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Strengthening Congregational Ministry: A Program to Enhance Theological Schools’ Capacities to Prepare Congregational Leadership, 1999-2003

Kathleen A. Cahalan
College of Saint Benedict/Saint John’s University, kcahalan@csbsju.edu

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Summary Report II
Strengthening Congregational Ministry: A Report on a Program to Enhance Theological Schools’ Capacities to Prepare Candidates for Congregational Ministry, 1999–2003

Kathleen A. Cahalan
St. John’s University School of Theology–Seminary

“I love being a minister. Even when the ministry is hard, it’s more fun than any other job I can imagine. Where else can you preach, teach, meet with a local abatement specialist, and get arrested for civil disobedience all in the same week? Where else can you be invited into the living rooms of new mothers and into the hospice rooms of the dying and find hope in both places? I do love being a minister. I love the agility it calls forth in me and the chaos that only Jesus could organize into a calling.”

Lillian Daniel

Introduction: Program overview

Lillian Daniel, senior minister at First Congregational Church, Glen Ellyn, Illinois, captures what is beautiful, ordinary, and holy about congregational ministry in this one brief description. I love to listen to pastors like Lillian talk about ministry. She’s the kind of storyteller that I want to keep listening to, the kind of preacher I want to be inspired by, the kind of minister I want at my bedside when I need comfort. How do ministers like Lillian find their way to serving in congregations, what makes them good at what they do, how are they formed to be spiritual leaders, what do they need to know to lead a congregation, and why do they stay in congregational ministry when it is increasingly demanding and underappreciated in our times?

The story of the Congregational Ministry Program, funded in 1998 by Lilly Endowment, Inc., is about ministers like Lillian and congregations like First Congregational Church. The story is also about the relationship of congregational ministers to theological educators, or, more precisely, the relationship between what Lillian does as a minister and what I do as a theological educator. What is it that I do in my place of ministry, the seminary, that awakens a love for ministry, a deep commitment to the people of God, a sound theological mind, an ability to preach, teach, take care of buildings, and be a prophetic word of hope? How do theological educators encourage such agility, imagination, and faithfulness?

In 2003, the Endowment invited me to write a summary analysis of what has been accomplished and learned through the forty-five grant projects. I have enjoyed three unique vantage points over the past five years, which makes me more than a casual observer of the program. I prepared, at the invitation of the Endowment, an analysis of the grant applications, “A Briefing Paper on the
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1998 Theological School Competitive Grants Programs; I helped to educate grantees on how to conduct a project evaluation; and, I currently teach in one of the schools that received a grant.

Rather than report on what each school accomplished, I have examined the work of each school in light of three overarching questions. First: What has been learned about the particular strategies taken up by grantees, namely student recruitment, contextual education, spiritual formation, lay ministry, distance learning, support for pastors in ministry, and partnerships with congregations and denominations? Second: In what ways have theological schools made strategic advances to improve their institution’s capacity to better prepare the next generation of congregational and parish ministers? And, third: What is the place of theological education in the larger landscape and ecology of the churches’ efforts to promote and develop strong pastoral leaders? In other words, what kinds of partnerships make the most difference?

To prepare this report, I reviewed the original grant proposals and thoroughly read grantee program reports, especially the final reports, most of which were prepared in 2003. I also conducted telephone interviews with twenty presidents and deans and fourteen project directors. Several shared materials from their grant projects, which allowed me to see the breadth and depth of their work. What becomes immediately clear is that every seminary cares that its students have the ability to be excellent leaders in strong congregations that make a difference in the lives of members as well as their communities. What is most exciting about what I have to report is that every seminary knows pastors like Rev. Daniel and succeeded on many fronts in working to connect to congregations like hers. I hope my summary and analysis give due credit to the enormous commitment, hard work, and courage to risk and experiment that are part of the story of these schools. Before turning to the program findings, it is important to first understand who the grantees are, what seminaries thought at the outset of the program about the challenges they faced in educating students for congregational ministry, and the strategies they designed to strengthen their capacity to better prepare pastoral leaders.

Profile of the Congregational Ministry Program

Lilly Endowment Inc. has supported theological schools and related institutions that have as their mission the education of Christian ministers and pastors for several decades. For the past twenty years, the Endowment has funded most of the research in the area of congregational studies. In the 1990s, the foundation made a commitment to strengthening pastoral ministry in congregations and in 1998 Lilly Endowment invited theological schools to be partners in its pastoral leadership development initiative. The Endowment invited all schools in The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) in the United States and Canada to consider how they might improve education for congregational ministry. A request for proposals was sent to 202 accredited schools. Seminaries could apply for up to $1.5 million in grant funds for five years. The Endowment received 108 proposals, forty-five of which were funded, totaling $53.4 million in grants. The Endowment awarded grants to schools that could make “a strategic advance to improve their institution’s capacity to better prepare the next generation of congregational or parish ministers.”
The largest number of grants (60 percent) was awarded to mainline denominational schools in the United States. Nearly half of all mainline denominational schools applied, and four denominations had particularly high application rates (seven out of eight schools sponsored by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America schools, twelve out of twelve United Methodist, eight out of nine Presbyterian Church (USA) schools, and five out of six United Church of Christ schools applied). Twenty-seven mainline denominational schools in the United States were awarded grants, with the ELCA, UMC and UCC accounting for fifteen grants (33 percent of the total grants).

The second-largest group to receive grants was Roman Catholic schools (20 percent). Among the Roman Catholic schools eligible to apply, 42 percent applied and of them nearly half were awarded grants. Evangelical schools accounted for 16 percent of the grants, four denominational and three independent schools received support. One each of the mainline independent and peace church seminaries received grants. It should also be noted that of the total, three schools are predominantly African-American and two schools are located in Canada. Five grants were given to seminaries that are the only, or one of two, seminaries in their denomination.

**Understandings of congregational ministry and theological education in 1998**

What can seminaries do to build their capacity to better prepare congregational ministers? Lilly Endowment asked theological schools a broad question and gave them the freedom to craft an answer to that question that best fit their ecclesial and educational situation. In their applications seminaries were asked to describe the state of congregational ministry among their constituents. Four distinct story lines emerge from each of the main groups in the program along with several common issues that all seminaries face together.

The first story is told by mainline denominational seminaries, and it is the story about the gap between the seminary and the congregation and the seminary and the denomination. The relative isolation of ecclesial institutions from each other has led to a breakdown in the mainline system that has had serious repercussions for seminaries. Mainline Protestant seminaries have found...
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It is increasingly difficult to recruit students, as the feeder-system—the process of selecting and forming ministerial candidates—has virtually disappeared in many mainline settings and few congregations see it as their role to encourage and call people, especially young people, to ministry. Most denomination-based feeder systems for seminaries, such as schools, camps, youth organizations, colleges, and congregations, are no longer linked in ways that cultivate new generations of pastoral leaders. The network of denomination-sponsored institutions once nurtured young people by means of a series of programs and activities. Adults invited young people to consider the ministry and lent guidance and support through their years of vocational exploration. While these institutions may still stand, they work in relative isolation from each other and rarely claim church leadership development as among their respective or shared priorities. The mainline Protestant story is deeply involved with building closer relationships among various institutions—seminaries, congregations, and denominations—for the purpose of recruiting, placing and supporting ministers.

The Roman Catholic story is a bit different, though many Catholic schools share the mainline Protestant concern for the loss of a feeder system that once promoted ordained ministry as a viable option for young men. The prevailing concern of Catholic schools now is how to prepare lay people for ministry, how to understand theologically the phenomenon of the lay minister, and how to prepare congregations and church leaders to accept lay people as ministers. The Catholic Church is witnessing the rise of a new professional class in parish ministry—the nonordained, professionally trained person who requires education and formation for ministry, yet whose role and work is not entirely the same as the priest’s.

Catholic lay ministers are now employed in a wide variety of church jobs: as pastoral associates in parishes, as diocesan-level administrative posts, and as leaders of specific congregational ministries (e.g., liturgy, music, religious education, pastoral care), often in large parishes that were once served by women religious. Seminaries have been the likely place to turn for the training of lay ministers, but it is a new task for Catholic seminaries, which until very recently trained only ordained candidates. Behind this pressing concern, of course, is the stark decline in the number of ordained candidates for priesthood, the rising age of priests, the number of parishes without a resident priest, and the loss and decline of large numbers of women religious who served local ministries for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Catholic grantees chose overwhelmingly to put their energy and focus into designing ministry education and spiritual formation programs for lay students at the graduate level.

Evangelical seminaries articulate two main concerns. The first is about the quality and character of people entering ministry. Evangelical seminaries want to find the best people for ministry and to recruit those with the strongest leadership potential to do congregational ministry well. Too many ministers don’t succeed, or don’t stay in ministry, which is devastating for congregational growth and vitality. The second concern voiced by evangelical leaders has to do with the changing character of congregational life. How can the...
seminary train people to understand congregations in all their complexity and to help ministers articulate a sense of the congregation's mission in communities that are constantly changing?

Several schools participating in the grants program are the only seminary in their denomination or are one of two schools (e.g., Moravian, Mennonite, African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, and Orthodox schools). The denomination might be small compared to larger mainline Protestant bodies or Catholics, but in many cases a single school must address the denomination's needs for high quality ministers on its own and thereby is among the denomination's most important institutions. The challenge facing these schools is not so much a gap between the seminary and the denomination as it is the demands of an ever-changing denomination that is spreading in different parts of the country and hemisphere. How can one or two seminaries serve diverse congregational settings? How can the seminary stretch beyond its walls to train ministers who cannot move to the seminary for full-time studies and to provide services to ministers and congregations?

Seminaries across the major Christian families have distinctive pressures and challenges. But seminaries also have a great deal in common as graduate schools for ministry, and in 1998 schools described several challenges they face together: changes in the student body over the past twenty-five years; the gap between seminary education and the realities of congregational ministry; providing education to students off campus, and supporting graduates as they move into full-time employment.

Nearly all grantees at the outset voiced a concern about the quality of candidates they accept. Schools admit that many of the students they are accepting into the Masters of Divinity (MDiv) program are not likely to be strong candidates for ministry, but because of financial constraints, they accept nearly all applicants. In addition to changes in the overall academic quality of students, seminaries have seen dramatic changes in their student bodies over the past twenty years. Forty is the average age of the student body on many campuses; many students are pursuing second, and sometimes, third careers; an increasing number are studying part time while working; and some students are not well-formed in the denomination or its tradition.

Older students bring maturity and experience to seminary as well as a clear sense of their vocation, a vocation that probably was discouraged when they were younger. The fact that they are older, however, presents a challenge to church leaders: they will serve a shorter period of time in the congregation and increase the number of ministers over age 50 in what is an already-graying profession. Older students can be less likely to relocate to attend a denominational seminary because of family and employment, and, therefore, seek seminary education at a school nearby. One positive outcome is that many Protestant seminaries are more ecumenical and now work with a variety of denominations to ensure that candidacy requirements can be fulfilled.

Seminaries have never defined older students as the problem. The problem many now realize is that the seminary forgot or failed to actively and intentionally recruit candidates for ministry who are college-age or in their mid-
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20s. While the number of older students has steadily increased, the number of first-career students and recent college graduates has steadily decreased. Many schools reported that recent college graduates constitute the smallest group on campus and young adults and high school-age youth are rarely invited or encouraged to consider ministry as a vocation.

Many would-be ministers cannot afford to attend school full time. Part-time graduate studies are not viewed as an ideal situation either for the school, which remains financially viable with full-time students, or the student, who faces financial repercussions for part-time status. Students who attend school part-time and work part-time will end up spending more money for their education, accumulating more student loans, and earning less income. Part-time students change the dynamics of campus life because there are fewer students participating in school-sponsored activities. Part-time and older students have changed the ecology of several denominational seminaries, placing greater demands on seminaries to serve a student body with diverse educational and ecclesial needs.

In addition to the gap between the seminary and the churches on the issue of recruitment, many seminaries agreed that a gap exists between the realities of congregational ministry and education for congregational ministry. Many seminaries face a credibility gap with congregations. Evangelical seminaries face the challenge from those who think graduate education is unnecessary, irrelevant, and at times harmful. Why can't congregations train their own leaders? Academic ethos, shaped largely by theology, Bible, and history guilds, is far more influential in the curriculum design and content of seminary education than is ethos of the congregation. Mainline Protestant seminaries face a similar credibility gap with their congregations. They often hear the complaint that the seminary places greater emphasis on acquiring knowledge through academic study than on acquiring leadership skills. Catholic seminaries face a gap in perception about what is happening with regard to lay ministers: many pastors are willing to ask parish volunteers who have no theological training to lead programs. Seminaries increasingly want to provide lay ministers with graduate-level education, but many parishes seem not to realize that ministry constitutes a profession for the lay leader.

An overview of the schools' strategies

Based on the analysis of their situation, it is not surprising what strategies seminaries chose to pursue in the Congregational Ministry Program. Two main strategies emerged to enhance schools' capacities to prepare congregational ministers: student-recruitment efforts and revising or enhancing the MDiv curriculum. Further, most grant projects contained several efforts in addition to recruitment and curriculum efforts, most notably developing distance-education programs and continuing-education efforts for pastors in ministry. Schools also sought support for seminary infrastructure such as the development office, capital improvements, new centers, new staff positions, and computer and network technology. Because of the size of the grants, most schools' strategies contained multiple projects.
Nearly two-thirds of the Congregational Ministry Program grantees sought to work on some aspect of student recruitment. It was increasingly obvious to seminaries that the ministry needs nothing less than a full-blown public-relations campaign—in every denomination. The ideal applicant pool for most seminaries includes high-quality candidates regardless of age with a diversity of ethnic representation, but it would also welcome a diversity of age groups studying full-time together. “High quality” translates into two

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characteristics: excellent academic skills for successful graduate studies and emerging leadership capacities that can be formed into the requisite skills for ministry. Seminaries generally know that they need to recruit more students, but they are also aware of the fact that by accepting only higher ranking students, they would likely enroll fewer students, thereby placing themselves in a vulnerable financial situation.

