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Theological Education for Vital Parish Communities: Lessons from Nine Catholic Seminaries

Kathleen A. Cahalan

Nine Catholic seminaries received grants in Lilly Endowment's program, "Strengthening Congregational Ministry: A Program to Enhance Theological Schools' Capacity to Prepare Congregational Leadership." In 1998, the endowment invited 202 accredited schools in the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) in the United States and Canada to consider how they might improve education for congregational ministry and make "a strategic advance to improve their institution's capacity to better prepare the next generation of congregational or parish ministers." The endowment received 108 proposals, 45 of which were funded (for up to \$1.5 million for five years), totaling \$53.4 million in grants. The largest number of grants (60%) was awarded to mainline denominational schools in the U.S., and the second-largest group to receive grants was Roman Catholic schools (20%). Among the Catholic schools eligible to apply, 42% applied and of them nearly half were awarded grants (seven schools sponsored by religious orders, two diocesan schools): Aquinas Institute of Theology, Franciscan School of Theology, Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, Newman Theological College, Sacred Heart Major Seminary, Seattle University School of Theology and Ministry, Saint John's University School of Theology and Seminary, Saint Meinrad School of Theology, and Washington Theological Union. The remaining grants were given to evangelical schools (16%) and other types of seminaries. (For a complete description of the grantees and their work, see my report "Strengthening Congregational Ministry" at <http://www.thefund.org/programs/theological>.)

Lilly Endowment asked theological schools the question, "What can seminaries do to build their capacity to better prepare congregational ministers?" Schools were free to craft an answer to that question that best fit their ecclesial and educational situation. Interestingly many applicants across all denominations shared similar perspectives on the problems besetting congregational ministry and possible solutions theological education could offer: Changes in the student body over the past 25 years, especially the absence of younger candidates in seminary, requires aggressive recruitment strategies; the lack of preparedness for students entering graduate-level theological study requires new curricular strategies; the increasing number of part-time students points to a need for fundraising efforts for fulltime scholarships; the gap between seminary education and the realities of congregational ministry calls for new forms of contextual education; providing education to students off campus means experimenting with new uses of technology for distance learning; and supporting graduates as they move into fulltime employment means bolstering continuing education programs.

"In addition to the common struggles facing the majority of Christian seminaries, each denomination has its own particular challenges."

In addition to the common struggles facing the majority of Christian seminaries, each denomination has its own particular challenges. For example, mainline Protestant seminaries have found it increasingly difficult to recruit students, as the feeder-system—the process of selecting and forming ministerial candidates through the inter-connected relationships between schools, camps, youth organizations, colleges, congregations and the seminary—has virtually disappeared. Evangelical seminaries are concerned about the quality and character of people entering ministry—too many ministers don't succeed or don't stay in ministry, which is devastating for congregational growth and vitality. Schools that are the only seminary in their denomination face the challenge of responding to the demands of an ever-changing denomination that is spreading in different parts of the country and hemisphere. Often these schools are training ministers who cannot move to the seminary for fulltime studies.

“But the Catholic grantees also voiced a new challenge...how to prepare lay people for ministry in a seminary setting, how to understand theologically the phenomenon of the lay minister, and how to prepare congregations and church leaders to accept lay people as ministers.”

Roman Catholic seminaries shared many of these challenges: the loss of a feeder system that once promoted ordained ministry as a viable option for young men, the increasing problem of training people for ministry who do not stay employed at the parish or diocesan level, and the increasing numbers of lay students who cannot move long distances for graduate-level training. But the Catholic grantees also voiced a new challenge. Their prevailing concern was how to prepare lay people for ministry in a seminary setting, how to understand theologically the phenomenon of the lay minister, and how to prepare congregations and church leaders to

accept lay people as ministers. Most Catholic grantees argue that collaborative training—ordained and lay candidates studying together—is a first step in strengthening collaborative parish ministry.

It is widely known in Catholic theological education that the Catholic Church is witnessing the rise of a new professional class in parish ministry—the non-ordained, professionally trained person who requires education and formation for ministry, whose role and work is continuous though not entirely the same as the role played by women religious in parishes and schools over the past century. Many Catholic schools, particularly those sponsored by religious orders, had opened their doors to lay students in the 1970s, offering masters programs in ministry, primarily in the area of religious education. By the 1990s, lay people were seeking the Masters of Divinity (M.Div.) degree, traditionally designed for ordination candidates. Increasingly, lay ministers are finding themselves in the position of leading significant elements of parish life as pastoral associates or parish life coordinators. If the director of religious education was the primary position of women religious in the 1970s, by the 1990s the faith formation director, liturgist, and parish administrator are the jobs most likely to be filled by lay ministers.

Seminaries have been one of the last places lay persons have turned for training since the majority of lay ministry training opportunities exist through diocesan formation programs or undergraduate theology departments; the smallest percentage (6% in 2004) are being trained in graduate schools of theology or seminaries. But the number of lay students seeking graduate training has been increasing with more students seeking the M.Div. degree. The Catholic seminaries that received grants in the Congregational Ministry Program chose overwhelmingly to put their energy and focus into designing ministry education and spiritual formation programs for lay students at the graduate level that complement their programs for ordination candidates.

