The focal issue of this project is the lack of attention to the educational needs of, specifically, parish clergy for providing parish leadership in the increasingly multifaith context of North America. The multifaith leadership literature and CHAPP conversations have been largely geared, sometimes explicitly but more frequently implicitly, to training leaders who work in multifaith settings, with chaplaincy and community/social justice ministry receiving the most focused concern. But for parish clergy, while their societal context is increasingly multifaith, their immediate context of ministry and overwhelming constituency is not. This means that their primary tasks in regard to a multifaith world are not so much engaging the religious other themselves. Rather it is helping their parishioners live faithfully within the increasingly multifaith reality of American society.

In response to the inattention, the project had two movements. The first was to research how parish clergy actually experience multifaith situations and issues in their parish ministry, the primary original research being a series of focus groups. The second movement was to outline two curriculum proposals for educating parish clergy for a multifaith world, building from the research and extensive conversations with the Hartford Seminary faculty.

One curriculum proposal is for an “introductory” MDiv course flowing from the assumption that a typical seminary “can only squeeze, at best, one more course into an already overly stretched curriculum.” The other proposal is the outline of a DMin curriculum specifically geared to parish ministry in an increasingly multifaith North America. The North American constraint is dictated by the ATS context of the project. The project’s focus is further constrained to Oldline Protestant parish ministry. Given the required brevity of the report I turn directly to the curriculum proposals, interjecting notable research findings into the rational for the proposed DMin courses. I conclude with a brief note on the project’s methodology.
The MDiv course proposal nicely serves as a preface to the DMin curriculum proposal. It does so because, even though the task (a single course) is narrower in scope than the DMin proposal, the outcome of the Hartford faulty discussions was more abstract, focusing more on broad themes, values and pedagogies than a concrete syllabus. While Hartford Seminary has offered a DMin degree for nearly forty years, it has not offered an MDiv since the early 1970s. Accordingly, MDiv issues are more of an intellectual exercise than an immediate and concrete quandary for us.

One further introductory note. A common theme in the CHAPP family essays is the desirability of a cross curriculum approach. The evangelical family essay puts it most succinctly, “we need to teach our existing courses in new ways, taking into account the new realities of religious plurality.” The Hartford faculty certainly supports this as the ideal. But as the evangelical family essay also notes, even when implemented, a cross curriculum approach would still require one or more focused courses. Arguably, the introductory MDiv course sketched out below would serve well within a broader cross curriculum approach, as well as a stand-alone until cross curriculum approaches become more common place.

The Hartford faculty discussion of an introductory MDiv course identified three general areas to be addressed, each having a subset of topics or methods. First and foremost for an introductory course is the rational for multifaith preparation for parish ministry. Further, we noted three different but interrelated layers to the rational: A) the theological case; B) the social/cultural/ demographic reality of the increasingly multifaith world in which all Americans live, work and worship; and C) the practical situations and issues that faith communities and their members face because of A and B.

The second area identified was that of practices and skills. The most important and deeply felt thrust of our conversation about this area was that it must not merely deal with knowledge about or even acquisition of the practices and skills under consideration. More important, it “must bridge to leadership.” This was a strong reminder that multifaith engagement is, ultimately, about doing. And for a parish minister it is, ultimately, about how one expresses and enculturates multifaith skills and capacities into a community of faith. The list of practices and skills we identified could be parsed and expanded in a number of ways, and our DMin curriculum proposal presents one cut. But to name just a few areas that are less evident in the broader literature: How to provide a credible witness about one’s own faith that appreciatively acknowledges the other (What? Oldline Protestants don’t testify!); How to deal with
congregational resistances (Pastor, why are you wasting your time going to clergy prayer breakfasts when there is pastoral calling to be done among our shut-ins); How to engage in the variety of types of multifaith dialogue, perhaps most important for laity, the so called “dialogue of life” (Pastor, my new boss is a Sikh); and How to conduct and prepare the congregation or members for life-cycle rites that cut across faith traditions (Besides going to the Pluralism Project’s website, although that is not a bad place to start).

Finally, our conversation noted the variety of different kinds of pedagogies needed because of the multiple ways of knowing essential to preparing for and engaging in multifaith ministry. There are, to be sure, a vast array of “facts” and wide range of substantive material that a student needs to know. The primary challenge in this regard is how much, and how to balance it with other necessities. Foremost among the other necessities is that by its very nature multifaith engagement is experiential and relational, and therefore experiential/relational pedagogies that help develop relational skills and capacities are critical at even the introductory level. Within a context of dialogue and hospitality such things as listening/sharing, appreciative acknowledgment and reverent relationality are now standard themes. But just as importantly, experiential/relational encounters provide the primary and arguably the most effective grist for the reflexivity required for self-awareness—self-awareness one of the qualities highlighted in virtually all treatments of multifaith practice. The key encounter we are speaking about is, of course, an encounter with religious others. Cross faith student bodies are a luxury few seminaries have in this regard, but there are a wide variety of models using extra-curricular resources for building such encounters into seminary classes (see for example, Roozen and Hadsell, eds, Changing the Way Seminaries Teach: Pedagogies for Interfaith Dialogue).