Financial support for students was a key recruitment strategy. Student aid included special scholarship programs for academically excellent candidates (full tuition plus stipend to encourage full-time study); stipends for students completing field-education requirements, especially for students who must give up paid employment to fulfill this requirement, or stipends for serving in a multicultural congregation that cannot afford to pay the student; and tuition support for ethnic candidates.

About one quarter of the schools, mostly mainline denominational schools, sought to create aggressive recruitment programs that included collaboration with congregations, colleges and universities, and denominational offices to promote ministry as a vocation. A revitalized feeder system would begin with congregations that recognize their role in promoting a theological understanding of Christian vocation for all congregants and encourage those with a call to ministry to pursue formal training. A rebuilt feeder system for seminaries would bridge the gap with colleges and universities as well as camps, denominational youth initiatives, and para-church organizations.

Another way seminaries sought to address the credibility gap is by stepping closer to the congregation. Such a move involves three steps. First, seminaries sought to strengthen their focus on congregations through research about congregations and by hiring new faculty in under-developed curriculum areas such as congregational studies, worship, church leadership, and practical theology. Second, they sought to use the congregation more effectively as a setting for ministry education in contextual education programs that moved beyond traditional models of field education in which students went off to the congregation on their own to be supervised by a pastor. Finally, the seminary wanted to be seen as relevant to the concerns and demands of congregations. The majority of contextual education projects were undertaken at mainline Protestant schools, mostly ELCA and United Methodist schools.

In addition to contextual education and new faculty, eight schools sought to create or revise lay ministry programs and twelve schools developed spiritual formation programs for MDiv students. An increasing number of lay people in Protestant churches are seeking ministerial education in order to serve the local congregation in places where a full-time ordained minister is not employed. Catholic seminaries sought to revise the traditional MDiv degree for ordination candidates into a MDiv degree for lay students; they also wanted to develop spiritual formation programs that complement their programs for ordained candidates.

Plans for initiating or revising spiritual formation emerged as an important strategy for both Catholic and Protestant schools, in part because The Association of Theological Schools in 1996 included it as a criterion for accreditation. A minister’s personal religious faith and practice are recognized...
as fundamental to successful long-term ministry, but intentional spiritual formation is lacking in many seminaries. Several Protestant applicants recounted that their graduates have reported to them that the seminary did not sufficiently help them to form daily spiritual disciplines that would support them in the ministry. The lack of such personal practice is seen by many pastors as a major cause for burnout.

Many schools requested funds to support two levels of instructional technology: basic support for computers or networked systems and technology for distance learning. Most seminaries seeking to use distance-learning technology were doing so in order to enhance their core program, not to replace the traditional classroom setting. In fact, some argued that through video-teleconferencing technology the face-to-face interaction between teacher and students and among students is retained. Seminaries are trying to reach particular populations of students through distance education courses: pastors who are already serving in ministry and whose denomination does not require an MDiv for ordination, and students who live at considerable distance from the seminary, often in rural areas, and who cannot relocate to the seminary (often this scenario involves denominations with only one or two seminaries).

Many seminaries acknowledged that the three-year MDiv degree as currently structured is inadequate for preparing congregational ministers. When their graduates were asked what was lacking in their seminary education, the majority of pastors replied, "training in practical skills." Further, many noted that newly graduated pastors find the transition from seminary into full-time ministry quite difficult.

Part One: Congregational Ministry Program findings

Recruitment strategies

Typically young people are not encouraged to consider ministry by the key people who influence their career path. Parents, college professors, campus ministers, friends, counselors and pastors do little to encourage people to listen for a call to ministry or to help a person begin exploring what a call to ministry would entail—and even further, what education for church ministry is about. Many people who sense they have a call to the ministry have been left to figure out on their own how to turn a call into a vocation and a vocation into service. Perhaps many calls go unheeded because it is so difficult for people, young adults and mid-career people alike, to navigate their way into and through ecclesial structures. What does the college junior or senior or young adult in his or her mid-20s know about local church leadership and
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the church’s educational requirements for entering the ministry? Without a familial, ecclesial, and educational culture that holds forth pastoral ministry as a viable option for those with the gifts to serve, seminaries have found it more and more difficult to recruit younger candidates, brighter candidates, and candidates from ethnic and underrepresented communities.

But the problem also lies with seminaries. In many cases, seminaries have developed the habit of welcoming only candidates that come to the seminary, often accepting all who apply, rather than going out and actively recruiting candidates. Seminaries too have largely ignored or forgotten how to help people find their way to their door.

Efforts by Congregational Ministry Program grantees demonstrate that ecclesial cultures can change and that seminaries can increase the number of applications through a variety of recruitment activities. With sustained steady effort, recruiting is not impossible: seminaries are able to increase enrollment with younger and more qualified candidates when they are intentional and proactive. The primary, and most obvious, means for increasing the quality of students is to offer scholarships, and several schools have succeeded on that front. But other options were tested with important results for all seminaries to note: some schools chose to develop programs and partnerships around recruitment by hosting exploratory events, while others developed new publications and resources for congregations and denominations that emphasize the call to ministry.

Scholarships. In most cases, full-time scholarships for high academic achievement yielded impressive results. Smart students bring a quality of thinking to the classroom and become leaders on campus, thereby improving the quality of life for all students and creating a different kind of academic community. For example, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary offered twelve students merit scholarships each year. The students not only elevated the school’s academic performance but also exhibited leadership on campus by serving as ambassadors for the seminary. About half of the scholarship students engaged in cross-cultural experiences. The program’s success has led the seminary to increase the scholarships to three years and the number of scholarships to fourteen a year.

Offering scholarships allows schools not only to encourage brighter candidates to apply, but it allows students to attend school full time, which decreases the time and expense of part-time studies. Seminary education is often delayed or forgotten when prospective students add the cost of graduate studies to their undergraduate debt and look ahead to the prospects of a low-paying job after graduation—the math is a stark reminder that ministry entails a form of sacrifice unlike many other careers.

However, offering full-time scholarship support is not without its challenges, as some schools learned. The goal to increase the number of ethnic candidates through scholarship support proved unattainable for a variety of complicated reasons. Many candidates simply lack the eligibility requirements for graduate study, including an undergraduate degree. But to the surprise of many recruiters, the candidates simply could not be found. It was assumed that a pool of ethnic candidates were waiting to enter seminary education if
only the financial means were available to them, but it now appears that money is not the only barrier. Some ethnic ministers find denomination-sponsored ministry formation programs more amenable to their personal, family and financial situation, especially when they are taught in a native language, such as Spanish or Korean.

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 its Millennial Generation scholarships were not ready to assume full-time study and make the necessary commitment to a life serving in 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 MDiv 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.

Similarly, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary designed a scholarship program for pastors to serve congregations in New England, a region the seminary has determined is in dire need of full-time pastors. But admissions staff found it difficult to recruit students to commit to serving in New England after graduation and those that did receive the scholarship had a difficult time engaging in the extra programming the seminary planned around ministry in the northeast. Gordon-Conwell planned to give twenty-five $4,000 scholarships per year, for a total of seventy-five over three years. Due to student attrition, 129 students received the scholarship, thirty graduated and forty-nine are currently enrolled. Of the graduates, fifteen are serving in ministry, seven have not found positions. About 37 percent dropped out of the scholarship program, either leaving the seminary altogether or enrolling in part-time studies. The seminary experimented with part-time scholarships but found it did not increase students’ course-load. Financial support for full- or part-time study could not always retain students because of the pressures of jobs, often in ministry, and family responsibilities.

Finding partners to promote the call to ministry. Many seminaries realize that they cannot recruit students on their own and that issues of recruitment, training, and placement must be identified as a priority by the entire church. As noted in Part One, many denominations have faced a breakdown in the ecclesial culture that supplied the seminary with a feeder system that started in congregations and ran through summer camps, colleges, and universities to the seminary. It is not just that organizations were more directly connected in the past than today, but that people—ministers and church leaders—were more intentional about guiding prospective talented candidates through the system.

One of the most exciting directions grantees initiated has been partnerships between seminaries with their supporting denominational bodies around issues of recruitment. The building of key partnerships may prove to have the most lasting impact on recruiting a new generation of people into
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ministry. In many cases the seminary became the catalyst and convener of conversations and programming around the call and vocation to ministry. When church leaders and ministers come together, rarely do they disagree about the nature of the problem or the need to respond. The problem is they rarely come together to analyze the problem carefully or forge solutions to solve it. Several mainline denominational seminaries convened youth ministers, campus ministers, judicatory officials, seminary administrators and faculty, and local pastors and found it was the first time that church leaders from different areas of church ministry talked together about recruitment for ministry. Lack of connection was not the only barrier seminaries faced. Seminaries learned that one reason the people cannot stay engaged in conversation and work collaboratively across organizations is because of the high turnover in leadership positions, especially in middle judicatory church bodies but also in youth and campus ministry positions. As Seattle University project directors noted, be prepared to do more than half the work when you forge a partnership with denominations.

In other words, it is not uncommon for seminaries to find partners who are eager to talk about recruitment but who lack sufficient resources to do something about the problem. Progress was made when the seminary took the lead in planning and executing the work. For example, in the United Methodist Church, partners realized that the candidacy process is too complicated, especially for younger candidates. To a college student, the ten-year process, from candidacy through education to ordination, is too long. Seminaries and their partners deemed it necessary to find more hospitable ways of helping younger candidates negotiate the system and for the system to reconnect its various parts to make the process less cumbersome and mysterious for would-be ministers.

One of the most compelling ways Methodist seminaries found to work at the issue of recruitment was to partner with congregations and judicatories to create a "culture of the call" on the local level. Wesley Theological Seminary discovered one way seminaries and churches are disconnected in their conversations about vocation: seminaries are trying to recruit students into graduate theological studies, but people in congregations are trying to discern God's call in their lives. Wesley leaders shifted their focus to creating a culture of the call for all Christians with an emphasis on discerning ministry as one of many important calls in the Christian life.

Several Methodist schools developed biblical and theological materials on the call to ministry, highlighting the calls of both historical and contemporary persons. An important strategy used by United Methodist schools was to shift the conversation with denominational partners away from professional criteria for ministry or the problem of clergy shortage to theological interpretations of church ministry. The culture of the call was promoted through Ministry Sunday events (which are now required by several annual conferences) for which the seminaries provided preachers, brochures, curriculum materials, posters, and videos—any educational or worship materials that congregations would find useful. Some seminaries partnered with youth leaders around denominational rallies and events and created programming around the call to
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ministry. For example, Wesley Seminary partnered with youth leaders in the denomination’s Salt ’n Light Ministry that trains youth workers and summer camps counselors and were able to reach about 4,000 youth through various events.

Lancaster Theological Seminary was successful in bringing together seven United Church of Christ conferences in the course of two yearly events on recruitment. Denominational and seminary leaders explored issues of vocation, discernment, legal issues, lay ministry certification, alternative tracks to ministry education, and publicity about ministry. In addition the seminary hosted Discover weekends, revised promotional materials, designed a workbook for local congregations, and developed a new Web site. By increasing their admissions staff, Lancaster was able to build partnerships with chaplains, judicatory leaders, youth ministers, and pastors. Saint Meinrad’s School of Theology tried a similar strategy by hosting a national symposium on the Millennial Generation for national, diocesan, and parish leaders. The seminary also designed a program for vocation directors focusing on using media and marketing more effectively to promote ministry.

A few seminaries found that the partnerships they tried to create with colleges were more difficult to navigate than expected. Two reasons seem most evident: some college faculty and campus ministers are hesitant and unwilling to encourage young people to consider ministry. Second, college students lack an understanding of what ministry is and what ministers do. Aquinas Institute’s research study, conducted at the beginning of the grants program, revealed that Generation X and Millennial Generation students have little to no awareness that ministry constitutes a profession in the church for which people are paid. It seems that campus ministers encourage young adults who are interested in church service to consider volunteer programs after graduation but not congregational ministry.

Seminaries that attempted to work with colleges pursued several strategies: contacting college representatives about recruitment opportunities, making onsite visits to campuses, attending job fairs, and making classroom presentations about ministry. 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. Over the five-year grant period, recruiting on college campuses proved too expensive and time consuming for schools that tried to consider it as a strategy in the future. Northern Baptist Theological Seminary leaders reported that it takes them three to five years to establish partnerships with colleges that bear fruit.