Because the grants extended over five years (beginning in 1999 and concluding in 2003) and were financially large, especially for small schools, each Catholic seminary crafted a multi-strategy approach. Each school identified some aspect of lay ministry as the focal point of its project, with the majority emphasizing spiritual formation and curricular changes around issues of multicultural issues, ecumenism, and contextual education. In addition schools worked on strengthening recruitment strategies and offering continuing education for ministers. In this article I examine these four strate-

gies, drawing highlights from the nine Catholic seminaries that participated in the grants program. Their efforts point to exciting developments in theological education that all Catholic theological educators may want to consider.

Calling on Many Fronts: Recruitment for Ministry Today

At the outset, recruitment seemed to be a straightforward challenge as the numbers of lay people serving in ministry had been on the rise for the past decade, and many were pouring into every kind of ministry program. In 1998, close to 30,000 lay people were seeking some type of ministry formation, with increasing numbers pursuing graduate studies.¹ Yet recruitment was more of a challenge than anticipated. The recent CARA Statistical Overview (March 2005) shows that since 1999-2000, the first year of the grants program, enrollment of lay students in some type of ministry program has been nearly cut in half (31,168 in 1999-2000; 35,582 in 2000-01; and 18,847 in 2004-05). At the outset schools anticipated few barriers to recruiting lay students, especially with grant-funded scholarships to offer students fulltime study. But recruitment was not as easy as was initially thought. Looking back over the past six years, four factors emerge that help to explain the difficulty in recruiting fulltime lay students to seminary education and the recent down-turn in lay ministry enrollments.

First, lay students find it personally and financially difficult to relocate and attend school fulltime, especially if they have families. Increasingly, lay ministry candidates are not religious women but are married or single, many are employed in good jobs with professional credentials, and the prospect of accumulating student debt *and* being employed in lower-paying jobs inhibits them from pursuing ministry. Schools found this particularly true among African-American and Hispanic candidates who have advanced degrees.

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"... not a 'how to book,' it raises the question, 'what now?' Hopefully this study will encourage its readers to go back to the original magisterial documents of this marvelous and complicated process of initiation."

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Second, the growing financial crisis at the diocesan and parish level in the past two years is effecting the perception that there are few jobs in ministry. Interestingly, both of these points may be based on perception more than reality: Most candidates with an M.Div. degree are highly sought after upon graduation and earn a decent wage.

Third, lay candidates may perceive ambivalence on the part of the church in identifying and supporting ecclesial lay ministers, at least an inconsistency at differ-

ent levels about whether lay ministry is a viable form of ministry. Taken together, these three factors are producing an environment in which lay candidates may want to be ecclesial ministers but perceive too many pressures and barriers to completing a three-year degree, finding viable employment, and supporting a suitable lifestyle.

Another factor that might be at play, but which there is not enough evidence to verify, is whether there existed a pent-up demand for theological education among a certain generation of lay men and women, which was largely met in the late 1990s, but which has now tapered off. There may possibly have been a large number of people, particularly lay women, already in ministry who were ready and willing to pursue graduate studies, but the reality is that there may no longer be large numbers of people waiting in the wings to be educated. There are certainly not large numbers of younger candidates for ministry, as all ATS schools realize. In other words, a decline in lay ministry may have been on the horizon regardless of the financial and ecclesial issues that have beset the church in the past few years.

“What is increasingly clear is that lay ministry is not a ‘given’ and that many seminaries who rely on lay students need to be as aggressive in recruiting and retaining lay candidates as they are about recruiting ordination candidates.”

What is increasingly clear is that lay ministry is not a “given” and that many seminaries who rely on lay students need to be as aggressive in recruiting and retaining lay candidates as they are about recruiting ordination candidates. In some Catholic seminaries, lay students constitute at least half if not the majority of students, so the survival of the school depends upon successful recruiting of all groups.

Seminaries know well the challenge of recruiting candidates for ordained ministry, but they also are learning about the challenges of recruiting lay candidates for ministry, especially younger candidates and candidates

who can enroll as fulltime students—two main goals of grantees in the Congregational Ministry Program. We know that recruitment for ordained ministry is not a high priority for Catholic parishes or families—most pray for vocations and some give to annual appeals for seminary education, but even fewer understand their role in calling forth lay leaders for the community and supporting their education and formation. Nearly all the work of promoting and supporting lay ministry lies with the dioceses and graduate schools and seminaries. Recruiting lay ministers involves a complex set of tasks, each of which demands time and resources in a seminary: raising the profile of lay ministry among young adults, raising the profile of lay ministry as a viable church profession with theological rationale, raising scholarship dollars to support lay candidates, and raising awareness about the need for ethnic minority parish leadership.

Most seminaries have realized that if they want to educate lay students, they have to proactively recruit them, and often this means shifting from a purely “admissions” strategy (enrolling students who contact the school) to a “recruitment/marketing/promotions” approach. Where do you go to recruit lay ministers? Some schools work locally, regionally, and nationally, drawing students from whatever contacts they can establish; some schools, primarily diocesan schools, are committed to working solely within their diocese. Advertising, Web sites, attending college fairs and professional meetings, and building up networks of alumnae are the main recruitment strategies.

Several schools, especially on the west coast and in major cities, face the challenge of recruiting leaders from ethnic communities. The challenge proved greater than school officials expected. Most assumed finances were the major barrier and allotted grant funds for scholarships for minority candidates. The reality proved more complicated. In some cases candidates had good paying jobs and the prospects of fulltime study at the expense of giving up fulltime pay was not feasible; for some, the prospects of fulltime church ministry was not appealing if they already had fulltime employment; and for some, graduate studies were not possible. In several cases, schools could not find candidates that would match their educational products. Lay ethnic candidates exist for ministry, but many need theological education in ways most seminaries do not deliver it, e.g., certificate programs, short courses, bilingual courses, and undergraduate courses.

