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## THE ECOLOGY OF VOCATION

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### Abstract

Those who care about the future of the church have a vested interest in both the quantity and the quality of candidates preparing for ministry in this generation and into the next. And it is easy to see those pastors as the product of a series of independent and individualized decisions. A college student, for example, meets with her pastor to discuss her future. Or an engineer sits at the kitchen table with his wife asking if they have the money for him to quit his job and head off to seminary. The future of ministry does indeed depend on these decisions. But those decisions depend on something else. They depend on a system, a system of formal organizations and informal relationships. They depend on the system in just the same way that a flowering bush depends on the ecosystem of the meadow in which it grows.

### Article Purpose

The purpose of this article is to study the interdependent ecosystem of organizations and entities that nurture the next generation of Christian leaders. We will call this system the ecology of vocation. This project's original goal was to map the ecology of vocation that surrounds theological schools. Scott Cormode initially pursued this goal by mapping the ecology of vocation that surrounds his school (Fuller Seminary). But it seemed wise to compare that experience to the study of other schools' ecologies. To that end, scholars from four other schools studied the ecology of vocation that forms their students. The original purpose of this paper was to report the findings of that comparative study with the hope that reporting these findings would inspire other schools to map the ecologies that nurture their students.

A second purpose arose, however, as we put this paper together—a purpose that cannot be separated from the first purpose. We found that each school reinvented the very process of mapping the ecology in order to fit the needs of that school's particular culture. In other words, we set out to understand how ecology shapes students (and we will discuss that), but along the way we also discovered the important ways that a seminary's culture shapes the school, its faculty, and its very notion of education.

Before this paper describes the specifics of how the study pursued its goals, it will be important to explain what we mean by the ecology of vocation. Perhaps the best way to begin is with an analogy to show what we mean by ecology. Then we can tell the story of a particular leader's vocational journey in order to show how the concept of an ecology helps us to understand the development of vocation.

The best metaphor for understanding the development of a minister may be to think of a river flowing from the hills to the sea. Think of the life course of a pastor's development as the flow of that river. The river passes through a number of different environments on its way to the sea. A confluence of streams may come together to form the river. The river may pool at some point to create a lake. There may be rapids or deep, still segments. The river may pass through a forest or create a meadow. The point is that the river itself is an ecosystem even as it passes through and is shaped by a network of ecosystems. Together these various ecosystems create the ecology of the river. In the same way, a minister's development over time has a logic of its own. That makes her development like a river in that it has its own ecosystem. But, at the same time, her development is influenced by a number of other organizations and entities as well. These are like the lakes, forests, and hillsides that shape a river. We cannot understand the river or the minister until we look at the entire system together. That is why we need to understand the ecology of vocation.

But what does that look like in the life of a leader? Let us focus on one example. Even before John K. arrived at Fuller Seminary, he felt sure he was called to plant new churches. Soon after he graduated from the school in the 1990s, he and his wife began hosting a Bible study in their living room. It eventually grew into a congregation of over 200 members, almost all of whom had no faith commitment before encountering his church. The church recently purchased land near a freeway and is getting ready to build a new sanctuary and gymnasium.<sup>1</sup> In short, Rev. K has become the kind of minister that Fuller Seminary wants its graduates to be. He is pastoral with his parishioners, preaches solid Biblical sermons, and has a commitment to evangelism. The question is, how did he become such a minister?

Although it is true that Rev. K learned a great deal about ministry in the seminary classroom, many of the key moments that formed him for ministry came outside the school. He came to faith as a child in an independent Bible church. Then, when he was in high school, his parents moved the family to a Presbyterian congregation, where the youth minister (freshly graduated from Fuller) had a profound effect on John. During college, Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship gave him valuable experience not only in leading groups but also in starting new ministries. After he graduated from college, he worked as a youth minister under the tutelage of an old, wise Presbyterian pastor. But, when that pastor retired, John K. had a very frustrating experience working with an interim pastor who did not value innovation or evangelism. The frustration continued when, during seminary, the denominational credentialing body informed him that they believed only older, more

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<sup>1</sup> The information from John K. was verified in a day-long interview on August 31, 2006, when the grant project began. Much has obviously happened in his life and ministry since that time. But for the purposes of this paper, we will narrate his circumstances as of the grant's beginning in 2007 rather than attempting to complicate it by adding new twists and turns – especially the ways that the economic crisis of 2008 shifted his church's ministry.

experienced pastors should be planting churches. Conversely, after he founded his congregation, he encountered a wise denominational leader who mentored him. And all along the way, a network of friends confirmed his gifts and discussed the questions that were closest to his heart. These experiences shaped his understanding of ministry and his assumptions about his gifts for church planting. It is clear, then, that many of the lessons that made him such a strong graduate came outside the seminary classroom. Some even happened after he had earned his degree. In other words, much of the success of a theological school's ability to form students for ministry depends on external entities. It depends on the ecology of vocation.

