

Theological Education

Volume 40, Supplement
2005

ISSUE FOCUS

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The Association of Theological Schools
The Commission on Accrediting

ISSN 0040-5620

Theological Education
is published semiannually by
The Association of Theological Schools
IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA
10 Summit Park Drive
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15275-1103

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This periodical is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database*, published by the American Theological Library Association, 250 S. Wacker Drive, 16th Floor, Chicago, IL 60606; Email: atla@atla.com; Website: www.atla.com.

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Continuing the Conversation

Theological Education invites responses, of up to 1,500 words, to articles published in the journal in order to foster conversation among its readers. Reader responses may be emailed to the managing editor at merrill@ats.edu. Responses are published at the discretion of the editors and may be edited for length.

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Editors' Introduction

Hearing the Voice of the Congregation
in Theological Education:
Toward the Assessment and Revision
of MDiv Curriculum

Craig L. Nesson
Wartburg Theological Seminary

David A. Roozen
Hartford Seminary Institute for Religion Research

In 1981, Lilly Endowment Inc. made the first of a series of relatively small investments in a group that came to call itself The Project Team for Congregational Studies. The group's first publication, *Building Effective Ministry*, was a celebration of "the importance of the local church" and an outgrowth of the conviction that "congregations yield unanticipated riches when taken as worthy objects of serious study."¹ The reason why a group of scholars and church consultants would invest themselves in advocating what millions of American churchgoers took for blatantly obvious—the importance of the local congregation as worthy of serious study—was more directly stated in the project team's second book, the *Handbook for Congregational Studies*. Writing from within a mainline Protestant ethos and addressing, among others, theological educators and denominational leaders, the team observed:

Congregations have frequently been urged into action as agents of evangelization and social transformation and then written off as irrelevant because they failed to perform as desired. But the initial failure may lie not with the congregation but with those who have urged the congregation without a sensitive understanding of its inner life and resources or of the possibilities as well as the limits placed on the congregation by the context in which God has called it into being.

... This does not mean that we are not also concerned with transformation, whether of congregations themselves or with their role as agents of transformation for individuals and society; however, we believe that this is best accomplished when we take seriously and appreciatively, through disciplined understanding, their present *being*—the good and precious qualities that are within them—as means of grace themselves that enable the transformation of congregations into what it is possible for them to become."²

Editors' Introduction

It appeared that after a quarter century, the “treasure” in James Gustafson’s 1961 analysis of the church as a human community³ was finally breaking through the glum and dispirited attitude that dominated the time as represented in such well known titles as *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies* and *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches*.⁴

As a herald of the rediscovery of an appreciate understanding of congregations, the project team was responding to a swirl of broader social and cultural dynamics. We point to this swirl as the backdrop for two noteworthy publications of the early 1990s:

In light of the communal and anti-institutional views of baby boomers, let alone the increased fragmentation within denominations that further erodes the national level sense of common identity and purpose, the relatively recent rediscovery of local congregations is unsurprising. Perhaps the only unusual aspect about this rediscovery was its almost simultaneous mention by both a sociologist writing in a prestigious, academic journal and by a folksy church consultant writing for church practitioners, each referring to “a new paradigm.”⁵

The former reference is R. Stephen Warner’s “Work in Progress: Toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States.”⁶ The latter reference is Loren B. Mead’s *The Once and Future Church: Reinventing the Congregation for a New Mission Frontier*.⁷

The crux of Warner’s argument is “that religion in the United States has typically expressed not the culture of the society as a whole but the subcultures of its many constituents; . . . as the vital expression of groups.”⁸ In support of the reemergence of this historical reality, Warner cites a variety of recent studies showing the development of “assertive particularism, resurgent traditionalism, creative innovation, and all-round vitality in American religion.”⁹ Among the organizational implications of this new innovative group vitality, Warner points to the fading of national denominational structures and the rise of “*de facto* congregationalism,” the latter grounded in the growing prominence of “affectively significant associations under local and lay control.”¹⁰

In contrast to Warner’s new communalism, Mead’s new paradigm was grounded in the changing nature of American church mission from a denominationally driven internationalism to a congregationally driven localism. That is, the new mission frontier of Mead’s subtitle is immediately outside a local church’s doors. One finds the same congregational and missional themes as core tenets of faith within several emergent theological streams, perhaps most notably the missional church movement.¹¹

The rediscovery of the congregation during the 1990s was also evident in the consciousness of national denominational structures. One goal in the restructuring of the United Church of Christ in 1999, for example, was to increase the

denomination's responsiveness to the needs of the local congregation. A similar interest in "servicing the local congregation" is evident in the 1997 Reformed Church in America mission statement.¹²

All of the above undoubtedly contribute to a growing readiness within theological education for a more appreciative engagement of congregations. But two additional factors were also critical. One is largely pragmatic, the second more substantive. Pragmatically, many seminaries found themselves short of both quality ministry students and funding. A more sensitive and invigorated connection to congregations presents itself as a reasonable strategic response to both these resource issues. The substantive driver appears as an ironic twist to the priority attention given to the globalization of theological education during the 1980s and early 1990s. A book on one of the major projects of the time puts it this way: the conversion to contextuality implicit in the pedagogy and theology of globalization "was accompanied at the majority of project schools by an increasing concern with the parish as context for ministry."¹³

Theological education's growing readiness for a (re)turn toward the congregation was crystallized into action by a series of major funding initiatives by Lilly Endowment, beginning in 1998. The five case study programs contained in this issue of *Theological Education* all received funding from the series' initial Program to Enhance Theological Schools' Capacity to Prepare Congregational Leadership. The cases and commentaries that accompany them are the product of a two-stage dissemination effort by Wartburg Theological Seminary toward the fulfillment of its Capacity Building grant. Rather than the extended report initially proposed, Wartburg and its primary grant evaluator decided that a conference of theological educators and the subsequent publication of conference resources would more engagingly put a wider variety of grantee experiences before a wider range of theological educators.

The conference was held June 22–24, 2004, at Wartburg Theological Seminary, in Dubuque, Iowa. It flew under the banner of this volume's name: *Hearing the Voice of the Congregation*. Participation was limited to fifty. The target audience was two or more person faculty / administration teams from schools interested in sharing and critically reflecting with a group of appreciative peers on the experience of seminary programs that have attempted to intentionally engage congregations as one means of assessing and enhancing the capacity of a school's MDiv curriculum to nurture pastoral excellence. The conference was grounded in initial drafts of the five case studies contained in this volume. The case studies were intended to address insights and implications about methods of "listening" to congregations, the nature of congregations, the nature of pastoral leadership, and MDiv curriculum and the systems that "deliver" it. The two commentaries that follow the cases in this volume are revisions of reflections delivered at the closing conference plenary.

The five case studies document the following projects, including comment on the project's efficacy for generating experiences and information that informed and provoked collective faculty assessment and review of a school's MDiv curriculum.

Editors' Introduction

Wartburg Theological Seminary developed two processes of curriculum assessment: (1) on-campus reunions of graduates and (2) structured visits by members of the faculty to graduates and their congregations. Additionally, the seminary articulated “Twelve Pastoral Practices” as a tool for linking the school’s mission statement to the outcomes sought in its MDiv curriculum. Strengths of the processes included their engaging the entire faculty, enhancing the bond between congregations and seminary, immersing faculty in the congregations of graduates in a way that changed their teaching styles and deepened sensitivity to the diverse reality of pastoral leadership, and generating concrete data for curriculum assessment. The case also provides helpful insight into the dynamics of formation and importance of the “informal” curriculum.

Seabury-Western Theological Seminary documents its effort to develop competency-oriented models of education in which competencies are identified as actions rooted in knowledge, character, and skill contributing to positive outcomes in congregational contexts. This initiative included an intensive and multidimensional study of clergy competency, significant influences in ministerial development and their relationship to training—findings from which are included in the case. The initiative also entailed a parallel series of contextually oriented curriculum developments—including an integrated set of core courses, the development of courses that teach and require students to do “congregational studies” in the field, and a process for reviewing all courses for their contextual and competency orientation. The case also includes a helpful discussion of the differences and interrelationships among academic, formational, and professional models of education.

Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary presents its effort to better fulfill its purpose of leadership education—the education of leaders for congregations engaged in the education, care, and nurture of members for mission in the world—by directly connecting to congregational leaders. Specifically, the case uses a “critical moment” approach to reflect on its implementation of a church relations council, a gathering of clergy that met with the faculty twice a year for two years to talk about their interests in the seminary’s ministry degree program curricula, especially regarding the development of spiritual leaders. The case provides insight into clergy, lay, and faculty fault lines regarding ecclesiology; the dynamics of engaging faculty and council members in collegial discussions of faculty teaching practices and outcomes; and the constraining potential of faculty guilds that often divide and focus faculty work in individualistic patterns and in orientations abstracted from congregational leadership.

Candler School of Theology engaged in a project to develop the capacity of “reflection seminars,” related to two required years of Contextual Education, to instill the critical thinking skills essential to professional competency and to enhance sensitivity to congregational practices in faculty and/or the curriculum at large. The case’s discussion of pedagogy is framed by a consideration of three fundamental levels of learning: rote, meaningful-integrative, and critical think-

ing. The case highlights the challenge of reaching faculty consensus about readings for the seminary's contextual education seminars, and the challenge of reaching consensus about the balance between teaching via contextual education content per se (e.g., Bible, church history), or a process or method of thinking that students would take into their professional ministry. The case concludes with a discussion of four concrete implications of student and faculty involvement in the Contextual Education program for the curriculum at large.

Luther Seminary explains its development of local and distance congregational partnerships for teaching congregational leadership in context, including at the heart of the program a monthly cluster meeting bringing together pastors, students, and a faculty member for discussion around a common curriculum. Curriculum challenges addressed in the case include an ever present "practical" versus "academic" debate, maintaining a balance between scholarly readings and "in the trenches" case studies, and addressing various learning styles. The program's positive contribution to the contextualization of the larger curriculum and to seminary-congregation relations affirmed the foundational assumption that pastors and congregations were committed not simply to the students but also to their vocation as educators for the church. Pastors and congregations were interested and able in contributing to the preparation of future pastors for the church to a greater degree than was currently being asked of them. The case also notes, with some irony and caution, that despite the fact that nearly half of the faculty have come to include assignments related to congregations in their course expectations (and/or draw on pastors to contribute to courses they are teaching), in the words of an outside observer of the program, "The readiness of faculty as a body to engage in rethinking a context-based approach to ministry education may have been overestimated."

The first of the two commentaries that follow the case studies is by Charles R. Foster. He frames his reflections and questions with three issues emerging out of the recent study of teaching practices in theological education that he directed for The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The three include (1) the significant number of students who enter seminary with deficits in many of the areas of knowledge and experience that traditionally one could presume, (2) the fact that faculty (often in the same school) use a number of pedagogical terms to mean quite different things, thereby diminishing the rigor of critical attention and engagement of such issues, and (3) the uncritical appropriation of business vocabulary and practices in discussions of effective pastoral leadership and vital congregations across the church and often in our seminaries.

The second commentary is by Inagrace T. Dietterich. She draws on her experience working with congregations and clergy as director of theological research at the Center for Parish Development in focusing her observations in the following three areas: (1) the shape of the church, (2) the shape of theological education, and (3) the shape of God's mission.

Final thoughts

As the editors of this volume and the organizers of the conference, we express our appreciation to the authors and schools that through their cases publicly put forth their experience for critical reflection. On their behalf, as well as ours, we also want to thank the conference commentators and indeed all the conference participants for their forthright observations, questions, and shared experience, much of which has been incorporated into the revised cases that follow. Our special thanks are extended to Lilly Endowment for support of the conference and this issue of *Theological Education*. We also are particularly grateful to the entire Wartburg community for its ongoing collaboration with us over the many years of our common grant effort, not to mention its gracious hospitality and assistance during the conference.

An analytical summary of the intents and learning from the full spectrum of Lilly Endowment grants in the initial capacity building initiative of its Strengthening Congregational Ministry program is available from The Fund for Theological Education.¹⁴ This report provides a quick and helpful overview of the larger body of creative effort, of which our case study programs were a part. We learn there, for example, that forty-five grants were awarded in the initiative, that the largest number of grants focused on revising or enhancing a school's MDiv curriculum, and that the largest number of the latter involved some strategy for contextualizing the curriculum. All five of our case programs fall into this category and therefore represent the modal stream of the initiative.

The analytical summary refers to the contextualizing strategy as the attempt to step closer to congregations, to better align what ministers do as leaders of congregations with what seminary professors do as theological educators. The summary also notes, as is evident in each of our case studies, that drawing the context of congregational ministry into course work and one's style of teaching is the primary way faculty members within the grant programs actually "contextualized" the curriculum. But as one will see in our cases, there are a variety of ways of "bringing the context into the classroom."

One can, for example, be more intentional about sending students out to congregations in ways that enable them to more effectively bring their experience back into the seminary classroom. Within the grant initiative as within our Luther, Seabury-Western, and Candler case studies, this typically involved some reformulation of a school's contextual education or field education course offerings. In at least one of the cases, this further included specific training of students in congregational studies, which they were then required to apply to an actual study of a congregation. Alternatively, one could send faculty out, either to congregations or to conversations that included veteran clergy leaders. Our Wartburg case study includes a congregational visitation focus, and the Luther and Candler cases include placing faculty in contextualized conversations with clergy, typically as part of a supervisory team for field placements. In a slight

variation, the Garrett-Evangelical case study involves bringing an advisory group of clergy to campus for multilayered conversations including regular discussions with faculty about curriculum issues. As a yet third general strategy, one at the center of the Seabury-Western case study, is more traditional social scientific research on congregations and clergy leadership.

As the summary report notes, these strategies produced a wealth of “exciting” and “promising developments in ministry education.” But in a more cautionary tone, the report also observes that “old habits die hard on most faculties,” and progress toward change is typically slow and incremental.¹⁵ While insights into the barriers to change can be found in the following cases, the cases’ thicker description is devoted to implementing change, including examples of each of the things contained in the succinctly comprehensive list of learning from contextual programs contained in the summary report, which we quote at length:

Contextual education requires a change in faculty culture, identity and vocation. It challenges faculty to walk out the seminary doors and see the congregation as a classroom setting. It requires a different style of teaching where the text to be interpreted is the congregation, people’s faith experience, and the demands of ministerial responsibility. It requires different contractual arrangements to be formed with the school. Contextual education requires faculty to be explicit about educational philosophies and pedagogies. It requires more time, and for some, may threaten time devoted to scholarly pursuits . . . Just about everything that contextual education requires flies in the face of faculty culture.¹⁶

All the cases testify to the possibility that change, even if only incremental, is nevertheless possible. Just as each of the case seminary’s movements toward change involved listening to congregations, we hope that listening to the experience of these cases will provoke your own seminary’s movement toward change.

[Editor’s note: The journal is grateful for the work of this issue’s two guest editors, Craig L. Nesson, academic dean at Wartburg Theological Seminary, and David A. Roozen, professor of religion and society and director of the Hartford Seminary Institute for Religion.]

ENDNOTES

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2. Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney, eds., *Handbook for Congregational Studies* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986) 7.
3. James M. Gustafson, *Treasure In Earthen Vessels: The Church As Human Community* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961).
4. See, for example, Peter Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies* (New York: Doubleday, 1961) and Gibson Winter, *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches* (New York: Doubleday, 1961).
5. David A. Roozen and James Nieman, eds., *Church, Identity, and Change: Theology and Denominational Structures in Unsettled Times* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 32.
6. R. Stephen Warner, "Work in Progress: Toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States," *American Journal of Sociology* 98, no. 5 (March 1993).
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8. Warner, "Work in Progress," 1047.
9. *Ibid.*, 1048.
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11. Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998).
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14. Kathleen A. Cahalan, "Strengthening Congregational Ministry: A Program to Enhance Theological Schools' Capacities to Prepare Congregational Leadership, 1999–2003." In *Summary Reports of Lilly Endowment Grant Programs* (Atlanta: The Fund for Theological Education, 2005), 43–84.
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Rethinking Pastoral Formation at Wartburg Theological Seminary: Using Graduates' Experiences in Parish Leadership

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ABSTRACT: From 1999 to 2005, Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, engaged in the project, "Cultivating Pastoral Leadership Grounded in Wisdom and Directed Toward Mission: Rethinking Pastoral Formation in the Seminary Curriculum," funded by a grant from Lilly Endowment. This project included the development of two processes of curriculum assessment: (1) on-campus reunions of three-year graduates and (2) structured visits by members of the faculty to graduates and their congregations. The faculty also developed a document describing "Twelve Pastoral Practices" that has been used as an assessment tool together with the seminary's mission statement. This article documents and evaluates the two processes of curriculum assessment. Refinements to the processes are proposed in order to establish an effective and ongoing assessment process. Strengths of the processes included strengthening the bond between congregations and seminary, immersing faculty in the congregations of graduates, and generating concrete data for curriculum assessment.

During summer 1999, Wartburg Seminary began work on a major, capacity building grant from Lilly Endowment. Having just graduated the first class of Master of Divinity students to be shaped by a significant curriculum revision implemented in fall 1994, a major purpose of the grant was to develop an effective and sustainable structure of assessment and feedback into curriculum revision that included on-campus reunions of graduation classes and faculty visits to congregations where Wartburg graduates were serving. This case study describes Wartburg's experience with these two efforts to use graduate's experience in parish leadership as a source of curriculum critique and revision. The case begins with a bit of background about Wartburg and the immediate history that informs these efforts. It then turns to a description of the reunion and parish visitation processes and an assessment of their effectiveness. It concludes by turning to Wartburg's experience with using the information and perspective provided by the graduates' experiences to reflect on and revise its MDiv curriculum.

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Wartburg: context, character, and 1994 curriculum revision

Located at Dubuque, Iowa, Wartburg Theological Seminary is one of the eight seminaries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). It was founded in 1854 through the missional efforts of Wilhelm Loehe, pastor of the village church at Neuendettelsau, Germany. The central concerns of Loehe's theology—worship, community, mission, and diakonia—continue to shape Wartburg's commitments today. Wartburg graduates serve across the United States and throughout the world, with a majority concentrated in the upper Midwest.

Wartburg has a faculty of sixteen full-time professors and a student body of approximately 200. Apart from an important contingent of international students, the student body is almost entirely ELCA Lutheran. While the MDiv degree program enrolls the majority of students, the seminary also confers a Master of Arts (including a possible concentration in Youth, Culture, and Mission); Master of Arts in Diaconal Ministry; Master of Arts in Theology, Development, and Evangelism; and Master of Sacred Theology. As part of the MDiv degree, Wartburg requires a unit of Clinical Pastoral Education and, as an ELCA seminary, a year of supervised internship in a congregation. In the ELCA funding formula for seminaries, the MDiv degree holds a privileged place in receiving a higher proportion of financial support from the denomination than other degree programs.

The seminary is characterized by the work of three centers: the Center for Youth Ministries, Center for Theology and Land (rural ministry focus), and Center for Global Theologies. Wartburg has historic connections to the church in Germany, Papua New Guinea, Tanzania, and Namibia with more recent connections to Norway, Guyana, Brazil, and India. These relationships reinforce Wartburg's commitments to globalization and contextualization in an ongoing way. The seminaries of the ELCA work in close collaboration with one another, and, administratively, Wartburg belongs to the Covenant Cluster of ELCA schools, cooperating with the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) and Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Columbus, Ohio.

One of the distinguishing marks of Wartburg is its highly residential character, where faculty, staff, students, and families participate in a close community with one another. Wartburg has worked to maintain its character as a residential campus by constructing many units of student housing both for singles and families. Because of the value placed upon the communal formation process, faculty come to know students very well. The Wartburg ethos pays careful attention to the development of students as candidates for ministry, and the faculty listens closely to student voices. Indeed, some faculty members consider the campus refectory their "second office."

The Wartburg Mission Statement describes the seminary as "a worship-centered community of critical theological reflection where learning leads to mission and mission informs learning" (see Appendix A). During the academic year, daily chapel is at the center of campus life with a large percentage of students

and faculty in regular attendance. Architecturally, the chapel and refectory are located next to one another in such a way that there is a natural flow from worship into community and vice versa. At Wartburg the “curriculum” includes not only required course work but also worship and life in community

There are several distinctive qualities that characterize the Wartburg faculty ethos. Like the other ELCA seminaries, Wartburg’s faculty is very engaged in the candidacy process of the church. In addition to conscientious academic advising, faculty members are fully involved in recommending students for approval at various milestones in their preparation for ordination and other forms of ministry. During the academic year, the faculty meets weekly for “faculty enrichment,” intentional discussion of theological topics and common readings, and the business of teaching and learning. Each May the faculty goes on a two-day retreat that is a time for enhancing common work on the seminary curriculum and building faculty relations. The curriculum itself is committed to faculty team-teaching across disciplinary lines and by the frequent use of small group pedagogy. The Wartburg faculty has a reputation for strong collaboration and collegiality in teaching and learning.

Wartburg Seminary implemented a new Master of Divinity curriculum beginning in 1994. This curriculum is oriented toward proclaiming and interpreting, in the words of the mission statement in which it is grounded, “the gospel of Jesus Christ to a world created for communion with God and in need of personal and social healing.” A key phrase for describing this twofold curricular purpose is “justification and justice.” The curriculum takes seriously increasing religious pluralism and ethnic diversity as defining characteristics of the context in which the mission of the church must be carried out today. Students are also led to pay careful attention to the particular features of the local context in which they serve. Within the structure of the MDiv curriculum, the first and last semesters were especially focused on matters of context and mission in courses titled “Religion, Anthropology and the Human World”; “Justification and Justice”; “Religious Issues in Contemporary Life”; “Bible in the Parish”; “Leaders in Mission”; and “Theology in Transition.” The Wartburg curriculum also emphasizes the value of cross-cultural and interreligious immersions in both international and domestic contexts through the offerings during January term. In sum, Wartburg Seminary understands itself, consistent with its mission statement, as “a worship-centered community of critical theological reflection where learning leads to mission and mission informs learning.” It is a formative vision that, as we shall return to later, graduates believe the school delivers.

Rethinking pastoral formation

Wartburg’s Lilly grant was part of the Endowment’s Program to Enhance Theological Schools’ Capacities to Prepare Candidates for Congregational Ministry. Wartburg’s particular proposal was titled, “Cultivating Pastoral Leader-

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ship Grounded in Wisdom and Directed Toward Mission: Rethinking Pastoral Formation in the Seminary Curriculum." The grant period began in July 1999 and, after receiving a one-year extension, concluded at the end of June 2005.

The grant proposal flowed from the confluence of three major streams. First was the implementation of Wartburg's new Master of Divinity curriculum in 1994. Second, Wartburg participated as one of eight pilot schools in testing the new accreditation standards of The Association of Theological Schools from 1995–1998. In the new standards, there is particular concern for the coherence of the curriculum with the seminary mission statement and for outcome-oriented assessment. Third was the desire to create clear feedback loops as a form of assessment for the seminary curriculum. This was also in response to the spirit of the new accreditation standards.

The Cultivating Pastoral Leadership grant included four, interrelated components.

- ◆ Faculty Development. Specifically, Wartburg faculty participated in a Wabash Center Teaching and Learning Workshop, focusing on matters of teaching pedagogy and strategies for promoting student learning. Whereas previous Wabash Center workshops were constituted of professors from different institutions, Wartburg was the first entire faculty to participate together in the Teaching and Learning Workshop process. One fruit of faculty collaboration during the grant period was the publication of a book authored by twenty-one Wartburg professors and instructors titled *The Difficult But Indispensable Church*.¹
- ◆ Educational Technology. Simultaneously with the beginning of the grant period, Wartburg inaugurated its first campus communication system. Desktop computers were installed in faculty offices and the entire campus was wired for Internet connection. For a short period, the grant made possible the hiring of a specialist in Educational Technology. In a separate initiative (later in the grant period) nine members of the Wartburg faculty also received initial training in online teaching pedagogy.
- ◆ Curriculum Assessment. Three forms of curriculum assessment have been undertaken under the auspices of the grant: (a) written and oral evaluations of the entire curriculum by all students at the end of the academic year and also by first-year students at the end of the first semester; (b) written and oral evaluations of the MDiv curriculum by graduates of Wartburg conducted at their three-year reunion, held after Easter each spring; (c) assessment interviews held with Wartburg graduates and members of their congregations through structured visits of graduates by members of the Wartburg faculty.
- ◆ Curriculum Revision. The final component of the Cultivating Pastoral Leadership grant has involved actual revisions to the MDiv curriculum, based on the assessment process.

All four components work together to intensify the Wartburg faculty's individual and collective focus on the intersection of curriculum and the church. *The Difficult But Indispensable Church* collection, for example, represents the faculty sharing with each other in print, and before that in discussions of drafts in process, a range of personal interests and perspectives on ecclesiology and the practice of ministry. Such a collaborative effort cannot help but inform and be informed by the faculty's collection and processing of its graduates' perspective on their experience in parish leadership and its relationship to the preparation they received in Wartburg's MDiv program.

The specific focus of what follows is the latter two components of the grant, the reunion and parish visitation programs of curriculum assessment and Wartburg's experience with using the information and perspective provided by the graduate's experience to reflect on and revise its MDiv curriculum.

Designing to engage

Wartburg's use of graduates and their congregations as windows into the efficacy of the MDiv curriculum has, as noted above, two distinct parts. One invites three-year-out graduates back to campus in early spring for a two-day "reunion." The second sends faculty out for a weekend visit to the congregation of three-year-out graduates.²

Reunion. MDiv graduate reunions are a longstanding Wartburg practice that predates the new curriculum and Lilly grant. To use the practice more intentionally for purposes of outcome-oriented curriculum evaluation, therefore, was a comfortable and natural extension of an already established, valued and anticipated link between school and the congregational experience of its graduates.

Tweaking the traditional reunion design toward a more intentional and extensive focus on curriculum assessment involved both increasing the amount of time given during the reunion to reflection on one's experience in ministry and being more intentional about structuring the reflection in ways that connected to the curriculum. The former resulted in two sessions being devoted to curriculum assessment during reunion, scattered amid fellowship, continuing education sessions, and participation in Wartburg's daily worship. Worship and several of the fellowship times provide opportunity for graduates to mingle with faculty, and a faculty member typically leads one of the continuing education sessions.

The curriculum assessment sessions in the revised reunion design are led by the dean and use a structured, curriculum-outcome instrument as a discussion guide. Wartburg's Twelve Pastoral Practices, described in more detail below, have served in this capacity since their inception, replacing a seven-item assessment form originally developed for course assessment. The discussions are, as observed by the grant evaluator, "rich, energized, free-flowing, and overwhelmingly affirming conversations but not without moments of pointed and uncomfortably candid critique."³ Following the two reunion sessions, the dean writes a one-page summary of the feedback from graduates that is shared with faculty at their spring retreat.

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Attendance at pre-grant reunions typically edged slightly more than fifty percent. The availability of grant resources enabled Wartburg to pay for travel expenses to the reunion, increasing attendance to 80–90 percent of a graduating class.

Congregational visits. Faculty visits to congregations take place throughout the year. They typically involve travel to the congregation on Friday, an interview with the graduate-pastor early Saturday morning, followed by group conversation with five to ten lay persons over lunch. A community / context tour led by the pastor typically follows lunch, the afternoon culminating with dinner with a group of community leaders, selected and invited by the pastor. Sunday typically begins with the faculty member's participation (but not leadership) in worship and other possible Sunday morning fellowship and educational events at the parish. The public portion of a visit typically concludes with a general congregational luncheon at which the faculty visitor reports, "What I heard." This is followed with a concluding interview with the pastor-graduate.

During scheduling and visits, faculty emphasize that the purpose of the visit is to assess the curriculum, not to evaluate the pastor. The emphasis, besides correctly stating the intent, is to assuage any anxiety and hesitancy that might be occasioned by the thought that "a church authority is coming to evaluate me or my pastor." Both clergy and congregation hear and understand this. Nevertheless, there is also evidence that hearing and knowing do not always fully succeed at preventing a bit of anxiety. There is no evidence that it has been a major problem in the Wartburg experience.

Faculty interviews and observation during a visit are guided by a loosely structured set of questions and observation points (see Appendix B). The field guide, as well as the visitation process more generally, has been discussed, informationally, at several faculty meetings throughout the course of the project. More focused, ethnographic training was neither provided nor requested.

Following a visit, a faculty visitor submits a brief (one page) written response to the following four questions:

1. What was noteworthy about the ministry that you observed and heard about in light of our mission statement?
2. Based on the ministry that you have seen and heard about, what is the seminary curriculum accomplishing effectively in light of the Mission Statement and the Pastoral Practices?
3. What are the three main insights that other faculty members should know about this visit?
4. Based on this visit and all that you have heard during this process, what changes should be made in the curriculum in light of the mission statement?

This report is used as background for a one-hour debriefing interview conducted by an outside consultant and two faculty colleagues. The debriefing is designed to cover:

- ◆ The ability of the graduate to analyze the context of their ministry.
- ◆ The correspondence between the Gospel proclaimed and the Gospel heard.
- ◆ Key insights you wish to share with other faculty members.

The presence of faculty colleagues in the debriefing not only serves to broaden the analytical perspective brought to bear on a visitor's interpretive summary of his or her experience but also serves to make the visitor's individual experience vicariously available to two or more colleagues.

This process of reporting and debriefing replaces an initial process that was felt to be too time consuming and felt to produce too extensive a collection of narrative material for efficient analysis and focused, collective discussion. It involved a half-hour to hour interview of the faculty visitor by the dean that was recorded and transcribed. The transcription was then returned to the faculty member for editing.

The move to the "one-page, plus interview" reporting format, however, did not surmount all the challenge of making the information from all the individual visits available for focused, collective faculty discussion. For example, in contrast to the reunion process for which an annual report has been regularly prepared and shared with faculty since the beginning of the grant initiative, there was no regular, cumulative summarizing and reporting of visitation observations, insights, and concerns, only an occasional distribution of the one-page reports to the faculty. Again, the primary problem was experienced as the seeming enormity of the amount of more narrative, ethnographically obtained information. Such a problem could, arguably, have been avoided if the faculty had opted for an initial inclination toward developing quantitative measures that could be employed by graduates in evaluating the seminary curriculum. But such an approach was rejected for at least three reasons that even in retrospect the Wartburg faculty continues to affirm. One was the inevitable loss of breadth, depth, and nuance occasioned in quantitative approaches. A second was that the more ethnographic approach of the visitation process built on a strength of Wartburg, specifically the relational quality of students' on-campus experience. Third, there was a sense that the visits would broaden and deepen individual faculty perceptions of the actuality and diversity of congregational life in a way that even the most nuanced presentation of quantitative data was unlikely to do.

On the flip side, even the more limited but still seemingly expansive breadth of the one-page faculty reports and the vagaries of the debriefing process appeared to prevent implementation of regularized means of summation and presentation that might facilitate collective, focused discussion. Over time, a recognition of the helpfulness of the regular summary reports from the reunion assessments for such explicitly focused, collective faculty discussion led to a commitment that some such process had to be developed for the visitation process. The initial process decided upon, and as noted above initiated this past

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fall, was to invite two consultants to read through the one-page faculty report summaries and each formulate a set of general observations and conclusions. One of these consultants was the theologically trained, congregational development consultant who has been an advisor to the visitation process since its beginnings and who sits in on the visit debriefings.⁴ The second consultant was a sociologist of religion with expertise in interpreting qualitative data and ministry studies who has no prior involvement with or knowledge of Wartburg.⁵ The reports were initially presented at Wartburg's November 2004 faculty luncheon collegiums and stimulated an engaged but somewhat wide-ranging discussion. More importantly, the discussion generated the commitment to return to the reports as a concrete reference point for ongoing faculty discussion of the curriculum.

During the first four years of the visitation process, Wartburg faculty have conducted approximately fifty congregational visits. This is roughly one per faculty not on leave per year and slightly less than half of any given year's three-year-out graduates serving in parishes. Congregations to visit are selected by circulating a list of eligible graduates among faculty, from which faculty select and seek to schedule whatever number of visits they are interested in making.