For younger candidates seminaries have to look to

colleges and universities to begin cultivating interest in ministry. A few Catholic schools looked to the network of colleges and universities sponsored by the same religious order—Aquinas Institute partnered with Dominican schools and the Franciscan School of Theology with Franciscan institutions. Recruitment on college campuses, surprisingly, proved difficult to navigate for seminaries. It was disappointing to learn that some college faculty and campus ministers are hesitant and unwilling to encourage young people to consider ministry as worthy work after college. Most mentors encourage young people who are interested in church service to consider volunteer programs after graduation, but not parish ministry. Most schools realized that the seminary's job is to promote an understanding of ministry rather than directly recruit students. Only when seminary admissions counselors made their way into classrooms and were able to talk substantively about ministry and seminary education was the visit worthwhile to the seminary. Sending promotional materials to colleges garnered little interest from college students.

“Perhaps the most significant barrier to promoting ministry as a vocation on college campuses is the general level of ignorance among college students about what ministry is and what ministers do.”

Perhaps the most significant barrier to promoting ministry as a vocation on college campuses is the general level of ignorance among college students about what ministry is and what ministers do. Aquinas Institute conducted a research study in 1999 on college students' attitudes about ministry, which revealed that Generation X and Millennial Generation students have little to no awareness about ministry—rather than holding a negative view of ministry, which one might expect, they had no view. As Aquinas Institute points out, college students practice faith with a service orientation but do not recognize ministry as a “career” for which a person can seek training and employment.

Two seminaries designed programs focusing on promoting the idea of ministry with young adults:

Aquinas Institute sponsored Ministry in the Mountains, and St. Meinrad held “Thinking of Priesthood” retreats. Both were successful, though labor-intensive strategies. Ministry in the Mountains, a 10-day experience in Colorado led by Aquinas faculty and staff, offered college students formation in theological reflection and direct experience in ministerial leadership. St. Meinrad, in partnership with local dioceses, sponsored retreats for young men contemplating the priesthood. One of the most important outcomes for participants was overcoming a sense of isolation about their call to ministry, because many young men think there is no one else like them who could be considering the priesthood. The retreats offered participants a chance to talk with other young men about vocation, priesthood, and ministry as well as broaden and deepen their understanding of vocation in the Christian life.

Each program enjoyed some success, but each faced a common hurdle: finding young people to participate. For example, Aquinas Institute was able to recruit 79 students from 25 colleges over four years; St. Meinrad partnered with 25 dioceses to offer retreats, and nearly 500 young men participated over six years. St. Meinrad and the dioceses had difficulty finding college or young-adult males who, if they were attending college and away from their home parish, were unknown to diocesan leaders.

Even though the seminaries met with what they perceived to be low interest among college recruits, the results for those who did attend are worth noting. Of the 79 students in Aquinas Institute's program, 16 are working in ministry, mostly part-time; four are in volunteer service programs; another 12 are enrolled in graduate schools of theology, six at Aquinas; and four are considering attending the seminary. About half, then, have moved closer to considering ministry as a vocation, and about a quarter are enrolled in graduate school. Even though the program did not become a direct recruiting tool for the institute, Aquinas found that the impact on both faculty and students made the experience worthwhile. Nearly three quarters of Aquinas faculty taught in the program, which heightened their knowledge and sensibilities about Millennial Generation students, who will soon account for the student body that all seminaries will be welcoming. Though Saint Meinrad did not directly enroll candidates who attended the retreats, they found that offering young men the chance to explore what priesthood is is a necessary first step to promoting a positive understanding of ministry and facilitating vocational discernment among a popula-

tion of potential candidates.

Most seminaries cannot support labor-intensive programs for college-age students on their own, but for those that can partner with colleges to provide exploratory experiences, the efforts may be worthwhile. The challenge will be to find the students. Seminary admissions counselors learned that the way to the students is through the college chaplain or a faculty member, both of whom influence young people's choices about service opportunities and careers, but who themselves need to be educated about the church's need for ministry, vocational discernment about ministry, and knowledge about what constitutes ministry today in the church. Aquinas's work with a network of Dominican colleges and universities over the past five years has grown into a partnership with 20 undergraduate institutions where they make regular site visits and have established relationships with "influencers" on each campus. It seems that ministry needs a grass-roots public relations campaign in Catholic high schools and universities that promotes awareness, facts, and opportunity.

Seminaries that put grant money toward recruitment activities definitely saw an increase in enrollment during the five-year grant period. Aquinas reports a 52% increase in lay M.Div. students, with an increase in fulltime students from 116 to 176 over the five-year grant. In addition, these same schools report an increase in the numbers of younger candidates. In 1997, Aquinas Institute had two students under the age of 30 enrolled in the M.Div. program and today there are nine.

"Offering scholarships not only allows schools to encourage brighter candidates to apply, it also allows students to attend school full-time, which decreases the time and expense of part-time studies."

Offering scholarships not only allows schools to encourage brighter candidates to apply, it also allows students to attend school full-time, which decreases the

time and expense of part-time studies. However, offering fulltime scholarship support is not without its challenges. The goal to increase the number of ethnic candidates through scholarship support proved unattainable for a variety of complicated reasons. JSTB was able to grant 15 fulltime scholarships for lay M.Div. students, although they could not reach their goals of ethnic diversity. Many candidates simply lack the eligibility requirements for graduate study, including an undergraduate degree.

