of her time at Taizé: “hearing in French, *Alleluia, le Christe ressuscite, Alleluia il est vraiment ressuscite, Alleluia*— ‘Alleluia, Christ is risen, he’s really risen, Alleluia,’ and singing that over and over.”

When she visited the family in their home again on Sunday afternoon, she learned that Luke’s father, Lamar, had been confronted with well-meaning messages from neighbors that Luke’s death was “God’s will.” She found herself reaching for theological frameworks to help sort through the events. She said to Luke’s family, echoing Coffin: “This isn’t the will of God. This is a tragedy. This is what happens when gravity, the same force that holds us to the ground, rolls us over in a tractor when it misses a [turn] when it’s shoveling . . . It’s not God shooting him with God’s finger, but this is natural. This is gravity. It’s an accident. That’s not to say that God isn’t still at work in and for

Luke and in and for the family.” Responding to this loss, Eve says she drew upon words, images and theology from her professors. In addition, she reached for Fretheim’s “way of acting with people,” his collegiality, his capacity to nurture people who disagreed with him, and his calmness.

Reflecting on the early months of her new pastorate more generally, Eve said the “practical stuff has meshed with good theological and biblical learning.” These two sides of theological education, practical and theoretical, now “walk together” in her counseling, preaching, and worship leading. The work is about more than “what you’re supposed to know,” says Eve. It is also “how this means something for your life.” Eve says she doesn’t want to be doing “superficial” ministry, but only wants to offer what she can genuinely believe for herself. She sees an integration of practical, theological, and biblical learning “taking root” in her work.

In some respects, of course, Eve’s story is unique—the distinct experiences and particular influences are her’s alone. Yet as remarkable as the differences are across the broader group of 50 seminary graduates in this study, Eve’s story of growing wisdom for the practice of ministry is not unusual, but resonates with the stories of other beginning ministers. Through practicing ministry alongside wise mentors and in diverse contexts, Eve and the other ministers are growing in their pastoral imagination, their embodiment of adaptive leadership in changing and changed contexts of public ministry today. They find ways to make use of their theological learning from seminary and yet draw upon ministry practices, which connect them relationally with those they serve as ministers

# Six Major Findings

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## 1 | Learning pastoral imagination happens best in formation for ministry that is integrative, embodied, and relational.

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The truth, however, is many students experience their preparation for ministry as more about information than formation.<sup>48</sup> Too often, such information is taught in discrete and seemingly disconnected disciplines and the knowledge is decontextualized from the ministry settings in which most students intend to use all that they learn.<sup>49</sup> The effort at integration—if one is explicitly made—tends to be in a final-year integration seminar or in reflection groups as part of field education.<sup>50</sup> This finding shows that exactly those integrated, contextualized moments are the key to forming pastoral imagination. In unpacking this point, we discuss two intertwined issues. First, our study participants experience the most formative learning by immersion in ministry practice (usually through CPE or Field Education) and in seminary experiences (classroom or otherwise) that have the horizon of ministry explicitly in view. Second, as students engage in these immersion experiences, a common pattern emerges: our participants experience the clash of abstract, decontextualized knowledge with lived situations, a sense of being overwhelmed, which comes from dealing with multiple variables in these situations, and a sense of responsibility for the risk entailed in choosing a course of action.<sup>51</sup>

In the opening story, Eve describes getting to the place where the practical and the theoretical “walk together” in her ministry. That she retrospectively sees the coming together of these aspects of her training provides one example of a “lack of alignment” in theological education.<sup>52</sup>

Alignment at its best in theological schools means various aspects of teaching, spiritual formation, curricular pacing, denominational requirements, student intentions, and cultural expectations about ministry all converge and “walk together” creatively, as Eve puts it. Lack of alignment refers to the various ways teaching in theological education is disconnected from the horizon of its intended use in ministry leadership, and misalignment can happen in numerous unpredictable ways for schools and for individual students.<sup>53</sup> At Eve’s seminary, the M.Div. curriculum worked on two tracks, with classroom work and fieldwork as distinct and almost entirely nonintegrated pathways through the degree program. In order for adequate formation for ministry leadership to take place, such formation requires a lively interchange between contexts of knowledge acquisition and leadership practice. Yet, like Foster et al. found in *Educating Clergy*, most schools do offer students some opportunities for integrating practices, and students like Eve are remarkable in their capacity to find and learn from them.<sup>54</sup> Eve’s later realization about how the practical and the theoretical have come together in her ministry also points to the “over-time” character of learning.

In many theological schools like Eve’s, the goal of integration or alignment is hamstrung by lack of attention to ministry practice in theological education. Among other causes, this disregard of practice reacts to the demands of the academy and its various disciplinary guilds that authorize (and reward) faculty status.<sup>55</sup> In our interviews, we asked the question: “What prepared you for ministry?” It was

common to hear a laugh, a knowing look, and then a hyperbolic answer that seminary offered nothing helpful for ministry. With more conversation, participants described learning the skills to do social analysis or critical exegesis, but receiving little sense of how to translate that work into a sermon or Bible study. They learned how to construct and give a sermon, but for some the work of a social ethics course or a New Testament course seemed to be simply academic exercises disconnected from the horizon of ministry. The angle of vision one has shapes one's understanding of the circumstances of theological education, and from the perspective of the learners, the knowledge acquired in seminary education is too often difficult to integrate in ministry practice.

### **Immersion in Ministry Practice**

We met Fr. Stephen, a tall, lithe Army chaplain in his early 40s with short-cropped hair, just after graduation from his Orthodox seminary. He recounted his journey from Southern non-denominational Evangelicalism to Orthodoxy, describing his effort to keep secret his growing love of liturgy even while serving as an associate pastor at a Protestant megachurch. He told us about being an impatient seminarian given that he was already ordained and had served a tour of duty in Iraq as an Army chaplain. Yet despite his impatient impulses, he described his journey into the Orthodox seminary as grounded in the "obedience" asked of him by an Orthodox Army chaplain mentor, Fr. Luke. Fr. Stephen recalls him saying, "I'm not just going to let you strap on some vestments and start acting like you are Orthodox." At his mentor's insistence, he left active duty and, with his family in tow, entered seminary for training as a priest.

Despite the rich distinctive elements in his Orthodox seminary experience, his depiction of a disconnection between the classroom

## **In order for adequate formation for ministry leadership to take place, such formation requires a lively interchange between contexts of knowledge acquisition and leadership practice.**

and specific ministry experiences resonates broadly among our study participants. Processing his early field education experience with his supervisor, Fr. Stephen said, "I was totally not in touch, in tune with the life that they were living at all." He felt the need to "get a newspaper subscription" because after conversations with parishioners, he realized his seminary experience had disconnected him from what was "going on in the real world." His supervisor Fr. Dave coached him not to be dismissive: "People talk about what they know, about their lives. They need you to meet them there." Fr. Stephen recalls him saying, "One of the greatest challenges is to help them connect what they're doing with the Gospel, not to brush what they're doing aside and shoot the Gospel to them like a missile!" This framing, meant as coaching for congregational ministry, also offered Fr. Stephen a model for theological education which he subsequently applied to his coursework as well.

The congregational field experiences, along with a hospital unit of CPE, were for Fr. Stephen and the vast majority of students we interviewed, a major stimulus to their growing pastoral imagination. He and his classmates told us Dr. Albert Rossi, Director of Field Education, played a "huge" role in their priestly formation. He is renowned for encouraging students to "get their hands off the wheel" and open themselves

to being shaped by God and God's people with whom they connect in field placements.<sup>56</sup> Immersed in pastoral practice, disparate pieces of theological education are integrated in embodied, relational action. Fr. Stephen recalls an early pastoral experience:

The church appointment yanked me out of the classroom and thrust me into another world where I had to quickly find my footing because nothing that was happening on campus was providing me an orientation towards that experience. . . I was like, whoa, whoa, stop this! Slow down this bouncing ball. I can't follow it, orienting to the lives of the people as they are living them and getting out of the ivory tower.

It is not that he and other students find their courses in liturgy, theology, church history, scripture, and so on, uninteresting. The trouble comes when faculty teach toward the horizon of their scholarly fields, a practice with deep roots in American theological education, rather than the horizon where students intend to go from their training (usually some form of ministry).<sup>57</sup> Fr. Stephen vividly portrays how students experience such academic teaching as profoundly disconnected from living communities of faith to whom they feel accountable in their education and formation in theological schools. Despite this, we found every seminary has some resources (staff, courses, programs) pitched to help students navigate the integration of their classroom learning with the plunge into ministry practice. Students seek out and learn from these key faculty and courses, as Fr. Stephen and his colleagues did at St. Vladimir's.

In addition to the fruitful field education experience, our study participants also told us they found help when an exceptional class or faculty member used immersion experiences in class. Participants told stories of classes using

ministry practice as part of their coursework: engaging case studies, experiential learning, and ministry practice exercises related to the content. For example, Eve's work with ministry case studies in her Old Testament course, "God and Human Suffering," helped her anticipate the kind of contextual, ministry-oriented work she would later need when facing a tragic death in her congregation. Classroom use of experiential-contextual learning was so desirable for students that some reported engaging in mental exercises in which they brought their ministry experiences prior to seminary into the classroom to "road-test" the material, making connections to ministry practice on their own.

Equally powerful, we heard over and over how the personal character and ministry experiences of faculty—when shared in class—remain with students long after the specific content of the course has faded from memory. Malinda, a bright and effective Mainline Protestant pastor in her mid 20s serving a rural congregation in the Southeast, recalled an assignment in a polity class to create four sessions of adult education on denominational polity. During her first year as a pastor, she taught the class in her congregation and it fostered great conversations about people's faith identity. She continued:

Yes, so I used *something* from seminary... I don't feel like I have used much that I've learned, and the things that I have held onto and used and actually applied were things that professors or individual students said [beyond the topic] in class. Like a professor would say something in passing about a practical situation they had in ministry, and that was the thing I remembered and applied rather than what was in the lesson.

Here, regardless of the course subject matter, students found it powerful when teachers took explicit steps from the course material towards the horizon of ministry leadership. Malinda recounted, for example, the influence of a lecture during a CPE unit at the hospital about prayer in a pastoral care setting: “the only thing I remember during the whole session was that he said, ‘If you’re going to do pastoral care with a baby, you have to hold the baby.’ He said this helped him see how embodied touch could become an incarnation of the prayer for God’s mercy and blessing on the newborn.” Malinda took this approach to ministry as a whole: “That notion has taught me a lot about the importance of embodying your ministry . . . that the ministry is not just something you think about,” recalled Malinda. “You have to hold the baby.”

### Three Key Characteristics of Immersion Experiences

As we have listened to these students now serving in ministry, it is clear the experience of the plunge into ministry leadership is a crucial point of integration of knowledge and skills, role and identity. This plunge very often includes three key characteristics, each related to one another but distinct and helpful to distinguish: *an experience of the clash of abstract, decontextualized knowledge with lived situations, a sense of overwhelming which comes from dealing with multiple variables in these situations, and a sense of responsibility for the risk entailed in choosing a course of action.*

Lucy, a gregarious and bright 37-year-old Methodist minister in the Pacific Northwest, embodies these characteristics as she describes her first pastoral call after graduation. While in her last year of school, serving a part-time internship, her District Superintendent suggested she take a newly open half-time call

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to a small congregation in the city. She did, but quickly learned it was a deeply troubled congregation with only a few members still attending, most of whom were members of one extended family. She, her husband, and her three children moved into the parsonage next door, and she dove into ministry with the church and in the neighborhood.

It wasn’t long before the theoretical ministry education she received in seminary *crashed into the complex particularity of her congregational setting*. As she tried to make sense of how to lead in this setting, she “tried a whole lot of different experiments, almost all of which failed.” These ranged from a seemingly low-risk improvisation (inviting 20 worshippers in a space built for 400 to gather in a circle near the front) to the high-risk challenge (inviting members to accompany her in providing a ministry of presence to the young adults at the Occupy Wall Street activist encampment near the church). Not only did she find resistance to any and every idea, she felt punished for her efforts when they were regularly unable to meet payroll, asking her to “hold her check” for a few weeks until they had money in the bank sufficient to pay her salary.

Dispirited, she felt *a profound sense of overwhelming*, not knowing where to turn for support, and what she might do that would matter. She bet her ministry on using her gifts



in preaching, rooted in daily work of pastoral care, as a way to break through the impasse she felt in the ministry. She poured herself into preaching, saying “I love preaching and I love my people. The church is dying but that doesn’t mean I don’t love my people and I know them really well. For better or for worse, from the pulpit, they needed that love.”

She *felt the responsibility to lead, and risked* the wager that deepened pastoral care, and the wisdom gained through such care informing her preaching, would be enough to build a connection. On the basis of that deeper connection, she hoped, they might open up space for revitalized ministry. Asked how she could keep this up, despite the difficult circumstance, she praised her preaching professors who pushed her, holding up high expectations for her practice. Yet they made sure she did not think it was all up to her effort, either. They helped her form a theology of preaching she framed thus: “because it’s not just you and me, it’s you and me and the Gospel! That was transformative I think.” While not sugar-coating how hard the experience was for her, she claimed her moment each week to speak the Gospel into the space between her and the congregation, trusting God to do more than she could see. She reported feeling relief that honest human emotion was expressed on her last Sunday with them: “the fact that they cried during my goodbye sermon was huge, rather than pretending it wasn’t happening.”

Such appointments to stressful, challenging ministry situations are among the many complications that arise in the transition to ministry.<sup>58</sup> They can cause real harm to ministers and their families, and even in some tragic cases, lead to a premature departure from

ministry. Lucy’s district supervisor, upon telling her of a new appointment at a larger, healthy church, expressed relief to have her moved from a difficult situation. Lucy, reflecting on this during the interview with us, noted, “You all are smart. This is not where you put the new seminary graduate.” It did cost her, and especially her family, to have to survive that year of very difficult ministry. Lucy found little help from her local, low-functioning ministerial association filled with wounded pastors and multiple struggling churches.

What did sustain her? She spoke powerfully about drawing on her experiences of adopting and parenting special-needs children. The complicated mix of selfless love and confounding struggle in parenting made what she experienced in her congregation somehow familiar and surmountable. She also pointed to the key function the “reflective leadership” thread played throughout her courses in seminary—the places “where I got what I needed, finally, to be a pastor.” In addition to a strong contextual education component, Seattle University’s School of Theology and Ministry is distinctive for a commitment to reflective leadership assignments in every course, whether Bible, theology, or, where it might be expected, in pastoral care.<sup>59</sup> Concurrently serving the small congregation as she finished coursework, Lucy said one course stood out as particularly helpful. A senior capstone class, “Theology of Pastoral Leadership,” spread out over the final year, included social analysis of the congregation and community as well as self-reflection on one’s leadership style.<sup>60</sup> As support for this reflection on larger leadership issues as well as practical strategies to survive the day-to-day challenges of her congregation, they read *Leadership on the Line* by Heifetz and Linsky, a classic on adaptive leadership. “That,” she remarked, “was one of the best books I read ever, ever, ever.”<sup>61</sup>

Pastoral imagination, as a capacity offering sharper perception and deeper wisdom in pastoral leadership, emerges through immersion experiences and contextualized learning in formal classrooms and informal interactions. These immersive learning experiences signal the importance of a particular kind of teaching, the topic taken up in the next finding.

## 2 | Learning pastoral imagination centers on integrated teaching that understands and articulates the challenges of the practice of ministry today.