Exploring ministry as a vocation. Inviting college students to engage in retreats or programs about ministry were more successful, though labor-intensive, strategies used by a few seminaries (e.g., Ministry in the Mountains sponsored by Aquinas Institute; Chicago Collegiate Seminary Program sponsored by Seabury-Western Theological Seminary; and Thinking of Priesthood retreats sponsored by Saint Meinrad’s School of Theology). Exploratory programs about ministry were helpful in a variety of ways for students who at-
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tended: students engaged a residential-learning experience where they could explore ministry, theology, and vocation with peers. One of the most important outcomes for participants in Saint Meinrad’s program was overcoming a sense of isolation about their call to ministry because many 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 they all faced a common hurdle. Finding young people to participate in the program was quite difficult for each school. For example, Aquinas Institute was able to recruit seventy-nine students from twenty-five colleges over four years; about thirty-five students applied to Seabury-Western’s program and thirty attended. Saint Meinrad’s partnered with twenty-five dioceses to offer retreats, and nearly 500 young men participated over six years. The seminary and dioceses had difficulty finding college or young-adult males who, if they were attending college and are away from their home parish, were unknown to diocesan leaders.

Even though the seminaries met with low interest among college recruits, the results for those who did attend are worth noticing. Twenty-seven college students enrolled in Seabury-Western’s program and thirteen are attending seminary or graduate school in theology. Of the seventy-nine students in Aquinas Institute’s program, sixteen are working in ministry, mostly part time, and four are in volunteer service programs; another twelve are enrolled in graduate schools of theology, six are enrolled 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 of the participants are 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 all seminaries will be welcoming in the future.

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.

A few seminaries worked with congregations to sponsor exploratory events for would-be candidates. For example, Bethel Seminary worked with three congregations to host Leadership Vision Seminars. The seminars were conducted by congregational and church leaders, with the assistance of the seminary, and focused on several age groups, including high school, college-age, young adults, and older church members. Implementing and hosting the two-day seminar proved labor-intensive because the seminar included personalized mentoring and coaching for each participant regarding an as-
Assessment of personal character and leadership skills but with some important results. Of the nearly 1,800 participants, thirty have enrolled at Bethel Seminary and another twenty-five to fifty are considering entering the school. The seminary also discovered that the Strengths Finder and Character and Leadership Matrix were helpful tools for participants as well as members from the sponsoring congregations, who participated in the activities of discerning gifts for ministry and service. The one hurdle Bethel Seminary has encountered is tracking and follow-up contact with students. The commitment to be in contact with young people who have an interest in ministry is not impossible, but it is time-consuming and difficult work for the seminary. If the seminary can nurture college-age candidates and keep the topic of ministry before them, the seminary will eventually benefit.

Increasing enrollment and welcoming younger students. Seminaries that chose to work on recruitment report an increase in enrollment during the five-year grant period, though the reasons why are not necessarily directly related to grant activities. Many seminaries are finding that candidates who are applying to seminary are younger in age than in the past and some seminaries are finding they can be more selective from their pool of candidates. Certainly recruitment efforts, especially scholarships, have helped in a direct way, but raising the church's consciousness about vocation and ministry is also having some impact. For example, Aquinas Institute reports a 52 percent increase in lay MDiv students, with an increase in full-time students from 116 to 176 over the five-year grant; Eastern Mennonite Seminary has increased its FTE from sixty to ninety-six students; Eden Theological Seminary reports a twenty-year high in enrollment, with a majority of students, 70 percent, living on campus; Payne Theological Seminary has increased its study body from fifty-four students in 1999 (forty-two FTE) to one hundred students in 2002 (seventy FTE); and both St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary and Wesley Theological Seminary report enrollments going up in all degree programs.

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 MDiv program and today there are nine; Eastern Mennonite has the highest number of students under the age of 25 in last ten years; Eden Seminary reports that 50 percent of their students are under 35 years of age (about 30 percent are college graduates and 20 percent are a job out of college). Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary reports that in 1998, 23 percent of the entering class was under the age of 30, and today it is 50 percent; the average age of students is down from 40 to 33. Thirty-five percent of the students at Northern Baptist are under 30 years of age, St. Vladimir’s reports the average age is down in the past five years, and Wesley Theological Seminary reports that one third of its entering class is under the age of 30.

Seminaries are eager to welcome younger students to campus. Besides the energy, critical questioning, and academic skills younger students bring, they also represent a generation that seek religious meaning of both personal experience and social realities. Many seminaries found that younger students infuse fresh ideas and bold questions into classroom discussions. Both Gen-
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eration X and Millennial generation students want to make a difference in the world and have more opportunity to do so than perhaps any generation before.

Younger students are most likely residential students. They enliven campus and residential life and become involved in campus activities such as student government, chapel services, and student activities. More residential students place more demands on some seminaries, which most schools are pleased to provide but can stretch campus resources. While most young students are not yet married, in the case of St. Vladimir's younger candidates are often married with young families. The seminary is required to provide services that attend to the whole family: affordable housing, safety, playgrounds, health insurance, and health care.

While most seminaries find it easy to adjust to the culture of younger students, having younger students is not without its challenges. Young students bring enthusiasm but are not necessarily better educated, and not all are the kind of students interested in graduate seminars in a rarified topic. Many bring a strong piety and are committed to living out the Gospel, though it is not a traditional denominational piety. Many young people embrace more eclectic tastes in spiritual matters and openly embrace and experiment with a variety of religious disciplines and ideas. Northern Baptist found that seminary professors need to listen to what younger students are saying about ministry, formation, and today's church. If they are not listened to, they will most likely leave the seminary.

Younger students, according to Aquinas Institute, can often be "seekers" rather than "subscribers." Many 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 about ministry as their vocation. If that is the case, seminaries need to be prepared to help people sort through personal, spiritual, and vocational issues during their studies.

A key strategy to help schools achieve success in recruiting students and promoting ministry is adding staff in the admissions office. Some schools hired full-time 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. Full-time staff members were also able to increase the amount and the quality of seminary recruitment materials, including Web sites and information packets about ministry.

Issues of declining numbers of ministers face many denominations. The good news is that the trend can be reversed through a variety of strategies. It seems that no one way is best, but that multiple strategies yield the most results. For mainline denominational schools that have listened to the story of mainline decline for several years, the recruitment efforts of the Congregational Ministry Program grantees should be heartening. No doubt the decline...
Enabling education for ministry

Educating about the congregation. For several decades theological educators have worked to figure out the best models for educating ministers. In the 1970s and 1980s, educators asked questions about how to overcome the gulf between theory and practice, how best to integrate theology and ministry, and how to help ministry students understand how congregations work. In the recent past, theological educators have grown increasingly concerned about the social and cultural context in which ministry takes place, especially in relationship to the changing role of religion in society and the emerging multiplicity of cultures and diversity of ethnic communities in regions, cities, and congregations.

The calls for change in theological education have been numerous, but progress toward change has been slow and incremental, without much opportunity for experimenting with new models and pedagogies. When asked why theological education has such a difficult time changing the way it educates ministers, two problems are consistently mentioned: the academic guilds determine the research interests and classroom focus of the faculty far more than the contemporary needs of the church, and the practical fields, including field education and the various courses in practical and pastoral theology are perceived as second-best, second-rate, and less academic in comparison to what is often referred to as the "classical" disciplines. Unfortunately for seminaries, the academic continues to be pitted against the practical.

Old habits die hard on most faculties and while the Congregational Ministry Program has not buried that culture, several exciting experiments point to promising developments in ministry education. The experiments in contextual education, in particular, demonstrate that 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 teaching students in congregations, and to the extent that schools could make either happen, positive results abound. Schools moved closer to congregations in three ways: redesigning courses and curriculum, improving field education opportunities with faculty involvement, and faculty members in a few schools taught courses in congregations.

Drawing the context of congregational ministry into course work is the primary way faculty members have "contextualized" the curriculum. As Luther Seminary noted, they had never before sent students out to investigate the context of communities as a site for mission. Several schools have revised or offered new courses focusing on cultural and social issues in congregations. For example, faculty at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkley have revised a number of courses, such as Sociology of Religion, Vatican II and U.S. Catholics, Interfaith Aesthetics, Spiritual and Religious Quests, Introduction to Ecumenism, and Prophets: Ministry in a Global Context, with an eye to the local
cultural and ethnic realities of California and North America. The 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. Luther Seminary changed their capstone MDiv course, Exercises in Biblical Theology, to Exercises in Biblical Theology for Leading in Mission. Boston University designed a practical theology seminar, Church and Theology in the Contemporary World, which engages students in interdisciplinary research on social and ecclesial situations in several world contexts. Regent College determined it was better to integrate its focus on marketplace ministry into two existing courses rather than developing new courses.

About one quarter of the schools undertook a revision of the MDiv degree with a particular contextual focus, or created new degree opportunities, and many were able to revise in light of ideas they tested during the project. For example, the Franciscan School of Theology, in response to the growing ethnic diversity on campus (five families of origin groups) combined two degrees to create a new degree: Masters in Ministry for a Multicultural Church. Seattle University now requires the course, "Ministry in Multicultural Context," in its MDiv curriculum. Christian Theological Seminary now requires one year of contextual education based on the success of the program it developed during the grant.

Some schools revamped field education opportunities by making them more focused and intentional learning experiences. Luther Seminary requires four semesters of contextual education and a one-year internship. Luther's project focused on redesigning the four semesters of contextual education into a corporate experience involving students, pastors, and faculty. Two to five students are assigned to a site, and the students from five sites are brought together with the five pastors and one or two faculty for monthly meetings. The curriculum focuses on the experience of ministry across the five congregations and helps students to both describe and evaluate the ministry of each community. Because the meetings go beyond the traditional student-supervisor conversation, students are able to see several models of ministry and to listen to pastors explain why they employ the models they do. Over the course of the five-year grant, eighty pastors and fifteen faculty members have participated with 120 congregations.

In addition to engaging students in conversation about ministry experiences, the Jesuit School offers students a chance to live at their contextual education site. Students formed an intentional lay community, Gelos House, located at a parish in the West Oakland Deanery, where they live in community based on Ignatian spirituality and practice. Interestingly, the lay community grew out efforts in the 1990s by students and the field education director through an integration colloquium in the field education program. 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 area's underserved parishes. After site visits, interviews, and evaluations, the students became involved in youth ministry, a soup kitchen, social outreach ministries, liturgy, and prayer
groups in five parishes. The Gelos House was established as the student base for community life and ministry during their studies. In 1998, Jesuit School faculty members committed to an Enhanced Contextual Ministry Program in the Deanery to further establish relationships with the parishes. The Jesuit School’s 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!

Other schools offered field education opportunities that included stipends to students to serve in congregations that could not pay a stipend; creating longer internship opportunities, especially in dynamic churches; increasing the number of teaching parishes; and exposing students to ethnically diverse communities. Claremont School of Theology partnered with United Methodist conferences to develop a student pastor program, with stipend, for students to serve small and ethnic congregations that could not afford a full-time pastor. Perkins created longer internship opportunities, which can be fulfilled throughout the MDiv program or as a one-year full-time option after course work is completed.

Many theological educators have realized that adding more hours to field education is not necessarily the answer—it is the way students spend their time in field education that makes the greatest difference. In order to change field education into contextual education, schools are more selective about placements, training supervisors, and engaging in research. In a few schools, the most radical curricular change required sending faculty to congregations to teach. At Chicago Theological Seminary, forty-five students selected the contextual education program as their field education requirement and served in three urban congregations; eight faculty members participated in the program as well. Chicago Theological Seminary’s faculty took the challenge to teach courses in the congregation with an emphasis on the congregation, for example, Reading the Psalms in Context; Worship as Local Theology; Theology of Atonement in Context; Bible and Economic Ethics; Personal and Social Transformation in Context. Faculty also participated in an integration seminar, “Practice of Christian Ministry,” with all students in the contextual education program.

Something akin to the medical school model of education is emerging in a few places: faculty and pastors instructing student ministers where ministry happens. When it happens well, three outcomes emerge. First, faculty experience first-hand the realities that a minister faces day-in and day-out and they begin to see implications for their teaching. Faculty change both what they teach and how they teach by their immersion in the congregation. The most startling results are when faculty in Bible, history, ethics, and theology teach their subjects to ministry students in the congregation—the setting forces them to make the substantive content relevant to the life of faith and the practice of ministry. Furthermore, they are challenged to help students grapple with thinking theologically about what is happening in the congregation.
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By enhancing field education or introducing contextual education, seminaries have strengthened their relationships to pastors and congregations. Both pastors and congregations become engaged in ministry education because they are invited to be intentional about their role in educating students and the context of their ministry is taken seriously by faculty members. Such intentionality on the part of theological educators makes pastors more connected to the seminary. For too long perhaps seminaries have assumed that pastors knew what to do in terms of supervising students in field education placements. Increasingly, schools are giving more attention to the training and supervision of supervisors—making it clearer what the seminary expects to happen through the pastor-student relationship and the student-congregation experience. For example, Phillips Theological Seminary established the Council of Teaching Congregations in order to link congregations and their pastors with one another. The Council offers ministers a chance to reflect on their vocation as educators of ministers.

When schools give more attention to this dynamic, they see results for both the pastor and the student. But add into the mix a faculty member and more can happen—the pastor becomes an honored dialogue partner, has the opportunity to learn from the scholar, and offers the scholar a realistic appraisal of ministry today; the faculty member is challenged to think critically (what most love to do), offer their insights and wisdom, and are invited to learn.

The primary winner in all of this, of course, is the student—though it is probably too early to tell how much of a difference efforts in contextual education will make when students graduate and become congregational leaders. Yet several indications point toward a model that can make a difference for students over the long-term. First, more time spent immersed in the realities of congregational life and ministerial responsibilities enhances vocational discernment—it makes students encounter the realities, challenges, and opportunities of ministry in a way classroom lectures or formation activities cannot do. Secondly, with both faculty and pastors as conversation partners, students are able to see the intellectual dimensions to the practice of ministry and why the study of theology and pastoral practice are so essential—it actually sends them back to the classroom eager for more study. Making the context of ministry a central focus of theological education allows integration to happen in a more natural way—theological issues and religious interpretation of the situation arise when practitioners and scholars think together about the context.