A few schools were surprised to find that retention was an issue for students on full scholarship, particularly scholarships targeted toward specific populations. For example, Aquinas Institute of Theology found that some recipients of their Millennial Generation scholarships were not ready to assume fulltime study and make the necessary commitment to ministry. Aquinas recruited five Millennium Generation scholars a year over three years. Four students dropped out of the program, two changed programs, and one extended his/her program beyond three years. Nearly half did not complete the M.Div. degree in the three-year period. Aquinas determined that some young candidates come to seminary in order to discern whether they have a call to ministry rather than arriving with a strong sense that ministry is their vocation. This experience may provide a clue for other seminaries that are welcoming younger students: Be prepared to guide them with basic vocational discernment about what ministry actually entails throughout the degree program. They may not know enough about ministry at the outset to determine if it is their calling, and the M.Div. degree may be a necessary testing-ground.

A key strategy to help schools achieve success in recruiting students and promoting ministry is adding staff in the admissions office. Some schools hired fulltime recruiters for the first time. With more people-power, schools were able to expand the network and number of contacts with people in parishes, youth work, camps, colleges and universities, and seminary alumni. Fulltime staff members were also able to increase the amount and quality of seminary recruitment materials, including Web sites and information packets about ministry. Most realized that they could not increase enrollment without a strong recruitment staff that worked on a wider front than just admissions.

Recruitment for ministry is a significant need for all forms of ministry in the church. Seminaries will need to lead the work of promoting ministry in the church, but they need partners—parishes, colleges, universities,

youth ministers, service programs—to assist them in helping young candidates understand what ministry is and what training for ministry entails. Seminaries that can develop multiple strategies for recruitment, and support their efforts with personnel and financial resources, will be able to build their student bodies and supply the local church with effective ministers.

Educating and Spiritually Forming Lay Ministers

The shift taking place in theological education since the 1970s has been not only the growing numbers of lay students seeking education, but also the growing reality that lay ministry is a distinct vocation requiring theological explanation, requirements for education, and ecclesial acceptance and accountability. Schools learned that the reality of the lay minister is not always welcome in some parts of the Catholic community. Some church leaders and parishioners would prefer priests and religious women as their ministers and see the emergence of lay ministry as a less than satisfactory response to the dwindling numbers of priests. But other church leaders and theologians see lay ministry as an exciting development, one emerging not from crisis but from vocation. Important theological work continues as scholars and church leaders define the meaning and reality of lay ministry, which in turn has forced a rethinking of ordained ministry. Saint John's University supported the Collegetown Ministry Seminar, which hosted a number of leading theologians to advance thinking about lay and ordained ministry. Together the group published the book, *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Ordained and Lay Ministry*, in 2003 (Liturgical Press).

In 2001, Saint Meinrad sponsored a national symposium on spiritual formation of lay ministers, "Called to Holiness," and commissioned a survey of lay ministry spiritual practices, which was published by James Davidson in *Lay Ministers and Their Spiritual Practices* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2003). The purpose of the research and subsequent meetings was to lay the groundwork for a spiritual formation program in the Benedictine tradition.

St. Meinrad, like many schools, realized that lay students need spiritual formation for ministry, just as ordination candidates, and that formation programs must attend to both ministerial identity and prayer forms that support the spiritual life of the minister. Most formation programs strive to complement academics, taking on issues of personal development and faith in a safe and appropriate manner. Spiritual formation is not marginal in

the schools that emphasize it, because the program requires new staff, faculty commitment, and student participation and time. Most formation programs are organized around a few key components: theological reflection groups, assessments of personal capacities, introduction to and development of spiritual prayer practices, spiritual direction, and other workshop or retreat opportunities focusing on ministerial identity or skills. Program directors introduced students to spiritual practices and helped them discern what styles and forms of prayer best suit their temperament, personality, and way of life. Most spiritual formation directors found that they could not adopt a one-style-fits-all policy, but experimented with offering a variety of opportunities, in a variety of formats, before it became clear what realistically works best for students.

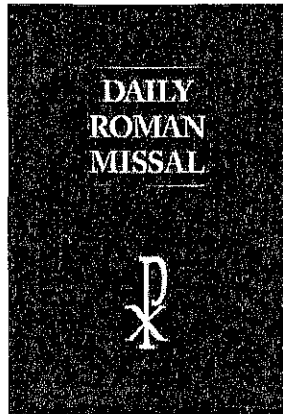
“What program components should be distinctive for lay students and what can be shared with ordination candidates? Should formation be required or voluntary?”

Because Catholic schools have a tradition of formation with ordination candidates, they had some knowledge about what formation is, but because the students they are working with are different from ordination candidates, they faced several other issues. What program components should be distinctive for lay students and what can be shared with ordination candidates? Should formation be required or voluntary? How much time should be given to formation? What are the appropriate forms of accountability? To whom is the student accountable?

Most schools found it unproblematic to combine several efforts in their spiritual formation programs for ministry students, while holding some activities distinct for ordination candidates, since most schools have well-defined requirements for ordination candidates. For example, theological reflection groups and workshops on ministerial skills could be combined. Most schools found that the identity of each group was strengthened, not threatened, through conversation about ministerial issues, including identity. In fact, Franciscan School of

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Theology eventually dropped the term “lay” in the title of its spiritual formation program to enhance the notion that program offerings are for all students. Many schools found that a collaborative approach to formation builds the basis for a collaborative approach to ministry.