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In ATS alumni surveys, an unsurprising fact is that in looking back on their seminary experiences, seminary graduates say their teachers were the most important feature of their education.<sup>62</sup> Our interviews highlighted some key aspects of why and how teachers are so crucial to student learning. Because immersion experiences are the most formative for learning pastoral imagination (finding one above), those teachers who stand in both classroom and context—and who help to put their subject in the context of the whole complex practice of ministry today—are regularly spoken of as the most influential.<sup>63</sup>

Education scholar David Perkins writes of the importance of teachers teaching “junior versions of the whole game” so students can see how the specific topics in a class make sense in relation to the whole. For most seminary students, even at more academic focused schools like Yale or Princeton, this “whole game” is the practice of ministry in its many forms.<sup>64</sup> The distinct challenge for seminaries, however, is that professors are formed to play a different game—the academic game.

Many are less (or not at all) prepared to create junior versions of the game of ministry leadership in their classes. As a result, students do not easily see how the bits they are learning in any specific class connect to the whole, to the game students are preparing to play. The kinds of teachers we are describing are those able to connect their discipline with junior versions of the game students are seeking to play. This works out differently in different moments within curricula in different programs, and at different kinds of schools. Some of the following stories show both the diversity, and the common threads tying these examples together.

In the case of those going into ministry careers, like Eve, such teaching towards the whole is crucial for creating a context for risking leadership in practice. Eve’s CPE supervisor and peer group both provided her support in debriefing—and learning from—the complex situations she faced, like helping a family with the death of their husband and father. “CPE,” Eve comments, “was a place where some really good learning was able to grow legs.” Her colloquial and bodily metaphor is apt. The experiential learning patterns of CPE, rooted in ministry practice with support for reflective engagement with that practice, helped her integrate and put into use all she had been learning in seminary thus far. Further, it helped her claim her nascent pastoral imagination, letting her articulate the “gravity and grace” of pastoral ministry. She could risk putting into practice pieces of her learning and be supported in seeing how they fit into a larger whole in her role as minister.

Yet teaching and learning the whole game need not only happen in field education settings, even if it happens there in the most formative ways. Traditional faculty like Terry Fretheim, Eve’s Hebrew Bible professor, can engage a class both *for* and *as* ministry. While this professor had served as a pastor for a few

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years after seminary, his forty-year seminary career was marked by more traditional faculty work: teaching and scholarship. Yet his course on God and Human Suffering was designed as a Bible course *for* ministry, literally serving as a bridge between the scholarly concerns of the Bible and the existential concerns of ministry experience. Biblical case studies—junior games of ministry—allowed students to practice in class the sort of contextual, integrated knowing most needed for ministry. Further, Eve reported, his presence in class seemed to her offered *as* ministry. She noted that his pastoral bearing in class, especially in the face of student disagreements, modeled for her the kind of ministry leadership she herself tried to embody in her early years of pastoral leadership. New ministers cultivate pastoral imagination when they seek out and engage integrative curricular elements or find dynamic teachers that—like Fretheim and countless others our participants named—help them to integrate their academic and skill-based learning with a developing sense of identity in ministry.

Our Fuller graduates offered a vibrant example of teaching that does this sort of integration, that is, teaching that connects elements of an academic area to the game of ministry students are trying to learn to play. They all jumped in to tell us about their church history professor, Charlie Scalise, who taught them to make connections between historical

conflicts and contemporary church issues. Scalise uses a bit of drama, donning a blue jacket to indicate he's stepping into character. He might be a kid from the youth group asking why the adults are fighting over money, or a friend at Starbucks asking about the purpose of a church program, or a nature worshiper who declares hiking more spiritual than liturgy. Professor Scalise is not only knowledgeable about church history, he also brings deep knowledge of the culture of the Pacific Northwest, including statistics, socioeconomic demographics, and years of engagement.

In character, Professor Scalise poses a question. It is often met with silence or some fidgeting in the class. If someone replies, Professor Scalise will push back. A conversation often ensues, until a student finds courage to ask, "Okay, Charlie, what are you getting at? What is the proper response?" He will reply, but only if students ask. Fuller graduates found the approach "so relevant and what church life is like... And you have to speak into those questions, not just from personal experience, but also to use them as teaching moments." Another Fuller graduate says the blue-jacket lessons force you to ask yourself, "Well, what do *you* think?"

Professor Scalise taught him to combine the intellectual and the pastoral "out of such a place of care and knowledge and wanting to see students grow. It's really a sight to behold."

Naomi, a Vanderbilt graduate in her mid-20s from a central state farming community, offers further examples of teachers and mentors over time who teach toward ministry.<sup>65</sup> She has held a number of ministry roles since graduation but—because she is a partnered lesbian—has had limited options for pastoral

leadership in Mennonite congregations, her home denomination.<sup>66</sup> She currently works as a community organizer on poverty issues while serving as a part-time supply pastor in a small UCC congregation. For Naomi, learning pastoral imagination has greatly benefited from those in her education who teach towards the practice of ministry.

Naomi chose Vanderbilt, a liberal university-related divinity school, after learning on a campus visit that her denominational seminary would not grant an M.Div. if she were “out and in a relationship.” Despite the complicated relationship she has to her own denomination because of the restrictive policy on same-sex partnered pastors, she is deeply committed to other aspects of its theology, including its strong focus on Jesus’ nonviolence in the face of the powers of this world. She tells of attending a national Mennonite convention in college where, in the midst of thousands singing in four-part harmony, she experienced a deep sense of call to ministry.

Early on at divinity school, Naomi shared her hopes with Viki Matson, Director of Field Education and Professor of the Practice of Ministry. Professor Matson heard Naomi’s deep sense of call and then worked with her to find three nationally prominent Mennonite churches known for publicly welcoming LGBTQ persons. Together, they crafted letters to each asking about a summer pastoral internship for a lesbian Mennonite student. After a phone interview with a Pacific Northwest congregation, and a positive congregational meeting, the plan was set.

Professor Matson was not only a caring and effective advocate for Naomi’s goals, but also impacted her by the action/reflection methodology of a required second-year course in supervised ministry. Most theological schools have some version of this familiar experiential

learning component as part of their curriculum: a field education placement in congregations or faith-based nonprofits, combined with required, structured time for reflection. Naomi and the other four ministers in our study from Vanderbilt all remarked about the durable impact of *this* particular formation process. Based on a case-study model of theological reflection, students are asked to engage three aspects of a given situation: doing, being, and thinking.<sup>67</sup> Doing focuses on skills and competences, being acknowledges the importance of presence and identity, and thinking refers to the importance of wrestling with theological issues.

Reflecting on the impact on her ministry practice, Naomi recalled a crisis at the UCC church where she served as youth pastor after graduation. The senior pastor’s 18-year-old son was in a terrible accident and suffered a major brain injury. He had grown up in the congregation and was loved by all. Most of the congregation would not yet know of the accident as they gathered for church that Sunday morning. Naomi stepped in to lead worship, and planned to tell the congregation right away, since the absence of the senior pastor would be obvious. She had prepared a special time of prayer, thinking through how to lead in the most helpful way. She said:

I took the field education model that we used, so the doing and being and the thinking of ministry, and I said, “We all want to do something. We want to rage at this senseless accident. We want to fix things for Pastor Susan, but our challenge and our call at this time is just to be.” That really connected with the people because no one knew what to do. What ended up happening was that we had a meaningful time of prayer.

Naomi also shared about using this same reflective practice framework for her youth leadership. “We go and do a service project and then take time to reflect, and that’s really intentional.” She’ll often pose a question, like “Where did you see Jesus today?” Asked what the kids say, she laughed and said “all kinds of things—like, ‘I didn’t see Jesus anywhere’.” Yet even joking answers are effective, she said, because “the model itself is doing the work.” As Naomi shared these stories, the other four graduates from her school chimed in with their own examples. The experiential learning framework taught by Professor Matson in the field education courses was formative and serves as both pattern of and resource for their ministry.

Naomi also found Wayne, her congregational internship supervisor, to be an incredible teacher and mentor both during her seminary experience and after. Most field education experiences, like Naomi’s, require some sort of supervisory sessions to reflect on ministry practice. While these teachers are not faculty, from the student perspective they can be powerfully influential exactly because they guide the student’s first leap into leadership in ministry. They are, as David Perkins puts it, guides to the “whole game.” Naomi recalls:

The day we met, Wayne planned to orient me to the church, a repurposed movie theater in the middle of a busy northeast Seattle neighborhood. We got out of the car and were headed toward the offices with a full agenda: meet staff, tour building, set-up office space, when a homeless couple approached. Clearly Wayne had spent a good deal of time with the two, who I later learned made their home in the blocks around the church. “Pastor, will you pray with us?” they asked. And so we did. This was my first lesson: Pay attention to the interruptions.

She remarked that Wayne made space for her to join into the fullness of the role, walking alongside her and reflecting on her experience as she tried out ministry. She recalled:

I got to preach and lead worship and planned worship and attended meetings and hung out with people and had coffee and went to their regional meetings. And I thought “Well, I can do this. This is something I’m suited for—the rhythm of a pastoral ministry.”

Wayne created space and safety to risk trying many new things, something cognitive anthropologists, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, in their discussion of apprenticeship call “legitimate peripheral participation.”<sup>68</sup> Partly this means Wayne stepped back, making space in the roles he usually inhabited for Naomi to step in and try out her own voice and leadership. Yet his relational credibility and spiritual authority in community extended to her, allowing her nascent leadership to be received as one with authority she had not yet earned. Further, the dialectic of action and reflection gave ample space for articulating the wisdom embedded in practice, a special gift of these teacher/practitioners.<sup>69</sup> One of the most important elements in the transition from imagining ministry to embodying pastoral imagination, is just this space to risk being a minister in all its complexity, and saying, often with delight and some surprise, “Well, I can do this!”

### **Complications: Being Sidelined**

When students do not have the benefit of such apprenticeships, especially immersion experiences where people “try on” a new ministerial identity, they experience

complications in the process of learning pastoral imagination. Two brief examples from the group we are following from Truett Seminary help show the kinds of challenges faced by students when things don't go well. For some, like Bob, these complications cause grief and hardship along the way, but do not ultimately derail a vocation in ministry altogether. For others, like Mariana, the harsh experience of rejection has contributed to her following other vocational paths instead of ministry leadership.

Bob, born and raised in a church-going Southern Baptist home, describes himself as a "golden boy." In his late 20s when we met him for the first time, Bob told us about being active in his church youth group and how the youth pastor picked him out for leadership roles which led him to a call to ministry. In college, he was student body president—respected and with a sense of idealism about church and the life of faith. He married his college sweetheart and after graduating from college, took a ministry internship job in a large Baptist church in another state. His role was to start a new "next-generation" service. With little support and high expectations, complicated by a disagreement over theology and mission with the senior pastor, Bob floundered. He recalls a low point in the pastor's office when the pastor discussed his expectations and disappointment in Bob. Also disappointed, Bob said, "When you hired me, you said you were going to be a mentor and you were going to teach me things, and you haven't done crap."

The story doesn't end tragically, however. Bob quit the job, but continued worshipping at the church, and in a heart-to-heart with God, heard a voice say, "I didn't tell you to leave." It hit home for him that he didn't respect *other* leaders who quit when the going got tough. So he went back to the staff team, to ask for his job back, and got a second chance. Things

healed, and he was able to see the pastor with respect, turning to him for advice. Yet, he admits, "I kind of had to make a part of myself die in order to be there . . . I had to learn to support his system, as opposed to doing my own thing." Bob says he learned a great deal from the experience about "reconciliation and forgiveness [and] my role in an organization."

After three years, Bob's desire for another level of authority and leadership led to his decision to attend seminary. He now serves as pastor of a Baptist church in North Carolina. The relationship with that first supervising pastor has grown over time. Says Bob, "This pastor is now my first call when I have ministry questions and his advice helped significantly in the first year of my transition into the pastoral role."

Mariana, also in her late 20s, a student in the same cohort as Bob, was born in South America, and had a quite different experience in her pastoral internship. Her words tell the story powerfully:

We [Husband Alex and I] went to work in the city where I went to college . . . We decided to work with a very poor church in a very urban setting. They did a lot of work with homeless and prostitutes and drug addicts so we thought that was going to be interesting. We got there and the pastor was completely against me, and Alex didn't know how to speak Portuguese, so I had to be involved in everything and translate, and the pastor wouldn't talk to me. He would talk to Alex and I had to translate and that was hard because when I left Brazil to come here to go to seminary it was because in Brazil I couldn't go (to seminary), so I went to seminary in a dilemma because I felt the call but I didn't

understand how could I be called if I was a woman. It didn't make sense. Then I went to seminary and realized I can do this, you know, women are called too, but then whenever I went into the field, I wasn't accepted in the church where we were working. The pastor would invite Alex to come preach and go visit people in the hospital and go to the prison with him and I couldn't do anything, not even go with him. They wouldn't let me. The only thing they would let me do was, it's a very poor church and ....so once a week I was allowed to go there and wash the church, like literally wash the walls, the floor, all the chairs, wash the bathrooms, which I actually enjoyed, (chuckle) I mean, you know, I wasn't able to do anything, so at least while I was there it was like I might just be washing the bathroom, but at least it's still the house of the Lord.

Ada María Isasi-Díaz argues a key challenge facing Latina women is “invisible invisibility.”<sup>70</sup> The phrase refers to the experience of being ignored by those who do not even recognize the reality of the destructive contempt they inhabit. Through Mariana's powerful story of non-recognition in her calling, we can grasp some sense of what Isasi-Díaz means by the phrase “invisible invisibility.” Despite doubts about the value of theological study affirming her sense of calling when she is so utterly rejected by the church she was trained to serve, washing the bathroom can be for Mariana tenaciously redeemed as a way to serve the Lord, and as a potentially prophetic symbol of her hope to serve more fully. While consigned to clean the church is a mode of silencing, Mariana attempts to reframe the experience as part of her struggle not only to find her voice, but a place to serve in ministry. Complications like Mariana's

don't allow some who are called to ministry, often women, to embrace their call fully. She and others make the most of their situation, but the conditions themselves are often unjust and can slow or prevent the budding and growth of pastoral imagination.

Whereas various teachers and mentors stepped in to advocate and come alongside Naomi in her call to ministry, neither teachers nor ministry supervisors took such a role for Mariana. Although she worked to redeem the situation and reframe the possibilities for ministry in her situation, on the whole she was left with questions about her call and very little support for the work of ministry.

These stories show the significance of the space created by supportive mentors and teachers, especially those teachers who both know the stakes of ministry today and draw students into immersive, experiential situations inhabiting roles in ministry. This obviously does not happen with only one teacher, or in one moment, but over time and across multiple teachers whose influence helps spur the growth of pastoral imagination. The next section takes up the particular dynamics of this growth over time, including the interplay of everyday practices of ministry and the particular critical and emotionally fraught moments that give shape to one's pastoral imagination.

### **3 | Learning pastoral imagination requires both the daily practice of ministry over time and critical moments that may arise from crisis or clarity.**

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Together practice over time and defining moments shape and stretch the capacity for pastoral work, as they did in Eve's case. She was in the regular flow of learning the practice of pastoral care through everyday ministry with

hospice patients when the dramatic moment of loss for the elderly couple arose.<sup>71</sup> In that “Holy Cow” moment the stakes of all she had been learning about ministry crystalized in her action, and she responded to the overwhelming situation by taking a risk to lead and pray. She also took responsibility for her actions, inhabiting the role of pastor for the family. In the weeks that followed, Eve was able to integrate her learning more fully into her ministry practice and identity by processing it with her peers and supervisor.