Two faculty/administrative committees initially guided the visitation process. One was the Leadership Grant Steering Committee, which focused on the linkages of the visitation process to the other components of the grant and to curriculum revision. The second was the Assessment Committee, chaired by the dean and assisted by an external consultant⁶ and grant secretary. The Assessment Committee was responsible for the design of the visitation protocol and debriefing procedures and for introducing the protocols and procedures to the faculty. In the third year of the grant, the work of the Steering Committee was merged into the ongoing work of Wartburg's Faculty Policies Committee. Consultants' costs, secretary stipend, faculty travel expenses, and modest per diem honoraria for visits are paid by the Lilly grant, as are the cost of common meals during the visit.

Evaluation of reunion and visitation processes

Reunion. It has already been noted that the reunion assessment process used a long-established and valued reunion practice at Wartburg, and that part of the reason it was appreciated by graduates was because the reunions were an extension of the pervasive sense of community that characterizes the Wartburg campus experience. It should also be remembered that among and within the highly relational nature of the Wartburg experience, students do graduate with the ability to think critically, especially about context. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that the grant evaluator found the reunion process to be, "a relationally enhancing, highly effective, and relatively inexpensive vehicle for interjecting critical, focused, and experientially informed feedback from the field into faculty conversations about curriculum."

To the extent the reunion process has potential liabilities from an evaluative perspective, they include the self-reported nature of graduate assessments, the possibility that the plenary nature of discussions do not plumb as deeply or as critically as individual interviews might, and that most of the faculty only experience the conversation indirectly through a summary report. Based on personal interviews with reunion participants and observation at both the reunion curriculum assessment sessions and faculty retreat discussions of the dean's report, the grant evaluator has not perceived any of these to be overly problematic in their own right in the Wartburg experience. But additionally, it is important to note that the potential methodological liabilities of the reunion process are directly complemented by strengths of the visitation process.

Congregational visits. The congregational visits have produced a host of tangible and positive benefits. These include, for example:

- ◆ Virtually every pastor-graduate and congregation has felt "good" about their visit, and in the vast majority of instances, there is clear evidence that the visit strengthened a congregation's positive feeling for and connection to Wartburg and to the ELCA.
- ◆ Every faculty visitor feels positive about the visit's impact on their perception of congregational realities, and the vast majority can articulate how this impact has changed some aspect of their teaching.

Nevertheless, the program continues to present several persistent challenges. Among the more notable:

- ◆ Faculty workload and scheduling issues have worked against the much more ambitious number of visits projected in the initial grant proposal as two visits per faculty member per year.⁷
- ◆ The selection process has yet to be examined for possible biases related to the informality of the way congregations are chosen to be visited.

Additionally, a variety of factors contribute to a tendency of faculty visitors "seeing what they are looking for." That is to say that, in general, faculty debriefings of visits tend to note two general kinds of observations. One are those things highlighted in the Wartburg mission statement, pastoral practices, and visitation guidelines. The second are those things idiosyncratic to a particular faculty person's disciplinary specialty. But as noted in the above discussion of the visitation process acting as a check on the potential methodological liabilities of the reunion process of curriculum assessment, one can see that the reunion process's direct grounding in the graduate's articulation of their experience provides a check against potential limitations of faculty perspective.

What is more, although perhaps not as great as one would find within some seminary faculty, there are, nevertheless, different perspectives and approaches to congregational leadership represented within the Wartburg faculty. To the extent such diversity is actively and directly put into conversation within the faculty, the greater it becomes a vehicle not only as a check against individual bias but also for enhancing the breadth of perspective that any individual faculty member at Wartburg brings to his or her teaching and to the observational

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expertise during parish visits. The engagement of such diversity is an intentional part of the visitation debriefing process, as already noted. It is also evident in the *The Difficult But Indispensable Church* book already noted. And, it is a primary purpose of a second faculty book currently in the planning stages dealing with faculty perspectives on how their teaching enhances the curriculum outcomes articulated in Wartburg's Twelve Pastoral Practices.

Comparing the two processes. While the assessments provided by the two complementary processes present much the same picture of the graduates' experiences at Wartburg and of the experiences' formative effects on their parish ministries (the specifics of which we turn to later in our case study), each does tend to identify at least a few things that lurk in the blind spots of the other. The differences flow, as would be expected, from differences in the structure of the two processes, including the fact noted above that the reunion process relies on the Wartburg graduate to connect curriculum experience and parish experience, while the visitation process relies on Wartburg faculty to make and articulate this connection.

The group dynamic of the reunion process, for instance, allows summative propositions to emerge as individual perspectives accumulate. During one of the reunion discussions, to take but one example, there had been several comments to the effect that while the Wartburg experience had "formed" a certain predisposition in the student, the now graduate-pastor wished he or she had gotten more in seminary about how to transfer that to the congregation. "Yes, I certainly left seminary with a strong sense of mission. But I'm still trying to figure out how to get the congregation to develop a stronger sense of mission." "Yes, I have a 'pastoral heart,' but since there are no mental health practitioners within fifty miles of my parish, I wish I knew more about doing pastoral counseling." Toward the end of a discussion that included several such comments, one of the graduates observed that perhaps Wartburg had unrealistic expectations about the amount of practical capacity gained during Internship year. While not an entirely new revelation for the Wartburg faculty, the graduate-articulated concern has given the issue new visibility and urgency in faculty discussions.

A unique characteristic of the visitation process, in contrast, is that it allows faculty to compare observation of a graduate with the faculty's direct observation of the laity with whom the graduate is in ministry. Thus one occasionally finds in the debriefing reports such comments as the following: "There appears to be a disconnect between the Wartburg missional agenda that clearly shaped the pastor and the patterns of ministry in a traditional family-oriented and family-run congregation." Or, "The explicit centrality that laity give to 'Grace' is something I always find reassuring, but we seemingly have a bit more work to do regarding 'Justice'."

Linking assessment to curriculum

Certainly one of the most rewarding features of the Wartburg effort to use graduates' experiences in parish leadership as a primary source for faculty action, in part because it also proved to be the most challenging feature, has been linking the assessment of MDiv curriculum by and through graduates and their congregations to actual revisions in that curriculum. It is to the successes and challenges of this linkage that we now turn.

The collegiality of the Wartburg faculty and sense of community that pervades the Wartburg ethos extends to the strongly collaborative nature of the faculty's approach to implementing curriculum changes. While the formal process calls for action at a faculty meeting on resolutions from the Educational and Curricular Policies Committee, major curriculum decisions are made only after thorough discussion of proposals by the entire faculty. As already noted, the Wartburg faculty holds monthly business meetings, gathers weekly for enrichment sessions and monthly for lunch, and engages in a two-day retreat every May. Any and all can be occasions for discussion of possible curriculum revision. Indeed, each May retreat during the grant period has included an extended discussion of curriculum issues creating an initial agenda of curriculum discussion for the next academic year.

Faculty conversations about curriculum are informed by the reunion and especially the congregational visit processes through explicit references to the reported information and additionally in the case of the visits, through the implicit learning gained by individual faculty members in their experience of graduates in the context of their ministerial leadership. Before turning to an elaboration of the outcomes and challenges of these linkages, it is important to note another significant relationship of the congregational visits to the Wartburg curriculum. We have previously noted that the congregational visits typically provide an occasion for congregations and pastors to feel affirmed in how God is working through their efforts in their context. We have further noted that the very thought that seminary professors would take the time to go out on such visits and to listen to the congregation's voice has built tremendous goodwill for Wartburg Seminary. But still further, the visits have been experienced by graduates in the vast majority of cases as a "continuing education" opportunity that affirms and extends the premium that the Wartburg curriculum places on the careful examination of one's context for ministry through a missional lens, through the foundational and intrinsic connection of justification and justice, and through the primary practice of worship. The presence of and desire for this kind of extended learning among graduates and congregation is often palpable on visits. Indeed, several faculty visitors have commented on consciously being aware of resisting its pull to slip out of one's "listening" role, especially during one's Sunday noon report-back of "What I heard." But the experience does reaffirm the power of the question—both in teaching and in research—and does reaffirm the caution that research is inevitably an intervention.

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Twelve Pastoral Practices

Reunion discussion of the relationship between graduates' Wartburg experiences and their experiences in pastoral leadership since graduation is guided, as previously noted, by a set of twelve curriculum outcomes. These "Twelve Pastoral Practices" (see Appendix C) were developed by the Wartburg faculty, beginning with an extended discussion at one of their May retreats during the grant, as a tool for linking the school's mission statement to the outcomes sought in its MDiv curriculum. The Practices's guiding question: What are the distinctive characteristics of ministry that the Wartburg curriculum intends to instill in graduates?

An original list of about forty items were identified and then refined and organized into the final twelve using the central themes of the mission statement. "Practices" does not refer to mere actions that are performed. Rather, pastoral practices are understood to be incarnated and embodied in being as well as doing. They aim at coherence between one's disposition and one's engagement in ministry. Effective formation instills a fundamental attitude out of which one acts.

There seems little doubt that the Twelve Pastoral Practices provide an engagingly concrete and "practical" interpretive tool for church constituencies. It is also clear that the Practices have helpfully focused the Wartburg faculty's collective reflection on its MDiv curriculum. Indeed, when the Twelve Pastoral Practices document has been shared with representatives of other theological schools, they often marvel that a seminary faculty can achieve such a consensus on desired outcomes. And while it is true that the Practices have become collectively recognized and generally appreciated by the Wartburg faculty as the primary frame for curriculum discussion to an extent uncommon in many seminaries, the faculty's common understanding of the twelve practices' meaning, value, and curriculum implications continues to evolve.

Assessment conclusions about the curriculum and resulting changes

The ultimate goal of the reunion and congregational visit experiments is not to produce a curriculum assessment, but rather to create an *ongoing* process of assessment and revision. To date, the two complementary assessment efforts have strongly affirmed the basic shape and content of Wartburg's MDiv program and generally confirmed Wartburg's denominational reputation for forming effective pastoral leaders. Based on a combination of reading visitation reports and corresponding interviews with visited graduates, for example, the grant evaluator concludes:

I've read most if not all of the debates about more scholarly and more formative approaches to theological education and always had a hard time understanding what "formation" really looks like. I can now tell you, or at least show you. Wartburg graduates are "formed." Read the Wartburg mission statement around which the new curriculum was designed and experience the

communal ethos at Wartburg, even if only briefly. Then go and spend some time with a Wartburg graduate in parish ministry. The correspondence of language, predispositions and capacities among graduates, mission statement and curriculum is just striking. Wartburg is a place that is articulate about what it wants in its ministry graduates and indeed, shapes graduates in this mold—which from all indications also makes good pastors.

More concretely in regard to the details, the two previously noted consultant analyses of the visitation debriefing reports point to the following examples of curriculum strengths and concerns. Areas of curriculum strength included, for example:

- ◆ Graduates are capable worship leaders and preach in a way that connects the Gospel to the congregation.
- ◆ Graduates are collegial in style with parishioners and extend this by their desire and ability to network with civic leaders and area clergy.
- ◆ Graduates are “mission minded,” understand the intimate connection between justification and justice, are able to read the context as well as the scripture, and have a global sensitivity.

Areas in which curriculum might be strengthened include, for example:

- ◆ Greater attention in the curriculum to the more applied side of pastoral counseling, working with congregational conflict, evangelization, and mobilizing a congregation for greater mission involvement.
- ◆ Greater attention in the curriculum to the theology and polity of other Christian groups, especially the more aggressively evangelical, decisional theology that many graduates see as the biggest “competition” for their parishes.
- ◆ Greater attention in the formal curriculum, campus activities and student “advising” process to the student’s spiritual nurture.

The reports further noted:

- ◆ That while the graduate-pastor appeared theologically articulate about central tenets of Lutheranism, their parishioners often were inarticulate or extremely simplistic in their understanding;
- ◆ That while graduates were globally aware, their interest or ability to bring the global to the congregation was sometimes lacking; and
- ◆ That while the vast majority of graduates shared Wartburg’s missional agenda, this frequently was at odds with a more traditional and family orientation of the congregation.

Although many theological educators share an academic tendency to believe that knowledge and awareness inevitably lead to action, most will acknowledge when pushed that the linkage is complex. Perhaps the ultimate test of Wartburg’s assessment efforts, therefore, is whether the faculty has been able to act on the information the reunion discussions and congregational visits have produced.

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To the extent this is the test, one has to conclude that the experience thus far is promising because several concrete changes have been introduced into the Wartburg curriculum as a direct consequence of the assessment processes. For example, while seminary graduates expressed deep appreciation for the rich worship life of the seminary, as noted above, they also voiced a sense of emptiness in their own spiritual lives when chapel services were no longer available. In response to this, probably the most significant curriculum development during the grant period has been the decision to add a half-time spiritual director to the seminary staff to work with students in matters of spiritual formation. Because of clear feedback from graduates, especially during reunion sessions, and from soundings taken of current students about the value of attending to matters of spirituality, the faculty also has replaced one required course from the first semester of the MDiv curriculum with a course titled Spiritual Practices. This course, which includes a small group component, has had a very constructive impact both substantively and relationally on students' transition into their seminary experiences.

Additionally as a result of the process of curriculum assessment, several courses that were originally taught as four- or eight-week courses now extend for the entire semester. Graduates and students had observed that their learning was enhanced when courses were taught over a more extended period of time. The mission requirement was changed from a three-hour offering to a combination of a two-hour and a one-hour offering. A final semester course, Theology in Transition, was eliminated from the curriculum in favor of opening up elective space for seniors. One of the perennial complaints about the Wartburg curriculum by graduates had to do with the limited numbers of hours allotted to elective offerings.

The faculty has also begun serious conversation about how evangelism is being taught across the MDiv curriculum, especially as they have heard about the difficulty experienced by Lutheran pastors (not only Wartburg graduates) in giving leadership to evangelism efforts. As one response, members of the Wartburg faculty, staff, and some recent graduates have published the booklet, *Forming an Evangelizing People*.⁸ Another remaining agenda item for the Wartburg curriculum has to do with preparing graduates to interact more effectively with American evangelicalism and particularly with pastors of congregations that are more conservative or even literalistic in their interpretation of the Bible. And still another continuing topic of faculty conversation is, as previously noted, how the curriculum can build on its proven capacity for forming pastors to be mission-minded in their own understanding of ministry, in order to enhance the graduates' ability to lead their congregations in living out this missional understanding.

The assessments, in these instances the positive assessment heard from graduates, also has lead the faculty to resist changing at least three features of the Wartburg curriculum that the labor intensive nature of the commitments had prompted them to reconsider. First, the faculty remains very committed to team

teaching, especially in the first semester, and especially because of the benefit articulated by graduates of having contrasting views represented by a team of faculty who teach the same course. Second, the faculty makes much use of small group pedagogy. This corresponds to the curriculum value that students not only learn from a professor, but also students learn from each other and professors learn from students. Assessment results affirmed the faculty's belief that small groups teach a collegial style of leadership that is greatly valued in the Wartburg ethos. Third, Wartburg remains very committed to interdisciplinary teaching. Supported by a preponderance of graduate opinion, the faculty largely shares the opinion that remaining within the strictures of the classical theological disciplines limits the effectiveness of what needs to be learned for the art of pastoral ministry. Indeed, one might anticipate future curriculum changes at Wartburg to include even more interdisciplinary teaching.

However, perhaps the most significant of the changes that have been stimulated through the congregational visit assessment process involves not the formal array of courses but rather how individual members of the faculty are teaching as a result of being immersed in the congregations and contexts of graduates. Several courses have been revised as a result of the learning from these visits, many of these changes incorporated as part of the projects generated by the Wabash Teaching and Learning Workshop. Insofar as faculty are themselves an integral part of the seminary curriculum, the curriculum has changed to the degree that faculty members are teaching differently as a result of the assessment process.

Reflections on the assessment/curriculum linkage

We have just outlined what we take as hopeful evidence that Wartburg has and will continue to be able to use the information gleaned in the reunion and visitation processes to systematically reflect on its MDiv curriculum. But the question remains, what can Wartburg's experience teach us about the bridges and barriers to a faculty's systematic use of congregational realities in its reflection about ministry curriculum? This is the question to which we turn in conclusion.

Several learnings jump out as critical in Wartburg's experience. One is that a succinct, explicit and regular summary of insights and information from its various and ongoing assessment efforts is essential for enabling the assessment information to be an explicitly focal partner in the faculty's collective conversation. A second is that a commonly appreciated and understood conceptual framework of curriculum outcomes can be a critical asset in a faculty's collective effort to link assessment information to curriculum decisions. Third, it is at least as important to expand faculty's experience of congregational life as it is to expand their knowledge of the interrelationship among curriculum, leadership, congregational life, and other's experiences of congregational life. Fourth, mul-

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multiple angles of assessment can serve to both affirm and complement each other. And not to be minimized, assessment processes can have positive interpretive and promotional consequences for a seminary beyond their primary assessment purpose.

The recognized value of a regular system of summarizing and reporting assessment findings is what has led Wartburg to make this a priority for its congregational visit track as it enters the final year of its grant work. The value and need were articulated by the grant evaluator in a mid-project report based on faculty interviews that asked specifically about the efficacy of the two assessment processes for informing faculty discussions about curriculum. The summary conclusion of these interviews:

While the vast majority of faculty can point to many examples in which the dean's reports from the graduate reunions informed conversations about curriculum change, they see little if any direct, systematic, common discussion of visitation feedback in such conversations. There is ample evidence of the indirect effect of visits on these discussions, both in idiosyncratic examples drawn from visits that some faculty have used in making a point during such discussions and in personal reports outside of faculty discussions about how the visits have changed a faculty member's perceptions of congregations. But thus far the effect has been through the visits' effect on individual faculty, rather than as a common, collective source of insight for group reflection.

... The results from the curriculum assessment sessions during reunion are explicitly referenced in faculty discussions, in large part, because they are collectively and concretely present on a piece of paper that everyone has in their hands.

A second reason, uncovered in the interviews, for the less direct affect of visitation insights in faculty discussions of curriculum issues was that, at the time of the interviews, the visitation guide and debriefing process had yet to be updated through the lens of the newly emergent twelve pastoral practices. Such an updating was another priority for Wartburg during this final year of its grant. As noted above, the twelve practices have become an operative conceptual frame for curriculum discussions. As also noted above, in contrast to the visitation protocols at the time of the grant evaluator's report, the twelve practices have provided the structure for the reunion discussions and reports since the second year of the grant.

That it was the feedback and discussion process rather than the visits themselves that were the most immediate challenge in linking the visits to reflection on the curriculum was further reinforced by two factors. As noted, virtually every faculty member can articulate how the visits have changed their perceptions of congregations and, accordingly, the way they teach. To cite just a

single example, one faculty member who had made several visits noted how clear the visits conveyed to him the fact that leadership in a congregation is more multiple and diffuse than “clergy centered” education tends to assume, and that it pre-exists within the congregational membership “before” the clergy person arrives. Among the many possible implications the faculty members saw in this, he highlighted two. A newly arriving clergy person has to be vulnerable and adaptive to the existing and continuing sources of leadership already in the congregation. Additionally, the clergy person has to have the capacity to both turn this leadership energy loose and manage tensions that may result as a consequence.

Further reinforcing the capacity of the visits to elicit insight is the fact that the two reviews of the visitation reports highlighted in faculty discussions this year, as noted above, clearly show that despite some ambiguity among some faculty regarding the link between curriculum and congregational realities, the visits do provide a rich source of critical observations, both affirmations and concerns, about the curriculum.

The initial accomplishment of Wartburg’s Twelve Pastoral Practices notwithstanding, the faculty is also well aware that, indeed, substantive ambiguities and questions about comprehensiveness remain. The practices are an effort to articulate the linkage between congregational outcomes and Wartburg’s MDiv curriculum. But such an articulation is almost inevitably tenuous and ambiguous because of the multitude of things that influence congregational realities other than the current, pastor-graduate. Presuming agreement that the curriculum can only be held immediately accountable for shaping the pastor-graduate, then it seems to follow that there is a two-fold link. One is the quality of the pastor’s leadership. The second is the congregation as the particular context for that leadership. They come together, perhaps obviously, as contextualized pastoral leadership, or alternatively, pastoral leadership as an integrated component of a congregational system.

Recall that contextual awareness is a centerpiece of Wartburg’s curriculum and both the reunion and visitation data suggest that graduates, in fact, leave seminary with this capacity and predisposition. Individual faculty presumptions and collective discussions about “leadership” are diverse. But the assessment process has provided some new insight about how and in what areas Wartburg graduates appropriate leadership skills. Specifically, it is evident in the assessment data that the student’s communal experience and style of Wartburg teaching and advising, that is, Wartburg’s informal curriculum, shapes students’ leadership capacities for preaching and teaching, liturgical leadership, collaborative styles of relating to persons, and, most recently, spiritual direction. But what is equally important to note is that it is precisely those leadership capacities not modeled on campus that are often discussed by Wartburg graduates as lacking in their seminary experience, for example, in-depth pastoral counseling and how to mobilize a congregation to do mission.

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As Wartburg concluded the final semester of its grant funding for its curriculum assessment experiments, it is well aware of both the value already added and the challenges remaining. It is also well aware that one of the remaining challenges is making priority decisions about the allocation of stretched institutional resources for continued support of the assessment program after the Lilly grant. The smart bet is that both the reunion and congregational visitation programs will become established as ongoing Wartburg practices. It is clear in the grant evaluator's interviews with faculty, for example, that they affirm the intrinsic value of the visits for making them better teachers and are willing to continue doing the visits after the grant period. It is interesting to note the parallels between the faculty's interest in linking pedagogy (a practice) to ministry education and their current efforts to link the practice of pastoral ministry to curriculum assessment. Indeed, the attempted linkages highlight several characteristics of Wartburg that make them uniquely suited for the trajectory they have chosen. First, a close and continuing concern about pedagogy and curriculum has been an explicitly practiced concern going back at least fifteen years to the beginning of their involvement in a major globalization project that provided the initiative for the new curriculum. Second, contextualization is a foundational concern of the new curriculum. Third, the school has been intentional about maintaining and enhancing the strong relational and communal character of its campus ethos. And finally, in contrast to many seminaries, the entire Wartburg faculty has a positive appreciation of congregational ministry, the vast majority has pastoral experience and maintains active parish participation, and several have well developed perspectives and experience in congregational studies. What would be a more natural expression of these commitments than to use the seminary's graduates' experiences in parish leadership as a primary source for curriculum assessment?

Craig L. Nesson is academic dean and professor of contextual theology at Wartburg Theological Seminary at Dubuque, Iowa, where he has oversight of the seminary's internship program and teaches in the areas of congregational leadership and theological ethics. He has served as the project director for Wartburg's Capacity Building grant from 2001–2005.

David A. Roozen is director of the Hartford Institute for Religion Research and professor of religion and society at Hartford Seminary, Hartford, Connecticut. He currently serves as grant evaluator for the Lilly Endowment grant that supports the Wartburg initiatives described in this case study.

Appendix A

Wartburg Theological Seminary: Mission Statement Approved May 1997

Wartburg Theological Seminary serves the mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America by being a worship-centered community of critical theological reflection where learning leads to mission and mission informs learning. Within this community, Wartburg educates women and men to serve the church's mission as ordained and lay leaders. This mission is to proclaim and interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ to a world created for communion with God and in need of personal and social healing.

In light of this mission Wartburg endeavors to form students who

1. claim a clear sense of their confessional identity as Lutheran Christians and a commitment to explore its meaning for our multi-cultural, religiously plural context,
2. understand that justification and justice stand together at the heart of the gospel as the church bears witness to God's justifying love for sinners in Jesus Christ and expresses that love by working for freedom and justice in society, and
3. envision the church as a global community manifested in local congregations assembled around word and sacrament.

Wartburg seeks to prepare leaders with the knowledge and passionate commitment necessary to serve the two-fold mission of the church: (1) to proclaim the good news of God's justifying love toward sinners in Jesus Christ, calling people to faith in a world where many "gods" claim loyalty and promise life and (2) to minister faithfully to our broken world, serving those in need and calling the world to repentance and renewed obedience to God.

Wartburg Seminary strives to form students theologically by faithful interpretation of Scripture as God's word, critical study of Christian and Lutheran tradition and careful attention to contemporary contexts. That formation should be both authentically Lutheran and appropriately ecumenical. It takes place through disciplined academic study in a community of learning and action where theology is always being formulated afresh as God's people live out their response to Jesus Christ in new and different circumstances.

As an integral element of its mission, Wartburg Theological Seminary seeks to be a community where the church and world intersect in thought and worship and where learning leads to and is informed by mission. Coming from both the United States and other countries, faculty, students, and staff, together with their families, bring to the seminary their diverse cultures, gifts of learning and experience, as well as the questions, agonies, and insights of our age. Wartburg encourages people to think globally and act locally as they struggle to interpret and live out their faith in Christ amid the religious, social, economic, multi-cultural and political realities of the world. Through its institutional commitments, inter-disciplinary teaching and varied pedagogical styles, Wartburg exercises its own discipleship as it seeks to prepare leaders for discipleship of decision and action grounded in our baptismal identity and lived out in increasingly diverse forms and institutions. As a resource for critical theological reflection, Wartburg is called to contribute to the theology of the ELCA and to engage the religious, societal and missional issues that confront the church.

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Appendix B

*Twelve Pastoral Practices
Embodying Wartburg Seminary's Mission Statement*

In May 1997 Wartburg Theological Seminary adopted a Mission Statement that has guided our mission as a seminary, including the implementation of a new curriculum. By curriculum, we mean not only the courses offered in a classroom setting but the entire program of formation, including worship and community life.

At retreat in May 2001, the Wartburg faculty discussed those pastoral practices that we hope to see in Wartburg graduates based on our mission. By pastoral "practices" we do not mean mere actions that are performed. Rather, these pastoral practices are understood to be incarnated and embodied in being as well as doing. They intend coherence between one's disposition and one's practice of ministry. Pastors thus informed are able to give reason why they act in a particular way. Effective formation has instilled a fundamental attitude out of which one then does.

The purpose of setting forth these criteria is for the Wartburg faculty to evaluate the effectiveness of our curriculum. It is not intended as a form of evaluation of students or graduates. We seek excellence in our educational programs and invite you into conversation about these pastoral practices as a way of further assessing and revising our curriculum.

The central question is: To what degree has the educational and formational process of the Wartburg Seminary curriculum accomplished its mission objectives?

Wartburg Mission Statement: Twelve Pastoral Practices

"Wartburg Theological Seminary . . ." [Three overarching practices]

- ◆ *Practice of Being Rooted in the Gospel:* Articulates the Gospel in a way that is heard as Gospel. Is publicly Lutheran and Gospel-centered.
- ◆ *Practice of Missio Dei in Word and Sacrament:* Is grounded in Word and Sacrament as the means by which God creates and forms community (*koinonia*) for God's mission (*diakonia*) in the world. Exercises faithful worship preparation and evangelical preaching.
- ◆ *Practice of Biblical and Theological Wisdom:* Interprets reality theologically and biblically as a habit. Has a core set of theological concepts that are interpreted with flexibility in different contexts.

". . . serves the mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America by being a worship-centered community of critical theological reflection where learning leads to mission and mission informs learning."

- ◆ *Practice of Ecclesial Partnership:* Displays a healthy sense of connectedness with the whole church. Fosters partnership with the ELCA and ecumenical openness.
- ◆ *Practice of Complex Analysis:* Demonstrates capacity to carefully examine complex social, economic, scientific, and religious issues without oversimplification. Sees relationships from a systems perspective, remaining non-anxious in the face of ambiguity.
- ◆ *Practice of Curiosity:* Is fundamentally curious, employing creativity in the use of language. Is open to grow beyond current perspectives and willing to pursue learning with intellectual depth.

“Within this community, Wartburg educates women and men to serve the church’s mission as ordained and lay leaders.”

- ◆ *Practice of Pastoral Concern*: Loves God’s people with a “pastor’s heart,” demonstrating a generous spirit in relating to others. Maintains a clear sense of pastoral identity and desire for excellence in pastoral ministry.
- ◆ *Practice of Personal Faith and Integrity*: Lives as person of faith, grounded in a life of prayer and study. Is self-aware in seeing the larger picture, proclaiming hope, and setting healthy boundaries.
- ◆ *Practice of Collegiality*: Leads in a way that is responsive to the situation and promotes team building. Creates collegial groups within and beyond the church for promoting many forms of ministry.

“This mission is to proclaim and interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ to a world created for communion with God and in need of personal and social healing.”

- ◆ *Practice of Evangelical Listening and Speaking the Faith to Others*: Listens in a way that leads people to deeper faith questions. Engages in thoughtful witness to the Christian message, especially to youth and those outside the faith.
- ◆ *Practice of Immersion in the Context*: Shows awareness of the context through listening to, dialogue with and involvement in the local community. Has ability to interpret texts and contexts with insight.
- ◆ *Practice of Sensitivity to Cross-Cultural and Global Dimensions*: Is sensitive to multicultural issues and religious pluralism in the context of globalization. Understands the inclusive character of the Christian Gospel.

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Appendix C

Visitation (Interview) Guide

Pastor's Interview

1. What's going well in your ministry? Your congregation? (Challenges, surprises, joys?)
2. What are the significant things happening in your community? What are the contemporary issues that your congregation is feeling? (If appropriate, how these things are influencing pastor's ministry.)
3. What is the Gospel you have been announcing? (Particular texts? When, where, how? In ways other than preaching?)
4. How is the congregation receiving your ministry? How is the Gospel being heard?
 - ◆ Do members understand the connection between justification and justice?
 - ◆ How do the members care for each other?
 - ◆ What is the relation between worship and mission/evangelism?
 - ◆ How does your congregation relate to the ELCA and other congregations?
5. What has significantly informed your understanding and practice of ministry?
 - ◆ Before and outside of Wartburg?
 - ◆ At Wartburg, formal and informal?

Observation, Interpretation

Lunch with Lay People

1. What are the significant things going on in your community? In your congregation?
 - ◆ How do members care for each other?
 - ◆ What is the relationship between worship and mission/evangelism in your congregation?
 - ◆ How does your congregation relate to the ELCA and other congregations?
2. How is life in the community influenced by and connected to the wider world?
3. How does this context shape the life and ministry of your congregation? Current issues?
4. What have you been hearing as Gospel?
 - ◆ How does this Gospel bring new life to this context?
 - ◆ If I talked to people in the community, what would they say is the Gospel announced by your congregation?
5. As you envision the future, what kind of leadership do you think will be needed for your congregation?

Dinner with Community People

1. What are the significant things going on in your community?
2. How is life in the community connected with the wider world?
3. What is the community's perception of this congregation? (Role of church? Message from church? Image of church?)
4. As you look to the future, what do you see as the role of the church?

Observation, Interpretation

Sunday Gathering with Congregation

1. Why I'm here. (10 min.)
 - ◆ Invite congregations into journey with seminary.
 - ◆ What I have been doing during the visit.
2. What I have heard. (10 min.)

"Exciting possibilities."
3. Table group discussion. (20 min.)
 - ◆ As you think about the future of the congregation, what are some of the exciting possibilities that you can see?
 - ◆ Are there some things I may not have heard that you think I should know?
4. Table group feedback. (20 min.)

Final Interview with Pastor

1. Conversation about what we both have heard.
2. Exciting possibilities.
3. Follow up questions. If not covered, perhaps questions relating specifically to the curriculum, for example: "How do you understand and interpret justification and justice within the context of your ministry?" Or "As you reflect on the Pastoral Practices, how well did Wartburg prepare you for your ministry?" "Which of these practices are most significant to you?"
4. Words to Wartburg (things you want us to know)?

Advice for outgoing seniors?
Advice for incoming juniors?

Observation, Interpretation

*Rethinking Pastoral Formation at Wartburg Theological Seminary:
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ENDNOTES

1. Norma Cook Everist, ed., *The Difficult But Indispensable Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002).
2. The focus of the visits is the "new" curriculum, begun in 1994. However, to provide a comparative perspective, the visits were to include not only the three-year-out graduates of the new curriculum but also the class of 1989, a class that graduated before the new curriculum began being implemented. A few visits to 1989 graduates were conducted, which gleaned a lack of glaring differences in the results.
3. Grant funding enabled Wartburg to contract with David A. Roozen, co-author of this article, to serve as an external evaluator of the reunion and congregational visitation assessment efforts. In this capacity, Roozen has attended all but one reunion during the grant period, interviewed the majority of graduates visited by faculty, interviewed all faculty at least twice, and been a participant observer at faculty retreats and many grant planning meetings. Direct evaluator quotes contained in the article are from periodic reports from Roozen to Wartburg.
4. The consultant was the Rev. Dr. Inagrace T. Dietterich, director of theological research at the Center for Parish Development, an ecumenical research and consulting agency located in Chicago.
5. Adair Lummis, "Wartburg Graduates: Their M.Div. Experience Viewed Through Visits to Them in Ministry," (unpublished paper, May 2004). Dr. Lummis is a senior faculty associate at Hartford Seminary's Institute for Religion Research.
6. Inagrace T. Dietterich, Center for Parish Development.
7. The initial grant design called for visiting both three-year-out and five-year-out graduates. The initial design also called for incorporating judicatory staff as visitors. The former was reconsidered for logistical and workload issues. The latter was reconsidered because of potential conflicts of interest related to the judicatories supervisory responsibilities.
8. Norma Cook Everist and Craig L. Nesson, eds., *Forming an Evangelizing People: Perspectives and Questions for Use in the Church* (Dubuque, IA: Wartburg Theological Seminary, 2005).