One important activity that a few schools initiated is student research in congregations. Students were able to work with faculty in developing research projects around congregation life. Students could share their work with congregational leaders, and begin to see the impact that research can have for understanding how churches grow and thrive. Boston University, through its Center for Congregational Research and Development, engaged students in research on developing new congregations in the New England Annual Conference (UMC). Seven congregations were started; five remain viable today. The Center consulted with six other congregations and conducted research for the congregations through courses on evangelism and mission.
Finally, nothing can substitute for mentoring, guidance, and training by excellent pastors. Students require exposure to excellent practitioners—ministers who preach every week with substance and creativity, who care for the sick and dying with compassion, who teach the faith in compelling ways, who build ministries in response to pressing social needs, and who manage staffs, budgets, and buildings—all in the same week. Students need to encounter, over time, ministers who are reading, thinking, praying, and building up communities of faith. And it is even more obvious that seminary faculty do too.

What are the key factors that make contextual education experiments work when they do and fail when they don’t? The key to success and the mark of failure consistently lie with faculty involvement. Faculty seem willing to talk about contextualizing theological education and designing new models for it, but actually doing it, with students in the field, is one of the biggest changes faculty have to embrace. At Jesuit School, faculty members had been calling for the need to contextualize the curriculum and to make more explicit the connections between theology, culture, and context, but the faculty was not certain how to implement the goal. When the grant opportunity came along in 1998, the school could test some strategies to actually do contextualized teaching and learning.

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. Junior faculty members are particularly susceptible to the demands of the guild, and may feel unable to participate in “experimental” programs. Just about everything that contextual education requires flies in the face of faculty culture.

When it works, here’s what happens. Faculty buy-in is high—not unanimous, but high. Most faculties agree that they have to engage student learning in the contexts of ministry and make it happen. Second, a few faculty members do it, and if they are the right faculty members, especially the right senior faculty, they become advocates and promoters of contextual education. Senior faculty can give junior faculty permission to try it. When a faculty member directs the program or a faculty committee is designated to give oversight, contextual education has greater academic standing. When selected faculty members are given time and resources to pursue scholarly research on issues facing congregations, the findings become part of seminary conversations as well as serve the interests of congregational leaders. When exciting things are happening for students in contextual education, they bring it back to the classroom, becoming catalysts for faculty to pay attention to the questions that arise from ministry. Curriculums and courses begin to change.

A second very important factor in successful field and contextual education programs is finding the right congregations to work with—pastors who have
the time to be with students, pastors who seek intellectual engagement with theologians, congregations that can form committees to guide and evaluate students' practice, congregations where exciting forms of ministry are shaping people's lives, and congregations that are connected to their communities and to community services. If the congregation is struggling or in survival mode or the minister is ineffective or burned-out, it is not a good context for students and should be avoided. Students will be able to help struggling congregations thrive if they have first experienced what a healthy congregation looks like.

In some cases, seminaries had to go far to find the right congregations, and some found partners close by. For example, Perkins School of Theology partnered with an African-American congregation in New Orleans that proved to be an excellent site for one-year internships. Luther Seminary partners with Shalom Hill in southwestern Minnesota as a residential site. Both Jesuit School and Chicago Theological Seminary were able to work with congregations in nearby neighborhoods.

Finally, field or contextual education works best when schools hire the right person to direct the program. It seems obvious, but if the wrong person was hired, the program stumbled. Most importantly, the program raises the profile of the field or contextual education director. Some schools utilized grant funds to hire a full-time director of field education, which allowed them to expand relationships and programs. Claremont School of Theology, for example, hired its first full-time director and found that it could enhance relationships with churches by giving more time, attention, and programming to field education. One important strategy that Claremont developed was training supervisors through seven on-campus meetings a year. The training sessions focus on teaching pastors how to mentor students, but also offer perspectives on leadership theory. The training sessions and a year-end celebration to honor their work sent a strong message that the seminary is a place that supports congregational ministers.

Time will tell whether the experiments in contextual education become a movement in theological education. Contextual education could replace or alter clinical pastoral education (CPE) as a paradigm for ministry education, with sociological approaches being substituted for psychology and therapeutic approaches. Contextual education shifts attention from the introspective and interpersonal skills to leadership skills in a local community. But replacing CPE would be a mistake; complementing it would be better. Emerging emphasis on contextual analysis should support CPE education because both are necessary for excellent ministry in the congregation.

More time and resources will be needed for schools to develop what they have started in contextual education programs. Schools need resources for faculty to develop pedagogies around teaching and learning in the context of ministry and resources to pursue research and intellectual work around contextual education. Schools also need to keep pursuing excellent field education opportunities. At present there is not nearly enough research, publication, and conversation going on among theological educators about how to do contextual education and why it matters for ministry.
Forming spiritual leaders. The development of spiritual formation programs is a second way in which schools sought to build capacity within the MDiv curriculum. Both Catholic and Protestant schools emphasized spiritual formation, with the Catholics adapting already existent formation programs for ordination candidates to their lay students, and Protestant seminaries developing programs for ordination candidates for the first time.

Why the emphasis on spiritual formation? Theological educators recognize that effective pastoral ministers are grounded in a relationship with God that is sustained over time, disciplined in practice, and bears fruit in personal and spiritual dispositions and habits. Seminaries are concerned with what they see happening to ministers once they leave seminary. A high rate of burnout, exhaustion, and turnover in ministry is one of the negative factors pushing seminaries to address issues of self-care and spiritual growth during seminary. Yet another is what seminaries see coming in the door: increasing numbers of students who are not ecclesiastically formed from birth and who are seeking religious identity and experience. Of these, many are converts to Christianity or to a particular denomination who, because of powerful personal experiences, are seeking more knowledge about and deeper experience of the faith. Whether these students have a call to ministry and have the capacity to lead a congregation is not always clear when they enroll in seminary, but what is clear is that the seminary seems to them to be a place where they can discover more than what their congregation, campus ministry, or parachurch organization had to offer. Theological education is serving an important catechetical role today for some students and spiritual formation programs fulfill a deep need and hunger for many students.

An overwhelmingly positive factor drawing seminaries to spiritual formation programs is the broad cultural interest in things spiritual and an ever-expanding ecumenical interest in adopting spiritual practices and traditions from distant Christian relatives, and even those outside the Christian household. Who, for example, would have guessed that twenty-first century Lutherans and Methodists would be walking in labyrinths, fasting from meals, or hosting centering prayer workshops? Spirituality is finding its way into Evangelical schools' curriculums and continuing education events as well.

While it is easy to be skeptical about spirituality in the culture today, especially its pop cultural forms in art and music, the quest of many Christians and their pastors for authentic religious experience is profound indeed. And that is one way to understand the thirst for the spiritual: the erosion of religious experience and identity by cultural powers that undermine the conditions for pursuing godly things (e.g., time, silence, beauty).

While Protestants struggle to overcome their inherent dislike for the term "spiritual," they have discovered wisdom in the practices of spiritual traditions that are neither cheap grace nor works righteousness. In fact, some of the most important work accomplished in the grant projects focusing on spiritual formation is the theological explanation and rationale schools developed for the spiritual formation program. In the case of several Protestant schools, administrators and faculty grappled with the language of spirituality, spiritual formation, and spiritual direction within the traditional categories of the Lutheran
and Reformed tradition. For example, Southern Lutheran Seminary faculty developed a position paper defining how spirituality can be understood in Lutheran theological terms. Likewise, faculty of Louisville Presbyterian Seminary faculty rejected a singular approach to spirituality, choosing to recognize diversity in the Reformed tradition as well as ecumenical resources beyond it. In both cases, where the project ended was not envisioned at the beginning until the community began defining what their terms meant theologically. In both cases the outcome is dramatic. Lutheran Southern is adding the requirement for a first-year spiritual formation course on vocation; Louisville is co-sponsoring a new Masters Degree with Bellarmine University on ecumenical spirituality.

The spiritual formation programs are not marginal in the schools that emphasize it. The programs require new staff, faculty commitment, and student time. The most successful programs are able to balance and find a solution to these three elements; programs that have struggled have usually found one or more of these factors to be a major bump in the road. Student willingness seems to be high across the board, though participation does not always match desire. The number one culprit: time. Students insist that course workload, jobs, and family obligations keep them from participating in programs; if they had more time, they would be there. In most cases, schools added program opportunities or requirements without taking anything away; in the worst cases students resent what feels like piling-on.

Nonetheless, students increasingly participate in spiritual formation. For instance, about one-third of Lutheran Southern’s students are involved in spiritual direction, up from zero when the program began five years ago. Similarly, fifty Louisville students are involved in spiritual direction groups, and nearly 60 percent of first level students participate in vocational discernment groups. In both cases the programs are voluntary. 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. At Claremont School of Theology a new five-day student orientation program is organized around themes of spiritual practice for theological education and focuses on theological reflection, self-care, and living and studying in a multicultural community. The program is voluntary yet nearly 100 percent of the entering students have participated, which has led the seminary to consider requiring a course on vocational discernment and spiritual practices in the curriculum.

Faculty participation is more difficult to determine: in some cases faculty are fully supportive, but don’t participate—again, time being the main reason, though division of labor seems to be another. Faculty may decide that spiritual formation is the program director’s job and not part of their responsibility. Some faculty may view spiritual formation as unnecessary, a passing fad, something that they did not need or receive in their seminary days. In the cases where the majority of faculty have approved of the program, had input and are involved in program activities such as mentoring, theological reflection groups, leading retreats, and participating in worship, all parties seem encouraged and satisfied. In the instances in which faculty defined theologi-
faculty tood in n Semi-cognize yond it. ginning rally. In equire-e is co- nerical hat em- student tion to nd one ngeness matchrkload, if they am op-st cases on. For lived in o.Simi-pes, and emment uents s single School around eologi-nunity, ts have use on faculty reason, t spirit-nsibil-ng fac, In the d input reflec-s seem eologi-
cally what spiritual formation meant in their tradition, the programs have a clear and solid foundation.

In the case of Catholic schools sponsored by religious orders the most exciting development has been the adoption of the order’s traditional practices to the lay students’ spiritual life. For instance, the 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. In this case, students design a rule that fits their life situation and spiritual gifts, and they are invited to a liturgy honoring their commitment. Over the past few years about seventy students, staff, and faculty have participated in the formation of a rule for life.

Finding the right person to direct a spiritual formation program is essential to its success. Several schools experienced turnover in the position, primarily because the “fit” between the person, job, and institutional culture was not present. What makes for a good fit? The fit between the person and the school’s culture is essential. Obviously spiritual formation directors could have been very talented in spiritual formation work, but if they were new to seminary life, or worked around rather than with faculty, they often could not bring a nascent program to maturity.

Spiritual formation then is primarily about the ecclesial and communal culture that is part of the daily life of a school. A spiritual formation program cannot be launched by a single director; its success depends on that person’s talent in continuity with the way the school functions. Operating against that culture will lead to isolation of the director and marginalization of the program. In those cases where the fit was right, seminaries have retained a full-time presence and put money into programming beyond the grant support—they can’t imagine being without the program or its leader.

What program directors seem to do best is to introduce the campus to spiritual practices and help students and faculty discern what styles and forms of prayer best suit their temperament, personality, and way of life. They offer retreat opportunities, introduce students to spiritual direction, work to enhance campus worship, encourage small group sharing in Bible study and theological reflection, encourage writing in a journal, and making an annual retreat. In other words, successful programs have not adopted the one-style-fits-all policy, but offer experimentation and exploration in a nonjudgmental and nonthreatening atmosphere.

The impact of programs on faculty and students is apparent. In some instances faculty are drawing connections between issues in spiritual formation and academic course work and are finding ways of teaching some of the topics in class (e.g., a course on the Psalms focuses on how Christians pray the Psalms). And in several cases, students recognize the spiritual formation director as their pastor and minister. Some students are clearly attracted to ministry of spiritual formation themselves and want to find ways of incorporating what they have learned in the program into their ministry. One of the most important elements for students across the denominational spectrum is participating in spiritual direction. Most schools help students find a director, but whether required or not, it is one aspect of spiritual formation that seems to have caught on and will probably continue for many as they enter full-time ministry.
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As the programs have developed, schools have had to decide whether they are required or voluntary; about half fall into one or the other category. It appears that as programs mature and find connections with courses, aspects of the program become required. As mentioned above, some schools are exploring a first-year requirement for a course in vocational discernment. Catholic schools more than Protestants struggle with the issue of requiring spiritual formation for two reasons. First, they often have a required program for ordination candidates; if ordination candidates are required, shouldn’t lay ministers? The second reason is the lack of church requirements for lay ministers—at this time there are no candidacy requirements for lay ministers prior to entering the seminary beyond academic requirements. Each school is struggling to figure out eligibility requirements as they go along: should students be screened before entering, or should 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, not the church.

When programs are voluntary, they strike a note of hospitality and welcome. Forcing spiritual formation on individuals who are unwilling seems like poor ministry and is counterproductive. However, 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. Accountability becomes the biggest issue in voluntary programs: if this really matters to the school, how can it be enforced?