Knowing how to act in a moment requires cultivating wise practice, yet seminary is limited in its ability to teach all that a future minister will need to know in the long arc of ministry. Neither can schooling fully train pastors to face the wide range of crises or critical learning moments that arise in ministry. Nevertheless a variety of possible pedagogies for the integration of knowledge and action are available to set students on a solid pathway for learning.<sup>72</sup> Already we have seen how Eve, Naomi and Fr. Stephen describe powerful, formative learning in seminary courses and contextualized case-study teaching, such as field education and CPE.<sup>73</sup> The cases are often constructed around critical moments experienced by the students themselves, drawing in analysis that is theological, cultural, psychological, spiritual, and pastoral in its character. Early practice for students, as well as educational partnerships with CPE and related programs, assist students in gaining practice in the daily demands of ministry, and in learning from the “Holy Cow” moments that arise.

Conditions for the birth of pastoral imagination in any situation require both of these: the daily practice of ministry, what Eugene

Peterson calls the “long obedience in the same direction,” and critical moments that often grow out of crisis and can lead to clarity, moments that Debra Kerdeman calls “being pulled up short.”<sup>74</sup> It is the interaction of these formative forces working together that shape a minister’s capacity for seeing a situation and knowing how to act responsively in a moment.<sup>75</sup> The accumulation of time and practice, complemented by multiple instances of being pulled up short, may lead to greater pastoral wisdom in the minister. The stories that follow show how a formative immersion in pastoral leadership interacts with a critical moment of learning, and in the midst of it, clarity arises for Malinda when she sees what is happening through the “eyes of faith.” The everyday immersion in ministry itself can be complicated in various ways, including walls that hinder one’s entry into ministry, walls of bias and suffering that remain inside, ministry situations that are troubled and overwhelming, as well as lack of peer and/or supervisory support for new ministers.

### **Embarking on the Long Obedience**

In her first year of ministry at a rural congregation of less than 100 members in the southeastern U.S., Malinda began the “long obedience in the same direction” in her ministry.<sup>76</sup> After feeling called to ministry as a young teen, she used her undergraduate studies to prepare for seminary. Malinda majored in classics, and in seminary she excelled in coursework. Yet in her first year of her pastorate, despite excellent academic preparation, she experienced many crises—moments of being pulled up short. Members of the two-century-old congregation in the Reformed tradition lacked knowledge and confidence about how to lead the church. Malinda says, “the congregation didn’t feel very equipped to do things. A lot of things fall on the pastor.” Like



the pastors before her, they expected Malinda to do “everything.” They also lived in dread that she might abandon them for a “bigger church.” Although seminary could not prepare her for the congregation’s particular expectations nor for the range of their feelings or actions, it did help her imagine ministry in some concrete and lasting ways.

With determination, Malinda took on what she called a “steep learning curve” in the congregation. She says she loves the preaching, the pastoral care, and “being a solo pastor.” Yet the first year was also “a roller coaster.” Malinda says before her first call, she felt like she would

**As one accumulates multiple instances of pastoral situations, by the repetition of doing what is needed in the flow of the day, the experience of how to do it becomes intuitive, as if without thinking.**

be graded on sermons, and she wrote them as if for preaching class. She also felt really nervous standing up to preach. Over time, however as she started weekly congregational preaching, she began to understand two things: she needed to preach for the congregation, not for a grade, and she was able to take in more fully what her preaching professor told her about the nervous energy: “Your mind is there; you just have to get the rest of your body up to speed.” As we noted above in finding one, Malinda connected this teaching with what she learned in CPE about “holding the baby,” concluding: “ministry’s not just something you *think* about.”

Overhearing Malinda’s learning about the embodied character of ministry clarifies that no

simple “application” model of learning-to-action will do. Instead, seminary at its best prepares new ministers with deep knowledge of history, tradition, interpretation, and frameworks for thinking as well as introducing them to the complexity of skills required for preaching, pastoral care, teaching, and leadership.<sup>77</sup> Several key teachers prepared Malinda for the embodied character of pastoral practice, and they gave her ways to engage in the “game of ministry” rather than staying stuck in the “academic game” at which she also excelled. When seminaries really do their work well, they create spaces that allow for integration and reflection that bring together deep wells of conceptual knowledge with the broad fields of everyday embodied, relational practice.

Pastoral imagination emerges and grows through immersion in the practice over time. As one accumulates multiple instances of pastoral situations, by the repetition of doing what is needed in the flow of the day, the experience of *how* to do it becomes intuitive, as if without thinking.<sup>78</sup> However, ministry doesn’t start out that way. In the beginning it is challenging to decipher where to put one’s attention. Or as Malinda says, it took time to “discern what is important and unimportant.” On her first day in the office, she was not clear about where to start. But she called friends from seminary and they listened. They continued listening over her first year as a pastor as more critical moments arose. Malinda says she learned through trial and error how to “develop some good boundaries” with her congregation in responding to e-mail and phone calls. Malinda was learning, in that first year, to “live in the moments” where she found herself. Setting a schedule was like walking a fine line, she said, “because if I’m too lax, then I end up writing

sermons on my day off.” She began to aim for a schedule with “flexible room” in it.

Salience, the capacity to pick out the important features of a complex situation, develops as a key feature of proficiency in any professional practice.<sup>79</sup> When new ministers start out, they are prone to feeling overwhelmed, not just as Eve was in a crisis, but also in the everyday demands for seeing and attending to what really matters, rather than simply what is right in front of them. As her sense of salience grew, Malinda told us how she began to see how brief conversations over shaking hands on Sunday mornings at the back door of the church helped set her schedule for the week.<sup>80</sup>

Immersion in the daily practice of ministry is also relational, requiring time for a new pastor to learn the dynamics of a congregation, to see its history and relational networks, and to learn the language of the place. Integrated into this discovery of the congregation is the pastoral work of bringing each of those realities into conversation with the realities of grace, incarnation, redemption, sin, lament, healing and other theological and spiritual center points of a life together caught up in God. We call this kind of seeing into the congregation, understanding the “more” of the situation.<sup>81</sup> The best congregations are already doing this work, and a new pastor joins in by offering another leading voice in the conversation, a new perspective on the mission of the congregation. However, many congregations are troubled and stuck in patterns that need dramatic new perspectives and attentions from their pastors.<sup>82</sup>

### Finding Clarity in Critical Moments

The everyday practice of ministry is an important condition for helping the new minister see the “more” of a situation. Yet, it is often the critical moment, sometimes beginning in a crisis, that brings out the most powerful learning and makes way for new pastors to offer their own best response. Malinda had one such clarifying moment in worship on Maundy Thursday in her first year. It was a new service for the congregation, and she took a risk asking them to participate in a hand-washing ritual. With all the other demands of Holy Week she spent fewer hours than usual preparing the service and sermon. The turnout was low, around 10 percent of the usual gathering. She was feeling let down until the lay worship leader said, “Where two or more are gathered...” Malinda instantly saw the stakes in the situation, praying, “Lord, make me worthy to speak to these people.” Despite her prayers, Malinda says, “liturgically the service was a complete wreck.” Although the new ritual went okay, Malinda felt as if the service “was a failure.” At the close of the service, the choir director stood at the back singing, “Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?” *a cappella*. When Malinda carried out the processional cross she dropped it in the foyer, making a great racket. Leaving the service, she simply sat down and cried.

Despite the clattering cross, and Malinda’s sense that it was the “worst service ever,” parishioners felt moved by the power of the ritual, saying: “we need to do this every year!” The one child in attendance went home, put on her bathrobe and a scarf for a stole, and she re-enacted the entire service with her stuffed animals. Later Malinda was able to see how the service was a very powerful reminder that “even when you feel flustered, standing there trying to be pastoral, the things that we do also matter. It’s not about you, but in a sense,

it's also about you... I think sometimes it's easy for us to get used to the holy . . . to forget to inhabit everything in the moment because we're so close to it all the time." Malinda ticked off some of the tasks of ministry like preaching, counseling and serving others, as work where she engages the holy each day. In her story, we noticed how Melinda sees the high stakes of her work, requiring her to lead with care wherever even two or three are gathered, and to notice

**The interplay between an extended immersion in practice and the singular critical moments when either crisis or clarity interrupt and pull one up short does not really solidify in one's practice unless processing and reflection help the moment stick.**

the possibility in a situation even when it feels like a train wreck that is beyond her power. All of the vulnerability and risk, the sense of failing and a sense of power, Malinda points out, are part of one's engagement with the holy.

Various complications disrupt this interplay of practice over time and critical moments that forge one's capacity for pastoral imagination. One complication to the "long obedience in the same direction" comes in the form of ministry contexts that offer conditions that are a continuous, overwhelming crisis, rather than a place for learning that shapes one for ministry. Obedience to God in those situations is tricky business and demands extra support. Debbie, a Lutheran pastor in her early 30s, has a warm, thoughtful demeanor, and is quick to cut to the heart of the matter. When we interviewed after seminary, she told us about such a complicated ministry placement. After growing up deeply

rooted in a Midwestern Lutheran congregation and community, she went off to Harvard Divinity School for seminary. After graduation, she returned to the Midwest for her yearlong internship, a required year designed by Lutherans to be an extended time of ministry immersion and integration early in one's formation as a pastor.<sup>83</sup> However, Debbie was assigned to a shrinking congregation of 10-15 people in the Iron Range region of Minnesota. She was the 16th intern pastor to serve in 16 years. Weekly she faced the "absences on a Sunday morning [that] were felt more strongly than the presence of anyone that was there."

Amid the depression and decline in the community, Debbie recalled, she felt like the parishioners were lacking a sense of reality, and "nothing that happened was a normal situation . . . It was just crazy!" When she tried talking to them about their situation, Debbie says, "it was like talking to a brick wall." When she reached out for help, even her mentors were caught up in the regional system of dysfunction in such a way that they could not offer genuine assistance. The lack of stability created a sense of permanent crisis for Debbie and added to the paralysis in the church itself. She considered departing before her year was complete, explaining to us through tears,

*"It was really hard to feel like a quitter, but it was so hard to even get out of bed in the morning and to be with people who needed to hear the Gospel and couldn't hear it, and to feel like I had learned what I needed to learn there. There's something to be learned about endurance, and then there's suffering that's just suffering.*

Then there's a point when it's time to leave." Debbie's experience challenges the placement of new ministers in congregations like this one. The better-equipped ministers like Debbie keep striving to learn, but the conditions are less than suitable to foster a healthy or growing sense of salience for ministry or extend the capacity for pastoral imagination. The stakes are high, feeling like a life or death situation for the church, yet the space for learning, growth, or taking risks is limited. Debbie did take risks, changing her preaching style and delving into the history of the congregation. The site had been in decline and underfunctioning for some time. Unable to afford a regular full-time pastor, they turned to the seminary internship program as a way to find inexpensive pastoral leadership, albeit with a transition every year.<sup>84</sup> This growing trend in rural parishes heightens the importance of supervisors who are willing to intervene and provide adequate support. That this did not happen contributed to the debilitating complications of Debbie's situation.

The interplay between an extended immersion in practice and the singular critical moments when either crisis or clarity interrupt and pull one up short does not really solidify in one's practice unless processing and reflection help the moment stick and leave a lasting, formative impression and expand one's capacity for pastoral imagination. Ministry practice over time must become constitutive of a particular context of ministry and move the minister beyond attempts to follow rules or "apply" knowledge to practice. As we show in the next finding, situations in ministry can be very formative. But for those situations to make a lasting impact, budding ministers need mentors who can offer relational and reflective space processing what happens and what it might mean.

#### **4 | Learning pastoral imagination requires both apprenticeship to a situation and mentors who offer relational wisdom through shared reflection and making sense of a situation.**

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Through steady attention to the place and people where a pastor serves, perception can shift from speaking to or acting upon a situation to a more improvisational response that embodies practical wisdom in the moment. This capacity for pastoral imagination is learning to think in action, making use of theological knowledge and skills in particular situations.<sup>85</sup> Where novice pastors can apprentice themselves to situations, with mentors to help them, the richness of the relationships and environments allow learning to take hold in embodied and relational ways.

With just a few months of apprenticeship to her first pastorate out in the rural farmland, Eve faced the loss of a beloved church member's adult son with little in the way of immediate support. Yet she reached for the examples of wise teachers and her own hard-won learning in other situations to guide her through the tragic loss. She recalled how her professor responded relationally to crisis. She thought of stories that mentors shared about coping with loss. She also pulled back from trying to do or say any certain thing in the moment. She allowed her new relationship with the family and church to lead her in knowing what to do.

New ministers cultivate pastoral imaginations when they apprentice themselves to the particular world where their ministry is situated, and find mentors who help them process their

thinking, feeling and action in that world. Naomi apprenticed herself to a ministry with people living on the streets, as her mentor Wayne came alongside her. He made way for her leadership, and she even “borrowed” his authority in her budding experiences of leading the church. Learning to lead in ministry is not a matter of following a set of rules or replicating someone else’s model of ministry. In each case, ministers must find the way that works relationally for them in dialogue with the ancient wisdom of the Gospel and values of their particular tradition. The relational wisdom of mentoring helps new ministers translate the knowledge and skills learned in seminary into their new situation of ministry.

### Learning Relationally from Mentors

In Trong’s stories of growing up and becoming a pastor within his ethnically Vietnamese congregation and working in various jobs before seminary, we heard a clear example of how an apprenticeship to various situations can pave a pathway to ministry. Although he did not have a single mentor who extended across his years of learning, Trong told us of the impact of multiple mentors before, during and after seminary. Trong describes the ways he drew on their embodied wisdom, what we claim as a key piece of learning pastoral imagination. Trong emigrated to the U.S. in the mid 1970s as a toddler with his family from Vietnam. They landed first in a Southern state, but they quickly made their way to Seattle guided by a call to help start a Vietnamese church. Trong and his family remained in that church throughout his childhood, youth, and young adulthood.

For several years as a young adult Trong tried to volunteer with the youth in his congregation.

Youth ministers came and went, but none would take him up on his offer to lead. He began to see that the church was divided into “factions.” Without the right connections, Trong would not be accepted for leadership. His first mentoring experience came when a paid youth minister, Tam, invited Trong to volunteer with the teenagers. This mentor was younger than Trong, yet the two would meet up after work to share a meal and hang out. “That was the first time,” says Trong, “that I actually got to sit down and talk to somebody about church and theological issues.” Learning the practice of ministry thus began relationally for Trong. Tam taught him how to put together a Bible study and other practical aspects of ministry. In the process Tam made space for Trong relationally, which helped set him on a course of imagining the possibilities of vocational ministry.<sup>86</sup>

After Tam left, Trong continued as the volunteer youth leader. Soon the pastor urged the church to move from the international district to the suburbs. Trong and his parents and about 50 others decided to stay in the urban center and begin a new congregation. After the urban Vietnamese congregation split, Trong became a leader in the group that stayed in the city. He found himself thrust into official leadership with members of the “second generation” congregation because of his prior volunteer work and relational connections with them. He began feeling “really ill prepared for the whole thing.” So he enrolled at Fuller Seminary’s Northwest campus. He was hoping to “get a grasp on biblical studies, theology, and the cultural context” of ministry. Trong read Helmut Thielicke’s, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians*, advising him to hold back from church work while starting seminary. “Wow!” Trong recalls, laughing, “It was too late for that!”<sup>87</sup> Trong was already immersed in the thick of things at his church.