Beyond Wish Lists for Pastoral Leadership: Assessing Clergy Behavior and Congregational Outcomes to Guide Seminary Curriculum

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ABSTRACT: This article presents research and curricular redesign at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary toward clergy competency development and congregational vitality. Survey, interview, and field research with Episcopal clergy and congregations nationwide provided feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of theological education for congregational ministry and identified the strengths and deficits in clergy that are influential on effective ministry and congregational vitality. This feedback influenced MDiv curricular changes—enhancing competency development for congregational leadership; integrating academic, formational, and professional models of theological education; and stressing immersion in ministry contexts.

The “subject” of theology, Jesus Christ, can only be regarded rightly if we are ready to meet Him on the plane where He is active, that is, within the Christian church.¹

—Helmut Thielicke

For laypeople, congregations remain a principal context for religious encounter, ministry, instruction, and action. For graduates from theological schools, congregations remain the primary context of vocational identity and work. Two assumptions follow: (1) that graduate theological education would focus on preparation and training of leaders for congregational ministry and (2) that theological educators would seek feedback from graduates and the congregations served regarding ministry effectiveness and educational preparedness for congregational ministry. In short, one might expect theological educators’ interest in developing both clergy competency and congregational vitality would lead them to close contact and assessment with clergy and congregations for the purpose of continuous improvement of teaching and training methods.

Unfortunately, just as with any institution, unexamined values and habits can produce unintended consequences,² specifically for theological education, an unintended but progressive disengagement from contexts of congregational ministry. Once habituated to this withdrawal from contextual learning and feedback, it becomes easy to dismiss the grit of real situations and contexts in favor of idealized images of competency and context, to dismiss feedback as ill-informed, and to redouble efforts to maintain habits and values that have become touch-points. Nonetheless, we are convinced that seminaries and divinity schools can develop competency-oriented models of education in which competencies are identified as actions rooted in knowledge, character, and skill contributing to positive outcomes in congregational contexts—the *ultimate testing grounds* of theological disciplines.

The research project, *Toward a Higher Quality of Christian Ministry (THQ)*,³ focused on clergy competency and training and on congregational vitality. It was conducted parallel to a series of curriculum developments at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, an Episcopal seminary in Evanston, Illinois. THQ findings provided new awareness of the strengths and limitations of the educational models most common to theological education: the academic and the formational. THQ findings also helped identify the skills and competencies that ordained ministers say they need but are not adequately provided by their education and training processes. Competency-development requires integration of a third educational model, the professional model, into preparation for ordained ministry. These three educational models are not competitors but key parts of an integrated approach to education and development that is well-supported by educational research documenting the need for integrated approaches in adult learning, with emphases on procedural as well as semantic knowledge. Seabury's efforts at specific curricular changes in the past four years are part of a school-wide response to the findings of THQ research, with key institutional supports that helped make this change possible. THQ research and Seabury's efforts point to emerging challenges and opportunities in the education and preparation of ordained ministers.

Three models of theological education

There are three basic models of theological education and of graduate education in general: (1) academic, (2) formational, and (3) professional. Different graduate schools and programs typically place primary emphasis on one of these models, based on explicit and implicit assumptions about the most essential elements involved in training.

The academic model emphasizes cognitive preparation through semantic learning (i.e., knowledge imparted through linguistic arguments and formulations). In traditional academic graduate institutions, such as those offering degrees in the humanities, social sciences, or physical sciences, students receive intensive immersion in classical disciplines that undergird a specific field.

Adherents believe that by exposing students to in-depth scholarship, the academic model shapes practice indirectly through a direct change and expansion of thought processes. Concepts, principles, and methodology are regarded as “tools for the trade.” The guiding principle, “As a man/woman thinks, so a man/woman does,” undergirds the emphasis placed on thought and the tools for critical thinking and research.

University-based divinity schools have typically preferred the academic model of training and education. Traditional areas of focus in this model include biblical studies grounded in historical, literary, or social science methods of criticism; biblical languages; religious history informed by general history, archeology, social science, and comparative religion; systematic, philosophical, or fundamental theology; and ethics. Once students have grounding in these areas and have the necessary cognitive tools for interdisciplinary levels of discourse, they may broaden their focus by engaging courses that involve religious dialogue with other areas of study.

The formational model is a distinct alternative, one that has been embraced, at least in principle, by many denominational seminaries. In this model, the focus turns from purely academic preparation and the shaping of habits of thought toward what is seen as a subtler preparation through total immersion—cognitive, emotional, and motivational—in a given tradition. The goal through such immersion is to engage and mold personal identities in accord with the deeply held values, practices, and assumptions that comprise the desired identities of a professional culture. Nonreligious examples of this form of graduate education include the extremes of psychoanalytic training and military officer candidate school.

In seminary education, use of the formational model has not meant an abandonment of the traditional academic disciplines. But it has resulted in a shift in focus, in teaching as well as in the structuring of community life. Academic knowledge is selected and offered with a particular aim of deep incorporation and “embodiment” of learning on the part of students (i.e., they live what they learn, practicing in the seminary community). Religious and professional identity are pursued in light of prototypic attitudes, dispositions, and behavior patterns that exemplify being a pastoral leader in a specific tradition.

The third model, the professional model, has been embraced in a variety of disciplines and can be found in curricula as variant as Masters of Fine Arts programs; Master of Business Administration programs; medical training programs for physicians, nurses, and technicians; engineering schools; and the contemporary PsyD doctoral programs for professional psychologists. There are a handful of seminaries using the professional model, although it is regularly applied in particular practical disciplines such as preaching, liturgics, pastoral counseling, and congregational leadership. In the professional model, competency and skill are the core measures for student progress and the central aims for education and training. Emphasis is placed less on matters of identity

formation and more on the development of skills and competencies sufficient for conducting the work of a given discipline. Standards of academic performance are still expected, but academic content is selected and offered toward its utility in practice and the overall thrust of education is toward ready access and well-rehearsed deployment of the skills, tools, and methods needed in a variety of situations.

In this sense, the professional model does not assume that academic or “declarative” knowledge (semantic, factual, propositional) is sufficient for helping people develop tools for application; rather, drawing on Anderson’s⁴ distinction, the professional model asserts that “procedural” knowledge leading to expertise (tacit, behavioral, situational) requires interactive learning, best facilitated by modeling of prototypic examples and by work-based reflection-in-action.⁵ Such tacit learning involves situation-based experimentation, in which students practice choosing and applying appropriate tools for each situation.⁶ A cognitive and motivational shift occurs in maturing adults toward problem-centered rather than subject-centered learning,⁷ suggesting that procedural knowledge is increasingly important in adult learning, eclipsing adults’ quest for semantic knowledge.

Comparative studies of professional, formational, and academic programs are scant, so it is not clear to what extent possible pitfalls are manifested among graduates of professional educational programs. Nonetheless, it would be easy for us as theological educators to become paternalistic and embrace or dismiss any one of these models based on what we believe clergy need most. To move forward, Seabury faculty and administration have adopted a process of listening to practitioners, the recipients and users of theological education, and to congregations, the indirect beneficiaries of theological education. First, what do pastoral leaders say about their educational preparation for ministry? Second, what are areas of relative strength and weakness in clergy competencies? And third, what are the implications of these for revision of seminary curriculum? Taking a research and development approach to curricular change, with a dual focus on congregational vitality and energy, was made possible by a generous grant from Lilly Endowment.

Clergy critiques of traditional models of theological education

Study methods

We undertook THQ, a nationwide study in the Episcopal Church, to learn directly from clergy what were practices, habits, and dispositions that contributed to effective ministry, particularly, to congregational vitality and growth. To that end, we conducted interviews, surveys, and case studies with clergy and congregations.

We first went to fifty-four ordained congregational leaders cross-nominated as “effective” and twelve cross-nominated as “struggling,” conducting struc-

tured interviews about their early perceptions of people and situations in the parishes they served, their decision-making processes, situations of conflict and collaboration, their use of creativity, seminary education, mentor and protégé experience, articulation of a theology of ministry appropriate to their setting, and patterns of communication with and within their congregations. We conducted shorter interviews with lay members, staff, and noninvolved town residents about their congregations, communities, and clergy.

From those interviews and from published human resource instruments, we constructed a survey distributed to 1,500 Episcopal priests and received a return of 456 completed surveys. More than 200 priests also completed an optional website survey focused on seminary experience and clergy job competencies. In addition, we conducted in-depth, focused case studies in six congregations, examining lay leadership development, networks of influence in decision processes, and the catalytic role of clergy.

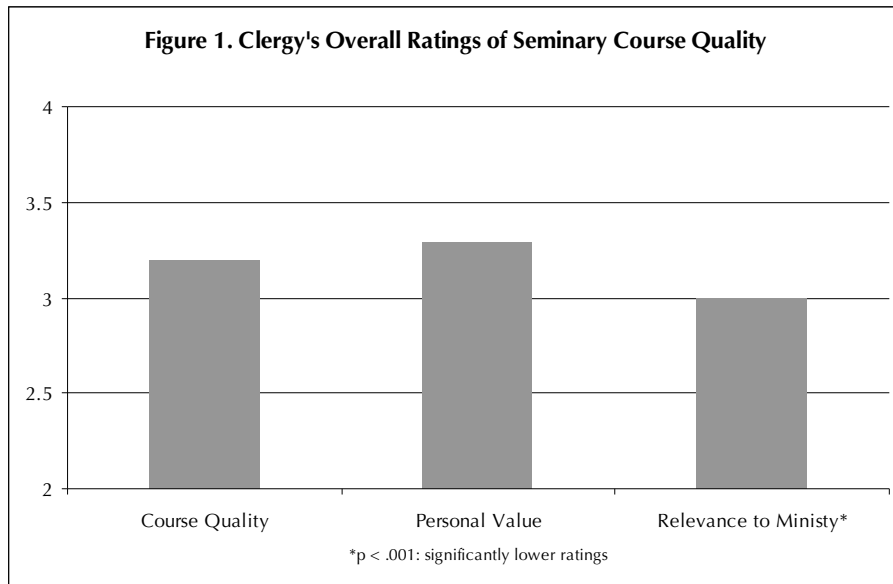
The Episcopal priests in this study were active in ministry, almost exclusively in congregational settings. The sample represents a broad age-range of clergy and also a broad historical period during which clergy received their seminary educations. Sample distributions for gender and race are representative of the distributions found in the entire population of Episcopal priests across its eight provinces in the United States.

Our national study revealed that while clergy were generally positive about their seminary educations, they also offered some clear signals about possible areas for improvement. Clergy's indications about their own competencies and areas for improvement provided further information to consider in the process of curriculum design. And clergy and lay reports of the lived behaviors of congregations offered further clarifications for improvements in the overall training processes for clergy.

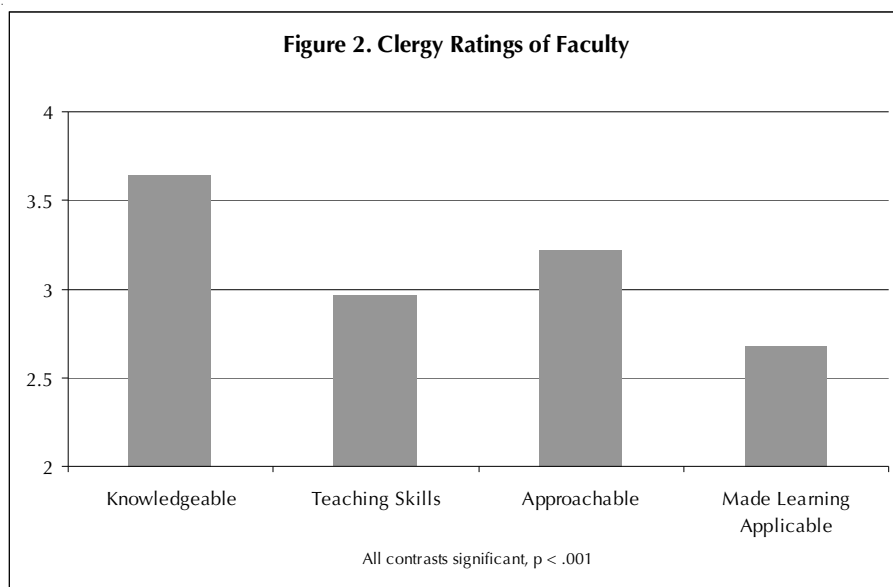
Clergy evaluations of seminary training

Respondents rated their overall seminary education, as well as specific course content areas, on three questions: the quality of the courses taken, the personal value of the courses, and the relevance and usefulness of the courses in everyday ministry. Rating scales ranged from 1 (poor marks) to 4 (highest marks). For purposes of brevity, we show only clergy's average overall ratings of their seminary education in Figure 1.

Episcopal clergy were generally positive about the quality, personal value, and relevance to ministry of their seminary educations. Fewer than 2 percent of clergy rated any of the questions about overall seminary education experience as "poor." But, as seen in Figure 1, clergy rated the relevance (i.e., applicability) of coursework for the everyday practice of ministry significantly and consistently lower than both the quality and the personal (i.e., formative) value of coursework. We found even stronger patterns of responses when we asked clergy about specific content areas of study. Ratings in biblical, theological, and historical content areas declined from course quality to personal value to everyday utility.



We found a similar pattern in how clergy rated faculty. Almost unanimously, clergy rated their theological educators as knowledgeable (Figure 2). They also considered them generally approachable. Ratings of teaching skills were significantly lower. And lowest were clergy's ratings of how well faculty helped clergy make learning applicable in "real world" ministry contexts.



These results need not be taken as an indictment of failure on the part of theological education—most ratings on all items were at least “fair” or better. Rather, like feedback from course and program evaluations, lower scoring indicates areas for improvement. Qualitative results from our interviews provided further clarification of these areas for improvement. In the interviews, clergy had positive assessments of seminary education. But among these practitioners, there were some clear patterns of critique of theological education, pointing particularly to shortcomings in both the academic and formational models. These are summarized and briefly discussed below.

Critique of the academic model. Priests reported enjoyment of the material and discussions in academic classes, but spoke about those academic experiences as discrete events remembered fondly, rather than as using them in their day-to-day ministries: “Some of the formal theology? While it was amusing and fun, it wasn’t much good carried out of seminary.”

One priest expressed her difficulty translating declarative knowledge into procedural knowledge and application:

How did my approach to ministry develop or change during ministry? Well, I think I learned to talk better about the faith. I got a little more articulate about stuff. And, I mean, I learned a lot. I’m not saying I didn’t learn anything because I did. You know, I acquired a body of information with which to... sort of a toolbox, I guess. No, I didn’t acquire tools; I acquired information, from which I could fashion tools.

Her assessment suggests a twofold critique of the academic model. Theological schools reliably impart academic information, concepts, and ideas contributing to declarative knowledge. But declarative knowledge is not equivalent to tacit knowledge and tools for action, and students are not typically taught how to “fashion tools from knowledge.” The deficit in training contributes to idiosyncratic, homespun application of knowledge in forming tools for congregational ministry. A parallel experience of anxiety and unfocused effort ensues as clergy, left to “find their own way” in ministry, invest time and energy trying to do things they have not been equipped to do, from everyday activities such as running effective meetings to more subtle aims such as helping to shift a community’s public theology.

Some clergy saw a third pitfall: an academic model can instill idealized role expectations that do not match the needs or expectations of the congregations they serve. One priest explicitly decried the mismatch of his anticipated roles as spiritual guide and teacher, which comprised a fraction of the actual congregational and community work, and the real challenge of organizational management, for which he had not been trained.

Critique of the formational model. The strengths of the formational approach lie in opportunities for feedback on personal character and in the experience of

Beyond Wish Lists for Pastoral Leadership

a progressive personal embrace of vocational identity. Direct faculty feedback helped one priest focus on particular areas for personal growth: “We were evaluated every year. And one of my evaluations said, ‘Matt, you are too reticent. You need to step forward and be more of a leader.’ Which was good for them to say—I think that was true.” The formational environments of seminary and field education helped another priest take on—and delight in—his vocational identity: “I came with a good deal of skepticism about parish ministry and with a pretty strong idea that I might try parish ministry for a few years but probably end up as a pastoral counselor. But, in the course of seminary, I fell in love with the idea of being a parish priest and particularly because of the summer parish internship.” Describing vocational identity development, most clergy referred not to classroom experiences but to practica and applied experiences as their clarifying moments. For other clergy, the overall formational experience immersed them in a social milieu that differed dramatically from typical congregational contexts: “In some ways, seminary is just kind of a black hole. You were in it. You did it. And you came out of it shaped differently. But, it just didn’t really relate to anything else, you know. It was over when it was over.”

Faculty can be tempted to pressure students to conform to an idealized image of clergy, regardless of that image’s disjuncture from contextual realities or personal qualities. A Latino priest explained how he was told by his liturgics professor to “lose his accent” in order to conduct proper worship. Experienced as “infantilizing,” “objectifying,” and enforcing passivity, such pressured conformity can lead clergy into confusion and anxiety as congregational leaders, as they realize that the pastoral image in whose likeness they have been formed hinders their effectiveness as congregational ministers:

I really think that seminary prepared me to be the kind of priest who sits in the office, prepares wonderful sermons, is available to all the parishioners anytime they want to come in—this is “Father Tim,” you know, the guy in Mitford.⁸ That’s what seminary training was for, was to be “Father Tim.” I realized that, “You’re not in Mitford anymore and it’s not like ‘Father Tim.’ I’ve got some work to do here!”—and I didn’t know what the hell I was doing.

Critique of the professional model. Clergy offered little feedback about overall experiences of the professional model in theological education, instead noting the absence of a schoolwide model of competency-focused learning and exposure to ministry contexts. Some lamented like one priest, “we are just not prepared for the real world.” Others attributed the disconnection from congregational contexts to a form of elitism on the part of seminary faculty: “[My seminary] did not always value the parish. And sometimes there was that sense that those people in the pews were stupid. And they’re not.”

Reflections on professional training of competencies and skills focused on specific courses in applied disciplines (e.g., preaching, worship, pastoral care, congregational leadership) or in practica (e.g., clinical pastoral education, field education). Clergy used terms like “hands-on experience” to describe these specific learning environments. They also noted how rarely they experienced such direct exposure in their overall theological education. For example:

Pastoral care has been very useful . . . Every seminarian ought to know how to do premarital counseling. If I hadn't taken this course [in marriage and family], I wouldn't have known how to do it.

Christian Ethics has been a good resource for me when dealing with the problems in our community.

Another school of theology taught me *conflict management*, but my own seminary did not. And if I had not taken that course, I would have been in deep trouble in terms of conflict resolution here in the parish.

Many clergy viewed competency-focused training as positive, stating that specific skills learned were essential to their current practice of ministry and that more training was desired. For some, the focus developed in skill-oriented courses honed academic interests and expanded and clarified ministerial identity.

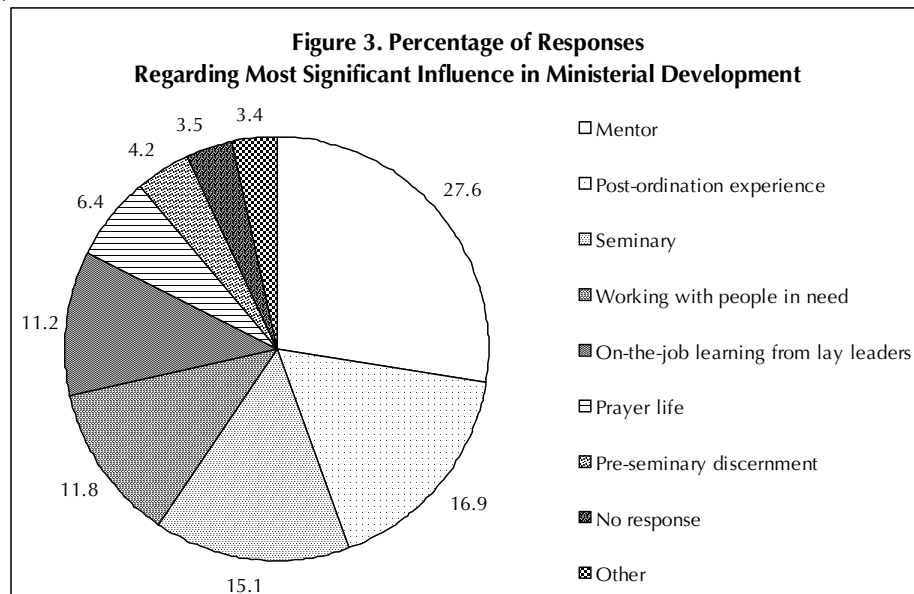
Nonetheless, professional training can also lose touch with context. Professional approaches can overgeneralize a single approach or application, not accounting for contextual variations by geographic region, race, or social class:

I got a great seminary education to be rector [pastor] of a good sized church. I knew nothing about rural ministry.

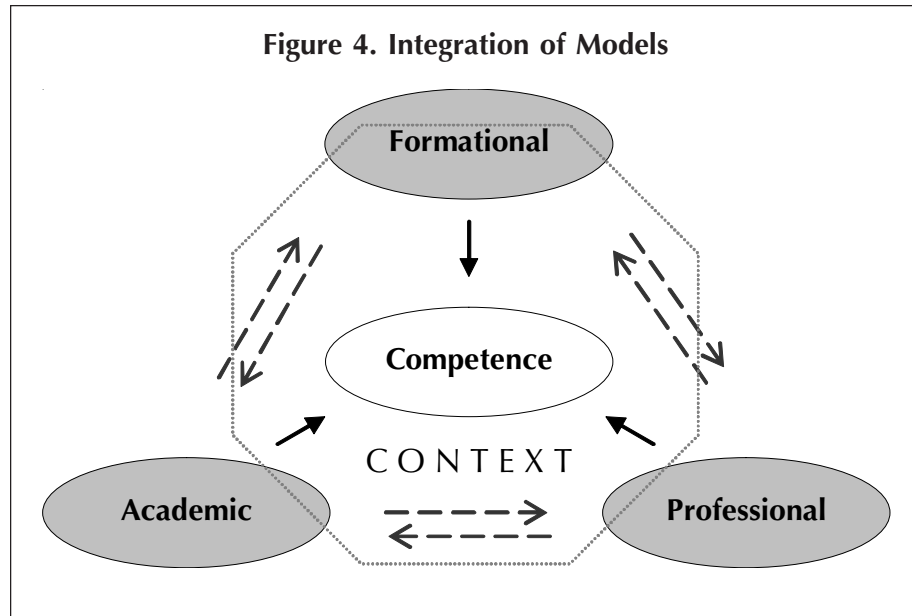
Our vision is too narrow as far as classes like pastoral counseling—which would be how to counsel [white] Americans. So, then you're off to a Hispanic congregation, or even if you're going to a Black congregation, you're lost. The “rules” don't apply.

The professional model, just like the other two models, can also lose contextual focus by becoming overly attached to a particular academic approach or grand theory. In this situation, training can build competencies toward theory rather than contexts. Finally, the professional model may be provided only as a tack-on to more academic theological education, with unclear oversight or guidance in curriculum development and training goals. Some clergy expressed problems emerging when contextual education was not adequately planned, contracted, supervised, and integrated with other curricula with the result that students develop habits for ministry that are not submitted to structured reflection, feeding into the pattern of institutional behaviors Argyris called “skilled incompetence.”⁹

In the end, Episcopal priests did not see theological education as the sine qua non of preparation and development for ministry. In the survey, we found that contexts for ministry provide the primary influences for ministry development. When asked what contributed most to their development as ordained ministers, 67.5 percent of priests cited context-based mentors (27.6%), post-ordination contextual training (16.9%), working with people in need (11.8%), and on-the-job learning from lay leaders (11.2%). Mentors were the most frequently mentioned influence, followed by on-the-job experiences and by post-ordination training. Seminary education was cited by only 15.1 percent (Figure 3) by priests as their principal developmental influence. Again, we take this feedback from clergy as an invitation to consider areas for improvement: to make clearer links between pedagogy, formation, and applicable competency development, with explicit and planful engagement of contexts for ministry.



Integrating models. Each model alone—academic, formational, or professional—has shortcomings in clergy competency training for varied congregational contexts. A more useful approach—and one more readily palatable for theological educators—would stress integration of all three models. In an integrated approach, content in each model of training would be informed, critiqued, and reinforced by content from the other two models, framed by context, and focused toward developing competencies (Figure 4). Knowledge, character development, and skill attainment are mutually informative, and contribute together and independently to context-relevant competencies.



Such an integrated model requires clarity about the competencies needed (not necessarily those desired) for identified ministry contexts. This can only be derived through contextual observation of behaviors, processes, and outcomes.

Identifying clergy's competency strengths and needs

Theological educators face challenges in identifying competencies. The wish lists generated by laity, clergy, or the theologians can produce an impossible and internally inconsistent set of ideals, for instance, desires for pastors of a specific age and lifestyle (forty, married, children) who are innovative while responsive to congregational concerns, entrepreneurial without making any changes in congregational life,¹⁰ with solid knowledge of both specific religious traditions and contemporary cultures, and love of people to the point of significant self-sacrifice.¹¹ Then again, the word "competency," like "leadership development," can become a buzzword that simply affords an opportunity for theological educators to reify their set assumptions and habits. A major study of "readiness for ministry" conducted by The Association of Theological Schools,¹² seeking opinions about important qualities and skills needed by pastors, yielded, in our opinion, a convoluted list of qualities and abilities comprised of internal dispositions, personal piety, and academic skills that merely restated the shared religious institutional values of the theological educators, clergy, judicatory officers, and seminarians who generated the list. These kinds of studies, in our view, cloud rather than clarify our judgment of competencies by focusing on generalized opinions and platonic ideals rather than experiences and lived behaviors and can end up reiterating unconscious, internally inconsistent,

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systemwide assumptions about religious leadership that, as other researchers have already found, hamper clergy development.¹³

Throughout the THQ study, we chose instead to explore clergy competency by asking clergy questions about behavior and reflection-in-action. More than 200 Episcopal priests responded to our website survey, indicating their level of confidence in performing 100 different clergy-related job activities (1 = not very confident; 4 = highly confident). Priests felt most confident in their abilities to be a role model and to handle core religious functions of preaching and sacramental or ritual ceremonies. They felt least confident in their abilities to develop lay leadership, do effective community outreach, set goals and evaluate programs, and develop and follow a scheme for organization of activity. In terms of specific high- and low-rated items, priests felt most confident in specific competencies related to basic religious functionary roles, offering positive encouragement and guidance to laity and taking basic care of themselves psychologically. But they felt least confident in specific competencies related to direct, active, and generative engagement with the more visceral aspects of people's lives, both individual and communitywide (Table 1).

Among important competencies, decision-making stood out as an essential area where ordained leaders, even those nominated effective, lacked education and training. From the mailed survey, 456 Episcopal priests indicated on which of seventeen decision-making items they perceived they had personal expertise sufficient to instruct and on which they perceived the need for further training. Table 2 provides a glimpse of the items on which clergy most frequently indicated expertise or need for training. These results suggest that, in regard to decision-making processes in congregational contexts, clergy have greater confidence in basic skills related to pastoral care approaches (e.g., listening, taking people's feelings into account) and internal theological reflection (e.g., knowing personal values) but less confidence in ways to face and manage conflict, read relationship patterns, reflect theologically on a community, and translate theological reflection into tangible and assessable goals.

Table 1. High and Low Clergy Confidence on Specific Job Activities

JOB ACTIVITIES	CATEGORY	AVG RATING
Highest Items		
Making church services beautiful and special	Sacrament	3.62
Ministry at burial services	Sacrament	3.53
Preaching to rouse sense of Word as a positive force	Preaching	3.49
Baptismal and confirmation preparation and officiating	Sacrament	3.49
Fostering lay responsibility to solve their group problems	Group Developm't	3.44
Running effective meetings	Communications	3.40
Building trust by keeping confidences and promises	Role Model	3.38
Understanding and providing moral, spiritual, and practical help to families	Pastoral Care	3.37
Managing personal stress	Self-Development	3.35
Providing sense of hope and vision for action	Group Developm't	3.31
Being role model through stable and reliable performance	Role Model	3.31
Marriage counseling, preparation and officiating	Sacrament	3.31
Preaching with thought-provoking interaction with societal ideas	Preaching	3.30
Lowest Items		
Forming communitywide groups for advocacy and justice	Com. Outreach	2.66
Mediating group conflicts	Group Developm't	2.66
Being role model through pattern of daily prayer	Role Model	2.61
Building cooperating congregational relationships	Group Developm't	2.60
Helping people of all ages know and live their faith	Sacramental	2.56
Developing lay leaders for programs	Lay Leader Dev.	2.55
Organizing fundraising programs and activities	Org. Leadership	2.55
Record-keeping, arranging for property improvement	Org. Leadership	2.52
Confronting and helping people with destructive behavior	Pastoral Care	2.51
Making personal contact with visitors and lapsed members	Com. Outreach	2.49
Counseling people who face problems & decisions	Pastoral Care	2.41
Involving lay leaders in decisions central to mission	Lay Leader Dev.	2.11
Reshaping/restarting congregations	Com. Outreach	1.66

1 = lowest rating, 4 = highest rating

Table 2. Clergy’s Self-perceived Expertise and Deficiency in Decision-making Skills

DECISION-MAKING SKILL	% OF CLERGY EXPRESSING NEED	% OF CLERGY EXPRESSING EXPERTISE
High Expertise		
Listening accurately	23.9	54.2
Accepting responsibility	22.1	51.8
Clearly stating desired outcomes	28.3	50.9
Taking people’s feelings into account	23.9	48.5
Presenting alternative solutions	28.3	47.6
Knowing own values that shape decision	29.2	45.2
Being evenhanded and impartial	29.6	43.6
High Need		
Managing personal anxiety in face of opposition	52.2	31.8
Outlining assessment process for progress on goals	49.8	27.2
Discerning deeper issues at stake	48.7	35.5
Improving/changing goals mid-course	45.0	28.5
Understanding flow of influence among members	44.7	30.5

These results, particularly among items where clergy expressed the least confidence or the highest need, correspond directly with results from the FACT (Faith Communities Today) survey. In the Episcopal Church nationwide, members saw their priests as caring, spiritual, hard working, and knowledgeable but not as evangelistic, charismatic, or capable in administration and conflict negotiation.¹⁴ Results also correspond to the patterns we found in our interviews. When asked about specific work-related behaviors and strategies, few Episcopal priests indicated clear communication strategies for either congregational or community contexts. They were rarely explicit or strong in self-understanding during decision-making processes, often defaulting to reactive modes.

Clergy nominated by peers and judicatories as highly effective were much more likely than clergy nominated as struggling to practice positive framing and interpretation of people’s behavior in their congregations, engage conflictual situations directly and proactively, make effective use of strong lay leaders in any change strategies, use their creativity effectively in starting new ministries, help their congregations develop active ministries of outreach and evangelism, and connect broad theological aims with specific goals and strategies. These behaviors of effective clergy helped their congregations grow and develop active rather

than passive identities, with significant congregational changes resulting in a matter of only two years of work with their parishes, including changes in emotional tone and 15–30 percent growth in attendance.¹⁵ Laypeople described effective clergy as maneuvering skillfully between the easy pitfalls of overly autocratic or pastoral-but-not-directive leadership. As recipients of more skilled and nuanced leadership, these laypeople more frequently experienced their congregations as places marked by enjoyment, kinship, and active engagement in spiritual development and social outreach.¹⁶ In short, clergy with more skill and will to perform were catalysts for congregational growth and vitality.