Seminary have also learned that it is important to be in conversation with denominational officials about formation, especially Protestant schools that are taking on formation programs for the first time. Oftentimes enlisting the help of denominational officials lends credibility and support to the effort. For example, Seattle University offers stipends to denominational formation coordinators who serve as leaders of quarterly gatherings of students from their denomination. The strategy is particularly important at Seattle University where twelve denominations are represented and where ecumenical formation has a priority. But even in the midst of ecumenical formation, Seattle places a high premium on denominational identity and sought assistance from regional and congregational leaders to ensure it happens.

The degree to which spiritual formation programs are effective in terms of enhancing ministerial identity and impacting the practice of ministry is yet to be determined. Younger students are proving to be more challenging on spiritual formation issues than older students. 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.

Programs that have gone through their initial growing pains and established a regular set of program offerings have found what best meets student needs. But schools will need to find ways of tracking students beyond gradu-
ation to discover what actually sustains people in ministry. What, of all the many program offerings, seems to make a difference for ministry?

The enthusiasm schools show for all things spiritual needs to be checked, however. Many of the practices that Christians and ministers are exploring have their genesis in Catholic religious orders and that context played a very important role in how the practices were understood and carried out. 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; it is not impossible, but most of us, including most pastors, are not cut from the saint’s cloth. 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. Dabbling in one spiritual practice this month, another next month, and something else next year is not the stuff of the spiritual tradition.

Students may very well experience a community of practice in seminary, but they won’t 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.

Lay leaders seeking theological education. The advent and development of lay persons serving the local church as ministers is a very recent phenomenon in both the Catholic and Protestant communities. Lay people serving as leaders in congregations, of course, has a long tradition and continues in many respects today as people serve on governing boards, in catechetical roles, in social service outreach programs, and liturgical roles. In the past, in nearly all instances, lay persons who felt the call to ministry sought to fulfill their call to service through ordained ministry. For example, as Protestant women sought full-time service in ministry in the twentieth century they pushed to change access to ordained ministry and, in most instances, denominations allowed the ordained ministry to expand to include these once excluded candidates. But recent developments in ministry appear to be different: people are emerging in churches that seek to serve as ministers but who are not interested in doing so through the traditional role of ordained minister. In the Catholic community, for instance, many lay people seek positions as ministers and choose to do so as lay people. In other words, if ordination requirements changed to allow women or married men to be ordained ministers, many people serving in ministry would remain unordained. Some, of course, would prefer their status be changed, but regardless of ordination status, a different kind of minister and a different form of ministry is emerging outside of ordination. A similar phenomenon can be seen in some parts of the Protestant community where lay people are seeking formal theological education and positions in ministry as lay, not ordained, leaders.
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The Congregational Ministry Program came along as many Catholic schools faced the stark reality that the number of ordained candidates was drastically decreasing and an increasing number of lay people were seeking education for full-time ministry. Many Catholic schools, particularly those run 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 degree, traditionally designed for ordination candidates. Increasingly, lay ministers were finding themselves in the position of leading parishes as pastoral associates or parish life coordinators. Catholic parishes have had to adjust to being served by one ordained minister, who may or may not be in residence in the parish. If the director of religious education was the primary position of the lay minister 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. The shift taking place in theological education since the 1970s has been not only the growing numbers of lay students seeking education, but the growing reality that lay ministry is a distinct vocation requiring theological explanation, requirements for education, and ecclesial acceptance and accountability.

All nine Catholic schools chose to develop programs for lay students that focus on recruitment, revising curriculums, developing spiritual formation opportunities, and placing lay ministers in jobs. Recruitment, at the outset, seemed to not be a major challenge, as the numbers of lay people serving in ministry has been on the rise for the past two decades. Yet recruitment was more of a challenge than anticipated: lay people find it difficult to relocate and face financial challenges to enroll full time, especially if they have families. In the wake of the sexual abuse scandals across the country and the growing financial crisis at the diocesan and parish level, seminaries and other types of ministry formation programs have recently experienced a decrease in the number of students preparing for ministry. In the past year the numbers of Catholic lay ministers enrolled in ministry education dropped by 10,000. It is important to note that the two West Coast Catholic schools placed less emphasis on lay ministry and more emphasis on multicultural ministry, not because lay ministers are not a reality in their area, but because the demands of ministering in multicultural community requires much greater attention at the present time. For example, Franciscan School of Theology dropped “lay” from the title of its spiritual formation program to emphasize that spiritual formation is for all students.

Several schools, especially those 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 full-time study at the expense of giving up full-time pay was not feasible; for some, the prospects of full-time church ministry was not appealing if they already had full-time employment; and for some, graduate studies was 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).

By and large most lay students find employment, though the situation appears to be different in various regions of the country depending on the support, acceptance and presence of lay ministry in a diocese and region. By and large, lay students are employed in a wide variety of positions in the church, but the parish is not always their first choice. Lay ministers are employed as high school religion teachers, hospital chaplains, diocesan officers, campus ministers in high schools and colleges, and retreat directors. The parish is perceived to have strong clerical and episcopal control, low job security, and less authority; other ecclesial contexts give lay ministers more autonomy and independence.

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 as their ministers and see the emergence of lay ministry as a necessary response to the crisis of dwindling numbers of priests. But other church leaders and theologians see lay ministry as an exciting development and one that has emerged 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. St. John’s grant supported the Collegeville Ministry Seminar, which hosted a number of leading theologians to advance thinking about lay and ordained ministry. Their work was published in the book, *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Ordained and Lay Ministry*, in 2003.

Interestingly a similar phenomenon of lay ministry is emerging in some Protestant communities, and more and more schools are recognizing the need to prepare lay leaders to serve congregations (e.g., Total Common Ministry in the Episcopal Church and commissioned lay pastors in the Presbyterian Church (USA)). The catalyst for lay ministry programs comes primarily from the fact that a large number of small congregations cannot afford a full-time pastor. Denominations are making allowances for a locally-recognized and mandated lay person to serve as a preacher or pastor. For example, the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary offers eight courses online for its lay pastor program, all of which are required by the Presbyterian Church (USA). The seminary is also developing advanced elective courses. Four University of Dubuque faculty members have taught in the program; adjuncts have been recruited from around the country. The Presbyterian Church (USA) estimates that about 400 lay pastors serve congregations in the United States and Puerto Rico.

The response to the lay pastor program at Dubuque has been outstanding: 522 students have taken at least one course in the past five years; eighty-seven presbyteries have at least one student enrolled. Most students are retired or near retirement and are seeking ways to serve their local congregation; very few would ever be candidates for ordained ministry.
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Phillips Theological Seminary is also working with judicatories to offer training to licensed lay ministers. The numbers of lay ministers are increasing but the reality is that no church body—the seminary, the judicatories, or the congregations—has the money to support their education. With grant support, Phillips was able to test, via distance education, one course, “Preaching the Lectionary,” through video-conferencing technology to lay ministers located in Missouri. The course had good attendance and was well-received, but the seminary cannot on its own build the structures to educate lay pastors located at great distances from the seminary. Their experience raises an important question for all to consider: Who is responsible for the education of the local lay leader?

New delivery systems in theological education

Perhaps no other aspect of the Congregational Ministry Program developed as quickly and met with such broad and unexpected success as the strategy to deliver theological education via technology. Clearly the bias of theological educators is for full-time residential students: teaching and learning, spiritual formation, and community life are all at an optimum if the school is a community that joins together face-to-face and where students live together for the duration of their course work. But the distance education strategies have proven that teaching and learning, spiritual formation, and community can all be gained through another medium, not so much at the expense of residential education, but as a complement to it.

The bias against distance education runs deep, but the evidence mounted by a few schools in the Congregational Ministry Program answers nearly every critique. Two important issues stand out in regard to education via technology: what constitutes teaching and learning through the new mediums and creating greater access to theological education.

Important developments were taking place in the evolution of technology just as schools went to work on designing and delivering distance programs in the late 1990s. In several instances, schools thought they would be delivering courses via video-conferencing technology: live pictures and voices of teachers and students reaching each other across space and time—something akin to interactive television. But within about a year’s time, the VCT technology was deemed too expensive and too cumbersome in comparison to the Web-based Internet options that were emerging. Interestingly, the Web-based formats have proven to be better educational delivery systems. In other words, advocates claim that more effective teaching and learning happens through online courses. Furthermore, schools have found they can reach more students in more places with better educational outcomes using the Internet.

When you ask the enthusiasts to talk about distance learning via technology, they almost never talk about the technology. The big surprise is how effective online teaching and learning can be for both faculty and students. What was thought to be a second-rate option, has in fact, for some, become a primary means of education for residential and distance students. What faculty members have learned about the merits of online teaching and learning is translated into their classroom teaching. Some schools find that when students
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evolver, strat-teaching, soul is other egies unity resistedvey ev-tech; andology rams eliv-es of hing unol-b the ased ords, rough ents tech-how ents. me a fac-ng is ents discover the merits of online learning, they request (or demand) that campus courses offer some online features.

What is the magic of online education? Two important features have emerged: faculty members are more intentional about how they teach and students are more active agents in the learning process. Besides contextual education programs, distance learning is the other area where faculty were challenged to change how they teach. Developing online courses is not as simple as modifying a residential-based course; it requires essentially that the professor develop a new course. In particular teachers have to develop ways in which students will engage the content of the material in discussion. Faculty, then, had to learn the computer skills to execute the course, and to develop a course that fit computer technology. Faculty resistance? Nearly universal. Faculty conversions? Most if not all faculty involved in distance education embraced the new format. In some cases, it is not a medium in which all faculty teaching will excel, and that seems fine for most schools.

One important element that made faculty members open to considering teaching online courses and changing their teaching practice was the kind of support they received, both in terms of personnel and technology. Providing faculty with the best equipment is not enough, though it helps. Making available first-rate technology with first-rate instruction in how to use it promotes the best outcome. If faculties are forced to use outdated equipment, much of the focus is on getting the technology to work, and they lose focus on the subject mater being taught.

But the most important element for faculty conversion and finally support of online programs is the reaction of students. Faculty report that student learning is enhanced—things that do not happen in a classroom happen online, in particular the way students express their ideas and interact with one another around important issues. Teaching moves beyond delivering content in the classroom, to creating an environment where student learning is focused, challenged, and enhanced, especially through student-to-student dialogue.

What happens for students? Some people have a chance at being a theological student who otherwise would not. For many of these students, access to theological education is impossible—they cannot relocate to a seminary or give up employment for three years to complete a degree. Online learning delivers education to these highly motivated students. It appears that students are willing to be trained to take online courses, to invest in the computer technology and Web-based services that support the course, and to spend the time reading and writing for class. The University of Dubuque requires online students to take a six-week technology course prior to beginning studies. There is nothing cheap or easy about online learning for students. And the accountability factor is pretty high: it is obvious if you are not participating in class.

Developing spiritual formation opportunities for students has not proven as difficult as once thought. Schools have worked to help students find mentors or spiritual directors to guide in vocational discernment; most students have a home church where they worship and practice ministry. Working with supervisors for field education is a bit more of a challenge, but not impos-
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sible. Most project directors have found that students take the initiative to build a learning community at their work and ministry placements. Most students discover a learning community of peers with their online colleagues, people with whom they can share ideas and in which they can turn for support, prayer, and counsel. Many faculty and program directors are surprised and delighted to discover the depth of conversation and care that takes place between students online.

Were seminaries able to recruit new students through distance programs? There is a slight indication that access to theological education via distance programs recruits new students, but the programs do not create new student populations from around the country or globe. In the case of Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond most students are from the region (70 percent within commuting distance). The seminary has a total of 336 students and sixteen instructors in distance education courses, with ten of its fifteen full-time faculty teaching in the program. By 2002, Baptist Richmond had developed thirteen courses; all required MDiv courses are now available to students online.

Distance courses seem to be a way for some students to enroll in a course without applying for a degree, and so may increase nondegree enrollment. Some nondegree online students eventually find their way to being seminary students. Some seminaries, such as the University of Dubuque, are serving special populations. Dubuque had hoped to reach Alaskan and Native American students, who are at a far distance from the seminary, but the seminary had difficulty recruiting for the courses and students did not have proper equipment. Dubuque had more success with educating lay pastors through distance courses.

Beyond seminary: Placing and sustaining ministers in the field

Education beyond the seminary degree is an important strategy that builds capacity. It is one of the most varied strategies in the program because there are a wide variety of educational experiences offered, ranging from lectures or one-day workshops to three-year peer group gatherings. Another factor that influences continuing education programs are the variations in denominational culture around issues of ongoing formation and education in ministry. Where a culture of lifelong learning exists in a denomination and where expectations and rewards are high for engaging in such learning, seminaries are able to develop a full menu of educational offerings, often tailored to specific populations. But where a culture of ongoing education is not present within congregations or denominational bodies—as evidenced by a lack of expectations, requirements, and financial assistance—seminaries struggle to maintain programming at a significant level and come up short on effecting change within the system.

The difference is largely denominational. Mainline Protestants can boast of a developed tradition of continuing education as a systemwide culture for ordained ministers. Evangelical Protestants can boast a congregation-based form of education with a highly motivated pool of ministers who are looking
to develop skills for successful ministry. Catholic ministers have little to boast about in terms of encouragement, finances, or expectations.