Going through a cohort program at Fuller meant that Trong experienced a variety of mentoring relationships with professors, pastors, and a peer group. His story of beginning in ministry is peppered with examples of guidance, support, and feedback from mentors. As we discuss above in finding two, Trong's church history professor, Professor Scalise, regularly led the class into situations posing as a confused church member or religious seeker. He simulated for students the need to pay attention to questions, make the most of each "teaching moment" and to give pastoral care through listening. Trong took away from those lessons more courage to ask questions essential for wise ministry and to listen carefully to the stories of others.

Another seminary mentor helped Trong face a growing conflict in his church. His mentor advised: "In preaching, you must find your voice and understand who you are and who the people are and the voice that they need to hear . . . not preaching to satisfy or be the mouthpiece for other voices."<sup>88</sup> Trong says the mentor's insight helped him see the truth not only for preaching, "but also for ministry in general." Trong told us he made use of the insight to interpret and navigate change in his current situation. He recalled, "I'm going to offer this ministry my voice and my vision and share that with [the congregation], but also hear what their vision is for this ministry so that we're all together on this."

Not all apprenticeships that benefit ministry begin explicitly in ministry. Before seminary, Trong worked in two jobs that taught him valuable skills, and helped him see the value

## **Ministers must find the way that works relationally for them in dialogue with the ancient wisdom of the Gospel and values of their particular tradition.**

of building relationships, which he would later say had inspired his ministry leadership and fostered his pastoral imagination.

Trong was a manager in first a chain bookstore and later for a team of stockbrokers. He says, "My experiences in business and managing people and understanding people and how to get the best out of people really prepared me for ministry because people are people, whether they're church people or not." When he arrived, the bookstore was operating "in the red." The corporate policy insisted on saving money by hiring part-time employees and providing no benefits. However, Trong turned it into "a profitable store" by increasing customer service, hiring more full-time employees, and providing benefits. Together he and his employees created a trusting workplace where they could contribute and belong. It was, to us, a powerful example: through the situation we saw how Trong learned to lead and collaborate with people, developing relational and caring skills essential for good faith communities and pastoral imagination.

Trong also took in the wisdom of two successful stockbrokers, a married couple, who understood a basic human truth about care and stewardship. Trong heard them say, "people only really care about two things: their children and their money." Trust and care were the core of the stockbrokers' vision and philosophy of investing, and they attracted people who wanted the couple to oversee their investments. Trong recognized how care for people and trustworthiness of leaders were keys to success

for the brokers. He says he thought about “how God entrusts us with ... the people of God, people that he cares about.” Trong says God was asking him “to take care of them... nurture them and [be] a steward of God’s people, and God’s stuff, the material stuff that he gives you.” Trong says his stockbroker friends taught him that ministry is, “seeing ourselves as stewards and not out for our own profit.”

When we interviewed Trong a second time, he was beginning a new ministry position with a Vietnamese congregation in a new city. Trong’s new role put him working as a 1.5-generation broker between the first and second generations.<sup>89</sup> He was helping the church navigate a recent financial and leadership crisis. We could see how he was drawing on wisdom from these two earlier work situations, as well as his years of ministry with the urban Vietnamese congregation in Seattle and guidance from his Fuller mentors. Each situation and mentor offered some relational guidance for Trong, which he needed in his new situation. For example he reflected with us about the intergenerational character of stewardship. He was helping the congregation

### **Sometimes mentoring failures can be a pathway to extraordinary learning.**

imagine their task as “passing a baton” from one generation to the next, requiring each generation to do their part to make it work. He also described how he was asking relevant questions and listening to everyone in the congregation as he navigated the crisis.

Trong was able to use his own voice and vision to make a theological distinction about the situation. He led people toward granting less importance to “how things look and

operate” between generations and to give more attention and importance to what they shared: love of Jesus, a desire to share the Gospel, and their relational connections to the church community. Navigating a crisis doesn’t come with rules or guidebooks. Yet we noticed how Trong’s relational work with the congregation, just two years out of seminary, draws on insights and experiences from multiple relationships with teachers, mentors, co-workers, and fellow church members. And with his pastoral imagination for the present situation, Trong draws on many years of apprenticeship to the church of his childhood, youth and young adulthood, where he initially learned the practice of ministry while being fully immersed in the congregation.

Fuller Seminary puts a high premium on feedback loops from mentors while ministry students learn. Yet, complications did arise for Trong, as not all the mentoring he received was helpful. Some students and mentors, he noted, are mis-matched, or worse, the relationship can be “terribly painful.” During his seminary internship in the urban Vietnamese church, where he was already employed full-time, Trong and the church’s new pastor were matched for mentoring. Unfortunately, the pastor did not grasp Trong’s learning goals for the internship, so the learning contract did not receive much attention. This echoes the experience that both Lucy and Debbie experienced in small struggling churches, where the lack of support and interpretation from a mentor made already difficult situations even worse. Bob also experienced a relational breakdown with his mentor; however, his situation was spacious enough that Bob’s choice to quit was not the

end of the story. Sometimes mentoring failures can be a pathway to extraordinary learning.<sup>90</sup> In Bob's case he and his mentor renegotiated their relationship and Bob was able to flourish in the situation for a couple more years.

Many layers of complications impact some of our participants, and we have found attention to the intersections of oppression—where race, gender, sexual orientation, and so on meet—to be a helpful frame for naming and analyzing the dynamics. We pick up these issues in discussing the fifth finding.

## 5 | Learning pastoral imagination is complicated by the intersection of social and personal forces of injustice.<sup>91</sup>

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Injustice can take many forms, yet in the U.S., the implicit biases of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation, as well as other marginalized identities, continue to influence church contexts and leadership opportunities for both young and second-career ministers. In the study we witness the resilience and determination of ministers who find ways to dwell in possibility rather than descend into despair over the “brick walls” of resistance they find along their path into ministry. Regularly the participants themselves describe the challenges of their ministry situation in terms of race, class, gender, sexual orientation and the like.<sup>92</sup> We think it essential to explore the shape and location of the brick walls they come up against, as well as the ways that ministers draw upon their emerging pastoral imagination to work around the barriers.

In the last five decades the landscape of vocational pathways, ministry training, and day-to-day practice of ministry, have changed dramatically. Congregations in America are witnessing considerable changes in their

pastoral leadership with regard to gender, race and sexual orientation. In 1958 women held virtually no pastorates in the U.S., with a few notable exceptions in Pentecostal churches. By 2008 women constituted 15% of U.S. clergy and led 10% of U.S. congregations. In Mainline denominations, women constitute between 10 and 30 percent of the pastorates.<sup>93</sup> Yet gender remains a barrier to ordained ministry in many traditions, notably in three large and influential denominational groupings in the U.S.: Southern Baptist, Roman Catholic, and some historically black churches.<sup>94</sup> Even in the denominations where women's ordination and leadership appears normative, the realities of gender bias and sexism continue to challenge women in their work. For example, in our third interview with Eve, she expressed frustration over the inequity of expectations for men and women in her new role as a parent of an infant, and she also felt a lack of respect when she offered her voice in public meetings.<sup>95</sup>

Congregations also remain racially and ethnically segregated institutions in the U.S.<sup>96</sup> The challenge for clergy does not rest in church segregation itself, so much as the ongoing challenges and harms of implicit bias and institutionalized social segregation by “race” and ethnicity everywhere in the U.S.<sup>97</sup> Minority women continue to face enormous challenges when answering a call to ministry, and the number of fully enfranchised women (that is, able to respond to the full range of leadership roles) remains remarkably low. In other cases, such as some Pentecostal Christian groups, women continue to identify calling in large numbers, yet they minister at the margins of official power.<sup>98</sup> In recent decades Christian



churches are increasingly faced with questions about the role of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) persons in their churches. Denominational groups and individual churches have responded such that the Human Rights Campaign can say, “many have been forced to leave those communities behind because of condemnation of LGBT people... Many religious organizations also have taken supportive stands on the issues that affect LGBT people in America, such as the fight for freedom from discrimination, the solemnizing of same-sex marriage and the ordination of openly LGBT clergy.”<sup>99</sup>

Intersectional issues of gender, race, and sexual orientation emerged powerfully as we gathered for a day-long interview with a vibrant group of young women, now five years after their graduation from Vanderbilt Divinity School. Two are serving full-time in ministry, one as an associate pastor in a congregation and one as a college chaplain. Two are working for non-profits in which they understand their work as ministry. One also serves part-time as a pastor in a local congregation. The fifth is in a Ph.D. program in public health, also serving part-time on the ministry staff of a very large congregation. We gathered them for the third time since their final year of seminary, reflecting on their formation for and learning in ministry. Delighted in each other’s company after a few years apart, they enjoy a day of deep sharing, laughter, and tears.

Jumping in to tell her story, Theresa recalled that the last time we gathered in this circle, she was desperately searching for a second call because her two-year pastoral residency was coming to an end. In that search process she found herself for the first time in an otherwise privileged life, experiencing oppression completely beyond her control. As a woman

## Where students have found opportunities for ministry, the work of leading the fight against oppression has looked a good deal more complex than it did from the halls of divinity school.

in a committed partnership with another woman, she found herself trying to convince churches of her worth as a minister, and it felt like “banging her head against a brick wall.” Just a week after her residency ended, however, she found herself interviewing for a chaplain’s job with a Midwestern college that was surprisingly ready for her gifts. She learned from her experience interviewing with churches to educate a committee from the outset about her partnership with Naomi rather than apologizing for her inability to meet their expectations. She gave a dynamic interview and they hired her. She says, “It was like the brick wall has not gone away, but it is as if I walked around it. I’m aware it is still there, but I’m not banging my head on it any more, although I still have some bruises, maybe a black eye and some scars.”

The college where Theresa is now a chaplain and adjunct professor has many financial challenges and a lot of anxiety, but, as she says in recognition and determination: “I serve the church. And I love, love, love everything I do.” After two years of ministry as a college chaplain, Theresa says she feels, in the words of the Apostle Paul, “grounded and rooted in love” for her family and her work (Ephesians 3:17). Despite the real limits of her situation, Theresa reimagined her own place and gifts for ministry, moving beyond apology to educate others,

claiming her gifts and making the most of the possibilities within her reach.

One of the key bonds this group of women in ministry shares is a common formation as “drum majors for justice,” a hallmark of their divinity school’s formation for ministry. At one point in the day, the conversation turned to their ongoing negotiation with this strong impulse towards prophetic ministry imparted during their seminary years. All, they agreed, were deeply shaped by a focus on prophetic ministry at their school. They recalled catching the fire of righteous indignation towards injustice and a desire to confront oppression relentlessly in all its forms as they graduated and moved out into their various ministry careers. Yet now five years out, hard-won wisdom emerges regarding the complex work of prophetic ministry “on the ground.” The group includes Naomi and Theresa, who met in seminary, as well as two African American women and a Euro-American woman. All have experienced various kinds of challenges, including outright discrimination, in their search for positions in ministry. Where they have found opportunities for ministry, the work of leading the fight against oppression has looked a good deal more complex than it did from the halls of divinity school.

Cassandra picked up on another thread of the conversation about the challenges faced by people who are not in the center but more on the margins of the church. It is difficult, she remarked, for women or minorities to get positions coming out of seminary, and some direct advice would be helpful—“if you are a 25-year-old single woman looking for a church you may need an additional vocation to consider, you know, you might not come out with a church right away, you may not come out making enough to sustain yourself.”<sup>100</sup>

Given that most women graduates she knows have struggled with these issues, she laments not hearing anyone say to expect it—and how to survive it creatively—during seminary.

Theresa continued, noting that when she was in divinity school, she was told she was special, called, and gifted, and she succeeded at the game academic work expected of her. As if speaking to her divinity school faculty, she noted: “You taught us to critique a world and how to tear it down, but you didn’t prepare us to be torn down by it. So it was really difficult to transition [from school to ministry]. It didn’t matter that I got an ‘A’ on [my] paper.” It is, the women told us, one thing to name injustice “out there” and another altogether when one feels its violence or attacks in one’s own life and person. Explicit engagement with this reality, and strategizing modes of response, would have been a more pragmatic lesson for the actual leadership challenges these students now face in ministry.

Mary, who is in her mid 30s, is experienced in global and multi-cultural ministries. She has been an associate pastor in the same congregation since graduation. As an example of how she has learned to be a wise leader in confronting injustice, she remarked that “learning how to ask the good questions is sometimes more powerful than sitting on a committee and saying, ‘Let me call you out on your racism.’” She’s learned instead, “to discern what question to ask to get a group thinking, questioning things for themselves.” She reflected back to divinity school, noting the social justice ethos, and being taught to challenge authority, to be bold and take risks when necessary in her congregational ministry. Mary says, “I’m way less prophetic and involved

in social justice than I thought I'd be, but I think it prepared me for when I need to challenge something, take a risk, or question authority. I feel prepared to do that. I know how to risk and challenge the system when I need to."

Theresa really resonated with Mary's experience of feeling intense righteousness during seminary but then not knowing how—and whether—to sustain this elevated mode of engagement. She said she couldn't sustain that level of "righteous indignation because no one likes you and you are just tired." Immediate, knowing laughter broke out in the circle. When she transitioned into a ministry setting, she felt guilt for not maintaining her high level of prophetic commitment. She expressed gratitude for models of what she calls "holy fierceness" but knows she can't live there all the time and be in relationship with everyday communities of faith.

Theresa noted Casandra was a leader in racial justice protests on campus during seminary, but has since served in churches, which are in some ways very conservative, and not easy to change. Casandra replied, saying she's been learning "how to faithfully live in this community that is not totally right, okay, there is some sexist stuff happening here, and I'm called to serve here, so [I wonder:] *How can I serve in this very sexist place?*"

Even in spaces that seem not to be "about race" or "gender" or "class," social differences rise in significance, and they have a profound impact on ministers as they learn to move in the world with supple pastoral imagination, especially in circumstances that do not mirror and support their sense of calling and leadership. Casandra offered one example, and James provides another.

As a second career seminarian, James had already put in 13 years as a pastor of an African Methodist Episcopal church in a Southern city when we met him. On interview day, he replied to our opening question: "What brought you to this point in your life."<sup>101</sup> He told us two stories that significantly shaped his life.

The first would be in 1969, I was bussed to an all-white school. That initially began one of the most difficult times of my childhood. I encountered things that just seemed unreal for a little kid to encounter. Never really made sense of it. It was so totally different from how my mom and my dad raised me and taught me to believe and think. Even though it was a difficult time in my life, my mom always said to me, 'Treat people the way you want to be treated,' and it was hard for me to reconcile that what she was saying to me with what I was experiencing. It was hard to bring the two together.

He recalled with great pain in his voice times when opposing basketball teams would see him and automatically forfeit the game rather than play a team with even one black player. After just one year James was moved to another school, losing friends and familiarity yet again. Even the efforts supposedly intended to bring about more fairness and dismantle racism in the U.S. had new, harmful, and lasting effects.