But how do these entities form an ecology? Each of these entities creates an environment for learning and formation. Learning and formation are not mechanistic processes; they grow in the same way that a plant grows out an ecology. And, when we examine the range of leaders being formed for ministry, we find that the organizations and entities that shape them fit together in a system of mutual dependence in just the same way that an upstream ecosystem affects what happens downstream. This interdependence makes the learning environment into an ecology. Anything that affects one part of the system affects everything else in the system.

There is a diversity of organizations in any ecology. In Rev. K.'s ecology, we find not only Fuller Seminary, but also a nondenominational church that provided his initial faith formation, a number of Presbyterian congregations that gave him the opportunity to experiment with his gifts, a couple of judicatories (one that helped and one that hurt his development), an Inter-Varsity chapter that thrust him into a creative leadership position, and many mentors and friends. The weakness in the wide literature on leadership formation is that it neglects all these ecological influences because it proceeds as if seminaries stand alone. There has been very little discussion of how theological schools fit into an ecology of vocation.

There are at least five key parts to the ecology of vocation. Each of these parts is really a cluster of organizations and experiences—in the same way that the rapids of a river or the place where it pools into a lake is both an ecology unto itself and part of the overall ecology of the river.

The first part of any leader's ecology of vocation is her formative faith experience, which often takes place in the congregation that first nurtured her to faith. If the leader first came to faith at a young age, this first component may include an experience of youth ministry. If so, that experience may make a lasting impression. In Rev. K.'s case, much of the work he does as a church planter harkens back to his high school experience of youth ministry. The camps and mission trips, the music and the mentors that went with youth ministry each shaped his *mental model of Christian ministry*. If that formative faith experience happens in adulthood, it influences a leader in a different way. But the important point is that most leaders engage in an implicit dialogue through the course of their development with their formative faith experiences.

The second key component of the ecology is one's experience of faith during college (and, if present, one's first career). Even those ministers who look back on the college years as barren spiritually have nonetheless been shaped by that experience. At this stage, campus ministries or para-church organizations can be important influences, as can camps, books, and web sites. They provide future leaders with a safe training ground to nurture their skills. Indeed, it may be that a significant portion of future leaders first discovers their gifts for ministry in these college contexts. On the other hand, there are those future leaders who graduate from college with no plan to be a minister. They prepare for some other occupation and then discover their call later in life. It would be interesting to compare the college experiences of first career and second career ministers to see if there is something distinctive about the college experience of either group (and we found that, in each

theological school we studied, what one school called “pipeliners”—those who came straight from college—had a different experience compared to those who experienced careers before matriculating).

Work experiences can be as important as college experiences in shaping the *mental models of ministry*. For those who perceive a call after the age of thirty, there is usually some kind of first career. And it is important to investigate the influences that different careers have on their mental models about ministry. For example, Rev. K. talked about working in his family’s restaurant. Being a part of a small business taught him a sense of responsibility and it taught him how to deal with the ambiguous boundaries that both small business owners and pastors experience. Rev. K.’s reflection came up as he was describing the difficulty he has had hiring youth ministers. He observed that fledgling ministers who have only known nine-to-five jobs are not prepared for the intrusive nature of youth ministry. He wants a youth minister to know instinctively that it is important to show up at high school basketball games, winter concerts, and Fourth of July parades. So he asks potential youth ministers about their job experience in order to gauge their ability to manage the elastic hours that ministry demands. There is much to learn from tracking the work experience of candidates for ministry.

The third key component is the congregation of call. At some point, every minister perceives some kind of call. Usually this happens in the context of some community of faith. This congregation of call may be a community that has already been important in a candidate’s development (e.g., it could be the same as the congregation that originally formed a candidate or it may be a college ministry) or it may be a community that she encounters after leaving college. But the context in which the potential minister receives the call has a large influence on what the candidate believes she is being called to be and do.