Among mainline Protestants, the United Methodists have the most obvious chance for cultivating a pool of likely participants for continuing education, since they do not ordain graduates immediately after completion of the MDiv degree. Methodist candidates undergo a three-year probationary period for further education and discernment prior to ordination. The three-year period provides a window of opportunity for both the seminary and annual conference to work together. Wesley Theological Seminary developed a package of educational programming for probationers (online) that focused on issues related to transition into full-time ministry, theology of ordained ministry, and teaching and preaching in the congregation. The probationer’s program proved far more demanding as a tool for continuing education, because it is course-based rather than event-based. The program is more labor intensive for faculty and pastors but far more rewarding for both. Saint Paul School of Theology conducted research on probationers’ experience and published a report in 2003, “The Journey from Readiness to Effectiveness: A Survey of the Probationary Process in the UMC.” The report’s author, Lovett Weems, concludes that mentoring is a key factor in assisting probationers through the process toward ordained ministry; supervision by district superintendents is the least effective.

Similar to the probationary program are continuing education programs in which seminaries focus on their own graduates as they make the transition from seminary to ministry, especially in the first three years. For example, Bethel Seminary combines mentoring for solo pastors in which pastors receive sustained coaching for eighteen months after graduation. Mentoring includes one-on-one weekly telephone conversations, and participation in peer learning workshops focused on congregational leadership in the areas of planning, change, finances, and outreach. Bethel leaders realized how under-represented solo pastors are in continuing education events, even though they constitute a very large number of people in ministry. Their time and resources are limited, but one significant barrier to attracting solo pastors to events is that they are not accustomed to asking for continuing education support from their congregations.

A similar strategy that proves successful is providing opportunities for alumni to participate in seminary continuing education opportunities. Grant support allowed seminaries to offer alumni an opportunity to attend workshops by subsidizing fees and travel. Some schools developed online resources, especially discussion boards and chat rooms for pastors to stay connected beyond graduation.

One of the most important forms of continuing education that has emerged is the peer group or sustained learning community that engages a group of pastors and theologians in learning together over time. For example, Lancaster Theological Seminary’s Leadership Renewal Program formed eleven groups of approximately one hundred pastors that met regularly over three years with faculty. The goal of the program is to assist pastors in facing the challenges of ministry in a diverse and changing context. Pastors found both
intellectual and spiritual renewal through ongoing conversation and support from their peers. And faculty discovered that through participating and teaching in the peer group they came to a better understanding of how postmodern realities impinge upon the daily work of pastors. Lancaster has become a regional resource center for congregations, reaching pastors far beyond their graduates, especially clergy in their region that do not know about the seminary.

Likewise, the Institute for Reformed Theology at Union Theological Seminary brings together pastors, faculty, students and denominational leaders in colloquies that meet from four to seven times over twelve to eighteen months. Students are able to participate and receive credit, and fifteen faculty members have participated over the past five years. Faculty members are able to engage the Reformed theological tradition with pastors and students, which have heightened the seminary's identity and profile in churches. Over the past several years, the Institute has sponsored colloquies focusing on worship, ecclesiology, race, and economics—all with a view to exploring a Reformed theological understanding of pressing issues faced by ministers and their congregations. The program has been so successful, the model is being replicated in other areas of the country. Schools experimenting with peer learning models are finding that a sustained learning environment allows relationships to develop, vulnerabilities to emerge, disagreements to be expressed and met honestly, and interpretations to become richer and deeper.

Catholic seminaries are developing continuing education programs to reach lay ministers. A few schools devoted financial and full-time personnel resources to develop and promote a continuing education program but with mixed results. A survey of lay ministers in Minnesota revealed to St. John's that lay ministers generally are interested in ongoing learning, as are ordained members, but most do not have the time or the money to support involvement in such educational opportunities. Because of the size and scope of the parish programs directed by lay ministers, it is a fact that they are overworked and do not have much time. But it is also true that there is little expectation for professional development because there is little recognition that they are professionals. A culture for learning will develop 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.

The current culture of continuing education has had an impact on each Catholic school that offered workshops and peer learning opportunities. For instance, St. John's sponsored ninety events with about 1,500 participants but cancelled 40 percent of the programs. Washington Theological Union 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.
Catholic schools are finding a way to serve ethnic ministers in continuing education programs. The Jesuit School offers a two-week Hispanic Institute that focuses on theology and ministry. Students are able to take eight courses over three summers for a certificate in ministry. The Franciscan School of Theology, likewise, collaborates with Latino, Vietnamese, Filipino, and African-American communities to host a summer institute certificate program. With sustained attention to the needs of all ministers, Catholic schools have gone a long way in creating a culture of professional learning and development, and without their efforts, many lay ministers would have little opportunity for continuing education.

Part Two: Making strategic advances to strengthen capacity

Strengthening essential capacities

What capacities for training high quality congregational ministers are essential for theological education today? Many answers are the same as those answers from ten or fifty or a hundred years ago: excellent leadership, first-rate faculty, quality students, strong finances, and a stable infrastructure. But additional capacities have emerged that are particular to the ecclesial and social situation of many seminaries today—capacities that involves working creatively and flexibly to build partnerships within ecclesial systems that are diminishing; capacities to create a momentum and interest in ministry within the churches; capacities to create multiple forms and avenues to theological education beyond graduate degrees; and capacities to respond to an environment of religious and moral pluralism that continues to impact religious identity and community.

Great Leaders. Seminaries need presidents and deans who can lead with ecclesial and intellectual vision—leaders who know the realities of their church bodies and can be a leader within the church beyond the seminary and who know the realities of graduate professional education and can operate creatively and efficiently in the context of multiple demands on the educational system. In speaking with presidents and deans to prepare this report, I asked interviewees what they saw as the three most pressing concerns facing theological education in the next five to ten years. Every person answered that finances are a major challenge facing theological education, regardless of the size of the school, endowment, or denominational relationships. Many are worried that the MDiv degree is not affordable and that many students will choose other options than the seminary for ministry education. Of course, many presidents and deans are concerned about cultivating the younger generation, enough of whom will stay in ministry for a lifetime and who will be attracted to serving in the congregation.

But finances and students were not always the first answer to my question. For many presidents or deans who view their role primarily as church leaders and public intellectuals the problems are much broader in scope. I heard concerns about the changing demography of America and how to prepare ministers for a world that is coming to be. Alongside the growing pluralism of American Christianity, many presidents and deans noted the in-
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ternational situation and the way global pluralism changes the way religious peoples live together for better or worse. How will we prepare ministers who are firmly grounded in their Christian identity but able to navigate in plural religious, social, and ethnic environments where other perspectives and ways of life need to be honored? Many worry about religious communities becoming closed, balkanized, and living in opposition, at times violently, with their neighbors. How can congregational ministers lead both their congregants as well as be a public voice for the social good?

Beyond presidents and deans, theological education needs good leaders in key organizational positions that serve students' direct needs and that work directly with partner organizations: directors of spiritual formation, field or contextual education, church relations, distance learning programs, and institutional advancement. Not only do schools need strong leaders in each of these key positions, but they need the right people in the right roles. Regardless of position, if a person was hired through the grant and did not fit the institutional culture or possess the necessary skills to navigate the administration and faculty culture, the strategy came to a standstill, and in some cases set the seminary back.

The question that needs serious attention is, how do we recruit the best and the brightest administrators and staffs into theological education? What are the feeder systems that develop the necessary qualities to be a good dean or director of church relations, field education, or spiritual formation? What can be done to make sure administrators and their staffs have the necessary support, continuing education, spiritual formation, and vocational discernment to do their jobs well?

Most seminaries cannot afford to have multiple staff positions in each office: in many cases one or two people work in each area (or in some cases one person covers two or more jobs), making the need for highly skilled administrators and staff paramount to the success of the work. Theological education needs administrators who can understand the complexities of theological education as well as denominational realities and at the same time be creative agents working at a variety of fronts to effect change in educational and ecclesial systems. When staff officers do not have the collegial support to do so, they become isolated. Oftentimes, the solution offered is to make sure those positions are filled by faculty, so the person has the status and governance role accorded to the faculty. But are there ways to expand governance to include people in key leadership positions beyond the faculty, for example, directors of field or contextual education, spiritual formation, or church relations?

Faculty involvement. In the majority of schools, some if not most faculty members were engaged in some aspect of the Congregational Ministry Program: teaching new or redesigned courses, working with field education projects, teaching in continuing education programs. If project leaders found that they had a difficult time engaging faculty members in the grants project, it was primarily because of two main reasons: time and expertise.

It is important to note how much faculty roles have expanded in the past twenty years. Not only is the knowledge base in every theological discipline growing, but areas of scholarship are more specialized. It is not fair to com-
pare what faculties have to know and communicate today with the intellectual work of theological faculty in the 1950s or 60s. A constant faculty concern is how to manage the information flow, how to keep up in one's discipline, how to at least sound like you know what is happening in other theological disciplines let alone disciplines outside theology. If schools were working on contextual education or spiritual formation projects, faculty were often working outside their areas of expertise, which can cause some discomfort.

Furthermore, the role of scholar, teacher, advisor, mentor, and governing agent all add more and more work—more is added but little is taken away. So, when energetic staff persons are hired to run a new program and they cannot garner faculty enthusiasm or participation, they are running up against certain realities shaping the complex (and multiple) role of seminary professors. In most cases, faculty members go out of their way to assist students and serve the school. Recently at Eastern Mennonite Seminary, for example, some full-time faculty contributed their salary raise to student scholarships. Such faculty commitment does not go unnoticed by students: some of the students with the highest awards volunteered to contribute back a total of $5,000 to incoming students.

A highly successful strategy employed by several schools involved building a body of knowledge through research on issues important to the church, to congregations, and to the seminary. One grantee noted that all schools should be required to do research at the outset of a grant. In those cases where grantees did conduct research at the beginning, the findings proved particularly helpful in gaining perspective on an issue before providing a programmatic solution. Saint Paul's study of probationary candidates clarifies what candidates found most useful during the probationary period, what inhibits their growth and development, and what points of the system are weakest in aiding candidates through the process. Most importantly, the research provided a platform for partnerships with annual conferences and the Boards of Ordained Ministry. The seminary supplied church officials with immediate and relevant knowledge about the situation of probationary candidates, which could be used to adjust and improve the process in each conference. In this instance the seminary serves as an intellectual center for the church engaged in meaningful applied research.

Strategic vision. Strategic vision is an important capacity for schools, especially when it is based on a realistic appraisal of the state of church ministry and the intellectual challenges facing Christian communities today. Strategies require a grasp of the seminary as a player in larger ecclesial, educational, and social systems but also require a realistic sense of how to work to effect realistic change. Strategic visions have to be translated into discrete projects, and the most effective projects are those that work steadily at incremental change over time. Some seminaries can multitask, affecting change at many points in the system at one time, but most cannot do so at a high level of engagement, energy, and progress, especially when the church is in a state of dissipation.

Seminaries need to choose strategic advances that fit their capacities and be realistic about the time it will take to make change happen—it is going to be slow. Most seminaries don’t have a lot of room for failure, so they need to
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proceed with care. The most effective change starts out small, realizes some success, makes adjustments through failure, gains momentum, adds further dimensions, and eventually becomes a movement. But rarely can all that happen in five years—in most cases institutional leaders are looking ten to fifteen years down the road to affect the kind of change they desire.

Why is change so slow, especially when it is so obvious what needs to happen? One obvious reason is that many seminaries, especially mainline Protestants, have moved so far away from their denominational sponsors that it requires time to just get to know each other, build up sufficient trust and dispel suspicions, and create a shared vision about what can be done together. Bridging the gulf between seminary and middle judicatories has proven one of the most challenging tasks in strengthening capacity. Most seminary leaders complain about how weak these systems have become, how unsure people are of their roles within the system, the dire financial situation, and the constant turnover of personnel—very little that points to a stable environment where seminaries can be working.

Good strategies include evaluation and dissemination, both of which are essential to building capacity. All schools were encouraged to engage in some form of internal evaluation, and most took up the challenge. Seminaries tend to think of evaluation in terms of answering to external demands, such as accreditation or foundation requirements, but the Congregational Ministry Program grantees were encouraged to think of evaluation as a way to build a culture of evidence and learning for themselves, their partners, and other theological schools. Most schools did conduct good internal evaluation of their programs and by the end of the grant had a realistic sense of the impact programming had on participants. Some schools invited outside evaluators to give additional critique to their work.

Grantees are eager to disseminate information about their programs and about insights into what they are learning. Nearly all schools used denominational publications to do so: newsletters, magazines, Web sites, and promotional materials. Some promoted their programs through denominational publications. In terms of research publications, about a dozen books were published by faculty members, and several more books are forthcoming.

The bottom line. The most disturbing reality is the financial position many seminaries face, as mentioned above. While some have large endowments, most have seen revenue streams dwindle to a trickle. Again, most mainline Protestant seminaries have seen a significant decrease in denominational support in a very short period of time, something that tuition dollars will not make up. Catholic seminaries that have a majority of lay students scramble to find scholarship money from private donors; rarely is there diocesan financial support for these ministers.

Seminaries are increasingly dependent on four sources of revenue: private donors, tuition, endowments, and grants. Most seminaries are working very hard, primarily by adding staff in development offices, to get donors to support the annual fund, scholarships, or endowed chairs. During the recent economic downturn, many seminaries did not reach the goals they dreamed of in 1998 but were able to keep pace and connect more and more individu-
as some further needs to sustain that just and together. Ten one leaders are constant where such are some tend such as ministry build other orientation of impactors to us and al marinarian transitions. As many rents, inline supply not able to ancilial priiking orbs to ecent named vidu-
als to the seminary’s work. Even in difficult economic times over the past five years, seminaries with people working full-time on fundraising experienced gains in annual fund drives, though few could raise the funds to support the entire grant budget beyond the end of the grant period.