THQ results are corroborated by other recent studies: clergy competency and congregational vitality are indeed mutually reinforcing.¹⁷ More vibrant congregations are more likely to seek out clergy with stronger leadership skills and to energize their pastors, thus calling forth clergy's best efforts and abilities. Clergy that offer clarity and consistency in their ministry are better able to galvanize the efforts and investments of congregational life around a common vision and purpose. Conversely, clergy-congregation mismatches are painful and frustrating for all involved, and poor clergy leadership habits are noted by laity as a primary cause of parish conflict.

From such research arise systemic questions about selection, preparation, and deployment for ordained ministry. Judicatories and seminaries, rather than adjusting their norms and aims in light of positive and tangible results by their strongest living examples of ordained congregational leadership, often continue to adhere to ideals that have perpetuated subpar performance in some areas of ministry crucial for congregational vitality. Researchers over forty years have noted a tendency toward selection of less assertive and more timid people for ordained ministry.¹⁸ Educational and denominational processes that place stress on conformity to a system and a kind of religious "genetic" prototype discourage the development of qualities that are associated with effective ministry—inner-directedness, assertive strength, and willingness to be directive. These neglected qualities can be developed through direct practice and engagement with the character formation of individuals. But they might more effectively and quickly be developed through focused competency development in specific skills. As a student learns how to identify and facilitate strong lay leaders or practices and masters different homiletic styles for varied ministry contexts, she will develop resources for greater inner-directedness, less anxiety, and an internalized confidence needed to be assertive as well as to ask others for assistance and shared leadership.

Developing an integrated, competency-focused model of theological education

For nine years, Seabury took leadership development as fundamental for education, adopting a joint focus on contexts and competencies for ministry and drawing on varied sources to inform curricular change. THQ research, combined

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with previous faculty research and continuing case studies by DMin and MDiv students, pointed Seabury in clear directions in terms of the behavioral and reflective competencies needing increased focus in the school's education and training for ministry. Among these were increased and more diversified means of reading congregations and communities, managing and setting goals grounded in broader theological aims for congregations and communities, conflict negotiation, and community-building and organizing for purposeful action. These broad competency areas were added to other competencies that remained important foci of Seabury's curricula: proclamation of Scripture that speaks to specific contexts and enculturated leadership and design of liturgical worship. Across areas of training, Seabury faculty sought to provide students with tools to become their own best "reflective practitioners,"¹⁹ helping them integrate knowledge, character formation, and skill development in the service of reading cultural and congregational contexts, creating and testing tools for practice, and building frameworks for action. Faculty gave students practice in continuous self-assessment, to help them identify areas of strength or need for further training.

Seabury's progressive development of an integrative approach began in 1995 with three events: (1) the adopting by the Board of Trustees a new mission statement, emphasizing mission, evangelism, and congregational development, (2) the founding of Seabury Institute's Doctor of Ministry (DMin) program in congregational development, and (3) the revising of the Master of Divinity (MDiv) Christian Ministries curriculum to focus on leadership and congregational development. Progress continued in 1998 with two further developments: (1) election of a new dean who placed central emphasis on leadership and mission and (2) receipt of a capacity grant from Lilly Endowment, funding THQ and two regional extensions of the Seabury Institute in Texas and Maryland. In 2000, THQ presented initial research findings to Seabury faculty and a national audience of educators, judicatory officials, clergy, lay leaders, and university researchers.

These factors coalesced in a significant curriculum revision for the MDiv program starting in 2001. Feedback garnered from THQ had a considerable influence on faculty in the shaping of a new MDiv curriculum with the overarching aim of developing strong congregational and missional leaders. Content areas of biblical studies, theology, ethics, and history, along with coursework in worship, preaching, pastoral care, congregational leadership, and mission came under scrutiny for curriculum revision in accordance with three questions: (1) Have we offered something academically solid and graspable? (2) Have we contributed to seminarians' personal formation? and (3) Have we provided clear and sufficient tools for applicability in varied contexts of ministry?

Seabury Institute—post-ordination professional development

The founding faculty of Seabury Institute sought specifically to address competency deficits in congregational leadership by creating a DMin program for ordained clergy who had been practitioners for several years. Influenced by and contributing to the emergent field of congregational studies, Seabury Institute

faculty found ways to merge academically challenging study, formative training, and professional development. Through a combination of text-based learning, guest lectures by effective practitioners, case study presentations, field studies of congregations, and group discussion among peers, DMin students learn a new vocabulary and tools for congregational assessment, work on internalizing new role identities as proactive change agents, and develop skills for effective congregational change. Seabury Institute's extension programs in Texas and Maryland further contextualized learning and focused reflective practice by creating regional student bodies of peers in professional ministry. Students' thesis topics reflect the contextual focus of their research and applications: *Use of Liturgy and Spirituality in Working with Chronically Troubled Congregations*, *Miraculous Expectations in the Lone Star State—Congregations Moving from Maintenance to Mission*, *The Thriving Church in the Declining Community*, and *Leadership during Rebuilding—Organizational Empowerment Using Benedictine Spirituality*.

Seabury's Master of Divinity curriculum—focusing on praxis

Seabury faculty developed and refined key courses in practical theology, preaching, and liturgics and worked jointly to create a more integrated MDiv curriculum that led students through a repeating cycle of theory, formation, practice, and implementation across their three years of study. The core courses for integrative theological education are described in sequential order of study.

The Gospel Mission course lays the foundation for the entire curriculum, bringing core religious aims and values into conversation with the diversity of cultural and congregational contexts in the United States. Shaped in its inception by our research and the leadership emphases of a new administration, the course was collaboratively designed by faculty in theology and ethics, biblical studies, missiology, liturgics, and congregational leadership. The entire Seabury faculty participate in class sessions, sometimes as instructors and other times as observers and facilitators. In the first term, students examine concepts of "Gospel" and "mission" as they relate to Christian vocation. In the second term, students refine their preliminary missiologies by examining varied contexts for mission within contemporary U.S. cultures and subcultures. Students are introduced to concepts and tools needed for "reading" cultures and communities as "living primary texts"²⁰

Field visits to local congregations are central to the course. In the first term, students visit diverse non-Episcopal congregations that have a unique understanding and articulation of their mission. In the second term, students visit Episcopal parishes selected for racial, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity. Each time, students examine congregational culture, focusing on values that undergird the congregation's worship, outreach, welcoming of newcomers, and mission and assessing the impact of clergy leadership on congregational life. From these experiences, students develop some skills in assessing both their strengths and areas for potential change and growth in congregations.

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Pastoral Care and Congregational Leadership follows Gospel Mission. Students learn basic theory in organizational systems and leadership, including historic and current mission principles and practices, family systems theory as applied to congregations, organizational theory, leadership studies, theologies of ordained ministry and lay leadership, and societal-religious interactions. Students engage in introductory self-assessment, with the aim of initiating clear self-development objectives. Assessment materials provide each student with feedback on their behavioral habits and preferences, particularly their decisiveness, creativity, interpersonal motivations, and conflict negotiation. Students begin to learn and practice basic skills in assessing behavior patterns in congregations, managing conflict, and building effective lay leadership networks. The course concludes with an introduction to basic pastoral care and preparation for clinical pastoral education (CPE).

Church, Ministry, and Culture takes students through an adaptation of the CPE model of contextual immersion and competency development, reshaped to expose students to congregational life and leadership. Students return from CPE prepared to “debrief” and to engage academic concepts in a new way, with their own personal “databases” of applied experience with human suffering, faith, and doubt. The course content remains focused on leadership, congregational studies, and the theology and spirituality of pastoral leadership. This sequence of theory-immersion-application leading back to re-engagement with theory helps students internalize and use knowledge but also helps students recognize those places in their education where there are gaps in “fashioning tools from knowledge.”

As the core experience of the course, student teams are sent on “Plunge,” an intensive immersion in selected congregations around the country for eleven to thirteen days. Instructors intentionally send students to congregations as different as possible from their familiar experience—a different region of the country, rural rather than urban, of different ethnicity, or holding a different set of theological and spiritual values. By conducting short-term religious ethnographies as participant-observers, students learn how to listen to congregations as “living documents.” In this combination of academic and tacit learning, students practice and begin to incorporate basic and subtle ministry competencies. Students learn how to probe for systems of meaning in their Plunge congregations through (1) direct observation of formal and informal interactions, (2) study of and participation in congregations’ programs, activities, and informal gatherings, (3) engagement with the broader community, and (4) interviews with staff, lay members, visitors and town residents. They learn to listen for local histories and current experiences of the church community and conflict, concepts of the church’s overall purposes and descriptions of its “feel” or climate. The Plunge helps students develop ways of understanding a congregation as a Self—an entity with an identity greater than the sum of its parts. It also helps students develop skills that assist them in reducing the strangeness of a new social environment, thus alleviating some anxiety inherent in new situations.

The Plunge experience culminates with student teams presenting their field experiences to each other and the entire seminary community. During these presentations, students are challenged to engage three core questions: (1) What is the “Self” or “Soul” of this congregation? (2) What style of leadership does the pastoral leader embody? and (3) What would I need to be effective as a leader in this congregation? Students engage “reflective practice” by verbally rehearsing ministry skills and teaching each other. This naturally leads students back to self-evaluation and a renewed focus on their own developmental goals and objectives, which become the basis for learning contracts in their field education. As of fall 2004, teams had reported on fifty-seven congregations across the United States and overseas.

In the summer of the middle year, students are free to pursue focused self-development activities. Some do internships in their judicatories. Some pursue language training. Some undertake training in community organizing, a program now also offered in the DMin program. Some obtain their first “continuing education” in focal areas of religious education for children or youth, premarital counseling, or similar applied learning. To date, no institutional expectation for such training exists. There is currently faculty discussion about instantiating an institutional expectation of continuing self-development and competency development in the summer of the middle year.

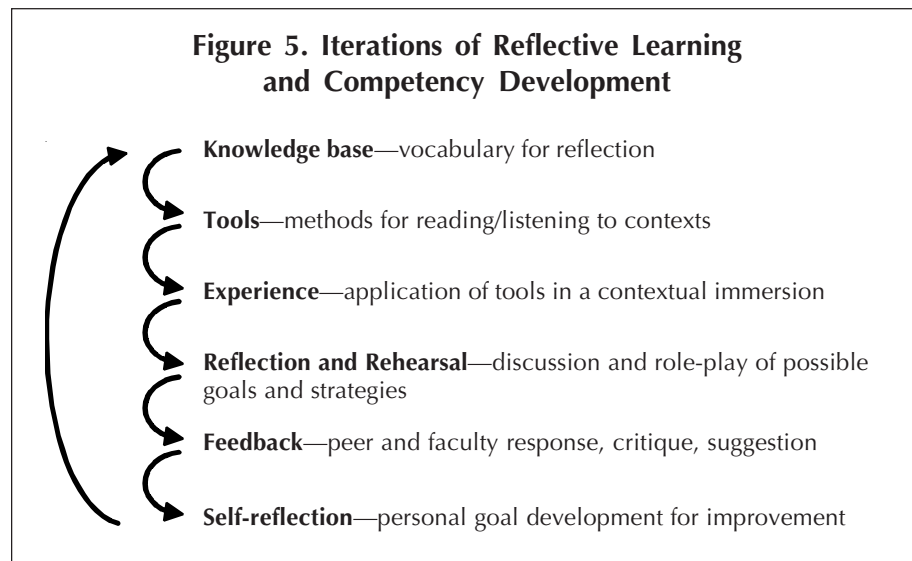
Field Education, the most intensive introduction to congregational leadership, is not an isolative experience for Seabury students. During a three-month, full-time internship, students form lay committees in their parishes to provide feedback on performance, skills demonstrated, and competencies either left untapped or needing some improvement. Students also meet weekly with their supervising clergy. Additionally, all students and supervisors meet in bi-weekly peer seminars, frequently discussing topics of congregational leadership. At the conclusion of field education, students and supervisors jointly evaluate progress on students’ self-development objectives, overall ministry performance, and projects undertaken in the parish. From this feedback, students are encouraged to develop new self-development goals and objectives for their own continuous learning and competency building during their early-ordained ministry. Peer seminars expose students to situations, issues, and life patterns in other congregations, but they also offer students an example of how to build peer networks for support and accountability.

Other courses provide opportunities for contextual study and reflective practice. In liturgical courses, students complete field studies of varied worship practices in Episcopal and non-Episcopal congregations. In missiology courses, lectures by practitioners help students grasp subtleties of context and culture. An elective course in young adult ministry requires students to conduct urban field studies, investigating specific Chicago neighborhoods, the concerns and passions of young adults who live there, and the degree to which neighborhood churches meet and address those concerns and passions.

Advanced Studies in Leadership is an elective for advanced students. It has been a primary place for experimentation and development in leadership training. The course methodology is modeled after case study seminars in business schools and psychodrama techniques used in training psychotherapists and community organizers. More than any other course, this course has been and continues to be shaped directly by THQ research. THQ findings, corroborated by other national studies, pointed instructors in the direction of an intentional, competency-based focus on five areas where clergy reported a lack of skill or a skewed approach: (1) making or managing effective decision processes, (2) negotiating and resolving conflict, (3) managing personal anxiety and fear of opposition, (4) developing strong lay leadership, and (5) networking and organizing within the broader community outside congregations.

An iterative process of learning

Students do not only engage competency training and contextual learning in isolated courses. Faculty members attempted to work in concert so that the entire curricular experience became an iterative process of learning. Solid academics were seen as essential for developing the language and tools for reflection needed when students engaged “real” and “laboratory” contexts. Contextual experiences informed and sharpened discussion in academic courses and helped students and faculty more clearly identify areas for personal formation and skill development. These approaches, at their best, reinforced each other, as students moved repeatedly through the sequence shown in Figure 5.



Students first practice setting learning objectives for themselves by setting short-term goals for their theological education and training. The process helps

students learn to state clear objectives, identify specific subgoals for knowledge acquisition, personal growth, and skill development, recognize strategies and resources that will help them reach those subgoals, and articulate reasonable criteria by which they will recognize improvement. Table 3 demonstrates how students are encouraged to break down broad academic, formational, and skill-development goals into a few tangible and attainable subgoals as their first steps in continuous self-development.

Initially, students were uncertain of this process, being accustomed to maintaining reactive and responsive rather than proactive postures vis-à-vis educational and judicatory evaluative systems. But once students began to understand the concept of continuous self-development, they adapted to the process.

Table 3. Example of Learning Objectives Exercise

Overall Objective: To become a better preacher

	Goals	Strategies and Resources	Criteria to Realize
Knowledge (Academic)	Learn different effective preaching styles Learn how exegesis connects with message delivery	Work with Homiletics professor Visit different recommended churches	Can identify and practice three distinct preaching styles Can use everyday language to convey new insights into scripture
Skill/Competency (Professional)	Become consistent in delivering a clear, focused message Speak confidently from an outline	Show outlines to faculty and pastors, invite feedback Take a course in rhetoric and public speaking	People’s feedback after my sermons indicating thoughtful/emotional engagement Can deliver a focused sermon from only a 1-page outline
Dispositional Habit/Attitude (Formational)	Manage my “performance anxiety” Become comfortable asserting myself	Practice with peers, invite feedback Work with pastoral counselor	Can be comfortable and willing to say what I mean in practice sessions

Challenges to the system—where from here?

Taken collectively, the competencies THQ research has highlighted as crucial for effective ordained congregational ministry are abilities to “read” a community, understand and embrace a community’s implicit theological and spiritual values, assess areas needing some work or improvement, establish relationships that facilitate and do not hinder congregational leadership, and set

goals with congregational members that further the religious development of the community of faith. Theological educators may be doing their best to provide some preparation of ordained ministers with these competencies. But pitfalls can occur along the way from intention to delivery, not the least of which are the untested and unquestioned assumptions held unconsciously by religious institutions regarding their own leadership needs.

Lurking behind the idealized images of clergy are continuing assumptions of a smaller, settled faith community as normative. It is of a community where families remain constant and faithful to a particular faith tradition across generations, and the pastoral leader is charged with the primary task of “community maintenance” as the “person” (parson or icon) of the parish. Despite valiant challenges from pulpit, lectern, and academic press—from a variety of standpoints including postmodernist, liberation, evangelical, and church growth perspectives—the assumptions continue to operate. Students who learn and embrace different perspectives of religious leadership and community often find themselves frustrated when they are ordained and trying to introduce all the exciting new concepts they have learned about justice, missiology, evangelism, or kerygmatic faith in congregations that show no immediate interest in their conceptual gymnastics.²¹

Today, most people live in larger, more fluid population centers where specific congregations and pastoral leaders are not well-known in their communities, where cultural backgrounds are heterogeneous, and where generational continuity in faith traditions cannot be expected. Religious leadership has needed to shift from community maintenance to community *building*, but it has not yet embraced this shift.

Lay members rightly expect professional ministry in worship, sacramental and pastoral ministrations, teaching, and, above all, communicating core religious truth. These actions embody the values and purposes of a religious community—a common faith as a home for common prayer. But community-building in a congregational context demands leadership that steps beyond being a role model of religious living, providing for core religious functions and rituals, and teaching. Community-building demands focused skills in facilitating relationships, mutual understanding, and deep communication that lead to trust, expressed in direct honesty, candor, and freedom. Such community-building work cannot succeed if the ordained minister does not understand or respect the community that already exists—both within and beyond the gathering congregation—and if the ordained minister has not gained competencies needed for real and diverse ministry contexts.

Seabury has made significant changes in a slow but progressive trajectory of nine years focused on strengthening contextual education and competency training. But, lest one read the picture as too rosy to be true, let us be clear that reception of these changes has not been unvaryingly positive, and adoption of the overarching “leadership development” objectives has not been uniformly embraced or comprehended. The challenges to systemic patterns at Seabury have been met with a mixture of enthusiasm, tolerance, opposition, and passive indifference by faculty, board members, administration, and alumni alike.

Growth beyond the limits of old, treasured models of theological education is difficult and can be painful. While faculty from a variety of both academic and applied disciplines have worked on curricular changes—including biblical, historical, and theological scholars—a few faculty have held fast to a model of theological education that eschews the unity of professional, academic, and formational dimensions of education. And, despite overall positive intentions, when developing new curricula and resources, faculty have found themselves often gravitating back to the domains they know best—the academic and the judicatory. For instance, in the first year of offering *The Gospel Mission*, course material on reading cultures and contexts merely introduced students to yet another academic vocabulary, leaving them to fashion tools from information by themselves. Since then, given student feedback and faculty reflection, better resources have been adopted.

The research and curricular revisions by faculty at Seabury point beyond themselves, with implications for the institution's practices of student recruitment, resource development, and board membership and development. Yet these connections have not been consistently pursued, and when pursued, have not been embraced. This situation can leave faculty members frustrated as we attempt to reshape an institutional culture when other constituents of the culture (judicatories, administrative staff, and board members) have not yet "connected the dots." The Seabury Institute's founding faculty made the Institute as autonomous as possible from the rest of the seminary, so that such institutional constraints and habits would not interfere with rapid program development. Unfortunately, this has perpetuated a disconnection between MDiv and DMin programs and curricula that has only recently been challenged. It is possible that the Seabury Institute will, in the future, direct the MDiv Plunge experience, making use of its graduates and their congregations.

Seabury is only at the beginning of a path toward fully integrating the iterative model of theological education outlined above. The faculty has only begun to gather the fruits of disciplined research of congregations and contexts of ministry and to wrestle with the best ways to bring academic content and contextual experience together. As such, we are only starting to gather the tools and skills they themselves need to teach, train, and articulate what may be called a truly competency-oriented theological education.

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Hearing the Congregation's Voice in Evaluating/Revising the MDiv Curriculum: the Church Relations Council

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ABSTRACT: Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary used a Lilly Endowment Capacity Grant to initiate a church relations council, a gathering of clergy that met with the faculty twice a year for two years to talk about their interests in the seminary's ministry degree program curricula, especially regarding the development of spiritual leaders. The authors summarize the agendas and recount critical moments from five council meetings. After evaluating the council's activity, the authors conclude by reflecting on the difficulty and necessity of developing and sustaining meaningful partnership between church and seminary for the sake of educating spiritual leaders for the church.

What is the purpose of seminary education? How is the seminary, particularly a denominational seminary, both a servant and leader of the church? How does a seminary know the effects of its education on the church and the public?

The purpose of The Association of Theological Schools (ATS), through accrediting standards and leadership education, is defined as improving theological schools in order to benefit communities of faith. Moreover, looking beyond those schools, the purpose expands to the ways those communities of faith teach the Gospel, offer new life, and seek structures of faith and justice. Implicit in this purpose is the commitment that seminaries are responsible for enhancing the lives of congregations, the persons who belong to those communities of faith, and the wider communities and cultures those congregations touch. Therefore, many of us have begun to speak of the purpose of seminary education as leadership education—the education of leaders for congregations engaged in the education, care, and nurture of members for mission in the world.

This case study is focused on efforts of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary to address and increase its ability to fulfill that purpose of leadership education by directly connecting to congregational leaders. Yet, the activities described in the case study itself push us beyond to strategic questions about by

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what criteria a curriculum is shaped as well as about the central purpose of seminary education.

The mission of our seminary, approved by the trustees and highlighted in the *Faculty Handbook 2002*, is as follows:

The mission and purpose of the seminary is to share in the church's task of equipping the whole people of God and providing leadership in Christ's ministry of personal and social transformation. The seminary:

- ◆ prepares persons for ordained and lay ministries in and through the church;
- ◆ prepares persons for university and seminary teaching in theological disciplines;
- ◆ provides theological research and reflection for the church.

In pursuing these goals, Garrett-Evangelical seeks to be a faithful and responsible part of the church.

Akin to many other mainline Protestant schools, this purpose statement focuses on the responsibility of the seminary to the church—"a faithful and responsible part of the church." Yet, the definition is functional—prepares persons for "ordained and lay ministries" and "for university and seminary teaching" and "provides theological research and reflection." Through the case study, we have come face to face with a significant question that transcends the "functional" definition of a seminary. To what end? Certainly the "mission and purpose" of the seminary is to "share in" providing leaders for ministries of personal and social transformation. Again, to what end? Do seminaries need to move beyond the "functional definition" of purpose—"to prepare"—to naming the goal to which persons are being prepared? In addition, alongside the question of ends is also the strategic question of how a seminary attunes its educational efforts to those ends.

A few years ago, Garrett-Evangelical took steps to move beyond function to name the purposes of theological education. Its administration, faculty, and board have authored a core purpose statement to guide our work. That is "to know God in Christ and, through preparing spiritual leaders, to help others know God in Christ." Among faculty and administrators, we often shorthand this statement by referring to the core activity of "preparing spiritual leaders." Yet, we are still left with the questions of to what end? To preparing spiritual leaders? What does this mean and for what end? To help others know God in Christ? Therefore to empower the ministry of the people of God? Or personal and social transformation? And how is this defined? These questions have become central to our conversations with congregational leaders.

The question on which we focus your attention is the struggle to clarify the "ecclesiological" task of seminary education. In a world of violence and increas-

ing disparities of wealth and resources, in a world of conflict sometimes fueled by religious differences, and in a church world filled with internal theological and value divisions, what is the mission of the seminary and how does that mission relate to the mission of the church? What difference do its leaders make? What difference does the seminary make as a faithful and responsible part of the church?

Context

Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary is located in Evanston, Illinois, on the campus of Northwestern University. The seminary is the product of two major mergers in its 150-year history (Garrett Biblical Institute and The Chicago Training School in 1934 and Garrett Theological Seminary and Evangelical Theological Seminary in 1974). It is a freestanding seminary of The United Methodist Church. The seminary offers the Master of Divinity degree; four professional MA degrees; and the Master of Theological Studies, the Doctor of Ministry, and the PhD degrees. Throughout our history, we have been a deeply and broadly church-related institution. While we may at times lean more toward the academy or more toward the church, we are always aware that we receive prospective leaders from the churches and that the churches expect well-prepared spiritual leaders in return.

That said, it was also clear to seminary officials in 1998 that the ties between this seminary and its host denomination needed work. The ecology of education for ministry was and is changing, as were the realities of ministry in a mainline denomination. In the tasks of identifying, nurturing, and equipping leaders for the church, the seminary and the rest of the church were doing too much separately. Thus, when Lilly Endowment sent out a call for proposals for the Capacity Grant program, the seminary formulated and sent a proposal.

We stated the major need and premise as:

We at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary believe there is a lack of dynamic spiritual leadership in the church today. Spiritual leaders of the future can be recruited, prepared, and sustained most effectively if their theological education is closely linked to spiritually vital congregations . . .

We proposed to address this need through engaging in the following activities:

1. discover, through disciplined congregational research, qualities that make certain men and women effective as spiritual leaders, both lay and ordained;
2. team strategically with congregations and judicatory leadership in identifying, recruiting, counseling, educating, and ordaining spiritual leaders;

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3. link seminary teaching and faculty more directly to the congregational context in which Christian faith is practiced in worship, proclamation, teaching, evangelism, discipleship, and mission; and
4. incorporate the findings of congregation-based research and education into the seminary classroom and into the curriculum as a whole.

Given the timing of receiving the call for proposals (late spring), the grant proposal was written largely by the administration with a group of participating faculty members. The faculty had several opportunities to contribute to shaping the proposal before it was sent to Lilly; many chose not to contribute their thoughts. (It is also important to note that some of the participating faculty and several administrators were called elsewhere prior to beginning to enact the grant-funded program.) Furthermore, the faculty was about to deliberate regarding a major curriculum revision and moving from quarters to semesters. At the same time, a major faculty transition was underway: faculty members who had been with the seminary for many years, some over thirty, were beginning to retire. Between 1998 and 2004, two-thirds of the present faculty was hired.

Lilly Endowment awarded Garrett-Evangelical \$1.26 million in December 1998. After an extended search for the personnel to work with the grant projects, grant work began in earnest in fall 2000.

A major theme of the grant is connecting with vital congregations for two purposes: for the sake of identifying, recruiting, and educating spiritual leaders for ministry and to conduct research on the meaning of spiritual leadership. In order to identify the clergy leaders of vital congregations, in summer of 2001 we asked bishops from four Methodist denominations (African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Methodist Episcopal, and United Methodist) to name pastors who had a demonstrated track record of contributing to the vitality of the congregations they served. From that list, we called a conference in October 2001. From our experience with that group, we formed a Church Relations Council (CRC). After a pilot meeting with a small group in spring 2002, the CRC met five times in the past two years.

In invitations to potential council members, we (the church relations director wrote the statement in consultation with the president, the dean, and two colleagues who were also working on Lilly-funded programs) offered the following purpose statement:

... to create a forum for on-going conversation regarding the relationship between the ministry degree programs and the churches' needs for spiritual leadership. The seminary believes that our degree program graduates are our primary church relations outcomes and that our ministry degree program curricula are our primary church relations statements. The seminary

hopes that these conversations will contribute to the faculty's understanding of the effects of our ministry of teaching in the churches as well as contribute to the council members' understanding of the seminary's intentions and efforts to relate to the churches through our curricula and our graduates.

Fifteen clergy agreed to serve on the council. Meetings typically included thirteen to fourteen of the group.

The meetings

We hosted five meetings of the council: October 2002, April 2003, October 2003, February 2004 (this meeting included Church Relations Council members plus pastoral leaders of our partner congregations), and April 2004. We will recount the developments through those meetings.

At the close of the pilot meeting in spring 2002, one faculty member said he would like to know why lay people attended church and would welcome a conversation with laity on that matter. Colleagues nodded. In response to that request, for the first meeting, we invited each clergy person to bring a lay member along. We asked the council members to familiarize themselves with the new ministry degree program curriculum we began that fall, which included reading the catalog and several faculty agreements that served as building blocks and guideposts in the curriculum. Council members and laity came well prepared. After a lively conversation with lead administrators in the morning, worship with the community, and hearing about recent research from several faculty members at noon, the council met with the faculty for about forty-five minutes in the afternoon. This meeting is described below as a first critical moment in our learning.

For the second meeting, the church relations director recruited several faculty members who were willing to meet in small groups with a colleague and with several CRC members regarding a particular course. Specifically, syllabi served as centerpieces for conversation regarding the ways in which a course contributes to preparing students as spiritual leaders—again, a central activity according to our core purpose statement. Other council activities that day included lunch with faculty members and conversation regarding both faculty and CRC members' reflections on their own seminary experience as spiritual leaders. After lunch, there was again a plenary session with the faculty that featured a mildly successful attempt to generate a reflection on the day's conversations regarding spiritual leadership.

The third meeting addressed the parallel and intersecting curricula in which students live: expectations of ecclesiastical credentialing processes and of the seminary's curricula. The church relations director solicited United Methodist ministry credentialing committees (District Committees on Ministry and Boards

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of Ordained Ministry) in the upper Midwest and two parallel committees from other denominations in the Chicago area, asking whether each has established criteria to judge fitness or effectiveness for ministry. Seven responses were received. In addition, the church relations director culled through all syllabi of the required courses in the seminary's Master of Divinity degree program. The faculty generated broad curricular goals in forming the then year-old curriculum but had not yet discerned more specific and measurable outcomes. In the morning of the meeting, CRC members met with the seminary's admissions staff and discussed criteria for fitness for ministry. At noon, the Master's Degree Committee and the council met for an extended lunch and an attempt to juxtapose the survey results with the assembled syllabi goals; there was much animated conversation but little of it focused on the juxtaposition! We also attempted a similar conversation in a faculty plenary session. We had learned by then that the faculty plenary was the least productive time of the day and came prepared to break into small conversation groups. In the CRC evaluation time after the plenary, however, members first commented on how difficult it was that day to engage with the faculty members. Several CRC members noted that a few faculty members commented, loudly enough to be heard nearby, that this activity was a waste of their time.

The fourth meeting of the council coincided with an invitational meeting of representatives of our partners' congregations (also developed during the grant) to discuss the purpose of seminary education. The vehicle for the conversation was a possible grant proposal that would extend the effective activities of the first Lilly grant. Seminary administration and faculty had explored the passion that fueled their ministries in the seminary. Faculty members defined this passion as discipleship—working to prepare disciples for Jesus Christ who would bring the transforming and loving presence known in Jesus of Nazareth to the people of God.

The focus of the Church Relations Council and the partner congregations at the February 2004 gathering of the congregational leaders was a spirited discussion about both (1) calling young persons to a ministry that would make a difference and (2) calling the seminary to focus its teaching and ministry missionally—that is, engaging teaching and learning by engaging and partnering with congregations who missionally were making a difference in people's lives and in the lives of communities and the wider public. We discussed with our colleagues the contrast in contemporary mainline denominations among congregations that are declining and congregations that are making a profound difference in their communities. One member suggested that much of education for ministry trains persons to be chaplains for dying congregations, rather than transforming, missional leaders. Substantial agreement between seminary administrators and church leaders at that meeting revealed that, in order to teach faithfully and prepare leaders, the seminary needs to learn from and seek to engage in partner ministries with transforming, missional congregations.

The final meeting included an open discussion with a group of six faculty members who team-taught two sections of a course named “The Practice of Ministry,” which the ministry area faculty designed together as an introductory course in their area. After some negative student evaluations the first year the course was taught, the course was fundamentally redeveloped. Near the end of the redeveloped course, it was clear that, from the student perspective, the course was again not meeting expectations. The council met with these faculty members in the morning, utilizing a conversation format from Parker Palmer’s *The Courage to Teach*.¹ This meeting is the subject of the second critical moment, described below. It is clear that this meeting produced the deepest, most vulnerable, and ostensibly the most mutually helpful interchange of the council sessions. The council spent the afternoon evaluating the two years.

Critical moments

In his book *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer writes that critical moments in the course of a class are times when the opportunity to learn was either opened or closed. In evaluating the CRC, we have identified three critical moments.

1. In the first meeting (October 2002), in plenary, faculty members asked the laity why they attend church. Two of the respondents related their journey from the church of their childhood, through a period of angry alienation from both church and God, and then their steps forward into a congregation. These lay people spoke of their strong need for and commitments to the community of a particular congregation but also of their hesitancy to profess faith in God. At the end of the CRC-faculty plenary, the faculty exited and re-assembled in a faculty meeting. Several faculty members were concerned about the doubting laity being a part of the CRC (note: they were guests that day, rather than members per se). After a time, discussion was suspended until the church relations director, who was meeting with the council, could be present. The brewing controversy resumed in email exchanges and in a subsequent faculty lunch.