James continued his story, saying "The second thing that has me where I am. . . was having my mom sit down and talk to me and apologize to me with tears in her eyes that she didn't have money to send me to college... And I remember saying to her, 'It's okay. I'll win a scholarship.'" James dreamed of being a professional baseball player, but in the school where he was bussed, "a racial fight occurred, and they disbanded the baseball team, and so

now I transitioned to basketball.” In basketball he realized his dream: “Lo and behold, I ended up getting a scholarship to college in basketball.” James says, “having dealt with all that as a kid from the seventh grade until college made me angry and it caused me to be bitter. I went to college on a scholarship, dropped out because I really couldn’t process all of this anger and bitterness.” The oppression and harms of personal and institutional racism took their toll on his spiritual and emotional health.

But that was not the end of the story. James put it this thus: “Somewhere along the way, having been raised in the church, God convinced me that I had to let it go (it wasn’t something I wanted to let go) or it was going to destroy me. So then I began to really listen. I heard God clearly. What God said to me is, ‘I want you to take the experiences that you had and make sure it doesn’t happen to anybody else.’ So my life has been one of trying to share with people the things that shaped me along the way.”

Now, as an inner-city pastor, James has turned this word from God towards physical, mental, and spiritual uplift of this neighborhood. While at Memphis Theological Seminary, he wrote an exegetical paper about the Luke 14 wedding feast, and “God spoke it as clear in my spirit: ‘You have become the very people you are writing this paper about.’” His middle class professional congregation was located right next to a very poor neighborhood, but, as he put it, “there wasn’t a single poor person in that church.” Over the years, he and his congregation faced their class bias and have launched free meal programs, jobs counseling, and an innovative revolving loan program

(the latter to fight oppressive pay-day loan businesses which prey on the poor). James says the events of his years, being taunted and called names, even when walking into a ballgame with an adult coach, “set me back as a child, but it cast me forward as an adult.”

Adversity, injustice, sexism, racism, and other forms of social and economic inequality are powerful shaping forces of both culture and identity, even when they are ignored or invisible. The inequities are durable and built on centuries of intertwined harm and privilege.<sup>102</sup> They reside in many institutional forms in the wider culture, including the church, and they are visible in the lives of ministers in the LPI study. Seminaries do not always prepare their students for the inevitability of injustice, although some professors, courses, and schools focus precisely on forming “drum majors for justice” and encourage prophetic responses to injustice and inequity.

Participants in the Vanderbilt group, as well as others in our study, have experienced great difficulty in finding ministry positions because of social injustice. Even when they do obtain jobs, as Casandra and Theresa describe, subtle bias remains and must be faced. Further along in ministry, James shows great humility and wisdom drawing upon his own experience of oppression as a resource and motivation for facing new circumstances in his ministry. Situations of harm and injustice are unavoidable in both church and society, and no single story captures all the dangers. Yet it is possible to anticipate potential injustice which can undermine the work of ministry. One of the gifts of pastoral imagination is to draw upon faith-rooted visions of God’s judgment and justice, alongside mercy and patience, seeing with the eyes of faith to the other side of the “brick walls” of injustice.

## 6 | Learning pastoral imagination is needed for inhabiting ministry as a spiritual practice, opening up self and community to the presence and power of God.

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Of all we have said thus far about the qualities and capacities needed for leadership in ministry today, learning pastoral imagination perhaps matters most as a core integrative capacity which recognizes the holy depth of a person, a moment, or a situation. Leaders who embody this capacity in their ministries are able—even under quite difficult circumstances—to open up ways to engage the sacred depths of life. They do this through inhabiting the core practices of ministry—teaching, preaching, care, prayer and worship, mercy and justice, leadership and administration—and inviting their communities of faith to join them. Drawing on the resources of a particular tradition and the immediacy of relational, embodied practices in their everyday work, ministry becomes a spiritual practice of opening self and community to the redemptive presence God.<sup>103</sup>

Working in the daily practice of ministry over time, Eve moved beyond the typical novice preoccupation with how she inhabits the role of minister, allowing her to be both less emotionally overwhelmed and more fully present for the family experiencing a tragedy. Additionally she turned her attention toward the congregation and community both in the moment and in the days to follow. She shifted her thinking and acting toward the needs, demands, and leadership of the wider community. Considerations of huge theodicy questions to the nuance of how she changed her sermon at the last moment all threaded together in her concern that God's mercy and hope be present in a powerful way in the midst of her congregation's life.

These changes are a sign of her growing pastoral imagination as she works in the midst of her community of faith. She shows the ability to improvise her plans for particular ministry practices—offering care or preaching—according to the demands of the situation. Further, she integrates biblical and theological knowledge and pastoral know-how with the relational and emotional character of the situation. This informs the development of her practice of leadership in caring both for individuals and for shaping a faith community whose deepest truth is of God's presence with and for them even in the midst of suffering.

Similar wisdom grows in a very different context of suffering and hope, that of Pastor Carlos, a Pentecostal pastor in the South Bronx. In the case of Carlos, his experience over time shows his growing sense of God's presence and call in the midst of his practices of ministry in his congregation and community.

### Inhabiting Ministry as Spiritual Practice

Carlos, who is in his early 50s, proudly tells everyone he meets he is “Bronx born and bred.” Raised in New York after his parents moved from Puerto Rico, he grew up attending worship off and on at a storefront Pentecostal church. After a period away from the church because of some family troubles, Carlos and his family reconnected to the church in a time of crisis. The pastor's intensive engagement helped Carlos's father find deliverance from the ills plaguing his life. During those years, Carlos says “I saw what my pastor did, and I loved what he did, and so in my heart said, ‘I want to be a pastor.’”

With a strict stay-at-home mother, Carlos was not allowed to go outside for fear of gang trouble. Consequently, he became a prodigious reader and in general an advanced student. He

graduated from high school at 15 but found the social dynamics of college as an immature 16-year-old too difficult. He returned home, and while attending a youth retreat, was singled out by the minister who, as Carlos recalled, “called me forward and encouraged me in the Lord.” He got a job at a Christian bookstore, met and married his wife, and had his first son. He began to be mentored in ministry at his church, and became first an assistant to the pastor, then an Exhorter, and finally a licensed Minister. He taught new converts, preached, and led worship alongside the Senior Minister. Carlos noted that jealousy arose between them, as Carlos was a popular preacher and teacher, and as a result he was assigned to pastor another church, the one he has served bi-vocationally for over twenty years.<sup>104</sup>

His early formation in ministry was through apprenticeship with the senior pastor. “In the Pentecostal tradition, you want to minister, basically, you shadow the minister. You do everything the minister says. The minister says, ‘Jump,’ you say ‘how high?’” At his first church, his senior pastor did not allow him to pursue further schooling, claiming it would distract too much from the needs of the ministry. Yet in his new church, which was in a “totally dilapidated state physically, morally, and spiritually,” he found he had to return to school simply to find help in dealing with the complexity before him—the finances, the building, the low morale, and spiritual malaise. He felt the frustration of making progress, getting a few new members, but “then it would fizzle,” and “I could never really understand.”

On top of these challenges, a few members he provocatively titled, “Ahab and Jezebel,” began actively to try to undermine his authority and to recruit other members to their side.<sup>105</sup> During the long struggle with these conflicts,

Carlos’s very sense of commitment to the ministry wavered. Yet, he reports, “I also learned that God did supply during that time, so I also had that confidence that he saw me through it before, he’ll see me through it again. But in the in-between times between knowing about the problem and having victory over the situation is the hardest time because you have to maintain your faith.”

The difficulty of those “between times” sent Carlos looking for further formation in

**Leaders who embody this capacity in their ministries are able—even under quite difficult circumstances—to open up ways to engage the sacred depths of life.**

ministry leadership. While attending various ministry seminars and conferences, he met a leader at City Seminary of New York, and felt God wanted him there. While admitting, “in the Hispanic Pentecostal tradition, the Pastor is a superhero in that he does everything,” Carlos was clear this wasn’t a sustainable model. He recalled from an episode of the Tonight Show where a man kept many plates spinning on poles. “He starts with three plates, then he’ll go to the fourth one and while he’s doing that one, he’s checking the other ones to make sure each is still spinning, and then he goes to start the fifth plate...For me, that’s a wonderful image for ministry.” Wonderful, he continued, in its accuracy, but not for a sustainable life. He needed “to break away from that whole concept of being a superhero.”

In a stressful ministry, seminary “was like an oasis in the middle of a desert.” Peer exercises

and conversations challenged him to deal constructively with criticism and to grow in his confidence. In his early formation in ministry, he recalls being shaped by “people who were very dogmatic and had answers for everything.” In class he was exposed to a wide variety of traditions, theologies, and personal stories. “It helped me a put a lot of things in perspective.” It also strengthened him to face challenges in his ministry.

I was taught to challenge my mind, and trust me, with the greater City Seminary community, your mind is definitely challenged. Every time people open their mouth you're being challenged, and I don't mean that in a negative way. I mean that in a wonderful way because I enjoyed our conversations. So what happened in all that time: a lot of self-growth.

Reflecting on his journey, he acknowledges learning in ministry since beginning as an assistant pastor at age 20, combined now with learning in seminary, has offered him maturity and wisdom. “I may have not been qualified to handle it at times,” he reflects, but “I believe if God brought you to it, he'll bring you through it, so then use whatever you have to tackle the problem.”

City Seminary gave Carlos an oasis, a place for spiritual growth, helping him to mature as a leader. It also offered him practical ideas for innovation in his leadership. After literally years of struggle with “Ahab and Jezebel,” their departure opened a new season of growth for the church. In this new season of positive energy, Carlos framed the changes with the New Testament image of “kairos,” an idea from a

special ministry seminar led by a Jesuit who was serving as a visiting lecturer at City Seminary. In order to seize the “kairos” moment, Carlos and his congregational leadership adopted a discernment exercise he'd learned in the seminar. He invited everyone in the church to join in and put “giant stickies on the walls” in the Temple, their worship room. Holding the meeting in the Temple was a very significant part of his strategy, thereby grounding the exercise in the presence of God, but also opening up the kinds of activity considered “holy worship and work.” He commented, “I've been tipping over a few sacred cows trying to make this strategic planning happen and some people don't like it. The Temple—for Pentecostals, and I don't know if it's the same for all Pentecostals—but the Temple is sacred. They consider it the Tabernacle of Moses, and you can't move the fixtures. You cannot do anything with it, you know.”<sup>106</sup> The exercise was called “Stop, start, and continue.” Carlos invited them to work in groups to label things that they need to stop, things they need to start, and things they need to continue, a process he reports, “brought about a lot of discussion.” They then held further meetings to develop their ideas and began to take on projects to address their challenges one by one.

Students like Carlos represent a large number of ministry leaders in the United States today.<sup>107</sup> For them, ministry as a spiritual practice begins with God's call, and gains its early shape by apprenticeship under a spiritual mentor. No seminary education is required for the licensing as a minister, and when seminary does enter the picture, it plays a distinctive role something akin to what is often termed “continuing education.” His own sense of being overwhelmed by the challenges of ministry motivated him to seek the “oasis”

of support as well as the “challenge” of the peer and faculty-led learning that seminary offered. Yet despite these distinctive elements of Carlos’s ministry profile, he evidences similar patterns of maturing, deepening in his trust in God’s presence and leading his congregation in practices of care and study, preaching and leadership, all with hope in the victory promised by his faith.

### **Without a place to stand**

While Carlos certainly experienced a variety of what we call “complications” in learning pastoral imagination, he had the support and institutional legitimation to endure hardship and grow in his ability to practice ministry in meaningful ways. Cathy, a priest who grew up Roman Catholic, had a much more complicated journey toward the practice of ministry she now enjoys as part of an Old Catholic faith community in the Midwestern United States. Cathy’s story, while distinctive in many ways, also parallels the stories of women we met from traditions that have limited public ministry roles for women.

The Roman Catholic Church was very important to Cathy as a child, and she was very active in youth ministry activities through high school and into college. She threw herself into social justice ministries, especially working with the homeless. Desiring further training and greater theological grounding in ministry, she sought a seminary to attend. She started first in an innovative distance-learning program at the University of Notre Dame but disliked the episodic intensive nature of the courses—she wanted to be immersed in her studies full time. She landed at St. John’s in Collegetown, pursuing the M.Div. It was during CPE that her vocational crisis really clarified.

My whole life I’d been told, ‘Oh, you should be a nun,’ ‘because I was such a good Catholic girl, but that never really fit with me. It always seemed like the thing I should do and I had a lot of guilt around the fact that I wasn’t doing it, but it never was where I wanted to go. Just realizing what it means to be a pastor and what it means to journey with people and be with people in their relationship with Christ... that is all I want to do.

She was clear that she was a skilled leader, that she really enjoyed preaching, and for the first time claimed that she felt called to be ordained. Yet tears accompanied her story as she acknowledged that embracing a new future would mean letting go of her past. Soon thereafter, a female faculty member who knew her story suggested language she could claim: perhaps she was becoming a “small ‘c’ catholic.” Her journey took her into the Old Catholic Church, first as a member, and then as a transitional deacon and now priest. Describing the transition, she said:

My work in ministry always seemed to me to be through the back door. It was always confusing language: how I could be a minister, but not really be a minister? Which names was I allowed to have and not allowed to have? I wanted what they had, and I was just able to decide that was what I wanted, and I’m willing to risk whatever that means to be able to go through the front door. I got to read the Gospel and preach the homily at this other Catholic community—which isn’t allowed in our tradition.



While she feels deeply the integrity of having a “place to stand” in ministry, her new community cannot afford to support her in a paid ministry position. So for the moment, she is working bi-vocationally, doing social service work with homeless youth (work she considers ministry) while working part-time on the ministry staff in her new parish.

Cathy and Carlos, for different reasons, serve bi-vocationally as ministers. Their understandings of ministry as a spiritual

practice, however, matured through a common experience of struggle for space to practice ministry amidst a clear sense of God’s presence and call in their lives. By inhabiting the weekly and daily ritual practices of ministry – like preaching, care, and administration – even without full time status or pay, they lived into ministry itself as a spiritual practice. Their mediation between the holy and the everyday grounds and directs their growing wisdom as leaders for communities of faithful practice.

## Implications for Theological Education, Ministry, Church and Society

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Theological education is in turmoil. While other historical eras have presented distinct challenges, we are by all accounts living through a time of dramatic shifts in religious life generally and in the institutions responsible for training leaders for communities of faith. The complex challenges are before us all, and no one knows just the right way to respond in the face of them. These challenges are adaptive challenges, and they require an integrative, embodied capacity, what we are calling pastoral imagination, to risk living into the gift of God’s world made new, in the words of Isaiah 58, “like a watered garden, like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.”