The essentially practical nature of multifaith engagement further suggests a full range of pedagogies related to action oriented education, such as case studies and the reading of first person and communal narratives. The practical nature of multifaith education further reminds us that our “subject matter” is necessarily interdisciplinary. And both this and the very bridging of difference at the core of “multi” still further suggests that such an introductory course be team taught.

Our treatment of an introductory MDiv course sketches, in highly abbreviated form, a framework of competency areas for parish leadership in a multifaith world and an overview of related pedagogies. Building on this, the outlining of a DMin curriculum
specifically targeted to congregational ministry allows for the more expansive development of a set of suggestive courses oriented to these competencies. Our DMin proposal is presented in terms of six, required courses, which in a typical DMin structure would leave some space for course electives and DMin project credits.

**Course One—Intro to World Religions/America’s Religious Mosaic.** Knowledge of other faith traditions is such a taken-for-granted foundation for ministry in a multifaith world that a “world religions” course appears to be the major point of entry for the majority of seminaries that offer MDiv courses in the area (in contrast to our above framing of a course that approaches the area more as a practice). Our focus groups with parish pastors support the importance of such a substantive base for work in the parish. While few of our focus group pastors felt that multifaith was a priority concern of their parishioners, all reported at least occasional instances where a parishioner asked a factual or pastoral question about some aspect of another faith tradition. Additionally, adult education forums or programs about other faith traditions were generally viewed by our clergy as something their parishioners would tolerate, some even desire, and something that in the experience of several of our interviewees, led their parishioners to want more and different kinds of multifaith experiences.

A consensus about the foundational nature of such a course, however, does not imply any consensus about how to structure it. Indeed, there are at least five issues that the design of such a course needs to confront. One is whether to choose breadth or depth in how many traditions to include in the course (see for example, Judith A. Berling’s, *Understanding Other Religious Worlds: A Guide for Interreligious Education*). Another issue is the extent of focus on the American expression of any particular faith tradition vs. its historical roots. Then, how much time, if any, does one devote to field trips to mosques, synagogues, temples or centers (which can serve as a bridge from historical origins to American expression)? Still another issue is whether to include “Christian others” in the course or religious alternatives such as secular humanism. Certainly for our Oldline Protestant focus group pastors, evangelicalism to the right and various forms of secularized value systems to the left were a more dominant reality in their and their members’ experience than other world religions. And finally, there is the critical issue of the extent to which the course is not only geared to the students’ learning about other faiths but also teaching other faith traditions to parishioners—the “bridge to leadership.”

**Course Two—Theology of religions.** Analysis of the FACT2010 national survey of 11,000 congregations suggests two primary motivations for congregations involved in
multifaith activities: theological inclusiveness and civic neighborliness. Both motivations are equally apparent in the Oldline Protestant pastors highlighted in Robert Wuthnow’s, *America and the Challenge of Religious Diversity* and our focus group pastors. But just like Wuthnow’s pastors, while strong and steadfast in their theological rational for inclusiveness and hospitality, our focus group pastors were considerably more uncertain and uncomfortable when it came to their Christology. Even for experienced pastors positively predisposed toward the embrace of all of one’s religious neighbors, there is still personal theological work that needs to be done, especially when articulating a credible, systematic theological rational for and with their laity is at stake.

Course Three—An Intense and Reflective Experience of Multifaith Dialogue. The formative and substantive impact of immersion experiences is well documented in theological education, and our own experience at Hartford Seminary with a week-long, intensive experience of dialogue strongly commends itself as a way to involve students efficiently and deeply in the experience/relational core of cross-faith encounter (Yehezkel Landau, “Building Abrahamic Partnerships: A Model Interfaith Program at Hartford Seminary” in Roozen and Hadsell, op. cit.). The course includes not only sustained dialogue, but also structured periods of engaging the core theology and practices of each represented tradition, of joint scripture study and joint participation in a variety of spiritual disciplines, and of reflection on the pedagogy of the week. The week-long, degree/non-degree format also lends itself to the necessity faced by the vast majority of North American seminaries to “recruit” the, in this case, Jewish and Muslim student/participants in the dialogue.

