

Theologies for pastoral ministry: listening and writing in community

BY CRAIG BARNES

The first phase of the Theologies for Pastoral Ministry to the Contemporary Church initiative has included a year of collaborative theological reflection among pastors and scholars across North America. Supported by Lilly Endowment Inc., this multi-year project of The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) aims to renew pastoral imagination and develop practical theological resources for the contemporary church.

Through five regional gatherings with a total of 67 individuals, the project engaged a grassroots discernment process to identify the most pressing theological questions facing ministry today. Each participant prepared a 1,500-word pastoral epistle, reflecting theologically on an issue or opportunity in ministry today. Together, the group represented 25 Christian traditions and a wide range of racial, generational, and denominational perspectives.

A smaller group then met in early 2025 to identify 10 central themes emerging from these epistles and discussions. These include:

1. Following Christ
2. Conflict
3. Divine Justice
4. Dignifying Difference
5. Ecclesial Identity
6. Eschatological Hope
7. Fear
8. The Spirit of Pentecost
9. The Pastor's Soul
10. Stewardship of Technology



These themes are shaping the work of Phase 2, as authors begin to write 12 new theological books that address the contemporary challenges of pastoral ministry. The authors will write in community through six more gatherings from December 2025 through November 2027. Along the way, they will also be engaged in seminars, continuing education events, focus groups, and writing journal articles. In this project, theology is not only an academic pursuit. It is a shared reflection born from the lived experience of ministry.

The Theologies for Pastoral Ministry project will continue through 2028, with the end goal of publishing 10 books on practical theology for the contemporary pastor. The first volumes are expected later in the decade.

For more information and updates, visit theologiesforpastoralministry.com.



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