Readers of this report will likely come from many different traditions, both within the Christian church and beyond it. Given a reader’s particular context, the challenges before the church and theological education may seem daunting, exciting, or both at once. Particular challenges important to some readers may

remain in the background for others. Similarly, modes of response, and especially Scripture and theological traditions informing those modes of response, will emerge in distinct ways to name the stakes of leadership in the face of multiple challenges of ministry today. In anticipation of such diversity, we have told many stories, and from a wide diversity of schools and graduates, to articulate key findings regarding learning pastoral imagination at the five-years-from-graduation mark in our study. We hope readers will make use of the following implications when they are helpful and will simply set aside those that seem aimed at other contexts. Honoring our desire to spark rich dialogue on these topics, the implications start with a brief statement of each implication, one building upon the previous. Following each statement, we ask provocative questions for

## When we ask about their most formative educational experiences, our study participants consistently turn to such contextually grounded learning experiences.

three distinct constituencies concerned about the future of theological education: the students who come to study at theological schools; faculty, staff, administration and trustees who tend the ongoing life of theological schools; and the broader church and society whose stake in effective faith leaders is huge but whose knowledge of how those faith leaders are best prepared remains rather opaque. The complexity of the future for these groups requires less in the way of singular answers and more in the way of becoming communities that ask the right questions.<sup>108</sup>

### 1 | Implication: Shift from a textual paradigm to a contextual paradigm

In its classical academic form, theological education over the past four centuries in North America has modeled itself on a textual paradigm, focused on practices of teaching and learning with texts at the center and classrooms in service of texts. This trajectory, rooted in the dominance of the academic disciplines and a university focus on academic scholarship, has coexisted in some tension over the last century with the consolidation of the “professional model” for ministry built on the M.Div. degree as its main credential for ordained ministry.<sup>109</sup> The growing professional ideal for ministry in the last century introduced greater emphasis on context and practice to the M.Div. degree. Yet the powerful academic ideal, shaped by the Enlightenment to enshrine the values of individual study and objective rationality, continued to hold sway in many disciplinary

guilds and the schools themselves.<sup>110</sup> Thus a dual-track educational model emerged in seminaries: professional and academic. Hence, while recognizing students would need real-world leadership skills, in practice theological schools tended to remain text-centric and focused on skills of critical interpretation.<sup>111</sup> Alongside this dominant model, other more contextual models coexisted, forming pastoral leaders in more significant proximity to congregational life and practice. As our findings above show, when we ask about their most formative educational experiences, our study participants consistently turn to such contextually grounded learning experiences.

In theological education today, a shift is underway to more carefully integrate the contextual with the trajectory of classroom-based formation for ministry, or, in more radical cases, to make context the center of formation for ministry. Our research strongly supports the shift to a contextual paradigm we believe most powerfully cultivates learning pastoral imagination.<sup>112</sup> Such a paradigm does not simply highlight the crucial role of contextual education as a part of theological education while allowing it to remain on the side, as an adjunct component to the classroom, which is the real center of the work. Rather, it would flip the center and margins. Contexts of ministry practice would be central with reflective learning across a range of topics and concepts that support learning in context.

**For students:** How can you most fruitfully root yourself in a context that offers space to experience ministry leadership as you pursue seminary education? Can this space be both relatively safe, so you can risk and

fail, and supportive enough, so you can engage in reflective learning about your risks and everyday efforts to learn ministry? What options are available for you to engage teachers and have supervisory time for reflection as well as peer group reflection? Are their opportunities to interweave classroom learning and contextual learning, seeking integration in your formation for ministry leadership?

**For faculty, staff, administration, and trustees:** How can your school's culture and curricula embody deeper alignment between classroom and context? Which particularities about context—especially contexts outside the white hegemony of evangelical and mainline ministry settings—are already shifting the needs and skills for ministry so as to demand new responses in classrooms and curricular design?<sup>113</sup> What intersections of classroom and context best foster leadership formation and pastoral imagination? Might asking these questions be the shared commitment of the whole faculty, rather than the contextual or practical faculty whose work typically raises these issues? What interventions might constitute not just strategic fixes in the programs and curricula, but might initiate adaptive cultural change? In other words, what moves beyond tinkering with what you already do, and risks an alternative proposal with distinctly different educational assumptions and practices aimed at the formation of imaginative pastoral leadership for the future?

**For church and society:** Can leaders in education—in church and society—critically question their own captivity to an idealist picture of the world? That is, can leaders critically question their default trust in what

books say, the reports of “hard data,” abstract theory, and decontextualized teaching and learning? Can they examine their distrust of practical wisdom and dismissal of contextualized learning – outside the schools of higher education? Further, how are these biases—deeply embedded in the culture of higher education in the United States—reproduced, as well as confronted, in theological schools, especially in patterns of job advancement, academic reward systems like tenure, and the hierarchy of knowledge?

## **II. Implication: Take account of the education and formation of the whole person—especially concerns for the personal impact of social injustice upon students.**

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The idea of questioning leaders in church and society about their captivity to a Cartesian picture of knowledge may seem fairly esoteric. In this second implication we wish to argue that release from the captivity to dualistic thinking is fundamental. The problem springs from the way Western conceptions of knowledge since the 18th century became the background for our basic cultural assumptions, powerfully embedded in our educational institutions. The problem in this view argues our essential self is the mind, and specifically its capacity for reason through which the mind apprehends the world. The crucial point, however, regards how we apprehend the world. A Cartesian view holds that only through reflection on the ideas within the mind can one most truly know the world outside the mind. Notice what is marginalized

here: not only my body, but also its sensory connection to the world around us.<sup>114</sup>

The implications are immense, including biases towards the special revelatory character of theoretical knowledge and marginalization or disappearance of bodies, emotions, relationships, and practical, contextual knowing. David Roozen, a long-time observer of and consultant for theological schools, puts a fine point on the result: faculties teach their students “on the assumption that if you ‘think it’ you can ‘do it’.”<sup>115</sup> The problems with this picture are many, starting with how it sells short a robust theological anthropology relevant to any faithful Christian: our whole selves—body, mind, and soul—are created good, and called to love God and neighbor. Further, when we sin, falling short of all God desires of us, redemption comes to us in the form of God-made-flesh, only adding to the depth of our status as more than spirit or mind. Our research shows again and again how ministers learn by apprenticeship to the world in which they live. Their integrative, holistic, and relational encounter with their world forms them as the particular persons they are, and are becoming, along their journey of formation.

This sharpens considerably when issues of intersectional oppression and the desire for justice come into the conversation. The whole Enlightenment tradition of abstract reason intertwined with a view of European white males as oriented to reason, and a continuum of women, savages (read: all people from Asia and the Pacific Islands, Africa, and Latin America), and animals who lack reason.<sup>116</sup> Theological education, when it aims to teach students to “think it” as David Roozen puts it, tends to have in mind placing the critical intellectual knowledge and skills of a particular faculty person’s academic discipline into the heads of

the students, usually confirmed by the passing of an exam or successful completion of a term paper. This avoids many things, including, as our participants show, honest confrontation with the ways that histories of intersectional oppression are not simply “out there” in society but also “in here” in theological schools—and certainly in churches—impacting the lives of students as they proceed through processes of formation for ministry leadership. Work for justice needs to be not merely another topic to “think” but a lived practice that is integral to the leadership formation of the whole person.

**For students:** Ask when considering theological education options: Which schools take learning in practice, mentoring, and integration of knowledge and practice, seriously as part of formation for ministry? At the school you attend, ask: How can I advocate for bringing my whole self to my education and formation for ministry? What contexts for, and practices of, integration exist between learning in the classroom and in ministry contexts; between spiritual formation and intellectual engagement; between personal experiences of injustice and analysis of social factors of oppression?

**For faculty, staff, administration, and trustees:** How can curricular elements, including classroom and experiential learning requirements, and co-curricular elements (chapel, spiritual formation, and the like) align intentionally to serve the integration and formation of the whole person for ministry? What practices of collaboration and communication among

faculty and between faculty and students, staff and administration, and trustees will foster such alignment? How can issues of oppression and justice, as part of a focus on holistic well being, be made integral to teaching and learning rather than simply left to the student?

**For church and society:** What conversations need to be fostered about public leadership and practical wisdom such that education and formation of the whole person is central not only in theological schools but also in nursing, medicine, law, engineering, and other professions tending the public good?<sup>117</sup> How can broader issues like student debt or seminary endowments be reframed as justice issues in terms of their impact on people who are socio-economically disadvantaged and on racial/ethnic minorities?

### III. Implication: Support developmental learning over a lifetime

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When children learn to ride a bike, they often begin with training wheels and an experienced older person who guides and coaches them as they ride, wobbling, down the sidewalk. When young adults learn to drive a car, they frequently take classes to learn some basic “rules of the road.” Following this, they take to the driver’s seat with an experienced instructor for a period of provisional, supervised driving allowed by a learner’s permit. Only after showing competence in the legal and practical skills of driving does one gain one’s own driver’s license. Something similar happens with learning ministry. Of course, like learning to

### Processing experiences of learning in practice, these colleagues often help turn what felt like failure to a fruitful opportunity for growth.

drive a car, in the case of professional leadership one needs to know the “rules of the road.” Yet the best research on human skill development shows this only goes so far because human beings grow in skill through an iterative process of learning in practice over time. Research shows it equally, if not more, important to learn from the feeling of panic in the seat of the pants that comes from taking a turn too fast as it is to learn facts and rules about turn signals and braking.<sup>118</sup>

Our research shows how important peer and senior colleagues are for learning pastoral imagination over time. Processing experiences of learning in practice, these colleagues often help turn what felt like failure to a fruitful opportunity for growth. Students draw upon diverse life experiences which impact their faith and call to ministry, continue building upon these experiences as they navigate through seminary, and deepen and grow in both skills and confidence as they graduate and transition into their new ministry roles. Across the range of Christian denominations and traditions, our participants told us stories of the terror and thrill of moving beyond learning “about” the Bible, theology, or even skills of ministry, to immersion in practice, trying on, or deepening, the pastoral or ministerial role in particular contexts. Eventually, with good enough support and practice, new ministers mature into those who embody skills, knowledge, and practice such that it looks and feels intuitive, as if done without deliberation, yet drawing on and integrating all the experience and relationships that have instantiated the practice.

**For students:** Whether or not your school uses portfolio-based assessment, how can you benefit from an assessment of your knowledge and skill as you begin seminary? How can you best process your progress in learning—in class and in context—as you risk living into your leadership role? Do you have peers and senior mentors, and a regular schedule of reflection with them about learning in practice? Do you need to develop such relationships? What feels overwhelming to you? Are there safe spaces where you can risk trying practice where you feel you are at the edge of your competence?

**For faculty, staff, administration, and trustees:** How might you recognize and assess the diversity of knowledge and abilities students come to seminary with? How can you help them to foster a robust engagement with their own learning over time? What kinds of assignments encourage growth in a practice over time? What mechanisms or systems of support and reflective practice will create a supportive environment for risk and growth, rather than protection and plateaued learning? How might clear outcomes for learning, including outcomes which are embodied and holistic, not just cognitive, help articulate stages of student learning over time? How will you help students’ embody relational skills for ministry that go beyond more engagement with written texts?

**For church and society:** Are there ways to name more carefully how faith leaders learn and grow over time? How might more collaborative models of leadership help engender a vital culture of peer learning among faith leaders? What might a shift from a culture of professional experts to a culture of life-long learners look like, and what different structures of ongoing education might this require?

## IV. Implication: Cultivate teachers who know the game of ministry

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A major tension facing theological education emerges from the implications thus far. The textual paradigm took its particular modern form through the Enlightenment emphases on mind and abstract reasoning. These contributed to the rise of disciplinary specialization and technical expertise as a model for knowledge production, especially at large research universities. Since these R1 universities train the vast majority of theological school faculty, their own deep formation over time is in the “game” of disciplinary specialization. They will as likely as not call themselves historians or philosophers or textual critics rather than theological educators. And truth be told, most faculties are grouped according to academic disciplines and are evaluated by their guilds on their contributions to these disciplines. While teaching and service count to varying degrees at different schools, the key coin of the academic world, theological education included, is peer-reviewed research and publications in one’s academic discipline.

The consequence, as we have seen, is the deep disconnect between the “game” faculty are playing and the “game” students come to seminary to learn how to play. Part of the issue, surely, is declining numbers of faculty who are themselves ordained pastors with prior congregational leadership experience. But a much larger issue is the intersection of prestige and reward built into the institutional structure and career paths for faculty, both in the schools that train them and in the theological schools that hire them. We celebrate those teachers—both contextual supervisors in congregations and other ministry settings, and those on seminary faculties—who showed up as the most influential teachers for our participants. In a

variety of imaginative ways, these teachers can clearly articulate how the pieces fit together into the work of ministry, and can engage students in making those connections themselves, both in class and in ministry contexts.

**For students:** Which teachers most “get” the kind of goals you have for post-seminary ministry? How can you engage them in helping you connect their discipline or particular gifts to your own formation as a leader? Are there places in the assignments for a particular class, or as part of a whole unfolding curriculum, where you can bring together all you are learning and put it into practice? What questions from contextual education supervisors will help you learn about their commitment to experiential learning and contextual theological reflection? How can you make use of written (text based) assignments to engage your learning in broader and more integrative ways?

**For faculty, staff, administration, and trustees:** What would it take to gain agreement on the need to recruit faculty and contextual supervisors who teach toward the game students need to learn to play, leadership in ministry? Could this recruitment commitment extend to every area of the faculty and not merely the contextual and arts of ministry areas? How could review, promotion, and tenure procedures shift so they more directly reward teaching, research, and writing focused on how a scholarly area contributes to ministry leadership? Might faculties commit to full participation in contextual education programs? Might doctoral programs think less about reproducing their disciplinary excellence and more about shaping teachers for the vocation of theological education and preparation for ministry?<sup>119</sup>

**For church and society:** How might churches and their leaders more directly take up the challenge of becoming partners in theological education, and making themselves intentional learning incubators for learning pastoral imagination? What continuing education do pastoral leaders need to become excellent mentors for seminary students learning in context?<sup>120</sup>

## V. Implication: Relationship to God is at the heart of forming wise pastoral leaders

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The classic critique dismissing overly academic theological education decries a focus on learning about God rather than building a deeper relationship with God. Yet theological education at its best—from the early church catechumenate, to the monastery and cathedral schools, to the emergence of the medieval university to the wide variety of seminaries, schools, Bible institutes, and churches carrying out theological education today—has had at its heart a desire for relationship with the One who made the heavens and the earth, the seas and all that dwells therein (Psalm 146). Our participants—to a person—went to seminary with a desire to know God more deeply and learn how—in a wide variety of paths in ministry—to serve God more truly in and through the church for the sake of the world and its great needs.

Learning pastoral imagination, while it requires all we have said above, finally finds its beating heart in relationship to the God of Jesus Christ who in love and mercy comes to make all things new. The Spirit works in and through human efforts at formation, bringing to fullness those distinctive gifts placed in us

for the work of ministry. Our research method, in fact, encourages and enacts space to know God. It is a spiritual practice of care and prayer and deep listening that again and again brings those whom we gather onto holy ground.<sup>121</sup> God speaks to our participants, and they in turn speak back, a dialogue of prayer and praise that punctuates their daily work in ministry. Ironically, however, with a few exceptions, our participants found this aspect of their formation for ministry was largely co-curricular, happening alongside, or outside, of their formal academic work. The issue here is not that spiritual life is missing altogether; rather, it is simply bifurcated and lacks integration with the more “intellectual” formation offered in the formal curricula of theological schools.

**For students:** How might you see what you are doing in seminary as spiritual practice, even and especially in the academic work required? What might it mean for your learning to be integrated into a capacity to see the holy depth, the presence and power and purposes of God at work, in the situations of your ministry leadership? What contributes to such seeing? How might such in depth seeing reframe your understanding

of effective leadership—when looking at a budget? a pastoral care situation? a sermon? an issue of public justice? How might you see ministry itself as a spiritual practice?<sup>122</sup>

**For faculty, staff, administration, and trustees:** What kinds of alignment across multiple modes of learning in the life of your school could foster integration towards pastoral imagination—at the level of curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular requirements, at the level of pathways through curricula (online, intensives, residential classrooms), at the level of full course syllabi, and at the level of course assignments? How might your faculty engage one another in theological and spiritual reflection on the practice of ministry with a telos of re-imagining your teaching and curriculum?