In schools sponsored by religious orders it was not difficult to retain distinctive opportunities for those students entering the religious community, but there was also an attempt to draw the order’s spiritual tradition into the formation program for lay students. For instance, the Benedictine seminaries drew upon the spiritual resources of *lectio divina* and liturgy of the hours. Franciscan School of Theology invites students to develop a rule of life, based on the Franciscan practice of the community bound together by a rule. Students design a rule that fits their life situation and spiritual gifts, and they are invited to a celebration honoring their commitment. Over the past few years about 70 students, staff and faculty have participated in the formation of a rule for life.

Most programs started out voluntary but over time found a way to make some or all aspects of the entire program required for lay students. Voluntary programs can face the problem of low attendance at events, and

miss some students altogether. They can resort to offering a smorgasbord of experiences to appeal to as many students as possible, but spread staff and resources very thin. But requiring formation poses its own challenges. The first reason is time: Many lay students are part-time students and are on campus only one or two days a week, and participating in a formation program that adds more time is difficult for many to navigate. Many students are willing and excited about formation, but find it difficult to participate in school-sponsored events, such as workshops, retreats, or theological reflection groups. At times, students can resent what appears to be extra work for non-credit or non-academic requirements if, for instance, the formation activity required reading or advanced preparation. In order to draw students together in a common time and place, St. Meinrad requires four weekend experiences for lay students, and Sacred Heart Seminary designed a Saturday morning program. Most schools had to experiment with different formats to find what worked best, and most learned to be flexible.

The second challenge is accountability. How do voluntary programs hold students accountable to participation, but, also, who is the student accountable to for

his or her formation and how does the school play a role in relationship to current or future employers? To whom would the school report regarding the lay student's formation issues? Several schools had students identify mentors in ministry who could help guide them personally and spiritually; others required spiritual directors. In both cases, students generally found it very helpful to have a person who can offer a listening ear or counsel through the long journey of ministry education. At Saint John's all students are required to participate in spiritual direction and report that it is the single most important part of the ministry formation program. It is certainly one aspect of spiritual formation that seems to have caught on and will probably continue for many as they enter fulltime ministry.

A spiritual director does not, however, play the role that the diocese or religious order plays in terms of providing a community of accountability for ordination candidates and members of religious orders. Currently, the church does not have candidacy requirements for lay ministers, although the recently accepted certification standards for lay ecclesial ministers could begin to function as a set of guidelines. They are designed as criteria for completion of theological education but not entrance to it. With no candidacy requirements for lay ministers to enter the seminary beyond academic requirements, schools struggle to figure out whether students should be screened before entering or whether screening and discernment take place once they have entered and be designated as a goal for the spiritual formation program. In the case of lay ministers, determining vocational identity, readiness for graduate studies, and readiness for ministry all fall to the seminary. The seminary must become all things for the lay students, holding them accountable to spiritual formation and intervening in cases where people are not spiritually or emotionally mature enough to become a parish leader.

“Younger students are proving to be more challenging in terms of spiritual formation issues than older students.”

Younger students are proving to be more challenging in terms of spiritual formation issues than older stu-

dents. For example, Franciscan School of Theology has found that younger students often have had little Christian formation at home and lack understanding about the theology and changes stemming from the Second Vatican Council; they can be more individualistic and consumerist when it comes to spirituality. According to Aquinas Institute, some younger students are “seekers” rather than “subscribers.” Seminaries found that they needed to help young recruits understand the demand of seminary studies while offering them a hospitable place to discern their Christian vocation. Of course, it has always been the case that some people come to seminary to figure out whether the ministry is their calling, but it appears that many more students come discerning rather than decided.

Perhaps the most vexing question that requires further reflection is: In what spiritual tradition is the student being formed? Lay traditions of the past developed into religious orders and, at least at this point, we have not witnessed the rise of communities of lay ecclesial ministers. Much can be learned from the history of religious orders about what sustains people and their practices over time. First and foremost is community, but not just any community; it is a community bound by a commitment, often embodied in a rule. Rarely can an individual hold to the disciplines of daily prayer, fasting, worship, and silence. Most people need the discipline and rules of community life to impress on them the habits of *daily doing* that keep shaping them over time. There is a danger that spiritual formation is episodic and individualistic. Dabbling in one spiritual practice this month, another next month, and something else next year is not the stuff of the spiritual tradition.

In the past, formation happened in the novitiate or pre-seminary settings and was the responsibility of leaders of the religious community—it was formation for religious or ordained life, but it also provided necessary formation for ministry. For lay ministers today there is no other community or context of formation but theological education, yet seminaries cannot do all the work alone—they need partners in parishes and dioceses and other religious settings to continually create a culture of ongoing formation for ministry. And, perhaps, lay ministers themselves need to take up the task of forming communities that hold themselves accountable to a rule of life that is the foundation for their ministerial practice. Because most lay ministers are married—that is their vowed life in community—seminaries may need to tie marriage, family and ministry formation together in more explicit ways.