This argument manifested faculty fault lines regarding ecclesiology (and the optimal degree to which church boundaries are permeable), the meaning of membership vows (in The United Methodist Church, members profess faith in the triune God, yet here two lay members expressly doubted God’s being), and the purpose of our church relations effort (with whom do we want to connect, and to what end?). For its part, the CRC members, in their post-plenary closing session and evaluation, knew that the lay testimonies would be simmering among the faculty and were very curious to know what would result.

2. In the fifth meeting (April 2004), the six “Practice of Ministry” faculty members met with the council. It took several months to schedule this

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meeting, in part because of hesitancy from half the faculty members to engage church leaders while the faculty members were still finding their footing in teaching this course. At the seminary, talking with one another about our teaching is not a part of our faculty culture—let alone when student evaluations of the course have not been stellar. Shortly before the meeting was to occur, the Ministry faculty recommended that this course be dropped from the curriculum. That decision, we suspect, greatly changed the character of the meeting. The CRC in its evaluation named this meeting the best of the five. Faculty clearly were vulnerable and open to hearing what the CRC members said; of the seven faculty evaluations of the CRC effort for the two years that we received, five were from these teachers.

3. Also related to this last meeting: A leitmotiv in CRC members' evaluations each time we met is, "I am not sure that we are being helpful." In the fifth meeting's evaluation, one member remarked that he does not feel competent to comment on curriculum per se, that he does not want to step on anyone's "turf," and that CRC members don't know where the "landmines" are when they speak with faculty. He went on to suggest that conversations could be built on questions such as "What should we be reading in order to perform ministry well?" noting the disparity between the books on an introduction to the Practice of Ministry syllabus and the books that he thinks "work" in ministry.

The larger context for the seminary-church leader exchanges

The context discussed in our fourth meeting in February of 2004 names the experience of many of us working with mainline denominations. We often find ourselves working in tired circumstances. The ecology of institutions that previously recruited for ministry and supported congregations engaged in profound ministries has almost dissipated. Over the last forty years, the annual conferences of The United Methodist Church in the Great Lakes region have experienced slowly declining memberships with numerous congregations dropping below the size and strength necessary to support a clergy leader with a seminary degree. At the same time, there are efforts at renewal and signs of new life. Congregations and judicatories are themselves reassessing their vocations. Some congregations have become revitalized centers of ministry. The contrast is stark: a number of congregations are growing in vitality as well as membership—some renewing older formerly grand city or town churches, some building new multifaceted ministries with expansive buildings, and others reaching to new populations—while annual conferences have fewer full-time appointments for our graduates and reduced resources for mission. Moreover, these contrasts are placed within denominational theological and value conflicts.

Therefore, we are coming to believe that to identify, invite, challenge, prepare, and support students for vital ministries requires a mutual focus on discipleship

and a partnership, trust, and collegiality among the seminary, its closest judicatories, its faculty, and local congregations. The relationships need to be strengthened between dynamic ecclesial leaders and with reforming congregations for the sake of our shared task of preparing spiritual leaders. This conviction was part of our Capacity Grant proposal to Lilly. Our experiences in the last four years have only strengthened our conviction. *However, how this occurs and how this becomes the focus of an institutional mission when faculty guilds often divide and focus faculty work in individualistic patterns are crucial issues recognized through the conversations and shared commitments exhibited with CRC.* Together, as a community of research, teaching, and faith, we need to assess and focus our efforts to prepare dynamic Christian leaders committed to and capable of inviting others into discipleship and mission (i.e., to quote our core purpose “to help others know God in Jesus Christ”).

The data

Effects of the CRC conversation effort on congregations

The effects we see thus far are on the council members rather than congregations per se. From evaluations, including ten written responses and an oral evaluation at the end of the fifth council meeting, the following comments were offered by more than one member:

- ◆ General appreciation for the seminary administration’s effort to reach out to the church and to invite them to the council.
- ◆ Affirmation of the importance of sustaining and strengthening the church-seminary connection.
- ◆ Perception that the faculty’s reception of the council fell into three groups—a minority who rejected their presence, the majority who were polite and engaged more or less, and a minority who warmly affirmed their presence.
- ◆ Surprise at how guarded some faculty members were, given the academic context of debate and exchanging ideas.
- ◆ Desire for one longer meeting per year to permit more relationship building between individual faculty members and individual council members.
- ◆ Appreciation for the first meeting, which included lay representatives, a desire to include them again, and acknowledgement that their voices and perceptions clearly made some faculty members uncomfortable.
- ◆ An increased positive perception of the seminary by most members, who also have even recruited students on our behalf, and an increased negative perception of the seminary by several (we did get into the faculty’s “kitchen business” several times).
- ◆ Concern that the council was not as helpful as it might have been, that we did not have an adequately defined purpose in addition to conversation and connection, and that we had not really connected the church and the seminary as powerfully as we might—along with commitments from all but one council member to continue serving on the council.

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***Effects of the Council conversation effort
on the faculty and the curriculum***

We prepared and distributed a faculty evaluation (May 1) via faculty mailboxes. After two weeks and only a few returns, we distributed it again in paper and electronic form and asked for their cooperation. To date, we have only received a few more. All but two returns are from faculty who participated in the final meeting regarding the Practice of Ministry course. We can attribute this low rate (less than one-fourth of the faculty) to end-of-the-year stress/timing, but we suspect such attribution would overweigh this cause (more on this below).

For the most part, the faculty who returned surveys appreciated the idea of the council and stated that they are open to its presence and purpose. There were several comments that pointed in the same direction:

- ◆ Keep building relationships;
- ◆ Look for a clearer question, conversation topic, or partnering project.
- ◆ And, the comment of one member, in effect, interprets the resistance we encountered from some faculty members throughout the past four years of church relations efforts. This faculty member commented that the church and seminary should be in conversation because the church and pastoral practice are often wrongheaded, and the seminary has much to teach regarding correct practice. This evaluation raises again the question of "To what end?" that must be addressed more thoroughly than we have to this point.

We can safely and correctly also say the following: the two sessions with faculty during which the faculty were most clearly positively engaged with council members, as judged by observation and immediate oral feedback, were the smaller groups focusing on a specific syllabus or a question within a syllabus. One faculty member in the spiritual leadership session said he was substantially revising his course based on the feedback he received. The session with the Practice of Ministry faculty included many positive exchanges, and the energy was consistently high on "both sides." As relationships between faculty members and CRC members are built and as we work together on common problems, the potential for positive effects will increase.

Emerging questions

We began the council with the assumptions embedded in the grant proposal itself. Perhaps the fundamental assumption is that, while congregations are infected with a market-driven consumerism (which we stated in the proposal), there are also many expressions of congregational vitality, demonstrations of that vitality in ecclesial practices, and spiritual fruits manifested in growth of several kinds, in faithful and effective service, and in effective spiritual leaders. From these vital congregations, the seminary should learn. We also assumed that the church is an essential stakeholder in the ministry degree program curricula and that direct conversation between faculty and other ecclesial stakeholders was a

good way to proceed. We now think that the assumption regarding the church being a stakeholder in the seminary curriculum still holds but that the method should change to focus on constructing and discussing shared, good problems. Robert Kegan refers to a curriculum as a set of good problems.² What is the set of good problems that could constitute the work of the CRC for the next two years? Currently, we are planning to move the CRC members into bridging between alums, their feedback on their education, individual faculty members, and the seminary's administrative leadership.

In addition: we cannot expect all faculty members to support any church relations program. Given the range among faculty on theological matters, to say nothing of personalities, unity is asking too much. Indeed, how does a faculty mutually learn from and teach congregations when faculty members believe they see deep, if not incommensurable, ecclesiological differences with other faculty colleagues and with the great majority of congregations our graduates serve and are likely to serve?

We recall two of the activities for which we sought the Lilly Capacity Grant:

1. link seminary teaching and faculty more directly to the congregational context in which Christian faith is practiced in worship, proclamation, teaching, evangelism, discipleship, and mission; and
2. incorporate the findings of congregation-based research and education into the seminary classroom and into the curriculum as a whole.

Both of these activities assume two-way bridge traffic, mutual exchange. Clearly, we have worked to build some of the relationships necessary for this exchange. We have also discovered the levels of support and resistance that exist within the faculty to moving farther in the same direction—as well as the importance for us of addressing the issue of the ends of seminary education, of dealing *honestly and practically* with our differing ecclesiological convictions.

These conversations would bring us back to the ends of seminary education. How shall we attune our educational efforts to partnership with church leaders? Too often the seminary and the church are suspicious of each other. To what extent do we in the seminary *want* to listen to the congregations and judicatory leaders as real partners in our educational enterprise? The seminary faculty is not in full agreement about how this can take place and even whether it is a good activity. Moreover, the church often wonders about the actual effect of seminary education on leadership of the church.

The partnership of the church relations council has clearly raised the issue of who indeed are our partners in defining the goal of theological education. To whom do we pay attention in determining that end? We find ourselves at a significant, potential turning point, seeking to understand and engage each other in the seminary, and each other between seminary and church leaders, in faithful and learning ways.

Conclusion

The recruitment and preparation of a Christian leader is a mutual effort among the churches, the judicatory boards of ministry, and the seminary. So, too, is education for leadership a mutual task. The seminary faculty, administration, and board may need to rethink how its mission and curriculum are shaped in collaboration with faithful, renewing congregations, its constituency and stakeholders. The seminary may need to be an initiating agent working to rebuild the ecology recruiting for and supporting the education for faithful leaders for the church. In order to fulfill that initiating role, seminaries such as Garrett-Evangelical will also need to give more attention to the interior conversations and changes necessary in order to increase our capacity to engage constructively and fruitfully with our ecclesial partners. The faithfulness and effectiveness of the mission of the church in the world are at stake.

Fueling faculty and student passions for ministry and discipleship and learning the practices of leadership for discipleship and mission need to become the foci of seminary education. How is the seminary to become a partner with congregations and other ecclesial agencies in the renewal of ministries and a partner in discipleship? Indeed the church needs students and ministers who have a pastoral imagination, passion for discipleship, excitement for mission, and skill in enacting practices of renewal, or, again, as our partner congregations say: an aptitude for discerning, pointing to, and joining God's work in the world.

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ENDNOTES

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Reflection Seminars as Loci for Critical Thinking

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ABSTRACT: The following discussion explores critical thinking as foundational for theological education. It advances the thesis that courses comprising practice of ministry have the potential to serve as the means of instilling critical reflection. It attempts also to engage in a meta-analysis serving as a critical analysis of the Reflection Seminars that are core components of ministerial preparation, particularly in practice programs. Inherent to this discussion is the recognized irony that while practice of ministry courses may receive less emphasis or have less value in theological education, they hold the potential for development of active learning groups foundational to teaching skills in critical thinking. Indeed, critical thinking is essential to professional competency and the ability to instill pastoral imagination.¹ The question is whether ministerial practice courses will develop these skills, especially when theology students may demonstrate other learning preferences. A further question is whether and how such Reflection Seminars can enhance sensitivity to congregational practices in faculty and/or the curriculum at large.

Background

As a Methodist-related and university-based theology school, Candler School of Theology of Emory University embarked on an ambitious project to contextualize its Master of Divinity curriculum.² Beginning in 1995 with faculty-led conversations, the entire faculty embraced—with few dissenters—the new project. The design and implementation were delegated to the newly revised Contextual Education (CE) program, which in December of 1998 began this project with partial support from a Lilly Endowment grant under its rubric of the Capacity Building Grants for Congregational Leadership.

The MDiv is the signal degree program among four in the school, enrolling approximately 500 students, with an annual entering class averaging (1998–present) 160 students of diverse backgrounds: 27 percent self-identify as persons of color and 55 percent are women. The faculty number forty tenure track, with additional adjuncts, lecturers, visiting, and part-time instructors. Within the CE program, there are typically thirteen CE I and twelve CE II Reflection Seminars for the academic year that are each co-led by a teaching supervisor and a Candler faculty member. Year one (or CE I) focuses on ministry placements in social or clinical related institutions, whereas year two (or CE II) focuses on ecclesiology

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using five areas of ministry: administration, liturgy, mission-outreach, pastoral care-calling, and teaching.

The primary aim of the CE initiative was to contextualize the MDiv curriculum and thereby to enhance the learning of students regarding their practice-based theological education. Other goals for the two required years of CE included enhancing cohort learning, relating practice to theology, increasing abilities to engage in theological reflection, and engaging practices of religion.

With revision of the former Supervised Ministry (SM) program initiated in 1969 into the current CE program of 1998, several changes were introduced. Faculty—all of whom are required to teach in CE on a rotation basis—received course credit for teaching in CE, a roster was introduced to ensure fair rotation, attendance for students was required and monitored, evaluations of all participants were introduced to retain integrity and implement accountability, and required readings were introduced into the Reflection Seminars, to cite several examples.

Critical issues

From the beginning, a task understood to be a challenge was the development of a syllabus with requisite readings to guide students' learning during the courses of the twenty-seven-week CE academic year. One continuing issue was whether to use a master syllabus that all faculty members were asked to implement or a menu driven syllabus from which faculty selectively implemented, revising it to fit their expertise, placements, and students' interests. As an aside, this tension, of course, is worthy of its own case study because the issue raises the specter of related academic concerns: control, ownership, and investment in the endeavor; academic freedom for course professors; or the conceptualization of the program vis-à-vis the curriculum and the faculty, to cite several. However, the more pressing issue was the manner in which the readings served as a catalyst to engage students in a primary goal of the program: students' abilities to reflect critically and theologically on their ministry placements.

As the faculty and the CE committee engaged in conversations about goals and implementation, we began to see faculty resistance to some aspects of the program, mainly surrounding evaluations, syllabi, and readings in the Seminars. At the same time, we spent significant time finding readings to aid in facilitating the learning goals of the program. The lack of relevant texts for practice of ministry is a lingering challenge and one recognized by the CE program.

A primary struggle was whether via contextual education we were teaching content per se (e.g., Bible, church history) or whether we were mainly engaged in instilling a process in students, one they would take into their professional ministry. The process was construed broadly as critical analysis, also termed theological reflection or biblical exegesis. Or, were we doing both?

As the faculty and supervisors in Teaching Team meetings, and the CE committee in its monthly meetings, continued to gather, reflect, and assess our work, we found ourselves spending more time on discussions of the readings. What readings should we use? Which ones worked best for most students? Were there readings that simply did not engage students and should not be continued? Also, what other readings were being suggested by supervisors, and even students; did they work? Did the readings enhance the learning goals of students or the aims of the CE program? The committee particularly spent a great deal of time on the issue of readings, including assessing whether to develop its own text that could serve as a reader.

Continuing questions

Focus on the readings also and more recently allowed the program to return to questions posed in the early years of the CE development: are we teaching theological reflection, or what is the primary aim of the Reflection Seminar? Is the Seminar more than a small group discussion or support group, and, if so, in what ways? What are the unique learning strategies enhancing ministerial education as it occurs in the Seminars? Can the Seminars enhance students' progress toward engaging the pastoral imagination?³ Or, more pointedly, if we are to "listen to the voice of the church" as this journal issue suggests and engage the church in active conversation, is this not the place where students begin that conversation with the Seminars serving as the locus for this process? This latter question raises the central issue of critical thinking, a form of analysis that is, essentially, a mode for theological reflection.

In his seminal report of 1956, H. Richard Niebuhr noted the importance of practice of ministry within theological curricula.⁴ Critical was the ability of faculty to embrace ministry practice within the curriculum; implied was the ability to critically reflect upon or engage in *praxis* of theology. The ability to demonstrate *praxis* embodied both theory-theology and practice. Critical thinking served as the basis of this educational activity for ministry. This activity was further acknowledged by the Association for Theological Field Education (ATFE) revision from emphasis on reflection to emphasis on *theological* reflection. Concerns about practice in ministry and the challenges of professional education, including those in theology, have lingered since the mid-1960s.

The importance of these theological assertions is substantiated by Jerome Brunner, who identifies three fundamental levels of learning: rote, meaningful-integrative, and critical thinking.⁵ Indeed, listening to the congregation may be identified, in part, by ability to instill in ministerial students agility at listening to their faith communities, and, in turn, learning how to use theology as a knowledge base upon which to reflect and understand congregations as loci of ministry practice.

Reflection Seminars as Loci for Critical Thinking

While all course professors may use examples from practice—the local church in mission, a Sunday morning observation, the effects of a church committee, or concerns emanating from pastoral calls—the most common form of small group activity in seminaries is the Reflection Seminar found in practice of ministry programs. These conversations engaging congregations occur most clearly in these Seminars, also serving to involve faculty in the conversations. What educational strategies do we use to capture the richness of these conversations occurring in Reflection Seminars? Beyond reading material, how do we prepare ministerial students for this important process of critical thinking? Can we borrow from other professionals to develop “active learning groups” that enhance ministerial education and better equip our students for churches of the future? Preparing men and women for churches of tomorrow and instilling in students the pastoral imagination so foundational to this complex and challenging role of minister demands a robust knowledge base and analytical skills.

Let’s pursue this issue a step further. At Emory University the theology school is one of several professional schools, illustrated by business, medicine, or public health. All professions—here sidestepping the argument that the term professional should not apply to ministry—need to educate practitioners who serve competently in their respective jobs or chosen vocations. Professional education involves responsibility for training and judgment.⁶ Business students need to lead organizations well both in terms of profit and integrity; medical students need to competently and safely aid those seeking health care; sanitary water or childhood immunizations are outcomes of quality public health initiatives. Ministers, too, need to competently serve as faithful leaders of their various communities of faith with skill and integrity. They need to enact the pastoral imagination.

Literature on professional education notes that all professionals need an opportunity to practice, especially adult learners.⁷ More importantly, in their educational settings, novices need an opportunity to engage in the forms of thinking that will allow them to experience the breadth and depth of issues or pressing situations they will encounter upon graduation—the challenges in ministry that most pastors encounter. As adult learners, seminarians will appreciate educational strategies and methods designed for adult learners. Common issues for seminarians should not be encountered for the first time in the parish: how to pastor a family with a dying child, the transition from a predominately African American—or any racial/ethnic identity—church to one now residing in a different culture, or how to effectively lead committee meetings on finances. These are the threads that weave the fabric of daily ministry. They are illustrations found in *Treasures in Earthen Vessels*, *Mill Hands and Preachers*, *Dimly Burning Wicks*, or *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*—classic descriptions of ministry excellence written by theologians who engaged in the practice.

To return to the primary point of this minor digression, every professional needs skill in critical thinking in order to perform well in his or her chosen occupation. Critical thinking is the foundation upon which discretionary deci-

sions are made. However, students' critical thinking abilities are grounded in the knowledge base—translate content—of the profession. Ministers are no exception. We know what that knowledge base is. Pastors build upon their knowledge of theology *writ large* to critically examine the situations emerging from their parishioners, communities of faith, and surrounding neighborhoods. This returns us to discussion of critical thinking.

Critical thinking

One point to begin the discussion about critical thinking is to consider that critical thinking is a form of analysis; it is the highest level of thinking skill and one upon which all professionals need to build and in which they need to engage. To practice competently, any professional needs critical thinking skills. Professional education strives to instill in its future practitioners—whether ministers, physicians, social workers, or lawyers—the ability to think critically upon the decisions they must make in their daily work.⁸ This is a fundamental aim of professional education, one not unique to theological education in preparation of ministers for future churches. The importance is highlighted by recognition that decisions and actions seminarians-as-future-pastors make influence the lives of parishioners, their loved ones, and communities. Obviously, however, what is unique about each of these professions is their knowledge base—that upon which the practitioner is expected to reflect. As it is with pastors, they use their knowledge of theology as the instructive basis upon which to engage in praxis. They learn to critically analyze, to reflect upon their faith communities, and to otherwise engage in an active reflective process. By doing so, students also engage the congregation—they listen to the congregation. However, students need to learn not only to “listen to the congregation,” but to listen, interpret what “they hear,” and then make a decision that will typically influence the faith community or its members. They need to decide and act. Listening to the congregation, however, is only the first of several steps.

But, where does that process begin? If we as faculty members expect students to learn this educational process of critical thinking once out in practice, we have missed a central responsibility of theological education. To serve competently, seminarians need to learn how to analyze the many functions of ministers serving unique roles in our society. Seminarians need to learn how to assess the various pastoral situations they encounter in their daily ministry to congregations—the many ways in which they engage in assessing their ministry.

Complex decisions require critical thinking abilities. Is it accurate that in many, if not most, seminaries the emphasis is on lecture-style courses rather than on the opportunities illustrated by practice of ministry. Perhaps the focus on engaging in conversation with the congregation is itself a way to rebalance ministry praxis with theology. As H. Richard Niebuhr recognized years ago, both theology and praxis are essential for competent ministry.

Reflection Seminars as Loci for Critical Thinking

So, too, critical thinking involves the development of skills that provide a student-seminarian with competency in ascertaining and taking in information—attending to the congregation or the congregant is one of those skills. Developing sensitivity and appreciation for listening is tantamount to competent ministry. Learning when to listen and when to ask or to follow-up are parallel skills that pastors of excellence demonstrate. Listening to the congregation is only one of several such skills important to ministry competency.

Learning styles

Let's turn now to learning styles. Rote learning is less applicable to professional students and the desired level of analytical skills pastors of excellence need to practice competently.⁹ Therefore, we contain the discussion of seminarians' learning to the two higher forms of learning: meaningful and critical. What is meaningful-integrated learning? For students to engage the level of meaningful-integrated learning, the student needs to take knowledge and, for example, compare and contrast the information or apply it to a known situation. Merely repeating information comes under the rubric of "rote" learning, illustrated by memorizing multiplication tables or important biblical events or dates; memorizing important theological terms is yet another. Rather, meaningful-integrated learning can be illustrated by comparing and contrasting two different approaches. A compare and contrast assignment to enhance meaningful-integrated learning might ask students to take two ethical theories and compare and contrast them, for instance.

In contrast to meaningful-integrated learning, critical thinking requires a student to take information learned in class, analyze it, and apply it to a new, yet-to-be-encountered situation. It would require that a student modify knowledge gleaned from a previous situation and assess it in light of a new one. Critical thinking asks students to take their prior learning into new, "uncharted waters" as it were, using content or theory learned previously. Critical thinking also involves the hermeneutical process of obtaining meaning out of the text, Scripture.¹⁰ With critical thinking skills, a theology student also might be asked to modify and demonstrate a new intervention, plan, or method. At the third level of thinking skills, the critical thinking level, instructors might take the comparison-contrast of the meaningful-integrated level to a next step, applying the preferred theology to a local congregation in which students are currently placed. Then students could be asked to critique how it might work, with pro and con aspects included. The latter form of critical thinking serves as a classic example of the type of analyses pastors will need in their local congregations. Likewise, ministers need to obtain meaning out of the activities in their local churches, activities that can be put into practice as they engage in the daily functions of their pastoring roles, capturing the pastoral imagination.¹¹

Strategies for analytical thinking-learning

Once a small group context or learning group is arranged as is typical of most practice programs and accurately describes the CE program, the next consideration is the pedagogical strategy to enhance and support critical thinking. How does an instructor design learning that will instill critical thinking? There are several strategies that enhance students' abilities to think in analytical modes. Two methods suggested by Brightman are Nominal Group Technique (NGT) and Thinking Aloud Peer Problem-Solving (TAPPS).¹² Neither of these educational modes is useful for rote learning but rather instills in and engages students in meaningful-integrated and critical thinking learning, respectively.

Another way in which students in active learning groups may demonstrate competency is by identifying the most critical ideas in a presentation and preparing a defense of their selection. Students, for instance, might address a doctrine or a plan to implement change in a local church. The seminarians, however, need to know the theology-theory behind the latter plan, for instance, understand the distinctions and differences, and then be able to assess how best to implement strategies to support and enhance their critical analyses in faith communities as future pastors. Seminarians may also be required to analyze cases, verbatims, critical incidents, or other forms of narrative from the congregation; strategies may be planned so students exhibit critical thinking in their Seminars.

At the end of their program of study, seminarians are expected to have synthesized their entire MDiv curriculum; synthesis is also a form of critical learning. Implied in a graduate is a competent seminarian who sees the relationships and connections between and among the various content areas: Bible, history, pastoral care, or ethics, to cite a few. In order to competently practice as a pastor, students need to understand and synthesize knowledge. They need to do so within an ethical environment, as well.¹³ If the analysis of a course may be construed as a micro level of critical thinking learning, then the appraisalment of the curriculum as the course of study is a macro level of analysis and synthesis. Where do they learn to do so? Students learn best about critical thinking in small groups providing opportunities for active learning education, education that is inherently available in practice of ministry programs.

Listening to the congregation: implications for faculty and curriculum

A lingering question is how and in what way the objectives of the CE program affected the faculty and/or the curriculum at large. What, if anything, did listening to the congregation contribute to the CE program? In what way is listening to the faith community illustrated? Given the objectives of the project, were there alterations influencing the faculty? Indeed, listening to the congregation has been evidenced in several areas.

Reflection Seminars as Loci for Critical Thinking

First, faculty who engage in practical courses where students are placed in ecclesial sites—churches and nonchurch ministry settings—are benefiting from engagement with and conversation about the local church. They are, indeed, listening to the congregation through the various reports, critical incidents, and verbatims of their students. In order to analyze the work of seminarians in their practical courses, the faculty members listen to and engage the congregation.

Second, students, too, as described above, engage in and demonstrate listening to the congregation by developing reports, critical incidents, verbatims, or other forms of reporting activity that emanate from their placements and work with local faith communities, the local congregation. Students illustrate their abilities to listen to the congregation through the rich and complex reports they provide faculty members, their peers, and supervisors in their practice of ministry work.

Third, faculty members also engage directly with the congregation. As an extension of their teaching in Contextual Education, several faculty groups made site visits to local congregations in order to more fully engage with and listen directly to the experiences of the members of the faith community, to witness firsthand the excellent work of the local pastor, and also to observe their students in ministerial practice. Such direct engagement also provides faculty in nonpractice teaching appointments an opportunity to learn firsthand how the local church is evolving, the social and demographic changes influencing the church, and the manner in which these changes affect members of the faith community. Listening directly to the congregation is an excellent learning opportunity for both students and faculty members.

Fourth, direct contact and engagement noted above provide faculty firsthand exposure to work with their prior graduates and other pastors in their pastoral excellence. As the on-site pastors supervise and work with seminarians, they, too, provide a rich conversation with faculty who represent the academy. Such direct engagement forms a rich conversation between the church and the academy illustrating abilities to engage the congregation.

In addition to components of the project that have been described above, a fifth component is worthy of attention. Candler faculty members teaching full time—in regular, noncontextual courses—were given an opportunity to apply for a faculty grant funded by the Lilly grant for the CE program. Without going into excessive detail on each course grant, suffice it to say that the grants became a signal manner for reaching “into the total curriculum,” and in ways creative and lasting. The award criterion allowed individual faculty members to contextualize their individual course(s) and thereby served as a means of incrementally contextualizing the MDiv curriculum.

In brief, of eight grants for courses, faculty members approached the challenge to contextualize their regular courses with innovation. They either added dimensions to their ongoing course, thereby revising their current course so *praxis* was introduced into their course, or the faculty member developed a new course

in his or her area of expertise but extended it to include the required contextual dimension. Each of these courses demonstrated an approach or pedagogy allowing students to engage the placement—the context—or to introduce the context from other courses such as their CE courses; it otherwise introduced praxis into this ongoing, previously nonCE course.

Through a variety of teaching methods and pedagogical approaches, instructors began the challenge of introducing students to contextual conversations. These teaching strategies and methods furthered the overall aims of the CE program in ways unanticipated and were among the most creative dimensions of the project. Furthermore, it advanced the contextualization of the entire curriculum, albeit incrementally in a course-by-course method. For faculty teaching in CE and in nonCE but contextualized courses, the interplay between these was unique and creative.

Faculty members, too, were thereby more engaged in the contextualization of the curriculum. In addition to the required CE teaching rotation, faculty members who embraced this goal were also engaged with local congregations. Teaching a course in his or her own area of expertise, but contextualizing it anew, allowed each faculty member to become increasingly sensitive to the voices of varied congregations. Faculty grants that extended contextualization by individual courses thereby also enhanced the ability of faculty members to engage with and listen to local congregations. While these faculty members were surely sensitive to the needs, challenges, and changes embedded in local congregations based on a long-standing history of contextual teaching, addressing the challenge to bring that conversation directly into the classroom only added to the importance and power of the contextual congregational voice.

In what other ways do faculty members and students representing the seminary or academy listen to the congregation? Voices of the congregation and members of faith communities may be heard as they comment on students' abilities to preach, contact them for pastoral calls, and engage them in committees of the local church. Evaluations, direct and formal, and indirect and more informal, also comprise avenues of congregational contact. All of these provide formative and summative information by which the congregation is listened to by faculty members. Indeed, no seminarian may proceed successfully into a third year unless the local church and its pastor affirm the successes of the seminarian in CE. The importance of the local church and its congregation is constantly affirmed and supported in the contextual engagement of the program. Listening to the congregation requires skills of the seminarian as he or she begins the journey to pastoral success. The road to engagement with pastoral imagination also involves learning to listen to the faith community.¹⁴ Learning to discern conflict, pain, and despair, or commitment and passion for the church are part of the learning of the seminarian. These experiences, too, form a part of the congregational sensitivity that students must learn.

Summary

The discussion above explores critical thinking as a foundation for theological education and the practice of ministry—CE courses as the means of instilling critical learning. The process of critical thinking involves sensitive listening to a local congregation. The exploration here also attempts to engage in a meta-analysis, itself a critical analysis of the Reflection Seminar as a source of ministerial preparation, regarding the fundamental skill of critical thinking about the knowledge base and practice serving theological education. The lingering and central question is whether curricular contextualization and synthesis occur without the parallel contextualization of practice of ministry via critical thinking regarding the knowledge base of theology as it occurs among seminarians in CE. Critical learning is a fundamental task of the CE Reflection Seminar thereby serving as a core component for practice of ministry programs.

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Learning Congregational Leadership in Context: A Case Study in Contextualizing Theological Education

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ABSTRACT: "Learning Congregational Leadership in Context," a project funded by Lilly Endowment, Inc. became the catalyst for assisting Luther Seminary to move congregations more fully into the center of its academic program. Several strategies were developed as part of this emphasis on contextualization that continue to provide the impetus for exploring how seminaries and congregations can best prepare students for effective leadership in congregations of the church, and several challenges had to be overcome. Evidence also suggests several ways in which the effort has influenced faculty teaching, the classroom experience, and the MDiv curriculum more broadly.

For the last five years, Luther Seminary, a school of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) located in St. Paul, Minnesota, has been engaged in curricular work related to the role that involvement in contexts outside of the classroom can have in the education of students preparing for positions of leadership in the church. To some extent, the effort can be characterized as an attempt to contextualize the academic program of the seminary more fully by deepening the involvement of students, especially MDiv students, in learning opportunities made available through participation in congregations and worshipping communities. Significant support for the effort was provided by Lilly Endowment that funded a proposal with the title: "Learning Congregational Leadership in Context." Even as the grant comes to an end, the work continues.

Although a seminary of the ELCA, Luther has a significant number of students from sister denominations. In the 2003–04 academic year, Luther had an enrollment of 758 students distributed among several degree programs: MDiv (48 percent), PhD, MTh, and DMin (23 percent) and MA (24 percent) with 4 percent not yet enrolled in any degree program. Included in the student body were forty-nine international students and 132 students from forty denominations in addition to the ELCA.

A surprising number of students are either commuter students, some from several hundred miles away, or students who make extensive use of online courses, or both. The faculty is also relatively large with approximately forty-five regularly called professors supplemented by a number of senior lecturers, adjunct, and contextual faculty members.

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Luther Seminary is geographically situated in one of the centers of Lutheranism in North America. For much of its history, it has served the predominantly ethnic communities of northern European immigrants that settled in the upper Midwest, with Norwegian Americans the dominant constituency.

That picture has changed and is changing, although aspects of that history remain quite strong. But as the student statistics indicate, the myth of homogeneity no longer applies although racial diversity remains minimal. The make-up of the faculty has also been characterized by a similar transition to greater diversity.

Nevertheless, the history of Luther Seminary can fairly be described as a seminary of the church that has emphasized the classical disciplines. Its biblical, historical, and systematic theologians have been strong teachers, theologians, and personalities. Increasingly, similar comments can be made of its pastoral theologians.