Student tuition dollars do help the bottom line, but the cost of educating seminary students is quite high for most schools because tuition is heavily subsidized. In university-based seminaries, the seminary student ends up costing a great deal more to educate than the other professional schools precisely because tuition is kept low. Obviously, more students create more tuition dollars, but it also demands more support in terms of scholarship money and other forms of tuition assistance. Very few seminaries can survive into the future on tuition dollars alone.

Endowments help seminaries immensely, though growing the endowment is a constant challenge. Again, the economy after 2000 saw more losses than gains. Many seminaries run the normal cycle of capital campaigns and it appears that those who are undertaking major campaigns are meeting with success. A quite successful strategy several schools employed is raising money to support a faculty position through an endowed chair. Several schools were able to secure the funds to keep a new faculty position hired through the grant in the relatively short period of five years.

Good grants. Obviously grant money is a much sought after source of revenue for schools, and the Congregational Ministry Program provided the largest sum of money offered to seminaries through one grant program from a foundation (up to $1.5 million). Seminaries can learn important lessons from this program about large grant projects and budgets. Lesson One: Big is not necessarily better. Obviously, one size does not fit all because seminaries vary so much in terms of size, and not all seminaries can absorb a large grant in the same way. Some struggled to spend the money in five years in ways that were both prudent and helpful. Some schools advanced a super-sized strategy based on their analysis of an entirely broken ecclesial system that needed fixing, but these schools could only make advances on a few fronts, both because of the limitations of their capacities, but also due to the weakness of the systems in which they attempted to work.

One factor about large grants is that they can prove to be difficult to manage for seminary leaders because they require extensive administrative attention, more than most people realize at the outset. The reason is that large grants are usually comprised of several discrete projects, each of which could be a grant project on its own. One wise president remarked that they passed up an opportunity for another large grant because they needed to raise their own capacity to relate to donors and not become dependent on grant funds for normal operations.

What large grants do best is make room for experiments—they allow schools to try something new, take a risk, fail here and there, and find out what works. In most cases the Congregational Ministry Program projects were experiments on both a large and small scale and they allowed schools to do things they never could have on their own. Many schools were already defining strategies, identifying issues and needs, and looking to pursue some
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fronts: the grant allowed schools to accelerate the timeline and make those realities happen more quickly. Large grants allow for extra support to do some work more quickly, but if the project proceeds too fast it is neither manageable nor sustainable.

Lesson Two: Keep planning (and evaluating) so that when opportunities arise, ideas and projects can be pursued, even if it is not clear at the time how the work will be funded. Large scale strategies were able to accomplish more when they had a solid plan in place before the request for proposals arrived at the door. As a wise person once said, money means work: consider what work needs to be accomplished and then ask for the money to support the work.

Lesson Three: Small is beautiful. Grant projects that aim at one or two strategic advances and work to make incremental advances were able to see significant results. Some schools chose to hire one person to work on one project; some schools chose to partner with a few congregations or one middle church body; some chose to work on one issue with one set of partners. In other words, schools with small grant projects (embedded within the school’s larger strategy) began by working with a few key people to build relationships so that institutional partnerships could evolve, and they placed the right people in key positions who have gone on to become change agents in the system. Generally, they had an easier time managing the grant.

What’s best, then, large or small grants? Lesson Four: Right-sized projects have the greatest success and impact. Large, medium, or small grants are all good and can each have a tremendous impact on the institution and project participants. What matters most is that the size of the project matches the capacities of the school, that the project does not overreach and strain the school’s capacities, nor that it be too small so as not to make room for creative thinking, trials, and adjustments. Good grants have a kind of institutional integrity, which matters far more than the budget total.

Creating energy and focus around a key issue is an important strategy: get people’s attention and hold it. It takes tremendous work to do both, but grantees could feel and see the system shift ever so slightly if they persisted long enough. A few seminaries faced significant internal changes during the grant period, including a change of president, accreditation visits from ATS, and turnover in faculty, all of which consume time and energy and make it difficult to keep up with grant-related activities. Turnover is a significant issue in seminaries as well as denominations. For example, nearly half of the forty-five schools hired a new president or academic dean during the course of the grant period.

One successful way to garner attention by the seminary community and its supporters is by creating a center or institute. Centers allow the seminary to get people’s attention, both inside and outside the school. It becomes a focused opportunity for fundraising and a way for university-based seminaries to receive funding through university structures. It can also be a vehicle for creating partnerships, especially with partners that are leery of the seminary and perceive the center or institute as an autonomous entity. For example, Chicago Theological Seminary’s Center for Community Transformation is a nonprofit agency. The nonprofit status is an easier way to raise money for the...
Building capacities and making connections

Partnerships matter. Building partnerships proved to be a key strategy for Congregational Ministry Program grantees, but for most it was uncharted territory. It has taken a long time for seminaries and the church to become separate entities and a long time for feeder systems to disintegrate—reversing or changing these trends does not happen overnight. As Phillips Theological Seminary discovered, judicatory officials relate to the seminary, but they are not necessarily connected to each other or to all the congregations—the seminary becomes the point in which people across congregations and several judicatories can come together. Obviously partnerships work for seminaries if there is someone assigned to pay attention to the partnership; if the relationship is understaffed, it won’t work. Project leaders found they had to go out and “hustle” partnerships by visiting churches and meeting with pastors and the congregation repeatedly.

Congregations proved viable partners for theological schools in relationship to recruitment, field education, and assisting new graduates in transitioning into ministry. In other words, there is evidence that seminaries found congregations that could assist them in moving forward on their strategies.
The most effective strategy was to enter a conversation with congregational leaders *listening* for what the congregation needed, what one president called the blank-legal-pad approach: tell us what your needs are and we will try to develop programs to respond. A partnership was born if the seminary had resources to assist the congregation.

Listening, serving, and responding to congregational needs are the most viable ways for seminaries to build the seminary-congregation partnership. Many congregations can be suspicious of seminaries: pastors know the seminary by their presidents who are seeking gifts and donations or field education directors who are seeking a site for a student. In most cases, it has been the seminary asking for something from the congregation.

Several seminaries reversed that pattern and asked congregations: What can we do to help you strengthen your ministry and mission? When the seminary provided catechetical materials, preaching aids, or teachers and preachers around issues of vocational call and discernment, congregations *used* the materials and developed ongoing programs with the assistance of the seminary. The engagement between seminary and congregation happened around a core issue for all Christian communities—one that both institutions share together—but seminaries did not cast it in too narrow of terms. Wesley Theological Seminary, for example, did not ask the congregation: help us recruit people into ordained ministry, but rather, what can we do to help you promote a “culture of the call” in your congregation. Bethel Seminary found a tool that had immediate benefit to the congregation that enabled people to understand their leadership gifts. According to Bethel, “we never say to a church you need to partner with us, but rather we’d like to serve your leadership needs.”

Partnerships with denominational organizations, particularly middle church bodies, proved difficult—many church leaders expressed interest, desire, and enthusiasm for the partnership with the seminary but could offer little to help support the effort. For example, Catholic dioceses do not recruit lay ministers; most of their efforts are focused on priesthood candidates. Yet even efforts to work with diocesan vocation directors, as Saint Meinrad’s noted, proved difficult because of high turnover and directors working more than one job. Catholic schools sponsored by religious orders generally experience strong connections and support from the community, but most communities, because of dwindling membership, do not have financial or human resources to offer the seminary. As each religious community supports fewer and fewer parishes, the lay graduates have less and less connection to their parishes. Dioceses do not have systems or resources to aid the seminary in placing students. Lay ministers become free agents in an open market.

In many cases partnerships were uneven and unequal. The Jesuit School knew at the outset that a commitment to working in the West Oakland Deanery meant serving in a resource-poor environment. Seattle University experienced tremendous cooperation from judicatory officials but not much dependability. Seattle witnessed at least 80 percent turnover in judicatory leadership in five years.

What benefits accrue from partnerships for the partners? Following on Robert Putnam’s now famous idea of social capital, one way to identify the
benefits is to describe the various kinds of capital that are built up through partnerships. I think seminaries develop three kinds of capital when they form partnerships with congregations and other church organizations: social, systems, and intellectual capital. Social capital refers to the kind and quality of human relationships that are formed and the bonds that develop over time because of the personal interchange that takes place between persons. Strong partnerships are formed because people come to know and trust one another; they learn something about each other that builds a base for ongoing dialogue and work. Chicago Theological Seminary was able to overcome the suspicion of pastors by being a steady presence week-in and week-out at the churches—and this included the project director and faculty regularly attending Sunday worship services. People are more willing to do more work in order to work together, which is what partnerships usually mean, if they think the work will make a real difference. Organizations—particularly church organizations—cannot build partnerships without significant personal relationships—building social capital—as the starting point.

Partnerships between ecclesial organizations also build up the church system. Systems capital, then, refers to the kind of connectedness between organizations that so many seminaries have seen wane—connections to camps, high schools, parishes and congregations, hospitals, social service agencies, middle church bodies, and national church bodies. In several instances, the seminary has become a catalyst in building systems capital, in many ways functioning in place of other parts of the system—gathering pastors and campus ministers, or social ministers and judicatory officials, or youth ministers and church leaders—conversations between different players in different parts of the system that don’t necessarily take place.

The seminary also builds up intellectual capital for the church. It would be difficult to write a report on theological education and not refer to H. Richard Niebuhr’s definition of the seminary as the intellectual center of the church. The seminary builds up intellectual capital for the church by learning from ministers and, in turn, critically reflecting upon ministry and faith in all its dimensions and contexts. And it does so by providing biblical, historical, ethical, and theological wisdom to help communities and their leaders discern faithful forms of witness, worship, and service.

Partnerships are forged when intellectual capital is at the service of the congregation and denomination—when scholars go to work on important questions facing communities, offer church leaders helpful diagnoses of the situation, and theological frameworks for thinking about ecclesial and social issues. Partnerships are further strengthened when people are invited to think together about the meaning and implications of research findings.

But building up intellectual capital for the church is the role of both the congregation and the seminary. In fact, a thriving church requires that all ecclesial organizations be intellectual centers for the church, a point Niebuhr missed. Congregations play a central role because they are the primary place of education and formation and in that regard congregations generate intelligence for the whole community. Seminaries need to take seriously the knowledge and wisdom that resides in congregations by both pastors and members, just
as congregations are invited to learn from the research, writing, and teaching
generated by seminary teachers and leaders. The church would surely benefit
if mutual learning was at the heart of the partnership between congregations
and seminaries.

Expanding opportunities for theological education. The primary way
seminaries provide education for ministry is through graduate-level MDiv
degree programs; many also offer two-year masters-level pastoral ministry
degrees and doctor of ministry degrees beyond the MDiv. One concern emerging
among theological educators is whether other forms of education need to
be developed along side the MDiv degree. In some denominations, such as
the United Methodist, such options have been available for some time. Many
UMC pastors participate in course-of-study programs in order to be licensed
as a local pastor. Most programs take place in the summer, and there are a
growing number of Spanish programs offered for Hispanic ministers.

In the Catholic community, the majority of lay ministers are trained in di-
ocesan-sponsored ministry formation programs, which may or may not carry
college credit. Likewise, diaconate candidates are not being trained in semin-
aries, but in diocesan-based programs. In the case of Newman College in
western Canada, the lay MDiv program proved too demanding for candidates
who lived a far distance and could only attend part time. The schools deter-
mined that a BTh degree offered online, with two month-long summer ses-
sions on campus was more amenable to these students and would guarantee
high retention and graduation rates.

Eastern Mennonite Seminary responded to its denomination's need for
ministers by developing a program of study for bi-vocational pastors, which
consists of thirty undergraduate credits over three years. The seminary de-
signed the program with area congregations so the local churches had a com-
mmitment and stake in its success; the seminary is responsible for delivering the
academic content and spiritual formation for ministry.

In addition to offering undergraduate or certificate programs, schools are
exploring with offering the MDiv program at a different site. Union PSCE, for
example, is offering the MDiv degree at an extension site in Charlotte, North
Carolina, where a majority of African-American candidates can attend. Luther
Seminary is also developing distant sites in western states where the congreg-
ation becomes the residence for theological education. Again students are
able to do up to two years of the MDiv curriculum online and attend some
courses at a site not far from home. Fuller Theological Seminary has devel-
oped a full-service extension site in Phoenix, Arizona.

Many schools want to prepare ministers to serve the growing ethnic diver-
sity within the Christian community. But most realize that recruiting into the
traditional MDiv program will not be the route to ministry education for many
Hispanic, Korean, Vietnamese, and other ethnic immigrant groups, at least in
the immediate future. Providing other viable options for these ministers and
their communities will be an important service seminaries can provide—such
opportunities can uphold the vision of educated congregational leaders.

Seminaries cannot be viewed as elite institutions that are unresponsive
to the different levels and needs for ministry preparation. What is becoming
clear in many denominations is that there are a growing number of people leading congregations as ministers who do not have an MDiv degree, who do not plan to get an MDiv degree, and who do not have the time, money, or educational background to fulfill the requirements for the MDiv. How is theological education responding to the educational needs of these ministers? Can seminaries afford to ignore these students because they do not fit the MDiv profile? Should the seminary expand training for ministry outside the MDiv through undergraduate credit or certificate programs or partner more intentionally with those organizations that do? Certificate programs or undergraduate programs may or may not serve as a feeder into the MDiv degree or graduate studies, so seminaries will need to determine, according to their own ecclesial traditions, what kind of competence is necessary for different levels of training in ministry—from the most basic to the most advanced.