Students are overwhelmingly positive about spiritual formation as part of their theological education. Even with the extra demands on time, they are willing to be formed in the hands of wise guides. Many students experience a community of practice in seminary, but unfortunately they won't necessarily find it in ministry. In fact, they will be looked upon to be building a community of such practice and wisdom. Yet what kinds of community of spiritual discipline and accountability do ministers have that can help them sustain their spiritual life over time? Finding a spiritual director or retreat house nearby, while essential to sustaining one's focus, is not the same as living and abiding in a promise-keeping community bound together in a common life.

Educating Students for Parish Contexts

Curriculums did not go unnoticed in the Congregational Ministry Program. In fact, about one quarter of all schools undertook a revision of the M.Div. degree. Among the Catholic schools three primary curricular foci emerged: multicultural diversity, contextual education in the parish, and revisions to degree programs for lay ministry students.

Clearly the west coast schools lead Roman Catholic theological education in focusing on issues of multicultural parish life and theological education. For example, Franciscan School of Theology in response to the growing ethnic diversity in parishes combined two degrees to create a new degree: Masters in Ministry for a Multicultural Church. The region's cultural diversity is mirrored on the campus with five families-of-origin groups represented in the student body. Of course, this reality means more than added courses about multicultural realities, it means adding faculty from those communities. The emphasis on multicultural ministry in the multicultural church has given FSOT a new identity, and its metamorphosis mirrors that of many Catholic institutions. In the 1970s, FSOT began accepting lay students, in the 1980s they became a seminary and school and theology, and in the 1990s added a Multicultural Institute. Now a school with three headings or mission-focused purposes—lay and ordained, Franciscan, and multicultural—the school has found a way to retrieve its 800-year-old tradition that envisioned women and men living and working together in common mission to its work today as a school of increasing diversity of many kinds.

Seattle University School of Theology and Ministry (STM), one of the newest and most exciting develop-

ments in ministry education, is an ecumenical school committed to ministry formation for Roman Catholic lay ministers and candidates for lay and ordained ministry from ten Protestant denominations sponsored by a Jesuit University. STM's grant project focused on curricular changes for both ecumenical as well as multicultural education. Both emphases challenged students and faculty to accept different forms of religious expression as well as different cultural worldviews. In both cases, STM worked at changing the curriculum through a variety of strategies: adding new faculty with ecumenical or multicultural expertise, adding readings across every course, adding new courses and requirements, and immersing students in ministry contexts where they could see the dynamics of ecumenical and/or multicultural worship at work in community. In terms of courses, the faculty has now accepted a course in ecumenical theology and "Ministry in Multicultural Context" as required in the M.Div. curriculum. They were able to host a Protestant ecumenical theologian in residence each year to team-teach the theology course as well as increase the number of Protestant faculty. Likewise, they increased ethnic representation on the faculty, hiring three Hispanics, one Filipino, and one Brazilian American.

In an exciting experiment with multicultural parishes, the field education program paired and placed 12 students in five multicultural congregations. The faculty sought the expertise of parish ministers and theologians to find ways of incorporating multicultural resources into pastoral courses. Although the efforts proved more time consuming and difficult to manage than anticipated, STM saw real results. Not only has the ecumenical and cultural make-up the student body and faculty changed, but the community as a whole has built a sense of trust to explore difficult issues of difference together. Most importantly, graduates report that they are better able to work with a congregation from another denomination, or that they can find resources to help them respond to a particular ethnic group in their parish.

Several experiments in contextual education are underway across theological education. In particular, contextual education is exploring ways in which the context of ministry can be a central point *and* place of engagement for faculty, students, pastors, and congregants. For instance, many seminary leaders argue that faculty members need to move closer to the realities of congregational ministry by being in conversation with students and pastors about the congregation or by teach-

ing students in congregations.

Among Catholic schools, the most rigorous experiment is taking place at JSTB. For example, faculty at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkley have revised a number of courses with an eye to the local cultural and ethnic realities of California and North America: Introduction to Ecumenism, Prophets, Ministry in a Global Context, Vatican II and U.S. Catholics, Interfaith Aesthetics, and Spiritual and Religious Quests. Faculty also changed the one-semester integration seminar to a two-semester course titled, "Culture, Awareness, Immersion and Analysis," which includes a two-week immersion experience in Mexico.

In addition to engaging students in conversation about the context of ministry, the Jesuit School offers students a chance to live in the West Oakland Deanery in an intentional lay community, Gelos House, located at a parish, which offers students an experience of Ignatian spirituality and practice during their studies. Interestingly, the lay community grew out of efforts in the 1990s by students and the field education director engaged in an "integration colloquium." In 1997, two years before the grant program began, the students and director met with the parish leaders in the West Oakland Deanery to begin conversation about how students could use their gifts for ministry in the underserved parishes. After sites visits, interviews, and evaluations, the students became involved in youth ministry, a soup kitchen, social outreach ministries, liturgy and prayer groups. In 1998, Jesuit School faculty members committed to an Enhanced Contextual Ministry Program in the WOD to further establish relationships with five parishes. The commitment included Jesuit faculty members opening a house in the Deanery, St. Mary's House, in order to live in the neighborhoods in which they were preparing students for ministry. Eventually, the Jesuit School assumed full pastoral responsibility for one of the parishes. Immersing students in the reality of congregational ministry, then, has far-reaching consequences for faculty if they follow the students into the neighborhoods.