In 1998, Craig Van Gelder, a theologian of the Reformed tradition with a PhD in theology and a second PhD in urban studies, was called to the faculty as a professor of congregational mission. Even before he taught his first course, he was asked to take primary responsibility in creating the proposal "Learning Congregational Leadership in Context." At the same time that Van Gelder was called, the author of this article was completing a sabbatical study project focusing on twelve congregations that had been long-time participants in the Luther Seminary full-year internship program. In addition, four international congregations in Europe that were hosting interns were also included in the study. Each of these sixteen congregations was visited over a three- to four-day period, and meetings were held with the pastor(s) and selected lay leaders. Among the learnings from that study, one that fed directly into the grant proposal was the recognition that these pastors and congregations, in being committed to the teaching of the students with whom they worked, had more to teach than what any particular student was able to learn. In other words, these pastors and congregations were committed not simply to the students but also to their vocation as educators for the church and were interested in contributing to the preparation of future pastors for the church to a greater degree than was currently being asked of them.

"Learning Congregational Leadership in Context" was, to some extent therefore, an attempt to build off those learnings and reshape the relationship of congregations and Luther Seminary in the education of the future ordained leaders of the church. Although not explicitly stated, and perhaps only partially understood, the shift envisioned was to see the church, specifically the congregational context, as strategically located to serve as a primary setting in which a candidate could be formed and prepared for congregational leadership. The role of the seminary, though important, could thus be understood as supportive to the learning that would take place in the actual contexts of ministry. Congregations then were poised to become the teaching subjects as well as the objects of study. The grant identified six goals or components:

1. Developing Capacity for Learning Leadership in Context within Alternative Congregational Learning Environments.
2. (Encouraging) Faculty, Pastors, and Congregations (in their roles) as Educators.
3. (Producing) Educational Products and Services.
4. (Equipping and acknowledging) Students as Partners in Theological Education.
5. Developing and Strengthening Networks to Support Theological Education.
6. (Creating) Publications Related to Theological Education.

The primary programmatic dimensions of the initiative were related to the first component, that of developing a capacity for learning congregational leadership in context within alternative congregational learning environments. Two basic approaches were envisioned. In the first, the seminary would partner with congregations in the metropolitan area. In the second, congregations at some distance from the seminary campus would become the primary residence for theological education rather than the seminary. These two approaches became known initially as the Twin Cities Strategy (finally to be called Contextual Leadership) and the Distant Sites Strategy (with some suggestion that it would be better identified as a Distributive Learning Strategy). The discussion in this article concentrates on describing those two approaches, including how they have influenced faculty teaching, the classroom experience, and the MDiv curriculum more broadly.

The contextual leadership program

The Contextual Leadership program has evolved over the last four years into a program in which all MDiv students and any MA student that chooses to participate are placed in local congregations for four semesters. At the heart of the program has become a monthly cluster meeting (i.e., four each semester) bringing together pastors and one to three students from each of four to eight congregations with a Luther Seminary faculty member for discussion around a common curriculum. The curriculum has been developed by students, pastors, and faculty in the program and modified annually. Undergirding the curriculum is a modest participation on the part of students in the congregation in which they are placed. Congregational participation is structured by a learning contract developed between each student and pastor-supervisor.

Implemented in a staged process, the first full sequence was completed at the end of the 2003–04 academic year, later than anticipated because of the unexpected death of the first program coordinator. Once in place, however, Contextual Leadership received positive marks from those involved and is now understood as the cornerstone on which the other dimensions of learning congregational leadership in context will be built. In addition to face-to-face clusters in the Twin Cities area, virtual clusters (email/Blackboard) have been developed to enable the participation of students, pastors, and congregations in places located at some distance from one another.

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The positive assessment of Contextual Leadership has been due to careful planning, strong administrative oversight, clear articulation of goals and objectives, development of realistic criteria for participation, cooperation of faculty, pastors, and congregations, and a meaningful curriculum that has engaged the support of participants, especially that of students and pastors.

Contextual Leadership has been a successful vehicle for edging congregations to the center of a process of theological education especially by (1) increasing the involvement of students and faculty in congregations while increasing the involvement of congregations in the theological education process and (2) expanding the approaches used to deliver theological education. A more detailed and nuanced description of the project reads as follows.

Program description

The Contextual Leadership program was originally developed under the leadership of the late Rev. Warren Sorterberg. Pastor Sorterberg, who worked on the grant project from late 1999 until his untimely death in early 2000, began the process of moving the vision of the program from concept to reality. After his death, the Contextual Leadership program saw a number of individuals work together to gather data and ideas for further refinement of what would become Contextual Leadership. However, implementation of a pilot program was looming and centralized leadership was needed. In 2001 the Rev. Troy Stack-Nelson was asked to lead the program. The initial task was to take what had been set up as a pilot and bring it forward to a fully implemented part of the contextual education offerings at Luther Seminary.

Prior to the arrival of Pastor Stack-Nelson, Victor Klimoski of St. John's University oversaw a process of developing an initial curriculum for the first semester of the 2001–02 academic year. Eighteen first-year MDiv students and eighteen supervising pastors were recruited and assigned to one of three clusters, each of which would meet once a month to discuss the curriculum. Each cluster had a lead pastor who acted as facilitator and a Luther faculty member who served as an informed listener, participant, and resource person for the conversation.

In the past at Luther, MDiv students had the freedom to locate a congregation in the greater Twin Cities area and inform the Contextual Education office of their choice. It was then up to the student to develop his or her own program of learning at the congregational site. The results of this approach were mixed.

This new approach—Contextual Leadership—was designed to reduce the “Lone Ranger” approach by bringing together students, supervising pastors, and a faculty person once a month for ninety minutes to have a structured, contextually and theologically based conversation.

In addition, covenant documents were developed outlining expectations of each participant type (student, pastor, faculty member). A cluster covenant and a congregational covenant were also developed. In this way, all parties had a clear sense of what was, and was not, expected of them.

The first cluster met the day after September 11, 2001. The assigned curriculum for that day was quickly dropped as students and pastors talked together about what it meant to be the leader of a faith community after such a shocking and tragic event. In a way, this initial cluster gathering set the tone for the rest of the pilot year. Conversations, while guided by the curriculum, would have a strong “real world” feel to them.

The pilot year of 2001–02 went very well as the three clusters each developed their own “feel” and tone. As with any small group endeavor, it took some time for trust to develop and personalities to mesh. However, by the end of the year at a picnic held to celebrate and give thanks for the first year of the project, each group rather naturally found itself sitting together to share a meal.

Curriculum topics during the pilot year included:

- ◆ what is a congregation?
- ◆ significance of context,
- ◆ theological character of context,
- ◆ context as source of learning,
- ◆ shepherding vs. leading,
- ◆ roles of a pastor,
- ◆ boundaries and balance, and
- ◆ spiritual renewal/discipline.

The summer of 2002 saw an expansion of the program from three to ten clusters for the upcoming fall. Recruitment of congregations and pastors and curriculum development for the second year of the project took up most of the summer. This second year (2002–03) was called the “full pilot” year, as the process was still being piloted but now with a full class of incoming MDiv students.

The increase in the number of clusters was necessitated by an increase in the number of students from eighteen to approximately eighty. The number of congregations and pastors went from eighteen to fifty-three. The number of faculty involved went from three to ten.

Curriculum for the second year focused on these topics:

- ◆ cluster introductions and reflections on 9/11;
- ◆ discipleship vs. membership;
- ◆ congregational identity in light of diverse theologies and cultural movements;
- ◆ pastoral identity;
- ◆ trinity as God’s story;
- ◆ public moral discourse and pastoral leadership;
- ◆ faith, risk, and mission; and
- ◆ pastoral identity II/farewell.

Evaluations indicate that the second year’s conversations were both intellectually stimulating and “real world” oriented.

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The second year also saw the addition of two “e-clusters” for online, distance students. Utilizing the same curriculum, these students and their “home” pastors, along with several faculty, met online once a month via Blackboard, Luther’s online teaching tool. Conversations were not done in real time via live chat but rather through “threaded conversations” of emails exchanged over a period of ten days each month.

A total of eight students and their supervising pastors utilized this electronic version of Contextual Leadership in 2002–03. Like its counterpart in the Twin Cities, e-clusters were well-received and well-utilized by the participants. Distance students had more in common than might be anticipated, and the level of conversation was nearly on a par with the face-to-face clusters. Technological barriers were minimal and most participants were quite enthusiastic in their appreciation for this connection to the seminary.

Finally, 2002–03 saw the addition of a small cluster of students and pastors located at Shalom Hill Farm (SHF), a retreat center in far southwestern Minnesota. These distance students were scattered around an area of about a 150-mile radius. They gathered every other month, again using the same curriculum used by the Twin Cities clusters. Here too, a faculty member (Alvin Luedke) volunteered to participate in the conversations. As with the e-clusters, the SHF cluster participants truly appreciated the opportunity to connect with the seminary in a nonclassroom setting.

Input solicited throughout the year, as well as through an online survey done toward the end of the year, indicated a growing satisfaction with this still new approach to preinternship contextual education. Based on this feedback, it was decided to move to “full implementation” for the following academic year.

In the third year of the program, 2003–04, the curriculum focused on expectations of the minister as leader and discussion centered on the following topics:

- ◆ expectations and aspirations of the minister as leader;
- ◆ what do members of your congregation expect of its ministers as leaders?
- ◆ what are the expectations of a minister in the denomination or tradition in which you serve?
- ◆ how does leadership get expressed in the worship/spiritual life of the congregation?
- ◆ how and to what extent does the congregation look to the minister as a “model of the Godly life”?
- ◆ how and to what extent does this congregation appear to seek both nurture and challenge from its ministers?
- ◆ what are the principal ways a minister stays healthy mentally, spiritually, relationally, and physically?
- ◆ ultimate expectations—authority for ministry: various views on source and expression.

Resources for the curriculum each of the first three years varied from scripture texts and collections of quotations, to case studies written by participating pastors, to scholarly articles from sources such as *Leadership Journal* and *Theology*

Today. Each month's curriculum was centered around a series of thought-provoking questions, designed to stimulate conversation.

Clusters were large enough that breaking down into smaller groups was necessary to further facilitate sharing and give all participants a chance to be involved. By spending time in both large and small groups, students had multiple ways of engaging the conversation, and both introverts and extroverts were well served; so too for supervising pastors and faculty members.

This third year of the program was also marked by an expansion in numbers. Some 140 students, eighty congregations, and eleven faculty members participated. It is likely that these members represent an approximate "high water" mark, as we are now at full implementation. The main variable for these numbers in the future will be the number of incoming students each fall.

The 2003–04 academic year also saw the ongoing meeting of e-clusters and the Shalom Hill Farm cluster. Once again these forms of Contextual Leadership performed well and were vital parts of the program.

Challenges

While the overall success of this program has been significant enough to ensure its continued use in the 2004–05 school year and beyond, there were nonetheless several challenges that presented themselves over the course of the first three years.

The logistics of coordinating ten clusters of between four to nine congregations plus the e-clusters and SHF cluster were at times a bit daunting. Technology, specifically email and the program's website, aided the process immensely. Still, it is quite time intensive to keep track of so many students, their sites, and the various clusters. The demands of working with a wide variety of personality and supervision types calls for a program manager with patience and flexibility.

Another ongoing challenge was curriculum. A strong committee of students, pastors, and faculty was created to develop the program's curriculum. However, the usual "practical" versus "academic" debate was ever present as participants moved through the curriculum each year. Maintaining a balance between scholarly readings (for example) and "in the trenches" case studies was often like walking a curricular tightrope! Also, addressing various learning styles was an ongoing concern for the curriculum development committee.

Faculty involvement has been a bit of a challenge, primarily because of what many faculty view as already busy teaching schedules. However, the faculty that have been involved have by and large expressed appreciation for the model and its ability to connect faculty with pastors and students in a way different from either teaching an adult forum in a congregational setting or presenting a lecture in the classroom at Luther. Several of the current Contextual Leadership faculty have been in the program two years or longer. Recruitment of faculty has been relatively easy, which speaks well of Luther's professors' willingness to engage the theological education process outside of the classroom. Faculty members, like supervising pastors, are modestly compensated monetarily for their participation in the program.

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There were many ways in which this model of pre-internship contextual education was superior to the previous model. For students, this model gives them an opportunity to interact with multiple pastors on a monthly basis. They hear different voices talking about a particular topic—different theologies, approaches, experiences, etc.

For pastors, this is a different kind of meeting. It is not a text study, it's not a judicatory meeting, and it's not a support group. It's a chance for pastors (and, occasionally, a lay professional who is supervising a student) to interact with one another and students and faculty on topics that impact parish ministry and what it means to be the called leader of a faith community.

For faculty, this model has allowed them to interact with students and pastors in a nonclassroom setting and share their knowledge and expertise, both academic as well as parish-based, in a different manner. While the learning curve for this new approach was somewhat steep the first year or so, faculty have adapted well to this different teaching environment and have made solid contributions to monthly conversations throughout the breadth of the program.

From the administrative side, how and where students are assigned has been clarified and tightened up. This has allowed deeper and more meaningful relationships with both the supervising pastors and their congregations.

Programmatically, the procedures for placing students have been made easier and more student friendly. An online site application form is used that gives the students input on their placement, with the Contextual Leadership Initiative office making the final decision for the placement, based on both student and pastor input. Expectations of all participant types is made clear through written documents called covenants, as well as through ongoing, regular email and voicemail communication.

In summary, Luther Seminary has made a significant commitment to changing how it does preinternship Master of Divinity contextual education. That commitment was initiated by the potential of, and later receipt of, a Lilly Endowment grant. As time has gone by, this vision turned into a pilot project, which turned into a fully implemented program. The buy-in by the various participant types has been substantial, and the future of this, no longer, "new approach" is bright.

Luther Seminary's Contextual Leadership Initiative office is committed to offering MDiv students the finest possible field-based learning experience possible. Fortunately, this institution is blessed with outstanding congregational partners, eager students, and caring faculty. Together, they make a powerful combination for preparing future leaders of God's church.

The primary benefit of this new program has been to solidify relationships between Luther Seminary, congregations, pastors, students, and faculty. Partnership in learning is more than just a catch phrase; it is how contextually based theological education is done.

Broader influences

The building success of the Contextual Leadership initiative notwithstanding, important questions remain especially with respect to the internal work of the seminary itself and the extent to which the contextualization effort has influenced faculty teaching, the classroom experience, and the MDiv curriculum as a whole.

In a summative evaluation prepared by an outside observer at the end of the five-year grant period, some of the impact that the emphasis had on the faculty and the curriculum was identified with the comment that “nearly half of the faculty have begun or continue to include assignments related to congregations in their course expectations, and several faculty members draw on pastors to contribute to courses they are teaching.”

On the other hand, the effort to give congregational activity a more central place in the curriculum and more prominence in faculty teaching remains a work in progress. Again in the words of the outside observer, “The readiness of faculty as a body to engage in rethinking a context-based approach to ministry education” may have been overestimated. Conversely, “the level of busyness within the faculty already demanding their time and attention” thus limiting their ability to make space for such rethinking may have been underestimated. Still, the fact that a significant number of faculty are more intentional about making sure that the congregational context is a dimension of their teaching is clear.

Two particular courses, both team-taught, illustrate the connection most clearly. The first is a core course designed to be taken by all students in their first year of seminary titled “Reading the Audiences.” The second is a course, “Exercises in Biblical Theology,” designed for the last year of the curriculum following the extensive involvement in the life of a congregation that most students have had in a full-year internship experience. In both courses, congregational ministry figures prominently as course content and in the imagination and orientation of the faculty teams that are cross-disciplinary in nature. In between these two courses, there are any number of other courses in which faculty, to a greater or lesser degree, have tended to congregational context. Minimally, Residential Faculty educated in the context of the academy are thinking about some of the basic assumptions with which they approach their work.

Bringing together the world of congregation and classroom in an integrated curriculum was the bold hope of the project. Steps have been taken in that direction, but much remains to be done including the need to make the case for some audiences that the goal itself is a worthy one to pursue. To some extent, the impact of the project is most evident in the fact that the question of contextualization made front and center by the project is constantly before the faculty in ways that enliven the work of the classroom and the interaction that occurs at all levels of seminary life.

Now in the project’s fourth year, the significant change that has been made is to the curriculum and that in two respects. The contextual character of the

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learning has been more strongly emphasized by giving each individual cluster more freedom to explore the themes of the curriculum with particular reference to the circumstances of the congregations of each cluster. Second, the curriculum is taking advantage of work being done in the seminary's Leadership Division and concentrating on exploring the arts of ministry over a two-year program. Such modifications are likely to be necessary annually if the program is truly to be engaged in helping students learn congregational leadership in context.

The distant sites strategy

As the Contextual Leadership program was being developed for students on the seminary campus, a second initiative was being explored to respond to the needs of students for whom becoming part of a resident community on a seminary campus presents significant difficulties. This initiative intended to take seriously the student context as well as the church context by bringing theological education opportunities to settings at some remove from the campus itself. Identified as a "Distant Sites Strategy," the hope was that students could remain in their context and through a variety of formats at least begin the formal program of theological education through which this call to serve as ordained leaders in the church could be fulfilled.

The Distant Sites Strategy was predicated on the fact that there appear to be a significant number of persons who have received a call to ordained ministry but whose personal circumstances seem to preclude the likelihood of moving to any seminary for four years of theological education. Often these persons are second-career students with family, employment, and financial considerations that are complex and intractable. For such students, unless theological education comes to them, it may not happen for them.

At the same time, congregations that have been instrumental in helping to awaken, nurture, and sustain a call to ordained ministry for such students may also be uniquely suited to provide the context in which what has been awakened and nurtured can be brought to fruition. It was on the basis of such thinking that the Distant Sites Strategy was born.

Initially such activities were envisioned for six different contexts, but what looked good on paper became problematic in reality. Even scaling back to include only three sites proved daunting. Experience in this area became a clear reminder that often one's vision exceeds one's grasp.

The three sites that were finally chosen represented three different contexts and were approached in different ways. The first setting was a retreat center in southwestern Minnesota that served as the hub around which a program developed. Courses were taught at Shalom Hill Farm, often in concentrated formats, by Luther Seminary faculty members or approved adjunct faculty. Students were encouraged to take advantage of online offerings. An interactive video course with a group of students and a faculty member was piloted both at

SHF and at Luther Seminary. A Contextual Leadership cluster with students and pastors from the surrounding area met regularly at the retreat center. Between fifteen and twenty students have been able to make gradual but steady progress toward the MDiv degree in this context.

A second context was explored with the support and encouragement of the judicatory personnel of an ELCA synod in the southwestern United States. Here the vision included possible cooperation with an extension program of another seminary, developing the local resources available in local congregations and pastors in a more full-bodied way, and greater use of on-site offerings. Despite goodwill and good intentions, progress in actualizing the vision has been limited and the program components slow to develop.

The third context was initially to be developed in the Pacific Northwest with a particular congregation serving as the contact point around which to gather a number of supporting congregations. Here also, students would be able to combine on-site experiences and online courses to put their programs together with their local congregations providing both support and opportunity for their learning.

In tending to the issues involved in developing this distant site, the presence of a theological house of studies serving an ecumenical population led to the conclusion that affiliation with the house of studies would likely provide a stronger base on which to build. That relationship is currently in the infancy phase but shows promise of responding to the contextual realities of both students and congregations in appropriate ways.

In addition to these three designated sites, occasional probes at a Distant Sites Strategy have been made in several other places as well, most noticeably in North Dakota and less so in South Dakota. The reality, however, is that putting this vision into practice in any of these settings has been complicated by a host of factors; has taken more time, energy, and patience than anticipated; and concrete results have been elusive. Although the initial vision was too broad and the resources not sufficiently focused, what has proven more disconcerting is the complexity of the effort given the multiple players, expectations, and interests in play. Political realities and competing constituencies are involved. Trust is not always easily built or maintained. Nevertheless, the frustration has not given way to either resignation or cynicism. Rather, the desire remains and the interest is such that the commitment will continue building on the foundation that the grant has made possible. This effort will continue if more slowly but certainly with more wisdom and realism than that with which it began. The conviction about the importance of such an initiative remains.

Finally, as is not unusual with such projects, the most significant result of the effort to develop a Distant Site Strategy is likely to be one that was not envisioned and could not have been anticipated. A cluster relationship with our sister seminary in Berkeley, California,—Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (PLTS)—encouraged by the ELCA some years ago has taken on programmatic

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integration with the development of the Contextual Leadership Initiative (CLI). All of the work in Contextual Education of both schools is being combined into one program and the challenge is breathtaking: to lead the ELCA in developing theological education for church leadership for the West—from Minnesota to the Pacific Ocean, from Alaska to California, Arizona, New Mexico, and all places in between. It is a challenge ready to be engaged with the work already done serving to provide the foundation for what lies ahead. Central to that challenge is that which was at the heart of the five-year Lilly project, specifically, to continue developing the vision, commitment, methods, and programs through which the congregations for which leadership is needed can increasingly become the context in which that leadership is developed.

Randy A. Nelson, director of the Contextual Leadership Initiative and the project “Learning Congregational Leadership in Context” at Luther Seminary, is the primary author of this article. The Rev. Troy Stack-Nelson, director of the Contextual Leadership program at Luther Seminary, contributed to the article.

Hearing the Congregation's Voice in Theological Education: A Response to the Consultation Conversation

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ABSTRACT: The writer comments on themes he heard running through the two days of discussion in the June 2004 conference on "Hearing the Congregation's Voice in Theological Education." He identifies them as (1) the significant number of students in need of catechesis or faith nurture and remediation of student knowledge and writing skills, (2) the use of pedagogical terms by faculty to mean quite different things, (3) an uncritical appropriation of business vocabulary and practices in discussions of effective pastoral leadership, and (4) a series of questions regarding new partnership proposals between congregation and seminary in the education of religious leaders.

As I ponder the conversations of the consultation, I am aware that my participation has been influenced by the study of teaching practices in theological education I am directing for The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.¹ This study has introduced the research team to the educational mission and culture of schools across a wide spectrum of Jewish and Christian seminary education. In recent months, we have been mining data from questionnaires completed by faculty, students, and alumni/ae and site visits to ten schools where we observed classes; interviewed faculty, administration, and students; and participated generally in the life of the school. Four issues we have encountered in that study have been highlighted for me as we have pondered what it means to hear the voices of congregations in theological education. I offer them to generate further discussion.

Issue one

Faculty in each of the seminaries report a significant number of their students are (1) "new" to Christian faith or Jewish observance, (2) new to their denominational tradition, (3) unfamiliar with many of the primary traditions and practices of the denominations in which they have grown up, and (4) have had little sustained leadership experience in congregations. Faculty also report that only a minority of their students bring to their studies familiarity with the literature

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and the patterns of writing traditionally associated with the academic competencies needed for clergy practice. Even as they describe their students as often very bright and willing, faculty also report they spend an inordinate amount of time and attention on catechesis or faith nurture and remediation of student knowledge and writing skills.

Responses to this situation vary across the spectrum of Jewish and Christian seminary education. Catholic seminaries now require thirty hours of philosophy as a prerequisite for graduation with a Master of Divinity degree of all candidates for the priesthood. Although Jewish seminary students typically have a rigorous academic background, most must take a series of preparatory courses for entry into the rabbinic curriculum. This adds at least one additional year to the education of most Catholic and Jewish seminary students. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America seminaries, for a different kind of example, require a full intern year—typically in a congregation—prior to a student's final year of course work in a deliberate effort to ground academic study in the practices of ministry. Most Protestant seminaries, caught up in the competition with each other for students, seek ways to intensify patterns of spiritual and vocational formation while squeezing, at the same time, remedial academic tasks into the traditional three-year curricular experience of students.

These reports from seminary faculty lead me to ask several questions of any new initiatives for faculty attention, such as the one to take more seriously the voices of congregations in theological education we have been discussing.

- ◆ How does a faculty organize itself to address increasingly time-consuming pedagogical challenges: remedial instruction for some students, basic catechesis for other students, vocational clarification of still other students, disciplinary and professional competency, and the integration of the total seminary experience in professional identity and practice?
- ◆ Given the pressure to expand faculty attention to a wider range of student educational and religious needs, what happens to traditional expectations for the academic proficiency of students in the theological disciplines? The conversation during this event has led me to wonder if the so-called marginalization of the old mainline denominations may not be traced in part, at least, to the diminished ability of many seminary graduates to engage contemporary public issues as theologians, ethicists, and biblical interpreters in their congregations and communities.
- ◆ Given the pressure to equip students for pastoral leadership within these constraints, the discussion of this event has also led me to ask why many in the church and the seminary increasingly view *practical theology* as a unifying framework for the seminary curriculum. At several points, I found myself wondering if its appeal may not be a response to voices from congregations wanting clergy to have more skills. If the interest in practical theology really has to do with technical competency, what prevents seminary education from becoming a training school in ecclesial techniques?

Issue two

During the site visits of our study, we became increasingly aware that faculty (often in the same school) were using a number of pedagogical terms to mean quite different things. We discovered, for example, that theological educators have quite different things in mind when they speak of *critical thinking* or *integration* in student learning. In this event we have been using *curriculum* and *context* in various ways. Many people seemed to be using the word *context*, for example, in much the same way that Seymour Sarason used the term *setting* in his book *The Creation of Settings and the Future Societies*². When used in this way, *context* refers to either an informal or formal arrangement of relationships with a shared purpose. Hence, a marriage, a clinic, a school, or congregation are viewed as contexts. Others among us have used the word *context* interchangeably with the word *place* so as to identify where something happens. Still others, especially when reflecting on something as contextual or on contextualization as a way of thinking about the agency of context, were more attentive to the structures and dynamics of power influencing the relationships and tasks of those *in* a context. Because a primary emphasis of the consultation was on the congregation as context and resource in seminary education, the lack of clarity about which of these definitions was operative at any given moment in the conversation diminished the rigor of our critical attention to the relation of congregation and seminary in the education of future religious leaders.

Curriculum was another word that lacked definition in our discussions. Some referred to curriculum as a course of study. This use of the word was especially prevalent in remarks about curriculum reviews or revisions. Others used curriculum to refer to the total experience of students. A review of the literature on curriculum would introduce other definitions as well. Lack of clarity about the use of this term is as problematic as it is with context. It is my perception that most curriculum revision failures may be attributed to the lack of faculty attention to the relationship of their assumptions about curriculum to the pedagogical culture in which the curriculum is located. By pedagogical culture I am referring to the many aspects of the seminary experience that may support, reinforce, or subvert the goals of a faculty for its curriculum: the nonacademic settings for student learning (worship, governance, community life, informal student conversations), the rituals and rites of passage intensifying student experience, and the teaching practices of the faculty that may or may not be congruent with articulated curricular values.

Issue three

A member of one of the small groups in which I participated identified a third issue. It involves the rather uncritical appropriation of business vocabulary and practices in discussions of effective pastoral leadership and vital congregations

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across the church and often in our seminaries. The issue originates in the pervasive influence of world views emphasizing technical rationality in the way we talk about humanistic values and processes, and even more, in the way we often describe processes related to the working of the Holy Spirit. This issue took several forms during our conversations:

- ◆ The lack of attention given in the cases and our discussion of them to the ecclesiologies embedded in the structures of seminaries for “hearing the voices of congregations” and in the guidelines for faculty and student participation in congregational *contexts*.
- ◆ Instrumental language often slipped into our conversations about our expectations of student learning, as for instance, when the goal of teaching of Bible is viewed as preparing students to preach or lead Bible studies.
- ◆ Despite the importance of attending to the development of competencies among students, when as faculties we begin to talk about teaching for competency, our attention often tends to focus on the quest for measurable goals. Increasingly I wonder how we can think pedagogically about developing competencies for ministry practice in relation to developing receptivity to the activity of God in learning and ministry leadership.

Issue four

I am always curious about what prompts our interest in a new idea, program, or strategy and what the unintended consequences might be if a proposed change is appropriated into the life of a school, congregation, or public life. For example, this consultation has led me to ask several questions about what might be the significance of new proposals for a partnership between congregation and seminary in the education of clergy. They include:

- ◆ What was the relationship of seminary and congregation in the education of religious leaders in the past? What values in that relationship have been lost in recent years that the new effort seeks to recover or transform?
- ◆ What political realignments are involved when seminaries begin to listen in new ways to congregational voices in theological education? Does this new emphasis imply a shift in the role and authority of who teaches and who assesses? What impact does it have on the traditional alignment of disciplines in a course of study? How might such a shift of focus influence who gets hired or tenured? What does it do to the relationship of faculty to their disciplinary guilds? Where are questions such as these identified and addressed in the seminary? In the church?
- ◆ What effect might a changing relationship of seminary and congregation have on the seminary's ability to prepare some students for careers as seminary teachers? This question has curricular and disciplinary implications.
- ◆ To what extent has the interest of seminary educators to enhance the role of the congregation in the education of future religious leaders been prompted

by the so-called decline of mainline denominations and the corresponding movement in these denominations to give preference to things local. If this is the shape of the future, what might be the role of the seminary as the bearers and agents of denominational traditions? Is that an important role?

I could have focused my remarks on specific issues raised in each of the cases. Each posed significant and important issues for the topic of the consultation and for the future of seminary education. My attention was diverted from their particularity to themes I saw running through all of them—and in the general course of the deliberations of the consultation. It is my hope that these comments may be useful as the conversation about the congregation in theological education continues.

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ENDNOTES

1. <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/PPP/clergystudy/index.htm>.
2. Seymour B. Sranson, *The Creation of Settings and the Future Societies* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1972).

Discerning and Participating in God's Mission: The Relationship between Seminaries and Congregations

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ABSTRACT: As a respondent to the conference presentations, the author cautions theological educators against "romanticizing" the congregation and urges that theological teaching include awareness of the complexity of church life today. She also addresses emerging approaches to theological education and their implications for supervised congregational involvement. The challenge, in her view, is to develop a holistic approach that affirms the distinctive nature and contribution of both church and academy to the discernment and participation in God's mission of reconciliation in the world.

At the heart of this conference was the overriding issue of what it means to bring the concrete life and ministry of the congregation into a mutually enriching conversation with the mission and curriculum of theological education. As someone who works with congregations in major change processes (both theological and practical), I believe what is required is not simply to add more ministry courses to the seminary curriculum or to make the congregation the center of theological education. The challenge is larger and so is the opportunity. At a time when the very identity and vocation of mainline denominations are being called into question, the opportunity is to develop a holistic approach that affirms the distinctive nature and contribution of both church and academy to the discernment and participation in God's mission of reconciliation within a broken and alienated world. Unfortunately, the much lamented separation—and often mutual suspicion and hostility—of the academic establishment and the institutional church has not always encouraged the needed creative and collaborative discussion that appreciates and utilizes their diverse interests and expertise. The case studies from the five seminaries presented at this conference demonstrated that new avenues are being explored and that there is hope for the future.

My observations will focus briefly upon three areas that have emerged as I have listened and participated in the discussions during these days: (1) the shape of the church, (2) the shape of theological education, and (3) the shape of God's mission.

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The shape of the church

The late James Hopewell, whose book *Congregations* was published posthumously, made a major contribution to the recognition of the complexity and significance of the congregation. Trained in comparative religion, Hopewell developed a novel and creative approach to congregations through ethnographic description. Focusing upon the lived experience of the congregation, this approach recognizes the power of the corporate identity of the congregation, of “the narrative that the congregation historically enacts through its day-to-day behavior and by its particular views and values.”¹ Stimulated by the field of congregational studies, many seminary faculty have become “participant observers,” listening to, analyzing, and describing various aspects of congregational life and practice.

Congregational studies arose, in part, in response to a narrow and negative view of congregations. In the 1960s there were several very popular books that put forth a strong critique of the local church, for example: *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies*,² *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches*,³ and *The Comfortable Pew*.⁴ These and other books contributed to the perspective that congregations were captive to the privatistic interests of middle class families. While they might be necessary, congregations were viewed as self-centered and self-serving. Because at the time, the mission of the church was predominantly defined by mainline denominational leaders in terms of social service and justice-oriented ministries, the congregation was not viewed as a worthy object of attention or investment.

In the endeavor to move beyond the negative perspective to an appreciation of local churches, the social and behavioral disciplines became key partners: “It simply never occurred to anyone to rigorously examine the local congregation in its concrete particularity until social scientific methods were applied to analyzing human and organizational behavior.”⁵ Congregational studies, using a multidisciplinary approach, sought to describe the fullness and richness of congregations in all of their empirical reality. The local congregation—its culture and practice as a whole—assumed center stage.