Expanding educational opportunities for training in ministry does not need to diminish the priority of the MDiv degree, which most denominations require for ordained ministers. Seminaries are obviously in a difficult position. On the one hand, there are those theological educators who claim that the MDiv should be expanded beyond its current three-years in order to better train students who come to seminary with little theological background. On the other hand, seminaries are being asked to provide training that is not at the standard of the MDiv program and not at the Masters-degree level. It is difficult for many seminaries to respond to that demand after working so long and hard to establish graduate education as the norm in their denomination. Most seminaries work according to the premise that ministry demands high-quality education at the graduate level. Of course, seminaries do not have the luxury of being all things to all people, so determining what kinds of educational programs the seminary can provide in addition to the MDiv, and what kinds of programs denominational partners should provide, will be an ongoing question facing church leaders in the future.

Part Three: Conclusion

Congregations serving seminaries

Perhaps pastoral imagination is really Christian imagination, the ability to see eschatologically, to see with eyes of the heart enlightened. I think of my academic training in the close reading of a text and realize that I still do that, but the text is not simply the scripture or a theologian. The text is also the congregation. My job in the preaching moment is to read our lives as a community and reflect it back through the lens of faith. To claim our broken bodies as God's.

Lillian Daniel

Congregations are the frontline of the church's mission in the world. Consider, for instance, what happened nationally and globally in the past five years as the Congregational Grants Program was underway. On September 11, 2001, U.S. citizens experienced an unprecedented attack on New York City that has
resulted in a war on terrorism, a war in Iraq, and increasing measures to secure
the nation. The U.S. economy underwent significant changes from the strong
gains enjoyed in the 1990s, which affected nearly every nonprofit organization
small and large. Clergy sexual abuse and the status of homosexual persons as
ministers and in legal unions were two issues that caused significant pain, confu­
sion, and questioned the credibility of church leaders. The list could go on.
What is important is that congregations, their ministers and members,
have to make sense of these realities every week—a minister has to preach the
Gospel in light of the signs of the times, but much of what is taking place in the
lives of American Christians is unfolding rapidly and with consequences that
few can imagine. The national and world events remind theological educators
that the church needs wise and prudent leaders who can help Christian com­
munities remain united in Christ no matter what differences seem to divide
the body.
Ministers are frequently referred to as the last generalist among the pro­
fessions, and, indeed, they require the capacity and sensitivity necessary for
working with individuals, families, and communities along a continuum that
runs from more ordinary life events to extreme crises. And as Rev. Daniel
notes, ministers are required to interpret a multiplicity of texts. They must
be well-grounded in the texts of the tradition—Scriptures, creeds, theologies,
liturgies, and doctrines—and able to understand and interpret the “living hu­
mnan document” that is each person’s life and experience as well as the “liv­
ing community document,” the unique text that is the congregation. Ministers
must be able to understand the factors that shape a congregation’s story and
practices with attention to the dynamics for life-giving patterns as well as de­
structive habits.
Ministers must be able to read the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in
the other, as Karl Barth noted, in order to be keen interpreters of culture and
wise judges of what faith means in particular cultural conditions. Ministers
are looked upon to answer questions about meaning and purpose, most im­
portantly the question “why?” They are supposed to know something about
the mysterious reality of God and be able to interpret how God’s purposes
are expressed in symbol, narrative, and experience. And, they are even sup­
posed to know something about what’s beyond earthly existence. From the
soul to the text, from the earthly community to the eschaton, from the boiler
in the church basement to the prophetic stance against injustice, ministers are
required to know and do a great deal beyond the ordinary.
If congregations are the frontline of the church’s mission in the world,
congregations can best serve seminaries by helping seminaries understand the
ways Christians are making sense of what faithfulness means in our times. If
ministers engage in serious reflection on the ways multiple texts are being un­
derstood and interpreted in the congregation and they share those reflections
with theological educators, they will be serving both the congregation and the
seminary by building the intellectual capital of both communities.
Seminaries serving congregations

Many of us enter the ministry thinking that we are entering a world of ideas, when really it is such an earthy calling. Nothing in my training could have prepared me, a person who once had the luxury of fainting at the sight of blood, for all that time in hospitals. . . . Nothing could have prepared me for how terribly earthy the ministry is; how incarnational.

Lillian Daniel

The truth is that much of what ministers do on a daily basis the seminary did not educate them to do. Seminaries cannot prepare ministers for every eventuality that comes along. Ministry is too complex a practice. Seminaries should tell their graduates honestly that there is more to learn, but they should not apologize about that truth. Rather seminaries can invite ministers into a lifelong journey of learning from the ministry and helping others, especially their seminary professors, to understand the beautiful, the ordinary, and the holy that are part of every minister’s work. Learning beyond the seminary can happen best for those ministers who receive an excellent education in the seminary.

Seminaries will serve congregations best by listening to congregations and being intentional about understanding and critiquing what is happening in congregations. In light of what they know about congregations, seminaries will be more able to create resources for congregations. Seminaries will serve congregations if they are seen as reliable and credible partners—part of the solution, not part of the problem. What Congregational Ministry Program grantees learned is that the work is intensive, it can be frustrating and emotionally exhausting at times, but it is also the work of faith that involves courage, risk, and, at times, sacrifice.

But seminaries have to do more than just think about congregations in their immediate context. Seminaries are also charged with thinking about the Christian life, the biblical, historical, theological, and ethical dimensions of faith that include aspects of the past and present that are not immediately connected to today’s situation or at least don’t appear to be immediately relevant. And congregations need seminaries to be communities of learning that honor and embrace rigorous scholarship on matters beyond congregations and current events.

As noted above, both seminaries and congregations need each other to be communities of learning, places where rigorous understanding, critique, and exploration are habits of mind cultivated by compassionate and smart leaders. Both congregations and seminaries would be strengthened as congregations and seminaries if they were more able to engage in mutual giving and receiving, a posture of openness, gratitude, and humility in the face of what can be learned from the other. It is not difficult to see that the Congregational Ministry Program has taken several steps in the direction of strengthening both congregations and seminaries to serve one another.
Summary Report II: Strengthening Congregational Ministry

Kathleen A. Calahan has worked as an evaluator in the Religion Division of Lilly Endowment. She currently is associate professor of practical theology at St. John's University School of Theology-Seminary.

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Appendix A

Congregational Ministry Program Grantees
January 1, 1999—December 31, 2003

1. Andover Newton Theological School
2. Aquinas Institute of Theology
3. Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond
4. Bethel Seminary of Bethel University
5. Bexley Hall Seminary
6. Boston University School of Theology
7. Candler School of Theology of Emory University
8. Chicago Theological Seminary
9. Church Divinity School of the Pacific
10. Claremont School of Theology
11. Eastern Mennonite Seminary of Eastern Mennonite University
12. Eden Theological Seminary
13. Franciscan School of Theology
14. Fuller Theological Seminary
15. Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary
16. Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
17. Hood Theological Seminary
18. Howard University School of Divinity
19. Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley
20. Lancaster Theological Seminary
21. Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary
22. Luther Seminary
23. Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary
24. Moravian Theological Seminary
25. Newman Theological College
26. Northern Baptist Theological Seminary
27. Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
28. Payne Theological Seminary
29. Perkins School of Theology Southern Methodist University
30. Phillips Theological Seminary
31. Regent College
32. Sacred Heart Major Seminary
33. St. John's University School of Theology—Seminary
34. Saint Meinrad's School of Theology
35. Saint Paul School of Theology
36. St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary
37. Seabury-Western Theological Seminary
38. Seattle University School of Theology and Ministry
39. Talbot School of Theology of Biola University
40. Trinity Lutheran Seminary
41. Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education
42. University of Dubuque Theological Seminary
43. Wartburg Theological Seminary
44. Washington Theological Union
45. Wesley Theological Seminary
Appendix B

Program to Enhance Theological School's Capacities to Prepare Candidates for Congregational Ministry

Program description

Few issues are more important to the Christian churches in North America than the quality of pastoral leadership. Though there are certainly many persons of real ability ministering in congregations and parishes, there is nonetheless a remarkable consensus among Christians—Protestant as well as Catholic, evangelical as well as mainline—about the critical need to draw even more highly qualified candidates to the ministry and to educate them more appropriately for their ministries.

Although this is surely an issue that can and should engage the energies of all agencies of the church, Lilly Endowment believes that theological schools can play a distinctive role in strengthening the Christian ministry. In an effort to encourage particularly creative initiatives from theological schools, Lilly Endowment will, in 1998, award major grants to those North American theological schools that design and propose the most promising projects that address the strengthening of the Christian ministry. Because the Endowment believes that to improve congregational ministry there must be both better students and better theological schools, this grants program aims to assist those institutions best prepared to make strategic advance to improve their institution's capacity to better prepare the next generation of congregational or parish ministers.

Eligibility

Every theological school fully accredited by The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada is eligible to apply for a grant in this program. Grants will be awarded on a competitive basis to support projects that hold the best promise of improving the quality of the Christian ministry.

Many kinds of projects might be proposed, and Lilly Endowment has no preconceived opinions about what kinds of efforts will best address this issue. Some seminary leaders, for example, have suggested that the lack of sufficient fundraising capacity to provide adequate financial aid to prospective students has a direct bearing on the quality of their students, while others have suggested that the physical condition of their schools' facilities inhibit them from attracting the most able candidates. Some theological school leaders believe that developing creative relationships with clusters of congregations, with regional church judicatories or with church-related undergraduate institutions can open doors to new and better recruitment practices, while others feel that they should develop or strengthen cooperative programs with other seminaries in their denomination or region in order to address common aims. Some seminaries may wish to concentrate on fashioning a new curriculum or on ef-
forts for faculty development, while others will want to pay more attention to programs of spiritual formation for their students. Grants for these and other promising ways of working to improve their graduates’ capacities to lead congregations will be supported from this program. In keeping with Lilly Endowment policy, no grants will be awarded for endowment or other permanent fund purposes.

Though a wide range of projects can and will be supported, only those seminaries that are able to present a convincing and compelling case for how the proposed project will significantly improve the Christian ministry will receive grant support.

Projects may vary in length from one to five years, and grants will be awarded in the $400,000 to $1,500,000 range. Since the Endowment has allocated up to $40 million in grants for this initiative, it stands ready to support a significant number of promising proposals.

Criteria

For a proposal to be successful, it should include all the following elements:

1. A full discussion of the institution’s analysis of the current state of congregational/parish ministry within the church public it serves.

2. A discussion of the ways that the institution has deliberately attempted to address the state of the ministry in the recent past and a description of how the proposed effort will be informed by that experience. If other agencies of the church have been the institution’s partners in past work on this issue, the proposal should discuss these collaborative efforts and how the proposed program will build on this shared activity.

3. A detailed description of the proposed project together with a timeline that relates clearly to the project’s goals and budget.

4. A realistic appraisal of the problems that the institution would expect to face in implementing the proposed project. The Endowment recognizes that almost all important ventures involve some risk and uncertainty, and therefore a proposal will be strengthened if it contains evidence that those responsible for implementing it have given realistic attention to the obstacles that might inhibit a project from fully realizing its objectives.

5. A statement that explains how the proposed project will strategically enhance the institution’s capacity to prepare better congregational ministers and the rationale behind choosing this particular course of action.

6. A clear statement of the outcomes of the program. Each applicant should state the results for which it expects to be held accountable.
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In doing so, it should articulate specific goals in clear and measurable terms. It should also provide an evaluation design that describes the process by which the program’s effectiveness will be assessed.

7. A description of the persons who will be responsible for the implementation of the proposal. Describe how their training and experience prepares them for the work of this project.

8. If the proposed project involves cooperation with one or more other institutions (for instance, with clusters of congregations, with other seminaries, with a denominational office, with a church-related college, etc.) evidence must be submitted that each participant has a genuine interest in the proposal. The evidence can be in the form of letters or statements of support from the leaders of the other institutions or agencies involved.

9. A full and detailed budget for the proposed project.

10. Either a plan for the post-grant financing of this new endeavor or a persuasive discussion of why this plan will not require support at the end of the grant period. The Endowment hopes to avoid aiding programs that will not survive when the Endowment’s funding is terminated.

11. The proposal should be signed by the theological school’s chief executive officer and chief financial officer. In the case of freestanding schools, the proposal should also be signed by the chair of the school’s board; in the case of university-related divinity schools, by the appropriate senior university administrator.

ENDNOTES


2. The Endowment supports The Association of Theological Schools, the accrediting agency for theological schools, and the Fund for Theological Education, an organization committed to supporting excellence in ministry. For a list of other organizations, with links to their Web sites, supported by the Religion Division related to pastoral leadership development, see the Web site, www.lillyendowment.org/religion.

3. Many of the projects funded by Lilly Endowment’s Religion Division, including research in congregational studies and resources for congregations, can be found at the Web site, Resources for American Christianity, www.resourcingchristianity.org.

4. Jackson Carroll and Barbara Wheeler developed six categories to classify theological schools: evangelical Protestant (denominational or independent), mainline Protestant (denominational or independent), peace church, and Roman Catholic.

5. Appendix A contains a list of the forty-five grantees in the Congregational Ministry Program.