**For church and society:** How can leaders in church and society contribute to a public understanding of the place and significance of wise, imaginative faith leaders in congregations and other organizations? What stories of pastoral leadership could be told to help make the nuance and significance of pastoral work visible to a wider audience?

## Notes

1. Past studies largely focused on institutions because funding shaped them in that direction. We are grateful that the Lilly Endowment shares our vision for a new complementary study focused on learners. Some of the major studies (many provocative books might be fruitfully consulted which are, strictly speaking, beyond this list of largely empirical studies of the field of theological education) over the past century include: Robert L. Kelly, *Theological Education in America: A Study of One Hundred Sixty-One Theological Schools in the United States and Canada* (New York: Doran, 1924); William A. Daniel, *The Education of Negro Ministers* (New York: Doran, 1925); *William Adams Brown and Mark*

*A. May, The Education of American Ministers, 4 vols.* (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1934); H. Richard Niebuhr, Daniel Day, and James M. Gustafson, *The Advancement of Theological Education* (New York: Harper, 1957); Jackson W. Carroll, Zikmund al., *Being There: Culture and Formation in Two Theological Schools* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Jackson Carroll, *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); Charles Foster et al., *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006); David V. Esterline and Ogbu U. Kalu, eds. *Shaping the Beloved Community: Multicultural Theological Education* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox



- 2006); Hosffman Ospino, ed., *Hispanic Ministry in the 21st Century* (Miami: Convivium Press, 2010); Elizabeth Conde-Fraiser, *Hispanic Bible Institutes: A Community of Theological Construction* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2005), Malcom L. Warford, *The Spirit's Tether: Eight Lives in Ministry* (Herdon, VA: Alban, 2011);
2. William M. Sullivan, "Introduction," 13, in Foster et al., *Educating Clergy*.
  3. Foster et al. argue seminaries are key, but also highlight the impact of practicing their profession over time in forming pastoral imagination. *Educating Clergy*, 22.
  4. Christian Scharen, "Learning Ministry over Time: Embodying Practical Wisdom," in Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, eds. *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2008), 265-288.
  5. Frances Westley, Brenda Zimmerman, and Michael Quinn Patton, *Getting to Maybe: How the World is Changed* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2007), 8-10.
  6. Ronald Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).
  7. Craig Dykstra, "Reconceiving Practice," 35 in Barbara Wheeler and Edward Farley, eds. *Shifting Boundaries: Contextual Approaches to the Structure of Theological Education* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991).
  8. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue, Second Edition* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1984), 187-195.
  9. Craig Dykstra, "Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination," in Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, eds. *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2008), 41-61.
  10. The concepts of situational perception and wise practical action have their oldest philosophical roots in Aristotle's notion of phronesis, which he contrasted with episteme ("fact" knowledge) and techne ("know-how"). This third kind of knowing, phronesis (practical wisdom), allows for skillful situated knowing in action, a concept that captures the heart of our question about the complex task of learning and embodying pastoral imagination over time. Foster et al., drawing upon William Sullivan's work, see phronesis primarily at work in field education, the contexts which bring "professional knowledge and skill to bear on specific pastoral, priestly, or rabbinic issues" 320. See also: Scharen, "Learning Ministry Over Time," 267; Dorothy C. Bass, Kathleen A. Cahalan, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, James R. Nieman, and Christian B. Scharen, *Christian Practical Wisdom: What it is, Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016); Paul S. Fiddes, *Seeing the World and Knowing God: Hebrew Wisdom and Christian Doctrine in a Late-Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
  11. We follow Kathleen Cahalan here who, in her book *Introducing the Practice of Ministry* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2010), 140-142, expands pastoral imagination in relation to *phronesis* and the gifts of the Holy Spirit undergirding the wise practice of ministry.
  12. Philip Robbins and Murat Aydede, "A Short Primer on Situated Cognition," in eds., Philip Robbins and Murat Aydede, *The Cambridge Handbook of Situated Cognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
  13. In wise practitioners what looks like intuition is a kind of accumulated knowing that is both embodied in the person and embedded in the practice or field in which their expertise resides. For a comparison in nursing, see Patricia Benner, Molly Sutphen, Victoria Leonard, and Lisa Day, *Educating Nurses: A Call for Radical Transformation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009).
  14. Dykstra, "Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination," 47.
  15. The best starting place is Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Skillful Coping: Essays on the Phenomenology of Everyday Perception and Action* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). See also, for application to learning ministry, Scharen, "Learning Ministry Over Time."
  16. See among others, George E. Vaillant, *Triumphs of Experience: The Men of the Harvard Grant Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).
  17. W. Clark Gilpin, *A Preface to Theology* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 5-8.
  18. E. Brooks Hollifield, *God's Ambassadors: A History of the Christian Clergy in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 127-28.
  19. *Ibid.*, 103-04, 116-18.
  20. *Ibid.*, 127-131.
  21. *Ibid.*, 148, 154-56.
  22. While the Catholic story of theological education in the United States has its distinctions, on the whole it, too, was influenced by European patterns, trends towards professionalization and standardization, as well as practical education in parishes, hospitals, and other ministry settings. See Glenn Miller, *Piety and Plurality: Theological Education Since the 1960s* (Portland: Cascade, 2014), esp. chapter 4 focused on the history of Catholic theological education. See also: Victor J. Klimoski, Kevin J. O'Neil, and Katarina Schuth, *Educating Leaders for Ministry: Issues and Responses* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005) and Katarina Schuth, *Seminaries, Theologates, and the Future of Church Ministry: An Analysis of Trends and Transitions* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999).

23. See Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001 [1994]) 73-80 for origins of the four-fold pattern of theological study.
24. Chad Wellmon, *Organizing Enlightenment: Information Overload and the Invention of the Modern Research University* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).
25. Gilpin, *A Preface to Theology*, 86-87. William Rainey Harper called for internships and field education in 1899. Some schools, in response to his critiques, claimed already to be doing the kind of training he commended. Underlying a good bit of the debate and calls for reform was the reality that ministers continued to answer a call to ministry from middle, working, and lower class families, the majority of them from the rural sector of America's population. See Hollifield, *God's Ambassadors*, 228-229.
26. See Brown, *Ministerial Education*; May, *Profession of the Ministry*; Mays and Nicholson, *Negroes Church*, May, *Education of American Ministers*.
27. Hollifield, *God's Ambassadors*, 232-34, 295-300.
28. Complaints about "professionalization" of ministry included that it felt cold and distant, it was incommensurate with priestly functions, and it was dismissive of the mysteries of God and the discipleship of Jesus. For an example, see Urban T. Holmes, *Ministry and Imagination* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976); See also Hollifield, *God's Ambassadors*, 293, 327-28.
29. Among other treatments of this shift, see Sally B. Purvis, *The Stained-Glass Ceiling: Churches and Their Women Pastors* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1995); and Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).
30. Glenn T. Miller, *Piety and Plurality*, esp. chapter 4 "The Rights Revolutions."
31. Conrad Cherry's *Hurrying Towards Zion*: (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) tells the story of how the development of a handful of university-related divinity schools set this pattern, including perhaps most importantly, providing doctoral training for a majority of the faculties at other seminaries. David Perkins, *Making Learning Whole: How Seven Principles of Teaching Can Transform Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009) describes how universities tend to teach according to narrow disciplinary topics rather than helping students put learning in the context of the "game" they seek to play with the whole of their learning.
32. This is a key point in William Sullivan's work on the professions, and professional education, in the United States. He assumes a lost tradition of "apprenticeship" in ministry education that does not fully appreciate the complexity of the forms of ministerial training existent in the history of America. See his "Introduction" in Foster et al., *Educating Clergy*, 5.
33. Foster, et al., *Educating Clergy*, 120-23.
34. Justo González, *The History of Theological Education* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2015), 127.
35. Grant #2008 1196-000 was made from Lilly Endowment to Luther Seminary in September 2008, and renewed in September 2013. We are grateful for oversight and collaboration with our program officer, John Wimmer, and vice presidents of religion, Craig Dykstra and Chris Cable. We offer deep gratitude to a series of leaders at Luther who have supported our work over these years: Presidents Richard Bliese, Richard Foss (Interim) and Robin Steinke, and Deans Roland Martinson and Craig Koester. We are grateful as well for the encouragement and support of project faculty advisors at Luther: Dwight Zscheile and Terri Elton. We are also deeply grateful to the Catrina Ciccone who has so ably managed the project at Luther. We are also indebted for essential feedback and support from our Advisory Board (2008-2013) Charles Foster, Patricia Benner and David Wood.
36. For a breakdown of women's pastoral leadership in a variety of U.S. denominations see Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, "Baptists in Tension: The Status of Women's Leadership and Ministry, 2012," *The Review and Expositor* Vol. 110:1 (Winter, 2013).
37. We recruited from Baylor's George W. Truett Theological Seminary, supported by both the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.
38. The phenomenon of the shifting role of denominational affiliation and the reality of "religious switching" was explored in Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988) and has been further explored by Darren E. Sherkat in a series of papers including Darren Sherkat, "Tracking the Restructuring of American Religion: Religious Affiliation and Patterns of Mobility, 1973-1998." in *Social Forces* 79:1459-1492. See also the Pew U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, which charts recent switching among U.S. Hispanics, accessed Dec. 30, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/05/07/hispanic-religious-switching/>.
39. A whole literature and academic movement has developed to seek deeper integration between theological and social scientific modes of research, mostly under the rubric of the Ecclesiology and Ethnography Network. Among other sources, one might consult the two initial volumes in the series *Studies in Ecclesiology and Ethnography*: Pete Ward, ed., *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011) and Christian Scharen, ed., *Explorations in Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2012).

40. We wrote at length about this aspect of our field research method in Eileen Campbell-Reed and Christian Scharen, "Ethnography on Holy Ground: How Qualitative Interviewing is Practical Theological Work," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 17, no. 2 (November 2013): 232-259. The notion of hearing one another to speech comes from Nelle Morton, *The Journey is Home* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press 1985), 205.
41. Bent Flyvbjerg, *Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How It Can Succeed Again* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 4.
42. See also Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, "The Power and Danger of a Single Case Study in Practical Theological Research," in Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Joyce Ann Mercer, eds., *Conundrums in Practical Theology* (New York: Brill, forthcoming).
43. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).
44. See for instance Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples, Second Edition* (New York: Zed Books, 2012), especially 61-81 on "Colonizing Knowledges;" See also: Christian Scharen, *Fieldwork in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), especially 31-47 on "Rigorous Self-Reflection."
45. Flyvbjerg, *Making Social Science Matter*, 78-81, suggests four types of cases that are chosen for their ability to show information-oriented findings: extreme/deviant cases, maximum verification cases, critical cases, and paradigmatic cases. In this report of findings we focus particularly on critical and paradigmatic cases.
46. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3-30.
47. William Sloane Coffin, "Alex's Death" Sermon in *A Chorus of Witnesses*, eds. Thomas G. Long and Cornelius Plantinga (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 262-66.
48. James K. A. Smith has directly taken up this transition from Christian education centered on information to Christian education centered on formation in his Cultural Liturgies series. See *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009) and *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013).
49. This problem is not new, nor is it a problem isolated in theological education. Yet the move to embrace graduate professional education (and with it, a master's degree) as the gold standard for ministerial preparation in many, if not all, traditions helped institutionalize 'schooling' (in Ivan Illich's sense) as the pathway to ministry.
50. For excellent discussions of integration in theological education, see Kathleen Cahalan, "Introducing Ministry and Fostering Integration," in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, eds. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2008), 91-115; "Reframing Knowing, Being, and Doing in the Seminary Classroom," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 14:4 (October 2011), 343-353; "Integration in Theological Education," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie Miller-McLemore (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 386-95.
51. Particularly as part of the developmental process of learning something new. See Campbell-Reed and Scharen, "Holy Cow! This stuff is real!" From Imagining Ministry to Pastoral Imagination," in *Teaching Theology and Religion* 14:4 (October 2011): 323-342 and Scharen, "Learning Ministry Over Time."
52. Charles Foster et al., *Educating Clergy*, 34-37.
53. *Ibid.*, 37, Foster and his colleagues say, "alignment or misalignment of the institutional culture and mission of a school either augments and reinforces or hampers and diminishes the intent in faculty teaching practices for student learning." Many other components also influence the possibility alignment or integration, including the experience that students bring to the table.
54. Note, however, Foster et al. also name what we found as well: in schools with more episodic or ad hoc integration rather than a more systematic alignment for integration, the weight of the integration work is largely left—by faculty admission!—to student initiative. *Educating Clergy*, 321.
55. In 2014, of the thousands of sessions at the American Academy of Religion and Society for Biblical Literature meetings, there was only one substantive paper which listed "ministry" in its title: Naomi Annandale, Vanderbilt University, "Pedagogy of the Finite: Theological Education and Preparation for Ministry with Persons with Disabilities." Not surprisingly, she was trained in Vanderbilt's "Theology and Practice" Ph.D. Program developed to respond to the problem of scholars well-trained in their respective disciplines but unsure how to direct these fruits towards the horizon of use in ministry. See Bonnie Miller-McLemore and Ted A. Smith, "Scholars for the Church: Preparing Seminary Teachers" *The Christian Century*, February 26, 2008, accessed December 1, 2015. <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2008-02/scholars-church>.
56. See also the discussion of Dr. Rossi's work on "pedagogies of formation" in *Educating Clergy*, 111-116.
57. Part of the problem, as Daniel Aleshire and others have pointed out, is the fact that most faculty are trained at a handful of elite university-related divinity school

- programs whose culture is dominated by the so-called “Berlin model” of theological education. Here, the focus is on objectivity, critical inquiry, and disciplinary specialization, and the force field shaping the direction of research questions is academic guilds, not the church and the life of faith it seeks to live in and for the sake of the world God loves. See *Earthen Vessel: Hopeful Reflections on the Work and Future of Theological Schools* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 36-37; see also David Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).
58. Many changes to the landscape of Mainline churches in the U.S. helped create situations like the one Lucy faced as she took her first call. Charles R. Foster laments the abandonment of religious education as a means to nurture faith, support budding pastoral callings, and shore up the future of the church. See Foster, *From Generation to Generation: The Adaptive Challenge of Mainline Protestant Education in Forming Faith* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012).
  59. Among the M.Div. outcomes at Seattle University School of Theology and Ministry is this: “Awareness of their own social location/ assumptions/ hermeneutics as they engage the text in their own lives, their communities, and the larger world,” accessed October 7, 2015, <http://www.seattleu.edu/stm/students/contextual/>. While many schools might share this or a similar outcome, it is rare that all faculty commit to upholding this by assigning work which embodies this self-reflective leadership formation.
  60. Dean Mark Markuly remarked in personal communication (October 7, 2015) that the commitment is, among other sources, profoundly rooted in the Seattle University Jesuit identity and its culture of Ignatian spirituality that includes the practice of the daily “examen.” See Roger Haight, *Christian Spirituality for Seekers: Reflections on the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2012).
  61. Marty Linsky and Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line* (Boston: Harvard, 2002).
  62. Aleshire, *Earthen Vessels*, 68.
  63. Teachers are the “most influential” among 15 options. This finding is corroborated by Tony Wagner’s work *Creating Innovators: The Making of Young People Who Will Change the World* (New York: Scribner, 2012). For the young twenty or thirty-something innovators Wagner interviewed, the most influential teachers (usually from the college years) had one foot in the academic world and one foot in practice. Almost all were non-tenured faculty, existing in marginal positions of power and influence. Their own institutions typically do not value teachers who focus on practice as highly as those doing theoretical research and academic writing, more traditional measures for tenure and scholarly prestige. Similar dynamics are at play in theological education.
  64. Perkins, *Making Learning Whole*, 2.
  65. Vanderbilt Divinity School faculty spent a year studying what it means to “Teach for Ministry” in 2003-04, resulting in a new Lilly Endowment grant for a program in Theology and Practice to train doctoral students across all areas of specialty how better to teach in seminaries and train ministers. By coincidence this study participant “Naomi” is not the person in Note 55.
  66. Mennonites generally have been reluctant to change policy on same-sex pastors. See Michael A. King, *Stumbling Towards a Genuine Conversation on Homosexuality* (Telford, Pennsylvania: Cascadia, 2009).
  67. In addition to spending 10 hours a week at a ministry placement and meeting weekly in both supervisory sessions and in a ministry seminar, students write case studies based upon situations that arise in their daily work. They write three case studies per semester, discussing them both with their supervisor and with the seminar.
  68. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
  69. See Patricia Benner, “The Role of Articulation in Understanding Practice and Experience as Sources of Knowledge in Clinical Nursing,” in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism: The Philosophy of Charles Taylor in Question*, eds. James Tully and Daniel Weinstock, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 136-155.
  70. Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha/In The Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), 188.
  71. A significant aspect of the practice of ministry is its character as performance. In *Educating Clergy*, 32-33, Chuck Foster et al. describe four “signature pedagogies:” interpretation, formation, contextualization, and performance. Although some seminary professors are well versed in the performance pedagogy, it remains a major challenge to show students how to improvise performance when new situations arise in practice. That is a capacity that only emerges over time in the practitioner if other conditions support that learning and growth.
  72. Kathleen Cahalan, “Introducing Ministry and Fostering Integration” describes a range of teaching approaches that prioritize integration early and late in the curriculum. See also Foster, et al, *Educating Clergy*, 330, for discussion of three kinds of integration: vertical (from from start to end of the course progression); horizontal (among different courses) and theological thinking (drawing on all courses to develop habits of thinking and practice over time).