Much has been learned about the dynamics, organization, and leadership of local churches through congregational studies. Although this approach reminds theological educators that their efforts do not make much sense without a relation to the ongoing life of the worshiping community, the danger is that theological educators will unduly romanticize the congregation. Paying attention to the narrative, theology, and practice of congregations will not magically bring clarity or enlightenment to the challenge of how to go about forming faithful and effective pastoral leadership. As seminaries prepare leaders for the church, an appreciative descriptive component is essential. Those who teach the theological, biblical, and historical disciplines as well as the practical disciplines must be aware of the complexity of church life today.

Yet more than description is needed. As the church and the academy pay attention to how and why Christians gather, congregations are neither simply to be studied nor to be serviced. In the midst of a rapidly changing and pluralistic world, the church is being challenged to transform its basic identity and vocation. Even the most familiar form of the church—the congregation—needs to be transformed. Just as new wine bursts old wineskins (Luke 5:37–38), so the ever new Gospel of Jesus Christ continually disrupts the established shape—traditions, structures, patterns—of church life and ministry. Within different historical and cultural contexts, the unchanging truth of God’s love and grace may be expressed through different and provisional organizational arrangements.

As an intentionally formed social entity engaged in particular practices to accomplish certain goals, the shape of the church is always influenced by the assumptions and demands of the culture within which it engages in ministry. Thus the congregational shape of the church is determined more by the particularities of the North American religious landscape than by any distinctive theological stance. The legal separation of church and state, the development of a participatory democracy, the emphasis upon the religious freedom of the individual, the proliferation of denominational choices, the desire for religious association and nurture in a society of immigrants, and the shape of the modern bureaucratic organization have all contributed to the advancement of the congregational shape of the church. While the congregational form is officially sanctioned by only a few religious communities, within the United States this shape has the practical force of an unofficial norm. Even those traditions that do not customarily focus upon a local religious community (e.g., Islam and Buddhism), when they have become established in North America, reflect the *de facto* congregationalism based “more or less on the model of the reformed Protestant tradition of the congregation as the voluntary gathered community.”⁶

Theological educators need to “listen to congregations” without losing their critical or transformative edge. As they engage in substantive dialogue with their graduates and other church leaders, they must discover ways to motivate and to resource congregations in the examination of presuppositions as well as the exploration of alternative visions of church life. As they join with congregations in experimentation and risk, new models or patterns of ministry may emerge from these consultations. Biblical visions of the nature and purpose of the church can deepen and enlarge imaginations about the range of ecclesial expressions. The exploration of the different ways in which the church has understood and carried out its mission throughout history, can provide tools to enable the church to engage in a critical analysis of its cultural context. Understanding theology as a dynamic and creative process intended for the edification of the whole people of God can help make connections between the insights of theologians and the formation of the church. Theological study of ecclesiology and missiology can bring the recognition that as God’s redeeming love is “enfleshed” in Jesus Christ, so the proclamation of the Gospel is embodied (faithfully or unfaithfully) within the organizational life and practice of the church.

*Discerning and Participating in God's Mission:
The Relationship between Seminaries and Congregations*

As they explore together the shape of the church, congregations and theological educators are called to affirm the distinctiveness of their endeavors, while at the same time recognizing the benefits to be gained by intentional collaboration. Bridging the gap between the church and the academy calls for attentiveness to diverse perspectives as well as the openness to new learnings and insights in the service of God's mission in the world.

The shape of theological education

Much has been written about the history, present condition, and future possibilities for theological education by knowledgeable, experienced, and concerned persons. New communications technology as well as changing patterns of family and work life have stimulated the exploration of new shapes for seminary education. Various of these approaches were presented in the case studies: the utilization of online courses, the development of distant learning sites, and contextual approaches that place students in congregations early in their seminary education. These approaches represent a "decentering" of theological education, moving away from a three- or four-year residential program in order to provide greater access, geographical diversity, and supervised congregational involvement. While incorporating certain aspects of these new approaches, other seminaries are committed to a vision of theological education that focuses upon the formation of pastoral leaders within a residential worshiping and learning community.

Within the small group discussions, questions were raised about the decentering strategies. What problems are these approaches solving? Are they a marketing tool, attempting to draw more people into theological education without requiring them to make a substantial commitment? As one participant put it: "Some students want the benefits of residential education and the convenience of distance learning. Is this really possible?" Another observed that because the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America expects pastors to be open to a call anywhere in the country, it might be better if potential pastors dealt with the issues of uprooting right at the beginning. From this perspective, a key aspect of the seminary experience is to step out of the familiar context, to become a "stranger," to encounter and learn to appreciate different kinds of people and traditions.

Both theological educators and church leaders need to consider the long-term implications of a decentering shape of theological education. How is the formation of pastoral leaders like and unlike the training of other professional leaders such as doctors and lawyers? At the heart of the issue is the meaning and experience of Christian community. I have come to believe that there is a certain ethos—habits, attitudes, patterns—that can only be experienced through participation in a "set apart" community. As one group participant asked: "If you learn different things in seminary, how do you learn what you didn't learn in seminary?" Now it is certainly true that mere physical proximity does not

automatically create community. And it is also true that it may be possible to create community as those who are engaged in distance learning gather together periodically.

The reason the formation and experience of Christian community is so important is because of the lack of community within contemporary life. Jim Wallis boldly declares that the greatest need of our time is not simply for preaching and service (as important as these are), but “for *koinonia*, the call simply to be the church, to love one another, and to offer our lives for the sake of the world.”⁷ In the midst of an increasingly impersonal, fragmented, and competitive world, Christianity’s embodiment of a different way to relate to one another is crucial. Just as the various influences of the modern world make or socialize people into the values of freedom, individualism, and self-reliance, so the church is challenged to form a people with different “habits of the heart.” As an alternative social reality, Christian communities teach people how to talk, how to act, how to fight, how to love, how to see the world in a peculiar—namely, a Christian—way.

Shaping their lives “in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Phil. 1:27), Christians engage in distinctive practices of togetherness. This relational nature of Christianity is illustrated by a recurrent but frequently overlooked biblical term *allelon* (one another / each other). Usually located within teaching sections of the New Testament, the use of the reciprocal pronoun indicates the responsibility members of the Christian community have for one another. Thus disciples of Jesus Christ are called to encourage one another (1 Thess. 5:11), to bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2), to be subject to one another (Eph. 5:21), to forgive one another (Col. 3:13), and, of course, to have love for one another (1 Peter 3:8). This social practice of one anothering, does not come naturally but must be both taught and caught.

While usually applied to the local gathering of Christians for worship, prayer, the breaking of bread, and fellowship, this vision relates to all gatherings of Christians everywhere. Pastoral leaders learn how to nurture Christian community through their own experiences of “one anothering.” Just as congregations often need to unlearn patterns of behavior, so seminary students need to unlearn certain disciplines and attitudes in order to be reformed or transformed. The opportunity of theological education is to invite students into a holistic community that includes disciplined academic study as well as a spiritually enriching and personally supportive climate. In other words, ecclesiology is not simply a subject to be studied but dispositions to be cultivated, practices to be engaged in, and habits to be developed. The qualities of Christian love—compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience—are learned, tested, and practiced as students cultivate not only their minds, but their hearts and souls as well. “Theological seminaries are places for listening, speaking, reading, and writing in praise of God. When students and faculties embrace these disciplines and allow themselves to be shaped by them, they share their faith in new ways.”⁸

*Discerning and Participating in God's Mission:
The Relationship between Seminaries and Congregations*

The shape of God's mission

While there has been much discussion about the shape of the church and the shape of theological education—and the relationship between the two—there has not been much attention given to the shape of God's mission during this conference. Perhaps it is simply assumed that everyone knows that God is at the center of both church and seminary. Yet in the midst of an increasingly secular and pluralistic world, I believe it is important to explicitly declare that discerning and participating in God's mission is what we are all about.

As I conclude these observations, I would like to offer a clear and perhaps bold assertion: the only reason for the existence of local churches or theological seminaries is to proclaim, teach, and embody the Gospel, the good news that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself: (2 Cor. 5:19). The church is the only body of people charged with declaring the truth about God and about the world. This is its identity, its mission, and its contribution to humanity. It is all too easily forgotten that according to human wisdom, the message of a crucified Messiah is not good news but a stumbling block and foolishness. While it may be comforting to affirm that "Jesus died for my sins," many Christians may not be as eager to embrace the image of the cross as indicating the shape of their communal and personal lives.

The dominant story shaping Christian communities today (both congregation and seminary) tends to trivialize the biblical story of the crucified Messiah. For many, the purpose of the local church is to attract and accommodate nonbelievers by speaking their language, giving them a respite from a competitive world, and providing meaning for their hectic and confused lives. And the purpose of theological education is to prepare the kind of leaders that congregations say they want. In this process, the radical nature of Jesus' charge to those who would be his disciples to "deny [themselves] and take up [their] cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34) is often interpreted in a domesticated manner. Bearing one's cross must mean that people are to be responsible, work hard, and be good spouses, parents, and citizens. The call to lose your life for the sake of the Gospel can't really mean that Christians have to suffer and die for their faith!

Discerning and participating in God's mission means shaping both the church and theological education according to a different story. Authentically wrestling with the question "Who do you say that I am?" calls for all concerned to be open to the unexpected, unconventional, and unpredictable ways in which God works. The radicality of the story of the crucified Messiah means that those who would follow Jesus Christ must "never become so sophisticated, so learned, so literate, or so professional that we cease speaking of this horror, the obscenity, this Cross of Jesus which alone has the power to shatter our world, so that the hope of the resurrection and new life can spring forth for us and for this world which our God so deeply loves."⁹ The challenge and the opportunity is for relationships, practices, curriculum, worship, and ministry to become pervaded with the

offensiveness and foolishness of the cross. "For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are saved and among those who are perishing; to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not peddlers of God's word like so many; but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in God's presence" (2 Cor. 2:15).

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Teaching Theology with Due Regard to Experience and Context

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ABSTRACT: Christian theology provides insights, derived from diverse sources, into the nature and presence of God and explores the values and means of our response. It is inevitably shaped by the context and experience of its authors. Teaching theology involves providing skills, examples, opportunities, and critical feedback for those engaged in such formation. Teaching theology is an activity of the church in cooperation with the Spirit and requires a systematic commitment to engagement with these tasks.

Toward the conclusion of a class session, a woman student stood up and remarked, "I am forty-eight years old. I have been involved in churches all my life. Why has no one ever told me about this before?" With some feeling, she was saying that the liberating and challenging things she was learning had never been revealed to her, not even hinted at, in the congregational life of the churches. I have found this story to be repeated many times over, in numerous places, and across three continents. While it is good that people find such value in their theological studies, we have to ask how it is that there is such a divide between seminary teaching and congregational life, and perhaps especially the teaching and preaching of those who have been trained in biblical studies and theology but somehow keep the benefits of these studies to themselves.

By contrast, many students of theology, engaged in some form of pastoral placement, complain that their seminary or college studies are not relevant to the practical demands of these ministries. There is a common perception that a great gulf divides the churches and their practical concerns from the academic interests of theological education.

In a recent article about ministry as a profession that has lost its defining identity, American writer Gilbert Rendle relates the following anecdote concerning the pastor of a large charismatic church. Like many in similar positions, this pastor appoints all his staff from within the congregation and provides their training. The pastor explained that he did not want his staff trained in a seminary where "they would learn things unhelpful to their ministry." When asked which things, he said, "theology and biblical studies."¹

Rendle recounts this episode in a discussion of the ways in which the professional training of ministers has become increasingly shaped by the academic model of the modern university, in which subject matters are treated as objective content to be studied, analysed, and perhaps mediated to others less expert than the graduate. The idea that the lay person has an immediate

knowledge of and relationship with the subject of our expertise does not fit easily into this notion of professional ministry. Rendle quotes the work of Nancey Murphy, who in turn draws from Hans Frei's study of the ways in which biblical narrative has been eclipsed by the modernist objectifying hermeneutics.² Murphy's argument is that in the modernist perspective, the Word of God is distanced from us as if it needs to be mediated to us by experts, who are able to decipher the mysteries of the text.

These observations invite a reconsideration of the nature of theology itself and specifically the teaching of theology. To begin this exploration, I pose the question, "How do we teach theology with due regard for experience and context?" In posing this question, I wish to suggest that in the study of theology we always bring to the process experiences that influence who we are and how we apprehend God, and thus how we articulate our experience of God. One significant dimension of this experience is the context in which we do theology. It is possible to pretend that context is irrelevant to our theology, that it will be the same whether we are in Madagascar, Majorca, or Melbourne. It is also possible to maintain that, while theology must attend to its context, this is done in a later phase, applying theological insights to that context. In this instance, theology is first studied and then contextualized.³ These approaches, I suggest, fail to acknowledge that every reader is situated, and they fail to recognise that in fact our experience and our context are crucial elements in how we actually do theology. Far better to acknowledge, welcome, and use these elements self-consciously and self-critically in the activity of faith seeking understanding. I do not advocate that reflection upon experience, such as pastoral practice or situational encounters, should replace Scripture, reason, and tradition as sources for theology. Rather, my contention is that all must be brought together in an appropriate way. Theology must be undertaken with *due regard* for context and experience. We do theology in context and in some kind of response to our own experiences, so it is best to recognise self-critically the ways these factors shape our theological perspectives. This means, however, that theology is inherently a biographical, if not autobiographical, activity as well as a form of rigorous study. What we say about God is necessarily something *we* say, in our situation and in light of our experience. It also has consequences for our lives. To develop and articulate a theology is a statement about who we are as well as about who God is.

In light of these remarks, it seems appropriate for me to begin by identifying crucial elements in my own position as a theological teacher. I have for more than a decade been engaged to teach systematic theology in a Baptist theological college. This school is itself part of a larger ecumenical consortium of theological colleges, all engaged in formation of ministers, priests, and religious, but it is also engaged in teaching large numbers of others who seek to study theology without the intention of being ordained. In the Baptist vision of church, ministry is not seen as the preserve of a select few, and it is in keeping with this vision that theological education and training are available to all who seek to enrich their lives and service in this way.

A further element in my own experience and tradition is the central place attributed to the Bible as an element in the formation of every Christian. The injunction of Colossians 3:16 indicates this perspective: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts, sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God.” Read in its context, this verse envisages a community characterised by discernment of God’s presence. It is about spiritual life; it links thankfulness, authentic community relationships, knowing God’s Word, worship, and compassionate service—all bound together by the indwelling Spirit of Christ. The question is whether the teaching of theology encourages such formation in the Word of God, or does it in fact distance people from that experience? Crucial to this question is the difficulty students and teachers of theology experience in relating this discipline, in particular, to the unselfconscious expressions of faith that occur, for example, when the local community of faith sings. It used to be asked as a test of an approach to theology, How does it preach? I would suggest that we need to ask of ourselves and of our theological communities, How do we sing? Karl Barth once wrote that wherever the community of faith is in good heart, it sings.⁴ My question is, how do we so engage our own lives in doing theology that we are able not only to write and argue and preach but also to sing and pray and serve? In short, how do we study and teach theology in ways that include our context and our own experience, such that this theology takes form in our lives—and even in our voices? If perhaps we had a greater focus upon these elements in our teaching of theology, pastors would not find theology so easy to dismiss as irrelevant to their ministries, and more people might discover the joys of theological insights within the life and activities of their local church. To explore these issues, I suggest we need to consider the “what” of theology—just what we think it is that we hope to teach—and then to consider the questions of how, by whom, and where this should happen.

The “what” and “why” of theology

Theology is the discovery and articulation by individuals and their communities of what it means for them to respond faithfully to God. For Christians, we might say, “what it means for them to be Christians” or to “have faith in Jesus Christ.” In the recently released film about the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Eberhard Bethge says that, as their teacher, Bonhoeffer was basically always urging his students to discover what it meant for them to be Christians. Bethge then says, with slight bemusement, that “we used to say in those days, ‘What is the will of God?’” What is striking here is that these questions, which Bonhoeffer reportedly saw as the essential tasks of theologians, are no different from the everyday tasks of every Christian and every Christian community. This perspective seems to me also to run through the entire theology of Karl Barth, who never seemed to distinguish between the demands of theology and the demands of

being a Christian. Is this a failing, or is it something at the very heart of theology? To do theology, for Bonhoeffer, was simply (that doesn't mean it was easy!) to ask, What does it really mean, here and now, for us, to be followers of Jesus?

Described in this way, theology involves a continuous conversation between one's context and one's personal and communal experience of God, bringing to that conversation all the resources of Scripture study, the traditions of the Christian faith, and the rigorous demands of critical reasoning. It implies a moral engagement as well as some analysis of one's situation and experience. Imagination and the many insights and resources offered in cultural expressions, from psychology to the dramatic and visual arts, provide further resources for this conversation. Necessarily, then, the conversation of theology is never concluded and never fixed. It is a conversation undertaken within a community, though requiring individual effort and attention. The conversation of theology is ultimately, I suggest, a conversation with God as well as with each other and with our tradition. In this conversation, God is an active participant, posing questions and possibilities as well as inviting and receiving our contributions.⁵

If we envisage theology in this way, it is essential to recognise some of the many elements in the conversation. Theology as so envisaged involves both information and formation, or content and experience. Its context is both the church and the world. It seeks expression in both word and deed. To study theology in this way requires some knowledge of the history of ideas, but it is not itself that study. To stop short at the history of ideas and their emergence as doctrines is not to do theology. Similarly, the study of biblical texts and themes is not, of itself, the study of theology; nor is it the study of a system or set of Christian ideas or doctrines, which may have been arranged into a coherent and interrelated system. These elements are all necessary but not sufficient ingredients for theology. The same is true of experience, or inspiration, and cultural reflection. These elements are essential to the kinds of conversation I have described in the previous paragraphs. But what is crucial in determining the activity of theology is what we do with these elements or ingredients. The way we use these sources and the proportions of each give unique substance and character to our theological work. Two groups or individuals may draw upon the same theological traditions and reflect on the same biblical text, but in significantly different situations and with radically different communal experiences. In light of these continuities and discontinuities, we engage in a theological conversation in which each has a voice and is also able to hear and respect the voices of others in that conversation. In this way, contextual theologies can maintain their unique contribution without being radically discontinuous with one another.

The objectives and outcomes of theological work are implied already in the preceding description of theology. What is it we are hoping to achieve in doing and teaching theology? It is easiest to begin by saying what is not enough, though again, we are identifying important elements in our objective in varying degrees and forms. Teaching theology is not simply about imparting information, for

example, about the meaning of texts or the history of doctrines. Neither is the goal of theological work exhausted by the crucial elements of understanding or explanation. Theology does seek understanding, but in so doing, it does not satisfy itself with the idea of explanation. Indeed, as Sölle suggests, to imagine that we have explained God and all God's dealings with the world would be blasphemous.⁶ Yet again, the objective of theology is not exhausted by the goal of witness or testimony to a particular tradition or experience of faith. This too may be an essential element in theology, but theology seeks to do more than to offer a confession of faith.

Gathering together all these elements, I would suggest that theology seeks to engage in a distinctive way in the conversation of faith, which requires not only these activities and outcomes but, even more essentially, involves *the formation of character*. Doing and teaching theology is fundamentally about our lives as people engaged in conversation with the tradition and texts of our faith, in response to our own experience and situations. But through all these aspects, the most basic thing to be said is that doing theology requires that we are *engaged with God*. In making this statement, it is important to clarify the sense in which this implies a "faith test" prior to doing theology. The idea that to do theology one must be engaged with God is not intended to require a certain doctrinal or confessional orthodoxy. Here the position taken by Paul Tillich is instructive. "The theologian enters the theological circle with a concrete commitment."⁷ This means that doing theology requires some level of commitment to the faith on which that theology reflects, but Tillich himself was careful not to define this commitment in terms of doctrinal orthodoxy. For him it was a matter of what he called "being ultimately concerned," which meant being genuinely committed to wanting to know about God and to relate to God, such that your whole person was open to this issue. That is what Tillich saw as the essence of faith. What this suggests is that to do theology, one must in some degree be responsive to the spiritual reality of God, even if one is not presently able to articulate a set of coherent or conventional ideas about God.

Finally, it is essential to add that doing theology in the conversational or responsive sense in which we have described it does require specific expression or formulation. The knowledge theology seeks is not a private store of insights or a personal attitude without reference to others. To engage in theology is to *converse*, to speak, even to talk back to traditions and other approaches.⁸ Furthermore, to articulate such understanding of and responsiveness to God is also to commit ourselves to actions and values. In the context and relationships within which it occurs, theological speech has consequences.

The "how" of theological reflection

There is a considerable literature on the nature of theological reflection as it has developed within several distinct areas, such as supervised field education, clinical pastoral education, and other forms of practical theology.⁹ This literature

seeks to argue that the insights gained through reflection upon pastoral practice are *theological*, essentially because many of the practitioners in this field have been educated in or work in contexts where this possibility was or is denied. One of the features of these movements is a protest against the organization of the fields of theological study that is broadly derived from Friedrich Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher's schema divided theological work into several fields, including philosophical, historical, and practical. Schleiermacher's heritage is seen (contrary to his own intention, I believe) to disadvantage practical theology by suggesting that in this area the genuinely theological insights derived from historical and systematic theology are then applied to the practice of ministry.¹⁰

My contention is that we need to reconsider the character of theological reflection, focusing not so much on one or two specific sources or emphases (such as historical sources or the attempt to develop a system of doctrines, or a focus on practical interests) but instead considering exactly what we are seeking to do in this reflection. For this reason, I have asked myself precisely what it means to reflect theologically. How are theological insights to be gained or derived?

My proposal for the "how" of theological reflection seeks to explain the conversational nature of such reflection. This conversation or movement of theological reflection includes a focus upon context and experience, drawing upon many possible sources, past and present, and returning to practical implications of these insights. This entire movement of reflection, and not just one part of it, needs to be named as theological. The central conviction of the Christian faith is precisely that the divine Word and truth is not an ideal or idea, closeted in eternity, but is rather a personal being who has come among us and is continually embodied in a community of faithful people, notwithstanding our limitations and failings. As a consequence, this outline of theological reflection is inherently contextual, experiential, and practical. These elements are not in contrast to other activities of theological reflection, such as biblical studies or historical disciplines. On the contrary, these practical and experiential and contextual elements are essential parts of any theological reflection.

On this basis, I suggest that to think theologically means: To *generate insights* into situations and experiences, in particular relating to the presence, purposes, nature, and invitation of God, and human life in relation to God.

These insights might be derived in a number of ways or forms:

- ◆ by deriving analogies from biblical texts to present situations and experiences, and vice versa,
- ◆ by deriving insights and analogies from traditions and movements for present situations and experiences, and vice versa,
- ◆ by reflecting upon visual works (such as films, paintings, and sculptures) or upon literary works to suggest analogies and insights for present situations and experiences,
- ◆ by reflecting upon a place (such as a land or country) or a specific place (such as a mountain, river beach, or building) as a source of individual or group identity and values, and

- ◆ by reflecting upon an individual's life journey, whether of one's own or that of another person, or the journey of a particular group or community.

Working from these insights to *formulate frameworks for understanding* present situations, in both individual lives and group situations, one can show how these insights relate to the texts and traditions of the Christian faith:

- ◆ to *identify and articulate values*, desirable moral and communal objectives, on the basis of these insights, and
- ◆ to *formulate action plans*, relating to the present situations, in light of those insights and values.

One crucial implication of this idea of theological reflection is that it should be *integrative*. The term integrative suggests a direction or tendency toward integration rather than an achievement—a situation where things have been integrated. My conviction is that we have never integrated everything in our lives, our experience, and theology. But what we can do is move toward a greater integrity through discovering the ways in which things we previously did not see as related do in fact belong together. All the elements we have described in theological reflection involve seeing and exploring such relationships: analogies between aspects of our experience and the texts of our tradition, relationships between the inward life of faith and the outward places we inhabit, or metaphors drawn from one situation that open up possibilities in another. All these ways of thinking draw us toward a greater sense of wholeness. They lead us toward seeing that all things are indeed one, in God.¹¹

Integrative theological reflection of this nature seeks a wholeness and integrity in the life experience of individuals, their present situation, their understanding of biblical texts and traditional formulations, and of other resource materials. Inherently it calls for present reflection, formulations, and action. As such, theological reflection is not only concerned with the practical or the personal but also not only with the historical or biblical. It includes all of these, together with ethical, political, and communal implications.

Having considered this brief suggestion on how exactly we might go about doing theology, two further questions immediately arise and will further assist us in explaining what we mean by theology. These questions concern who is to undertake these tasks and where this work should take place. Consideration of these questions also enables us to see more precisely just what it might mean to teach theology.

The “who” and “where” of teaching theology

When we consider the nature of theological reflection as described in the preceding sections, it seems that this activity requires inherently the inspiration and imagination that comes only from the Spirit of God. That is to say, in Christian experience it is the Spirit of God who brings forth the kind of articulation and formulation of experience that is envisaged here. It is the Spirit who brings

together the Word of God and the situations, needs, and aspirations of human communities and from all of these evokes a sense of divine presence, meaning, and direction. It is the Spirit who enables people to name Jesus as Lord and, as such, enables us to locate ourselves in relation to the historic and contemporary community of Christian faith—the church. These considerations suggest that, in a quite basic sense, it is the Spirit who will evoke the theological reflection, understanding, and formulation of any group or individual within the particular context.

If this is so, what can it mean to *teach* theology? What can one do to enable or evoke the Spirit-given activity of theological reflection? What I wish to suggest here is based upon the conviction that in an important sense I cannot teach theology; only God can do that. What I can do, however, is seek to cooperate with the Spirit of God in ways that may enhance and encourage what the Spirit is seeking to do. In order to do this, it seems important that I acknowledge as a teacher, by statement and attitude, what I cannot do and positively affirm and value what I can do.¹² There are, I suggest, five things that I can do to cooperate with the Spirit's work of evoking theological reflection by people who seek to know and name God within their context and experience.

Develop the skills necessary to identify and use the various formative factors

First, I can assist people to develop the skills necessary to identify and use the various formative factors or ingredients already identified for theological reflection. This may involve teaching people to read the Greek language of the New Testament or to understand the formation of the Apostles Creed. Or it may involve encouraging them to know the land where they live or to discover their own life journey, whether that is done through some form of analysis, using the Eneagram test or some other discovery tool. Given the wide possibilities for sources of theological reflection, the task of encouraging appropriate skills is a diverse one and cannot be undertaken during the short period of a single degree course, for example. Rather, during such a period of study, one can at most introduce people to some of these sources and to the possibilities of many others and help them to discover other people who are already engaged in this activity, so that they may relate to a wider conversation of theological reflection within their own context and community.

Provide examples

This first task leads to, or perhaps includes, a second. In teaching theology I can provide examples of how others, in their context and given their experiences, developed their theological insights and, if you will, their systems or approaches to theology. The use of examples here is helpful, however, only if we are seeking to learn more than the content of these ideas. To gain real value from studying Barth's theology, I am suggesting, requires more than to get a grasp of his system

of theological ideas. We need to know about his life, his situation, and the context of his work in order to know what it was he was really saying about God. His theology belongs and has meaning within that context and experience. That is not to limit it, rather it is to show its real value and lasting significance for people in many places.

So, to teach theology with a due regard for context and experience does not mean that we no longer study systems and approaches to theology derived from other places and times. To deprive ourselves of such insights and resources is silly; it would commit us to the tyranny of the present, or at best the recent, as if these are the only times in which God has been or can be known. What is crucial, however, is that we use the study of theological ideas and systems derived in other places, times, and cultures with due regard for their situatedness in order to gain from them insights into our own context and experience. Finally, it seems important to add that in offering to students the opportunity to learn from others who have developed their own contributions to the theological conversation, I as a teacher need also to be willing to give some account of my own journey of faith and the insights and struggles that have shaped my own theological understanding, whatever it may be. This account will inevitably be partial and limited. There is an important difference between attempting in one's teaching to propagandise for one's own theological perspectives and an appropriate, humble willingness to illustrate the process of doing theology in one's own context and in response to one's own continuing experience. The latter is not egoistic; it is, rather, an important ingredient in encouraging others to engage in the theological conversation.

Provide the space and opportunity

A third thing that I can do as a teacher is to provide the space and opportunity for people to engage in this activity or conversation of theology. There are a number of very basic factors here. If, for example, my class structure is so full of my speaking that there is never any time or opportunity for student discussion or contributions, such as through tutorials, the unspoken message here is that the students do not have anything to contribute. If the content of class discussions is always focused upon pure ideas and does not welcome relating these ideas to experiences, even the experiences of those whose ideas are being discussed, this too provides no space for student reflection upon their lives and their situations.

On the other hand, for many people, the sheer fact of being admitted to a class engaged in theological reflection is a great relief and encouragement. Here for the first time, perhaps, their questions are given voice and are honoured, not repudiated. They are encouraged to think for themselves and their ideas, concerns, and reactions (not always positive, not always well processed!) are heard with interest and respect. The classroom must be a safe place for people to speak, to venture ideas, and to be themselves.

Encourage critical feedback

A fourth ingredient I can contribute accompanies the others and this is the encouragement of my own critical feedback, analysis, and evaluation of student offerings. The crucial factor here is the recognition of mutuality in this critical process. Teachers and students are, in this vital sense, colleagues. We are members of a “guild” or a community of people seeking to gain from one another the best insights, by testing out one another’s practice and ideas, not in order to tear down or humiliate—though this is all too easily the experience of some if we are not careful in our approach. Rather, it is a form of respect and honour to one another, to evaluate, critique, and further question the contributions made within a process of theological learning and exploration.

Pray

Along with the provision of skills and examples, space and critical encouragement, the fifth thing that I can do as a teacher is pray. This is not a matter of whether prayers are spoken in class but rather a matter of the attitude of the teacher and the processes offered. The teacher can approach the work of teaching with the conviction that it is a form of cooperation with the Spirit and is, therefore, inherently an activity of prayer.

All this amounts to suggesting that the task of the theological educator is quite like the work of a gardener. There is much we can do to prepare the ground, to plant the seed, and to provide nutrients for the growth of the plants. But as Jesus suggested, we cannot make the plants grow; we cannot produce the harvest. In the end, I cannot produce my students’ theology. Only the Spirit can do this good work in them.

The conviction that the “growth” of theology is nurtured by the Spirit leads us to consider where this harvest might emerge. Where is my theological garden? The immediate answer is that theology emerges in the context of the church, that is the Christian community of faith. Theology is inherently an activity of the church, even though it is not always welcomed or valued by specific church groups. In the process where faith in God is coming to articulation, where insights are found and implications and actions envisaged, there is the church being continually reborn or renewed. It follows that whether theological education takes place within seminaries, university faculties, or wherever groups of people gather to reflect together upon their experience or context and upon God’s presence and purposes with them in that situation, this activity is part of the life of the church and witness of the church.

Consider systematic theology

The location of theological reflection in relation to the church helps us, finally, to consider that it might mean for a contextually related theology to be systematic. Inherent in the idea of a systematic theology is the desire not only for logical consistency but also for some comprehensiveness in giving an account of all

aspects of the Christian witness. In his *Systematic Theology*, Wolfhart Pannenberg explains that these requirements, consistency and comprehensiveness, are not the only necessary features of a systematic theology. An adequate theology must also make the *truth* of Christian doctrine its concern.¹³ To do so, it must seek to give an account of humanity, our history and experience in the world as well, so that the world is able to recognise itself in this account. In this way, for Pannenberg, an adequate systematic theology is one that seeks to commend the truth of Christian doctrine by giving an integrated account of how this faith relates to all of human life or what is sometimes called “reality as a whole.” This attempt to offer a comprehensive vision of all of life in and with God is the task of systematic theology as Pannenberg sees it.