The third curriculum strategy focused on designing programs suited for lay ministers. For Newman College in Edmonton, Alberta, this meant designing a new M.Div. residential fulltime program for lay students in cooperation with 18 bishops in western Canada, who could assist in identifying and recruiting students. It also meant designing field education opportunities at a distance, and developing spiritual formation standards. Newman learned a great deal over several years. First,

and most important, a fulltime M.Div. degree with a residential component is not feasible for the majority of lay students who are serving parishes in western Canada. Not only was recruitment difficult, but also the requirements for students were too many and difficult to fulfill, as well as a financial burden, even with generous tuition assistance from the school.

Rather than continuing to climb uphill to make the students fit the program, Newman adapted mid-grant stream: They dropped the program and designed a new Bachelors in Theology degree that would be offered through distance education. In this way, students would stay in their community (both family and parish), reduce costs for living away from home, retain their jobs, and receive a ministry degree at the bachelor's rather than master's level, which meant students could complete a degree in less time.

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Utilizing distance-education technology was definitely a trade-off, and for many theological educators appears to be a second-rate option. How can distance education possibly provide what traditional seminary education has to offer, especially in terms of a learning community? Surprisingly, many people in many schools are converted to the power of distance education, including Newman. It is not "less" educational, and, in fact, it provides a learning community in which important interaction takes place between students. Teaching an online course demands different skills of faculty, but many are finding that students are more engaged in their learning because they have to take more responsibility. Newman was able to hire good adjunct faculty to teach courses, work creatively with field education supervisors, and require students to come for two summer residences, thus creating time for face-to-face community and spiritual formation. All in all, the seminary is able to fulfill its goal of providing theological education for lay students in ministry, albeit in a pioneering way.

Continuing Education and Formation in Ministry

Seminaries are the first to admit that a minister's education is not complete upon receipt of the M.Div. degree, but that the degree is only the beginning of what many schools hope will be a commitment to lifelong learning. Through the Congregational Ministry Program several schools sought to expand and strengthen their educational efforts for ministers, especially for the large numbers of lay ministers in parishes.

Most schools reach out locally and regionally to meet the needs of ministers in their area, and try to go well beyond their graduates. Some schools are able to partner with dioceses or national groups, as was the case for WTU. The Union sponsored a catechetical day for religious educators in the Archdiocese of Washington, and was able to work with NALM and NACBA to host events for their members. In each case, the event was strengthened by pooling resources: The seminary was able to offer high-quality speakers and the diocese and professional groups gathered eager ministers. The Union also offered summer programs that consisted of daylong events over the course of two weeks, which were designed to entice people to come and stay for one or more days to capitalize on a variety of offerings.

The grant money gave schools an opportunity to experiment with different formats and offerings to discover what best serve ministers. Saint John's School of Theology and Seminary developed an extensive lifelong learning program hoping to serve the large number of ordained and lay ministers across the region, especially those in rural dioceses that have few resources beyond the occasional workshop.

Overall, Saint John's sponsored 90 events for 1,500 people. But even with such impressive numbers, the seminary recognized early on that offering a variety of high-quality events in a variety of venues (half-day, one-day, multiple days) did not always draw large crowds. In fact, low turn out and a high number of cancelled events (40%) led the seminary in 2001 to survey Minnesota parish ministers about their attitudes and practices regarding continuing education. In general, respondents were excited about continuing education and wanted to learn more about ministry; ideally a continuing education event would be one day or less, cost under \$90, and not be more than 50 miles from home.

Most ministers who responded to the survey reported that continuing education is important, although half view it as a luxury and less than half have a plan for their ongoing education. Parish support for continuing

education is present: More than 50% receive support (\$150 a year on average), and three-quarters of the ministers said they had time to attend events. Yet nearly one-quarter did not have time or money for continuing education.

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Support for continuing education exists, even if it is nominal in terms of financial incentives. The problem seminaries face working with continuing education programming is that most ministers said they wanted continuing education, but then did not act on it. And the consistent reason for not attending events is time. Ministers say they have too much work to do and cannot pull themselves away from parish duties to attend even a one-day event. This was particularly the case for parish priests. WTU found it particularly difficult to recruit pastors to attend one-day events with all costs covered because they could not leave their work. Saint Meinrad's Church Leadership Center was designed to serve ongoing educational needs of ministers, with the hope that parish teams would utilize the center's programs as well as come for retreats, but only three parish staffs could afford the time to come to the center.

Very few schools have the financial resources to run a large-scale continuing education program: Promotion, staff, hospitality, and speaker's fees far exceed what the school can hope to recover from program fees, especially when there is a small turn-out for an event. But the largest barrier to such programming is the low expectation for professional development, especially for lay ministers. Even with certification standards, a culture for learning will develop slowly as the recognition and requirements for lay ministers become more widely accepted. Catholic seminaries will have a difficult time creating this culture on their own; they certainly cannot support it financially or subsidize it for long. They will need to continue to find ways to partner with dioceses, universities, and professional organizations to provide high-quality lifelong learning for ministers.

A Few Lessons to Consider

What do Catholic seminaries need to be aware of as they prepare ministers for parish leadership? From the nine schools that participated in Lilly Endowment's five-year grants program, numerous insights can be gained. In conclusion I offer four, drawing one from each of the topics addressed in this article.

First, ministry needs a full-blown public-relations campaign in Catholic parishes, schools, and colleges/universities. Very few Catholics understand the theology of ministry that supports ordained presbyters, permanent deacons, and lay ecclesial ministers. Likewise, few parishioners could describe what ministers do all day long—most people encounter ministers when they come to church on Sunday morning or attend a religious education program. These brief encounters do not offer the faithful a deep understanding into the realities of the work of ministry. Of course, the people are not to blame, especially when the realities of ministry have changed so quickly in the last 25 years.