Course Four—Comparative Approaches to Contemporary Social/World issues (comparative ethics). Given the omnipresence of global issues and their entanglement with different socio/historically infused religious cultures, we were a bit surprised (and disappointed) how infrequently our focus group pastors drew upon multifaith understandings to highlight sermons or adult forums dealing with current issues. This was in part because of a sense that their lay audience would be uninterested in the complexity. It was even more related, we believe, to the fact that the pastors felt ill-equipped to authoritatively deal with the religious roots of the conflicts and differences, or the religious resources for resolution, regarding such issues as corporate capitalism, economic disparity, immigration’s challenge to multiculturalism, just war, democracy, woman’s roles, sexuality, etc.—either on the home front or abroad. It strikes us as painfully ironic that while business and political science programs are finally beginning to pay attention to religion, theological education continues to lag in its attention to
economics and political science. Globalization has forcefully brought the interdependent nature of the world into every layperson's life and work. The global reality is a multifaith reality. Therefore, how can a pastor deal credibly with the lived experience of his or her laity without understanding the multifaith implications of this lived reality?

Course Five—Motivating and Engaging Laity. The most surprising findings in our focus groups were: 1) the extremely low level of multifaith engagement or activity in the participants’ parishes or their observation of congregations around them; and 2) that the Thanksgiving eve “ecumenical” service was the most ubiquitous, but still minimally attended, form of multifaith worship in their experience. Given prior research, the former was to be expected, but we had hoped for a higher bar for clergy connected to Hartford Seminary. The latter apparently is a peculiar New England legacy (witness the logo for the Massachusetts turnpike).

Relatedly, the most significant influence that the focus groups had on our thinking about curriculum was the absolute necessity of a strong focus on motivating and engaging one’s laity. Although sometimes presenting itself as active resistance (especially as a priority for a clergy’s “church time”), the lack of lay assertiveness was more typically experienced by our clergy as indifference—and this regardless of city or small town/country locations, typically a good proxy for the proximity of congregation’s other than Christian. It clearly underscores the importance given to addressing the social, theological and practical rational for multifaith engagement in our MDiv curriculum discussion.

Civic encounters, like the “traditional” Thanksgiving service that have evolved from ecumenical to multifaith seem to be one typically tolerated, entry level kind of event for Oldline laity, as are a host of social service ministries that bring together multifaith teams of volunteers. Mission trips appear to be another, and inclusion of a multifaith dimension in confirmation programs and adult education forums, especially when led by a leader from another faith tradition, were still other frequently mentioned “easy” points of entry for laity. However, how one balances the potential such events have as a low thresh-hold entry point vs. their often superficial level of engagement as a potential end point has to be considered. As Wuthnow (op. cit.) observes, the vast majority of what passes as multifaith engagement in American congregations appears more designed to minimize lay exposure than to push on to more genuine levels of engagement. Alternately, as several of our focus group participants observed, the
purely social or informational nature of many such events make them safe places for an initial encounter, but rarely raise theological issues directly, much less raise them in ways that push participants to examine their own faith or faith tradition.

Course Six—Comparative Pastoral Practices. This is not meant as a theoretical course, but rather a practical course in how to attend to typical pastoral practices when they include a multifaith presence. In the experience of our focus group pastors these fell into two broad categories: 1) typical life-cycle rituals like weddings, funerals or baptisms in which significant stake holders are from different faith traditions and 2) cooperating with leaders of different faith traditions in co-leading public religious rituals or events, such as community holiday worship services, prayer vigils in the face of community tragedies or advocacy or reconciliation efforts in the face of social injustice. Perhaps because of the civic and justice orientation of Oldline Protestants, and perhaps because non-Christian faiths are still a small minority in much of New England, the co-leading of public religious activities was far more prevalent than our clergy’s call to be involved in life-cycle rituals with a multifaith complexity. To a non-initiate such occasions of ministerial practice may seem relatively mundane and prescribed, especially when working with leadership from another religious tradition. Our focus group conversations about such experiences, however, produced more about how things could go wrong and what not to do, than they produced constructive wisdom.

In conclusion: a note about the project’s methodology. Focus group participants were clergy serving Oldline Protestant congregations who had a connection to Hartford Seminary (student, graduate—DMin. mainly, or continuing education participant). There were four groups of 5–6 clergy each, participants evenly distributed by gender, age, and location of their congregations within a two hour commute to Hartford—the latter including city, suburban, and small town settings. As clergy with a connection to Hartford Seminary we assumed that they would be more open to multifaith issues and engagements than other clergy. The group meetings, typically an hour in length, were conducted by Adair Lummis of the Hartford Institute for Religion Research. The group discussions were framed by two overarching questions: What kind of multifaith issues or situations, if any, have you faced or been involved in over the last several years? Were there things you knew or wish you had known about other faith(s) or relating to other faiths that helped or would have helped you better minister in the situation? Lummis’ eleven page report on the focus groups can be obtained by emailing me at: roozen@hartsem.edu.
There were three layers of conversation with Hartford Seminary faculty. The design of the project and focus groups, a review of focus group findings, and the design of the broader faculty conversations were processed with the seminary’s multifaith taskforce. Focus group findings and a preliminary outline of a DMin curriculum were the topics for a faculty forum also open to senior staff and Ph.D. students. And, the MDiv curriculum was the topic of a morning’s discussion at our spring, 2012 faculty retreat.