It is questionable whether any person today can offer such an account, as it is no longer imagined that any person is in the position to offer a God’s-eye view of all of reality. Nonetheless, from Pannenberg’s proposals, we can identify some of the elements that are important in what I suggest could be a systematic approach to theology in context. Here I am not suggesting the production of something called “a systematic theology.” The term “systematic” here is not an adjective for the product so much as it is for the approach, the stance of those who engage in theological reflection. Certainly, any approach to theology should aim for logical consistency. Whereas we may value paradox, there is nothing to be gained from contradicting ourselves. Equally, it is desirable that in doing theology we aim to speak and act consistent with the historic witnesses to our faith, in scripture and in the living traditions of the church. This does not mean that we are bound to the literal formulations of the past but rather that we seek to show some kind of continuity with the intentions and values of those who have gone before us, even if we today must live and speak differently. Pannenberg is right to argue that theology is accountable to the world in which we live. My contention has been that theology must intentionally relate to the context and the lived experience of those who participate in theological reflection, and they in turn must seek to show to their contemporaries the significance of that faith and witness in that situation. All this suggests that a systematic approach to theology is not about the production of a finely tuned system of ideas, much as we may value the symphonic works of those who achieved such systems in the past. Rather, what we now mean by a systematic theology has more to do with a living process than a product. It is more a methodology than a magnum opus. What we envisage here is a stance or attitude, a way of being in the world. This systematic stance in theology is about being continually and consistently engaged in the conversation of theology. It means being continually committed to asking the contextual meaning of the Gospel. It means being constantly accountable to the question Bonhoeffer posed, What does it mean, for us, here and now, to be Christian? This systematic approach to theology calls for integrity and responsiveness, as we seek to live in faithfulness to the call of Christ. In so doing, this systematic theological stance will not be focused upon itself as a “system,” for it will be only too aware

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of the inadequacy and imperfections of its formulations. Rather, this kind of theology will see itself as a work in progress. As such, this systematic approach to theology is also biographical. It gives an account of the lived experiences, communal or individual, that have led the authors to speak of God in this way, and it articulates the ways in which they hope to live, or, to put it more appropriately, it articulates the hope into which they will live.

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ENDNOTES

1. Gilbert R. Rendle, "Reclaiming Professional Jurisdiction: The Re-Emergence of the Theological Task of Ministry," *Theology Today* 59, no. 3 (October 2002): 408–420, 417.
2. Rendle's reference is to Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy set the Theological Agenda*, (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1996), 96.
3. For discussion of an attempt to introduce contextualisation into an existing theological program and the inadequacy of seeing it as something to be added on in this way, see Luke Timothy Johnson and Charlotte McDaniel, "Teaching Theology in Context," *The Christian Century* 117, no. 4 (February 2000): 118–122.
4. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* vol. 4.3.11, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961, 866–867.
5. For an outline of the idea of conversation as a methodology for contextual theologies, see Frank Rees, "Beating About the Bush: Methodological Directions for Australian Theology," *Pacifica* 15, no. 3 (October 2002): 266–293. A more extended theology of "divine conversation" can be found in Frank Rees, *Wrestling With Doubt: Theological Reflections on the Journey of Faith* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001).
6. Dorothee Sölle, *Thinking about God: An Introduction to Theology*, trans. John Bowden, (London: SCM Press, 1990), 1.
7. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 12.
8. Letty Russell has used the term "talking back" to the traditions to suggest, in particular, a contribution of women theologians in response to the patriarchal expressions of theology received from much of the church's history. See Letty Russell, *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 35f.
9. Two of the key sources in this field: James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*, revised and updated ed. (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995), and Patricia O'Connell Killen and John De Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York: Crossroad, 1994).
10. Schleiermacher was in fact strongly committed to the importance of practical theology, though it may be that his schema did lead to the kinds of disadvantage to practical theology suggested here. This cannot have been Schleiermacher's own intention, as for him the nature of Christian faith and the work of dogmatic theology

is inextricably bound up with a unique form of religious experience he named “the feeling of dependence.” See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, English translation ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), Chapter 1, Section 4, “The Relation of Dogmatics to Christian piety.” Perhaps his theology as developed in *The Christian Faith* did not entirely fit the schema he had (earlier) outlined in his schema of theological disciplines, in Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of the Study of Theology*, (first published in 1810). For a critical appraisal of Schleiermacher’s schema, see, Edward Farley, *Theologia: the Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), chap. 4.

11. We are not here meaning to imply some kind of optimistic view of nature and human experience in which everything is somehow good and godly deep down. In reality, sin and brokenness are a part of our experience and world. Some experiences are truly horrific and some deeds are really wicked. This is not to be denied. Rather, we are suggesting that all our experiences, both good and bad, can be the stuff of theological reflection, so that we may discover some degree of meaning or integrity, even in the face of wickedness and suffering.

12. For an incisive discussion of teaching as a Christian vocation, see Mark Schwehn, “Teaching as a Christian Vocation,” *Theology Today* 59, no. 3 (October 2002): 396–407. Schwehn’s argument includes a critique of many of the values inherent in teaching in the present academic climate, such as the goals of “public-ation” and prominence as a scholar, in contrast to a commitment first to serve the good of those we teach.

13. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* 1, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1994), 48–61.

The Pastorate as a Metaphor for the Seminary Presidency: A Focus Study in the *Theological Education Journal*

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ABSTRACT: The Association of Theological Schools' (ATS) Theological Education journal has presented a great deal of material in its four decades on the seminary presidency. Much of the material has focused on finding a suitable metaphor for this demanding office. This paper suggests the "local church pastorate" as an extension of the "practical theologian" metaphor posed by Erskine Clarke in his mid-1990s volume, "The Study of the Seminary Presidency in Protestant Theological Seminaries." The bonds of presidency and pastorate are examined in five roles: (1) President as Pastor-Leader/Administrator, (2) President as Pastor-Steward, (3) President as Pastor-Community Builder, (4) President as Pastor-Scholar/Teacher, and (5) President as Pastor-Priest.

Introduction

The journal of The Association of Theological Schools (ATS), *Theological Education*, has proven to be a valuable resource during its forty-year history. As a researcher interested in seminary leadership, this author observed the changing perspectives over four decades in articles about the seminary presidency. What follows is a focus study of *Theological Education's* depictions of the presidency, which revealed two major observations that are worthy of note here.

First, there has been a progression of attention given to seminary presidents in the journal. From the early issues that offered a column in the back pages for seminary presidents (as well as other specialized groups, i.e., deans, trustees, etc.), to occasional articles written by and for seminary presidents, to ultimately studies resulting in full volumes/supplements dedicated to the subject.¹ The significant increase in material dedicated to the seminary presidency signals not only a heightened interest, but the depth of the material also lends itself to an understanding of its importance for the academy.

The second observation is of particular interest to this paper and composes much of what is presented here. The search for a comprehensive way to understand the seminary presidency has been an elusive one. Seeking to express fully the various aspects of presidential duty has led to many scholarly attempts at developing a fitting metaphor.² Most often the choice of metaphor has stemmed

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from emphasizing certain job responsibilities of the seminary president at the expense of others. The result has been a cycle of metaphoric frustration. In essence, the scholar is faced with the following conundrum: realizing that one picture cannot fully express the dynamics of the seminary presidency, an incomplete depiction is presented as falsely complete, which results in academic delusion or a total surrender of canvas and paints, which leads to hopeless futility. Neither option is palatable, yet it appears this is the two-item menu with which we are presented.

Amid all the metaphors presented such as: CEO, pastor, scholar, teacher, etc.³ one refreshing depiction emerged from Erskine Clarke's mid-1990s "The Study of the Seminary Presidency in Protestant Theological Seminaries." As part of his conclusion, Clarke reported, "Reflection on the history of the presidency suggests in a modest way a new metaphor for the office—the president as practical theologian."⁴ Clarke's thinking breathes freshness into the idea of the president as teacher. He does not, however, suggest that the president in the role of a practical theologian is a scholar with vast amounts of time for study, reflection, and classroom dissemination. Rather, he soberly admits that the varying responsibilities of the office prevent the traditional teacher/scholar role. Thus, he presents the president as a practical theology teacher in the context of all his presidential duties.⁵

This paper seeks to build on Clarke's research by reflecting on the work of many scholars who have written over four decades of *Theological Education* in the pursuit of understanding the seminary presidency. At this point it would be appropriate to reveal that this author writes from the current perspective of a pastor who is preparing to someday soon view this issue from within the academy as professor/administrator. Clarke's phrase above—suggests in a modest way—is an appropriate reminder that what follows is a humble attempt to add to the academy on the subject of the seminary presidency, not detract from those academics who have studied the subject previously.

Presidency and pastorate

The seminary president as "practical theologian" has a certain metaphoric appeal to those within the academy (though there may be some disagreement about the essential elements of practical theology as a discipline). Speak of a practical theologian outside the academy, however, and most will respond with a blank stare. Is there another image whose meaning finds a higher level of agreement? Is there another expression that will adequately describe Clarke's meaning to a larger, more inclusive audience? I suggest the old term "pastor" with the new meaning as derived from the modern "pastorate." With this thought in mind, a series of questions emerges.

Why is it that after a century of the seminary presidency being pushed toward the culturally demanding corporate executive role⁶ that it is still the pull of

tradition and church to be a pastor that the president feels most strongly?⁷ And is this a pull that modern seminary presidents should resist? If indeed this resistance occurs, is it due to an inadequate understanding of the role of pastor in the twenty-first century? Could it be that the term pastor is still seen in its limited-scope meaning of caregiver? Why not recognize that today's local church pastor, in order to be effective, must be competent in a variety of tasks: leadership, administration, teaching, preaching, counseling, fundraising? Do these competencies sound strangely familiar to those of a strong seminary president? Have those seeking a fitting metaphor for the seminary presidency that lean toward the CEO metaphor failed to see the corresponding emergence in the twenty-first century of the local church pastorate toward a multicompetence position as well?

Additionally, the concept of "calling" has long been associated with the pastorate, and interestingly, the literature on the seminary presidency affirms the importance of calling as well.⁸ Though there are certainly examples of strong pastoral traits in seminary presidents who have not served the local church, there is an undeniable credibility for seminary presidents who have served in local church pastorates when leading seminary students.

Further, being an exemplar of servant-leadership is indeed an overarching responsibility of both the pastorate and the seminary presidency. Seminary presidents are well aware of their role as mentor / model for students training for pastoral ministry.⁹ The people who are followers of these institutional leaders are ultimately following the person of Christ who embodied servant-leadership.¹⁰ It is with this spirit in mind that we now examine the seminary president in five contemporary pastoral roles: leader / administrator, steward, community builder, scholar / teacher, and priest.

The seminary president as pastor-leader/administrator

As a leader and administrator within the seminary, the president's focus is one of vision and developing systems and structures to achieve such goals. In a similar light, the local church pastorate is a place of vision and administration. Both offices deal with comparable issues in seeking to provide the necessary direction for their respective institutions.

First, it is an undeniable responsibility of the president to set direction for the seminary. In an early column in *Theological Education*, the writer compared the role of the president to that of a ship's captain and posed this rhetorical question, "Who but the president can decide where to put the emphasis and when to alter it?"¹¹ In a similar vein, more than twenty years later a study of executive leadership in the seminary identified this as the primary role of the president.¹²

Two related items to this first point emerge, however, as potential barriers to the accomplishment of such "captaining." First, though the president is seeking to set direction for the seminary with predominantly paid employees under his or her charge, using traditional CEO techniques from the marketplace will likely

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be met with resistance. The president would be wise to utilize the skills of pastoral leadership in the church—a voluntary organization. Former Washington Theological Union President Vincent Cushing addressed this point in a 1996 article,

Of late, I have grown increasingly uncomfortable with the “role” of chief executive officer in an educational institution. I have sensed that construct as inadequate to handle the ethos of an educational institution. A strong entrepreneurial approach creates as many difficulties as it solves. The nature of this institution is that faculty members are quite independent, and my discomfort with the entrepreneurial model arose from a desire to adopt what I would consider a more “ministerial” model, one built on collaboration, shared leadership, and joint goal setting.¹³

The second potential barrier to the seminary president’s directive leadership emerges from the all too familiar trap of busyness. Spending such a large amount of time in fundraising¹⁴ is often identified as the main cause, but more often, the president succumbs to a type of “death by details.” Who is to blame for this common enemy of leadership excellence? Is it the unrealistic demands of the institution or the type of personalities that often occupy the office of seminary president? Perhaps it is a combination of the two.¹⁵

Similarly, the local church pastorate has its set of expectations from a diverse constituency that can lead the pastor into a malaise of minutia. It is this researcher’s observation, however, that many people who become pastors already have a predisposition toward people-pleasing and detail-dawdling that lands them in this leadership ditch.

Former Fuller Seminary President David A. Hubbard tied together well the concepts of taking time for “leisure for planning, thinking, praying, dreaming”¹⁶ with its importance to self-development for institutional benefit. Hubbard concluded, “All I bring to our ministry—day after day, year after year—is myself. If that self is not growing then I’m shortchanging the place that counts on me for leadership. I can only do better work if I bring to that work a better, larger self.”¹⁷ These words are certainly true for both the presidency and the pastorate.

Second, in addition to direction setting, the seminary president must develop guiding administrative systems. This is often accomplished by equipping, empowering, and generally valuing competent administrative associates.¹⁸ Working with and through such administrators ensures that visionary leadership initiatives will come to fruition. In fact, a healthy understanding of the place of “ministry” within the word “administration” is a concept that though foreign to some in leadership should be embraced by the seminary president and the local church pastor alike.¹⁹

Seeing the seminary president as a pastor-leader/administrator mirrors the types of skills characteristic of a solid local church pastorate. There can be no denying that just as important as caring for and protecting the sheep one must have a shepherd sense of leading and feeding the flock.²⁰

The seminary president as pastor-steward

More than any other aspect, fundraising is the measure of success in today's seminary presidency. Recruiting and retaining quality faculty, developing innovative programs, and building new and maintaining or renovating old facilities are all dependent upon having the necessary financial resources. The local church pastorate differs from the seminary presidency in the strategies used to solicit funds and, in most cases, the amount needed to satisfy the institutional appetite. However, the similarity between these two leadership positions with regard to issues of financial health creates a stewardship brotherhood between presidency and pastorate.

In the early 1990s, one researcher reported the identifying link between finances and the seminary presidency. "In many respects, financial development is becoming synonymous with presidential leadership. It consumes a greater portion of the presidential agenda than ever before in the history of theological education, and it is altering the nature of the office."²¹ To a lesser extent, financial issues are defining the pastorate as well. The combination of declining donations with the increasing demands for ministry program variety and quality has resulted in tremendous budgetary pressures for the local church pastor.

It should be mentioned that the stewardship role not only includes generating more resources but also managing them more efficiently. Preparation for dealing with the presidential pressure of "how to do things when adequate resources simply are not available"²² has often been provided by pastoral ministry experience. This is true not only in the arena of financial resources but also in the area of human resources.

Former Columbia Theological Seminary President Douglas Oldenburg noted that "one of the most critical roles of a president is to recruit gifted faculty and staff."²³ Union Theological Seminary's former President Donald Shriver furthered this thought: "As every president knows, the task of recruiting faculty includes the task of keeping them once recruited."²⁴ Interestingly, both of these men reported they relied heavily on their experience as a local church pastor to deal with their responsibilities in the seminary presidency. Clearly, identifying, recruiting, training, and celebrating with volunteer servants in the local church prepares a president for healthy human resource stewardship in the seminary.

The seminary president as pastor-community builder

Traditionally, it is in the area of community builder that a seminary president is expected to display a high level of competency. The literature is replete with a call for "community" within the seminary, and the president is expected to provide the "pastoral" skills to facilitate it. Similarly, the local church is to be a place of belonging and becoming, both of which are hallmarks of a spiritual family. Thus, skills in care giving, counseling, and shepherding are essential elements in job descriptions of the local church pastorate.

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The president must first appreciate the historical significance of community by examining the seminary's past. Clarke's study revealed, "Protestant theological seminaries, drawing on biblical and theological images of the church, have frequently understood themselves as communities."²⁵ Next, the president will need to see his or her role in community building for the contemporary seminary as evidenced in the following: "The metaphor of pastor-president and the understanding of the seminary as a community continues as powerful shaping forces in Protestant seminaries."²⁶ Ultimately, this progression will lead the seminary president to understand the primacy of this presidential-pastoral role, which has proven surprising to some researchers.²⁷

As is often the case, something of such value must be developed by overcoming obstacles. A seminary president's attempts at community building face three noteworthy hurdles. Number one is the increasing schedule demands of the presidency itself. As mentioned elsewhere in this work, the insatiable appetite for funds has put the seminary president in the position of being away from the campus as a fundraiser for significant periods of time.²⁸ This coupled with administrative duties has taken its toll on the president's ability to develop relationships with others within the seminary community.²⁹

A second hurdle is the immense diversity of today's student body. The changing landscape of the late twenty-first century seminary, compared to that of the early to mid-1900s, is reflected in the following thoughts of one seminary president.

In the old days of Union, say in the '30s, almost every student was male, white and in residence. "Community" in such a group came readily. Now, in the '90s, with half of our student body being commuters, half being women, and 25 percent being members of some ethnic minority, we are a pluralistic place, subject more than ever to misunderstandings, eruptions of hostility, and causes galore. No wonder that people complain wistfully of a lack of community.³⁰

The third impediment lies in the long-standing issue of meeting the divergent needs of constituent groups (faculty, board, staff, students) in the seminary community. Developing institutional policy is crucial in the effort; however, it is the manner in which this policy is developed that determines healthy community. A participative process, where constituents negotiate to protect their interests, seems to lead to the greatest level of community health.³¹

The key to overcoming each of these obstacles lies in the development by the seminary president of a healthy environment for communication. Much like the local church pastorate, this entails both the subtleties of systems that create an atmosphere for a free flow of information within the institution and the more overt example of the institutional leader himself or herself.³²

Ultimately, all efforts to build community surpass the utilitarian needs of organizational harmony³³ and institutional efficiency. One president revealed the underlying pastoral motivation for community building as “a deep expression of our true humanness and indeed our discipleship.”³⁴ Further, understanding that the goal of community is not uniformity, but rather unity through diversity, leads to a more realistic and positive approach. The gifted president as pastor-community builder will lead the seminary in “how to celebrate our differences and affirm our unity.”³⁵

The seminary president as pastor-scholar/teacher

As the leader of an institution of higher education, the seminary president bears a certain level of scholarly responsibility. Likewise, most within the church look to their pastor for solid biblical scholarship and cutting edge teaching in areas of ministry programming. Thus, a ready connection exists between the leaders of these two life-transformation bodies.

Perhaps this area more than any other is one of frustration for the seminary president, who faces the inequity of the desire to teach and the scarce time available to do so.³⁶ When a seminary president teaches a course, there is often little time to do the type of scholarly research and study that is characteristic of a professor within the academy. The same inequity is mirrored in the pastorate. Both seminary presidents and local church pastors must endure changing job expectations due to the evolving times in which they serve.

The early volumes of *Theological Education* followed a time when the seminary president was initially a faculty member who became “first among equals” when he or she assumed the presidency.³⁷ This reflected an era when serving as president was a faculty member’s duty, to be avoided if at all possible and certainly considered subservient to the teaching role as evidenced in the following: “Executive work is ancillary to the function of teaching, which is, after all, the business of a theological school.”³⁸ Not unlike these thoughts, the local church pastor of this past era had many teaching and preaching responsibilities. Administrative duties and visionary leadership were deemed unimportant diversions from the weekly Sunday morning, Sunday evening, Wednesday evening (and oftentimes Tuesday evening and/or Friday evening) service schedule for pastoral presentations of biblical material.

Persons entering the presidency of the seminary from fields other than the pastorate may not fully comprehend this frustrating shift. Regardless of previous experience, however, it would be wise for the seminary president as pastor-scholar/teacher to remember the counsel of Clarke who encouraged “the teaching role of presidents in arenas other than the classroom.” He went on to explain,

When presidents address boards about issues in theological education, when they report to faculties about issues in the church, and when they talk to student convocations about seminary policy, they are engaged in teaching.³⁹

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Clarke's broader concept of teaching, as well as the presidential influence in faculty selection and curricular guidance, should help salve the seminary president's teacher/scholar psyche.⁴⁰

The seminary president as pastor-priest

As an initial point, clarification of the word "priest" is in order. Priest here is referring to the role of handling the holy (sacraments and ordinances) and performing ceremonial functions. It is not intended to define the position of priest within any religious order. Both the seminary president and the local church pastor are called upon to competently conduct gatherings or events that have symbolic meaning for their respective groups. Though there are obvious differences in the types and frequencies for each respective role, the importance for both in leading their institutions is similar.

The final area of similarity between the seminary presidency and the local church pastorate has been reserved as the last topic for two reasons. First, it is the least mentioned characteristic in the *Theological Education* writings on seminary presidents. The brevity of discussion could be attributed to the presidency's assumed competence in this role. Or perhaps it is viewed with little relative importance when compared to the other responsibilities of the presidency. Regardless, a president who exhibits strong "priestly" characteristics will undoubtedly enhance the institution in which he or she serves.⁴¹ Presiding with dignity at graduation ceremonies, preaching with passion and clarity at chapel services,⁴² speaking with integrity at denominational conferences, providing public strength and moral support to a grieving seminary community in a time of loss—all will go a long way in solidifying the president as an influential leader of a healthy institution.

Second, those who exhibit competence in the priestly role in one context usually flourish in the other context as well. A pastor whose ministry has been characterized by strength in handling the holy is well prepared for the role of the seminary presidency. Speaking before large groups is akin to preaching before large congregations.⁴³ Likewise, having a dynamic priestly presence in the seminary usually translates to effective preaching in local churches and participation in denominational meetings.

Conclusion

Viewing the seminary presidency and the local church pastorate as one and the same would be a gross oversimplification. To say that competency in one will ultimately lead to success in the other is a stretch as well. However, after reviewing the above evidence gathered from *Theological Education's* forty years, viewing these two positions from a metaphorical perspective does appear to reveal significant similarities.

Common issues and concerns create a bond in both the variety and complexity of institutional problems for the seminary president and local church pastor. Further congruence develops when studying the type of personhood necessary to keep a healthy perspective and persevere as president or pastor.⁴⁴ Here the issue is not one of role or function; rather, it is one of being and character.

Worry about the gap between the ideal and the real is a constant combatant that must be vanquished in the seminary presidency⁴⁵—as in the pastorate. Crisis management is never easy but always a necessary responsibility of leadership in the seminary⁴⁶—and in the parish. Despite the best planning efforts, it is often the presidential response to surprises that determines success or failure for the seminary⁴⁷—and for the church. Winning a battle or solving a problem has a fleeting effect when the seminary president realizes that those who feel loss from the last round will rise to fight again⁴⁸—sadly, such is the nature of leading the church as well.

In seeking to explore fully the responsibilities and characteristics of a seminary president, three conclusions emerge. First, success in the seminary presidency has an air of “divine grace” that humbles the president and makes him or her more thankful to God than reliant upon personal achievement.⁴⁹ This does not mean that there is a lack of giftedness in the people who serve as president; rather, the size of the task requires a recognition that God’s intervention is necessary for God’s work in God’s institution.

Second, for all the variant functions and roles of the seminary president, it is coherence that yields the best results for influential presidential leadership.⁵⁰ Certainly, there are instances when a certain function or role will dominate the president for a necessary period of time; however, compartmentalized thinking does not yield long-term effectiveness in the presidency.

Finally, developing a mindset to best realize the first two points is nurtured by serving in the local church pastorate.⁵¹ Though there are other professions that provide prior experiences that will enable certain competencies for the seminary presidency, none equals the experience of leading the church. In their essence, the presidency and pastorate are indelibly linked.

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ENDNOTES

1. The following is a list of all the *Theological Education* columns, articles, and volumes that were reviewed for this paper:

Vol. 1, no. 1 (1964): 63–69. “The Seminary President: Teacher of Students and Confidant of Trustees.”

Vol. 1, no. 4 (1965): 247–248. Column: “Presidents: Alumni in Capital Funds Campaigns.”

Vol. 3, no. 2 (1967): 326. Column: “Presidents: Seminary Self-Study.”

Vol. 3, no. 3 (1967): 423–424. Column: “Presidents: The Relationship of the President to the Organization of Academic Affairs.”

Vol. 4, no. 1 (1967): 589–590. Column: “Presidents: The President’s Role in Public Relations.”

Vol. 4, no. 2 (1968): 663–664. Column: “Presidents: How Two Faced (or More) Are We?”

Vol. 5, no. 1 (1968): 52–53. Column: “Presidents: Securing Corporation Support for Seminaries.”

Vol. 5, no. 2 (1969): 119–120. Column: “Presidents: The President’s Fiscal Responsibility.”

Vol. 5, no. 3 (1969): 303–304. Column: “Presidents: The Church Executive Development Program.”

Vol. 6, no. 3 (1970): 232–234. Column: “Presidents: Administration in a New Era.”

Vol. 6, no. 4 (1970): 294–305. “The Office of the Presidency in Denominational Theological Seminaries.”

Vol. 6, no. 4 (1970): 306–308. Column: “Presidents: Planning for Foreign Students in Theological Education.”

Vol. 13, no. 1 (1976): 44–52. “Seminary Management from the President’s Perspective: A Bicentennial Overview.”

Vol. 29, no. 1 (1992) *Executive Leadership in Theological Education*.

Vol. 32, supplement 2 (1995) *The Study of the Seminary Presidency in Protestant Theological Seminaries*.

Vol. 32, supplement 3 (1996) *The Study of the Seminary Presidency: Reflections of Seminary Leaders*.

2. Erskine Clarke built much of his study of the seminary presidency from the mid-1990s around John Knox McLean’s 1900 challenge to the theological community to identify a permanent role for the seminary president that would be fashioned after a corporate executive. Clarke’s concluding reflections observed that: “What McLean’s vision lacked, and what the presidency itself has largely lacked throughout the century, has been a coherent and compelling theological interpretation of the office. More precisely, the office has lacked a convincing metaphor that draws together into itself both the actual work of presidents and a theological framework for interpreting and guiding that work.” See Erskine Clarke, *Theological Education* 32, supplement 2 (1995): 105–106.

3. The literature is full of these types of metaphors for the seminary presidency. Just prior to his concluding chapter where he introduces his “practical theologian” metaphor, Clarke suggests titles for the many functions of the seminary president: “The President as Educator,” “Preaching and Public Relations,” “Builder of Buildings,”

“Builder of Programs,” “The President as Disciplinarian and Guardian of Morals,” and “The President as Spiritual Leader of a Seminary.” See Clarke, *Theological Education* 32, supplement 2, 91–103.

4. Clarke, *Theological Education* 32, supplement 2, 107.
5. Clarke makes a compelling case for the comprehensiveness of his metaphor in the following, “As a practical theologian, a president could understand the office to be that of a teacher—not necessarily a teacher-scholar or a classroom teacher, but a teacher who demonstrates by the practice of the office ways to lead a Christian institution in the midst of a particular social and historical context. In this manner, all of the work a president does would be understood to have a coherence around the task of teaching—how a president deals with finances and controversies; how a president relates to students, board, staff, and faculty; how a president handles schedules and family responsibilities; how a president speaks of the church and of congregational life; how a president leads worship, prays in public, and uses the Scripture; and how a president faces troubling issues of public welfare and personal ethics. In all of these and the other myriad responsibilities of the office, the president would be teaching, demonstrating in the practice of ministry a way to lead an institution of the church and to be faithful to the gospel.” See Clarke, *Theological Education* 32, supplement 2, 107.
6. Clarke referenced this fact not once but twice in his study of the seminary presidency. First, he stated, “A corporate image of society thus informed McLean’s call for seminary presidents. The new presidents were to be executives after the model of corporate America.” See Clarke, *Theological Education* 32, supplement 2, 14. Second, he writes, “The seminary presidency in the 20th century has thus reflected—if often from a distance and if often following the example of colleges and universities—the larger story of corporate America.” See Clarke, *Theological Education* 32, supplement 2, 33.
7. Leon Pacala’s early 1990s study of seminary presidents revealed that, “More than any other single term, presidents describe their leadership as pastoral.” See Leon Pacala, “The Presidential Experience in Theological Education: A Study of Executive Leadership,” *Theological Education* 29, no. 1 (1992): 29.
8. *Ibid.*, 31.
9. Douglas W. Oldenburg, “Reflections of a Pastor/President,” *Theological Education* 32, supplement 3 (1996): 105.
10. Luke 22:24–27.
11. Charles M. Cooper, “The President’s Fiscal Responsibility,” *Theological Education* 5, no. 2: 119.
12. Pacala, “The Presidential Experience in Theological Education,” 24.
13. Vincent Cushing, “The Presidency in a Union School,” *Theological Education* 32, supplement 3 (1996): 75–76.
14. This fact was mentioned often by seminary presidents. Two examples are cited here. See Robert E. Cooley, “Toward Understanding the Seminary Presidency: Reflections of One President,” *Theological Education* 32, supplement 3 (1996): 50 and Clarke, *Theological Education* 32, supplement 2, 85.
15. See Malcolm L. Warford, “Work and Calling: An Interpretation of Presidents’ Reflections on the Nature of Their Office,” *Theological Education* 32, supplement 3 (1996): 13 and Pacala, “The Presidential Experience in Theological Education,” 25.
16. David A. Hubbard, “Seminary Management from the President’s Perspective: A Bicentennial Overview,” *Theological Education* 13, no. 1 (1976): 49.
17. *Ibid.*, 50.

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18. Cooley, "Toward Understanding the Seminary Presidency," 47.
19. Donald W. Shriver, Jr., "The President as Pilgrim," *Theological Education* 32, supplement 3 (1996): 116.
20. James C. Fenhagen, "Reflections on Fourteen Years as a Seminary President," *Theological Education* 32, supplement 3 (1996): 95.
21. Pacala, "The Presidential Experience in Theological Education," 25.
22. Warford, "Work and Calling," 16.
23. Oldenburg, "Reflections of a Pastor/President," 104.
24. Shriver, "The President as Pilgrim," 129.
25. Clarke, *Theological Education* 32, supplement 2, 40.
26. *Ibid.*, 38.
27. Leon Pacala candidly revealed his feelings of surprise as a researcher in the following, "The overwhelming majority of presidents view their role in pastoral terms. One of their primary responsibilities is to meld and nurture the school as a coherent community. The extent to which presidents identify this role as the first priority of their office is one of the most surprising findings of this study." See Pacala, "The Presidential Experience in Theological Education," 27.
28. Clarke, *Theological Education* 32, supplement 2, 55.
29. *Ibid.*, 52.
30. Shriver, "The President as Pilgrim," 138.
31. *Ibid.*, 140.
32. John C. Bennett, "Comments on 'The Office of the Presidency' (by David Belgum)," *Theological Education* 6, no. 4: 305.
33. Warford, "Work and Calling," 11.
34. Hubbard, "Seminary Management from the President's Perspective," 45.
35. Oldenburg, "Reflections of a Pastor/President," 105.
36. Cooley, "Toward Understanding the Seminary Presidency," 47.
37. Clarke's first chapter of his study (especially pages 5–10) chronicled this phenomenon along with a brief explanation on page 51.
38. Sherman E. Johnson, "The Seminary President: Teacher of Students and Confidant of Trustees," *Theological Education* 1, no. 1 (1964): 69.
39. Clarke, *Theological Education* 32, supplement 2, 92.
40. *Ibid.*, 93.
41. Fenhagen, "Reflections on Fourteen Years as Seminary President," 87.
42. Zikmund listed some of these competencies among a list of thirteen things that she "had learned" during her early years as a seminary president. See Barbara Brown Zikmund, "On Becoming a Seminary President: Reflections on My Early Years at Hartford Seminary," *Theological Education* 32, supplement 3 (1996): 175.
43. Clarke, *Theological Education* 32, supplement 2, 94.
44. Oldenburg, "Reflections of a Pastor/President," 105.
45. Cushing, "The Presidency in a Union School," 82.
46. Shriver, "The President as a Pilgrim," 139.
47. Fenhagen, "Reflections on Fourteen Years as Seminary President," 86.

48. Shriver, "The President as Pilgrim," 143.
49. *Ibid.*, 150.
50. Clarke, *Theological Education* 32, supplement 2, 101.
51. Oldenburg lists ten "qualities for effective presidents of seminaries" and then follows this list with the statement, "In one way or another, and to one degree or another, the pastoral ministry nurtured those qualities within me." See Oldenburg, "Reflections of Pastor/President," 108.

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4. The *American Heritage Dictionary* and the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* are the references for preferred spellings.
5. Provide a paragraph ABSTRACT at the beginning of the article in approximately 80 words.
6. Add a short (2–3 sentence) paragraph at the end of the article identifying the author(s), institution or relationship to the project/topic, position held, and/or other information relevant to the experience of the writer(s).
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