Ministry must be lifted up, explored, explained, and defined in order for the people of God to be able to discern who in the community is gifted for leadership. An important place to focus energy is with young adults who are discerning what to do with their lives. Parishes, high schools, and colleges/universities can all play an important role in allowing young people to explore what ministry is and what ministers do in order to discern if they have the gifts for ministry. Of course, such exploration requires spiritual direction *and* opportunities to "try out" different aspects of ministry by participating in religious education, social justice, and liturgical ministries. The future of ministry cannot rely on a few committed campus ministers or theology professors, however. It demands institutional focus and attention along with connection across a wide range of ecclesial organizations.

In other words, seminaries alone cannot create the conditions out of which the church calls forth ministers. Granted, seminaries could work more closely with parishes and schools, but they do not have the infrastructure to maintain numerous partnerships with these institutions. Even after five years of recruiting on college campuses supported by grant funds, several Catholic schools found they could not sustain that work on their own. Seminaries do not have a strong presence in higher education or local communities of faith. Such initiative must come from leaders in higher education and parishes that are willing to work together with the seminary to enhance ministry's public image. Together, ecclesial

partners should recruit ministers; seminaries can then recruit graduate students for theological education.

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Second, seminaries must be prepared to educate and spiritually form a new generation of Catholic ministers. Younger students bring intellectual excitement and curiosity to theological education coupled with a strong faith and openness to spiritual exploration and relationship. But many may not come with a strong ecclesial formation in the home or parish. Again, the seminary cannot become the primary place of formation and education—it should ideally build on family and parish formation. Ministry experiences for young adults can be an important step prior to seminary education to help people discern if in fact ministry is their calling. If seminaries house too many people figuring out if ministry is their vocation, the seminary loses its primary purpose: to form the vocation into the minister. Theological education must be prepared to help people sort through personal, spiritual, and vocational issues during their course of studies, which requires more time and focused attention outside the classroom.

Third, it has become increasingly clear that the parish is not always the first, or most compelling, context for ministry for students.² This may stem partly from the fact that increasing numbers of younger candidates know little about ministry, especially parish ministry. Some young adult candidates have strong experiences in campus ministry programs or through RCIA that cultivates their interest in ministry; their most recent ecclesial experience is not necessarily rooted in the parish.

Another factor that influences lay students' interest, or disinterest, in the parish relates to the reality of parish life today. The parish is perceived to have strong clerical control, low job security, and less authority, whereas other ecclesial contexts are perceived to give lay ministers more autonomy and independence, such as hospital chaplaincy or retreat work. There may also be

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the perception that jobs are being cut in parishes and too risky. On both counts, the perception may not match the reality, as job satisfaction is high among lay ecclesial ministers, and seminaries report that most of their lay students find good employment in the parish. Seminaries must help their students decide about employment based on good evidence about the realities of parish ministry. That parish ministry is changing and can change is certainly a fact, but it is not the beleaguered institution some make it out to be. In fact, the seminary has to hold the parish up as the center of the local church's ministry, out of which all other ministry flows in schools, hospitals, and social service settings. If students can gain more experience in the context of parish life through contextual education programs, they will discover the joys and dynamics of parish life and be more drawn to it.

A fourth lesson to draw from this analysis relates to education beyond degree programs for ministers. Because of the realities of parish ministry today bishops and priests must continue to find ways to encourage, in fact, require and demand that all people employed in ministry continue their education and spiritual formation as ministers. Such requirements are not merely about “professional development,” although every minister should strive to gain in competence in all areas of their work. It is about ensuring high-quality pastoral care, preaching, education, and worship in parish life. If ministers do not have time, financial support, and strong encouragement to read, retreat, and learn, they will quickly burnout and lose their passion for leading the people of God. Parishes cannot risk high turnover of

ministers; they need and deserve stable leadership. And a firm foundation of ministry can be built only by intellectually vital and spiritually alive leaders.

The endowment's 1998 grants program invited schools to consider ways they could strengthen congregational ministry. The question forced schools to think outward about the communities to which their graduates go and serve, rather than thinking only inward about the struggles facing the seminary. To focus on the parish as the primary context of ministry and the primary aim of theological education helped seminaries gain a deeper awareness of the context of ministry—ecclesially, demographically, culturally, and geographically. It provided opportunities for faculty and students to explore ministry as it is practiced and to understand the dynamics of parish life in neighborhoods, cities, and diverse cultural settings.

The criteria for changing theological education, then, becomes the parish, which means the seminary is accountable to local communities, and not just to itself or higher education. Schools embarked on ambitious plans, realizing well into the program that five years was not much time to affect the seminary culture as well as building ecclesial partnerships with parishes, universities, and dioceses. Real strategic change, both in the seminary as well as other church organizations, takes much more time—and intentional relationship building. Hopefully the next step in Catholic theological education will be stronger relationships between ecclesial institutions in fostering a climate and culture for ministers to be called forth and educated for leadership in the church.



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Endnotes

1. Mary L. Gautier, “Catholic Ministry Formation Enrollments: Statistical Overview for 2004-2005,” Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, (Washington, D.C., March 2005): 23.
2. See Barbara G. Wheeler, “Is There a Problem?: Theological Students and Religious Leadership for the Future,” *Auburn Studies* (Bulletin 8, 2001): 24.