73. Critical incident learning can engage students in variously helpful ways. For example Scott Cormode at Fuller Seminary teaches using carefully crafted and interlinked case studies. See Cormode's "Almond Springs" cases: [http://www.christianleaders.org/Almond\\_Springs/index.htm](http://www.christianleaders.org/Almond_Springs/index.htm) (Accessed Feb. 17, 2015). Critical incident learning may also be effective when it teaches students to write reflectively about their own moments of crisis, clarification, or feeling "pulled-up-short." For example Viki Matson, and her cadre of seasoned ministers who facilitate field education classes at Vanderbilt Divinity School, lead students in an intensive reflection process on cases written by students.
74. Deborah Kerdeman, "Self-Understanding as a Focus of Teaching and Learning" in *Education and Practice: Upholding the Integrity of Teaching and Learning*, eds. Joseph Dunne and Pádraig Hogan (London: Blackwell, 2004), 144–158. Kerdeman observes that being "pulled up short" is a "deep recognition [which] confronts the fundamental limits of what human beings know and can do," 154.
75. Craig Dykstra writes about the significance of knowing how to "see in depth" and respond with pastoral imagination in "Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination," 41–61.
76. Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1980). The phrase is from Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), 77.
77. Historically, a move to bring more integration to the knowledge and use of knowledge in theological schools emerged out of a series of studies between 1946 and 1957 that identified a problem: "the need for a more holistic, integrated approach to theological education." The solution emerged in the new area of "field education." See Robert T. O'Gorman, Kathleen Talvacchia, and W. Michael Smith, "Teaching from a Community Context: The Role of the Field Educator in Theological Education," in *Theological Education*, 37:2 (2001): 1-58.
78. Foster et al in *Educating Clergy*, 153, argue that pastoral imagination is a "habit of mind." One feature of that habit of mind goes beyond a compendium of knowledge and requires the learning of salience, which is more than information literacy. It is an embodied knowing about how to respond that is both learned through intentional repetition and then essentially forgotten. The habits of mind are crucial for doing ministry, but they are only one aspect of ministry practice, which is also embodied, relational, emotional and grounded in context. See also Dykstra, "Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination," 50-51.
79. According to Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Taylor, *Retrieving Realism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), (51n27), salience is a feature of the prefrontal cortical part of the brain which, through embodied learning in the world, "creates a foreground-background distinction that is necessary for an organism to act . . . in accordance with . . . a goal, a task, a sense of the situation, a disposition to action, a perspective".
80. Benner, *Educating Nurses* (chapters 5 and 6) shows how salience is learned through trial and error, and best learned with close supervision or coaching from an experienced practitioner.
81. See Eileen R. Campbell-Reed and Christian Scharen, "Ministry as Spiritual Practice: How Pastors Learn to See and Respond to the 'More' of a Situation," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 12:2 (2013): 125–44.
82. In the LPI study we hear frequent accounts of the nitty-gritty of new pastors' experience, and no one goes into a congregation without uncovering warts, baggage, troubles of all kinds. There are few if any ideal congregations, although clearly there are more and less healthy ones. New pastors are often drawn into small, fledgling congregations, and pastors in our study were no exception.
83. Lutherans have tried to maintain aspects of the "apprenticeship" model of ministry by requiring the yearlong internship for ministry candidates, but they are facing challenges of time and money in moving people to new locations. See Foster et al., *Educating Clergy*, 283.
84. These aspects of the situation were confirmed both by Debbie and by the internship staff at the school.
85. Patricia Benner, et al. in *Educating Nurses*, 93-95, describe the necessity of skilled teachers who can teach for salience by helping nursing students connect their acquisition of knowledge with their use of it, learning to 'think in action' and "increasing [the] facility for situated cognition." Students deepen and solidify their medical and clinical knowledge through the particular, open-ended situations that the clinic offers. The parallels for ministry are striking.
86. The text in this case is very important. Trong learned to put together a Bible study, a major component of youth ministry in his tradition. However, learning the skill through a mentoring relationship is of equal or greater significance.
87. Helmut Thielicke, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999/1962). Thielicke understood a half a century ago the gap between church and academy, and he articulated a developmental trajectory for seminarians training to be pastors. He argues that rapid intellectual growth often outpaces spiritual maturity (10), and he points out how theological doctrines include hard fought wisdom and often deal in "dialectic and paradox," complex meanings that must be engaged and practiced over time to be understood experientially. In other words students can imagine the importance of doctrine conceptually, but don't yet embody or have

knowledge that has “‘passed through’ as a primary experience” (11). He warns young seminarians can be “thoroughly bewitched intellectually” and even “victimized by the seduction of conceptual experience” when they identify with what they are reading and “imagine intellectually” but don’t yet know it in its fullness. He calls such growth “theological puberty” and admonishes churches to try and understand it (12). An exception to Thielicke’s suggestion that first semester theological students refrain from preaching and teaching, are students like Trong who are already leading in ministry and spiritually more savvy and experienced.

88. This kind of self-understanding and ability to articulate one’s one voice is necessary in most helping professions. It is key to doing work that is relational in character. See H. Frederick Sweitzer and Mary A. King, *The Successful Internship: Personal, Professional, and Civic Development in Experiential Learning* (4th Edition) (Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole, 2014), 85-110.
89. See *The Vietnamese American 1.5 generation: stories of war, revolution, flight, and new beginnings*. Edited by Sucheng Chan ; with contributions by students at the University of California (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2009); See also Christian Phuoc-lanh Phan, *Vietnamese Americans: Understanding Vietnamese People in the United States, 1975-2010* (Xulon Press, 2010). Phan identifies 1.5 generation Vietnamese Americans as those born in Vietnam around the end of the “Vietnam War” and emigrating to the U.S. as infants, children, or teens. They have access and make use of two cultures and two languages.
90. Founder of “self-psychology” Heinz Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, eds., Arnold Goldberg with Paul Stepansky (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, 564-72, argues that optimal failures or frustrations in understanding, when they allow one to retreat and explain, can help establish resilience, empathy, and self-esteem.
91. The category of intersectionality helps name the intersections between forms or systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination including race, class, gender, sexuality, and so on. Nancy J. Ramsay, “Intersectionality: A Model for Addressing the Complexity of Oppression and Privilege,” *Pastoral Psychology* 63 (2014):453-469.
92. Researcher Yasmin Gunaratnam, *Researching ‘Race’ and Ethnicity: Methods, Knowledge and Power* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003), 30-31, excavates the troubling categories of ‘race’ and other identity markers (class, gender, ethnicity, etc.), which can reify the problems of racism and other hegemonies, particularly in the research setting. She says, “The ‘treacherous bind’ of ‘race’ and its close relationship to racism is an ever-lurking presence in research. It has implications for all researchers who are concerned with social difference and with how research can be used to challenge racism and oppression.” With Gunaratnam and Stuart Hall we use the categories of ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ as concepts that are presently under deconstruction and destabilization, and no longer accepted in their earlier meanings “as representing essential, discrete difference between groups.” Rather we use them in service of “addressing and dismantling racism.” Importantly our study participants still evoke the terms, and yet with meaning that is also for them unstable and dismantling. Thus we follow their lead and share in the work of destabilizing ‘race’ as well as ‘ethnicity’ and ‘gender’ and other troubling social categories.
93. Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair T. Lummis, and Patricia Mei Yin Chang, *Clergy Women: An Uphill Battle* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox 1998); Chaves, *Ordaining Women*; Purvis, *The Stained Glass Ceiling*; Carroll, *God’s Potters*; Eileen Campbell-Reed, “Baptists in Tension.”
94. In a national sample of 1,863 African American churches across seven denominations, Barnes (2006) found denominational differences in openness to women clergy: Baptist denominations, followed by Churches of God in Christ, are the least likely to support women clergy. See Alexis D. Abernethy, “Women’s Leadership in the African American Church,” <http://fullermag.com/womens-leadership-in-the-african-american-church/>, accessed September 24, 2015.
95. The conversation in the Round three interview centered around the book by Sheryl Sandberg (with Nell Scovell), *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead* (New York: Knoff, 2013). The book presents various research findings, describing in detail an achievement gap between women and men, and also an ambition gap for working women.
96. Mark Chaves, *American Religion: Contemporary Trends* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 16-32, reports on some minor increases in racial-ethnic diversity among predominately white congregations (80% or more of members are white), between 1998 and 2006, but no similar changes among predominantly African-American congregations (80% or more of members are black).
97. Project Implicit—a collaborative research effort between researchers at Harvard University, the University of Virginia, and University of Washington—offers dozens of “Implicit Association Tests” (IATs). These tests tap those hidden, or automatic, stereotypes and prejudices that circumvent conscious control. Accessed December 30, 2015, <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>
98. See Richard N. Pitt, *Divine Callings: Understanding the Call to Ministry in Black Pentecostalism* (New York: NYU Press, 2012).
99. Human Rights Campaign, “Faith Positions” Accessed October 3, 2015, <http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/faith-positions>

100. Our participants roughly match debt of theological students overall: about 35% have no debt, 30% have \$30,000 or less, 10% have \$30,000-\$40,000, and about 25% have over \$40,000. Much more troubling, and related is this finding on injustice: 47% of the minority participants in our study have over \$40,000 of debt. For analysis of ATS data, see Sharon Miller, Anthony Ruger, and Kim Maphis Early, *Taming the Tempest: A Team Approach to Reducing and Managing Student Debt*, *Auburn Studies* 19 (New York: Auburn Seminary, 2014).
101. When we interviewed participants in the study, we asked three questions of each cohort of five students: What brought you to this point in your life? What has prepared you for ministry? And tell about an “aha learning moment” in ministry.
102. Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 8-9, traces “a history in which the Christian theological imagination was woven into processes of colonial dominance” and which has lost its “deepest instincts of intimacy.”
103. We have learned much from Kathleen Cahalan’s depiction of ministry as a spiritual practice—including the six core practices named here, which are rooted (and authorized) within Jesus’ ministry as a way to define ministry—in her excellent book *Introducing the Practice of Ministry*
104. Carlos has spent a career in bi-vocational ministry, meaning he has never drawn a salary from the church and works another job for income while also serving as pastor and bishop. City Seminary of New York is made up of a student body of all bi-vocational ministry students—none are now or anticipate being full-time paid ministry leaders, even as they almost all consider ministry to be their vocation whatever their paid work may be. See Pitt, *Divine Callings*.
105. In 1 Kings, King Ahab marries a Phoenician princess, Jezebel, who convinces Ahab to abandon Yahweh and worship her gods, Baal and Asherah, instead, and to persecute the prophets of Israel.
106. Carlos continued, “They were like ‘You can’t do that. That’s a desecration of a holy place. You can’t do that.’ And I said ‘It’s not a desecration of a holy place because we’re doing holy activity. I don’t understand what you’re talking about.’ And you could see the tension because people were upset that I challenged them on that point, you know, but some things I’ll stick my neck out on the line.”
107. See “A National Survey of Hispanic Protestant Denominations in the USA,” accessed December 30, 2015, [http://www.hispanicchurchesusa.net/national\\_survey\\_hsus.htm](http://www.hispanicchurchesusa.net/national_survey_hsus.htm).
108. Westley, et al., *Getting to Maybe: How the World is Changed* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2007), 19.
109. Glenn Miller, *Piety and Profession*, xi.
110. Foster, *Educating Clergy*, 42, 47-49.
111. Charles Foster, et al. *Educating Clergy*, xx; Edward Farley, “Four Pedagogical Mistakes.”
112. Sullivan, “Introduction,” in Foster et al., *Educating Clergy*, 2-4.
113. Lee H. Butler, Jr. unpublished paper delivered at the Society for Pastoral Theology, Denver, CO, June 20, 2015.
114. A brief and utterly compelling summary of the argument can be found in Dreyfus and Taylor, *Retrieving Realism*. See also Charles Taylor, “Overcoming Epistemology,” in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997) 1-19.
115. Michael I. N. Dash, Jimmy Dukes, and Gordon T. Smith, Learning from the First Five Years: Noteworthy Conclusions from the Parish Experience of Recent Graduates of ATS Schools,” *Theological Education* 40:2 (2005): 71.
116. One key source: Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*.
117. William Sullivan, *Work and Integrity: The Crisis and Promise of Professionalism in America, Second Edition* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004).
118. Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Skillful Coping*, 31.
119. Helen Blier and Barbara Wheeler, *Report on a Study of Doctoral Programs that Prepare Faculty for Teaching in Theological Schools* (New York: Auburn, 2010) shows the vast majority of theological school faculty are produced by fewer than 20 mostly university-based doctoral programs in theology and religious studies. These schools, furthermore, follow the tendency to choose and form students to reproduce themselves, perhaps with the recent exception of the theology and practice programs at Vanderbilt, Emory, and Duke. The danger is, of course, that faculty members arrive at a seminary preparing leaders for ministry and faculty resent the task, wishing instead to commit their time and energy to the priorities of research and writing expected for status in their academic disciplines.
120. George Mason, *Preparing the Pastors We Need: Reclaiming the Congregation’s Role in Training Clergy* (Landham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012).
121. Campbell-Reed and Scharen, “Ethnography on Holy Ground.”
122. Campbell-Reed & Scharen, “Ministry as a Spiritual Practice: ...”

## Auburn Seminary

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