The fourth key component of the ecology of vocation is the nexus of organizations that shape a student during

her seminary years. For the purpose of this study, we are interested especially in those influences that take place *outside* the classroom. These include: (1) the internship or field education context (this may include the ministries students do for academic credit and those that they pursue simply to pay the bills or to continue their calling), (2) relationships with a credentialing body such as a presbytery, a Methodist annual conference, or a Lutheran synod, (3) Clinical Pastoral Education (particularly in a hospital setting), and (4) extra-curricular student activities within the seminary.<sup>2</sup> Each of these learning environments shapes a student during their seminary years, but no one is directly related to what happens in the classroom.

Finally, the fifth key component of the ecology centers around the initial experiences that a pastor encounters as she steps into ministry. Particularly important are the first summer after graduating from seminary and the first five years in ministry. As new ministers make sense of these new experiences, they either internalize or shed lessons that they learned in seminary. They also become attuned to questions that they could not ask until they took up the mantle of pastoral leadership. Each of these five key components is a nexus of organizations and influences surrounding a developing minister. Each provides an environment for learning. And each is in some way shaped by the others. Together they form the ecology of vocation.

The difficulty in putting together a study such as this is to determine the parameters of investigation. For the purpose of this study, the principal investigator

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<sup>2</sup> Carroll, Jackson, et. al., *Being There: Culture and Formation in Two Theological Schools* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). We were particularly interested, here, in extending the notion of “seminary culture” that Carroll et al. describe in *Being There*. Experiences such as campus chapel or influences such as on-campus speakers or especially small Bible study groups composed of other students can provide important environments for students to explore new ways of imagining what it means to be in ministry. Ironically, we found that the seminary culture shaped the very idea that each school had for what they were doing by participating in this study.

(Cormode) proposed to the other scholars a set of parameters to follow in doing this study. They were asked to study the five key components that we described above. That is, we will study: (1) Formative Faith Experiences, (2) College Experiences and First Careers, (3) Congregation of Call, (4) Experiences During Seminary, and (5) Ministry in Context. Each of these five is its own cluster of organizations and influences—just as a mountain lake is its own ecosystem.

None of these schools followed exactly the process that Cormode outlined. In some studies, that would be problematic and call into question the results of the study, but the opposite is true here. A significant finding of this study is that each school reinvented the process in order to meet the needs of and to embody the mental models inherent to that school's seminary culture.

The original goals of the comparative project were to determine if other schools would find it useful to replicate the original study done at Fuller Seminary and to see if those other schools reached the same conclusions. The result has been profound. We found that each school found the process exceedingly useful, but that each school re-invented the process (or made the process its own) in order to maximize that usefulness. Very early in the comparative project, it became clear that achieving comparative results (by following replicated methods) was going to be secondary. Taking seriously the ecology of vocation required each school to reinvent the process to that school's culture.

The other important decision has to do with the methods that the investigation employed. Our first method was to conduct surveys with graduates in their first years of ministry. That gave us a baseline of data. But after that, it was extremely important to follow up with interviews. The stories that graduates tell are an important window into their experience.



## The Quantity and the Quality of Leaders

One last point needs to be made. Most scholarly discussions of ecology focus on quantity but not quality.<sup>3</sup> Using the ecology metaphor suggests an intuitive connection between quantity and ecology because it is like saying that the amount of rain affects the yield of the wheat harvest. This is why the effectiveness of youth ministry today shapes the quantity of ministers tomorrow. And it explains why intervening in the vocational discernment of college students makes good sense. The ecology of vocation is an environment that bears fruit. Without it, we will indeed run out of ministers. But there are deeper reasons why the ecology of vocation is crucial to the future of religious leadership.

The ecology of vocation affects the quality and not just the quantity of religious leaders. Let us explain how this works in greater detail because this insight provides a guide for what data we collected. The most respected scholars on leadership have shown us that every leader acts out of a *mental model* of what leadership should be. Each leader carries within his or her mind an image of leadership. For example, Peter Drucker talks about “the theory of the business,” by which he means a mental image every leader and corporation has of what the organization exists to do, why it matters, and how that endeavor will help the organization thrive.<sup>4</sup> Every decision that the organization makes (or that a leader makes on the organization’s behalf), he argues, depends on the “theory of the business.” That is why “the primary

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the use of the term “ecology” in organization theory. It is almost solely concerned with what it calls “births” and “deaths,” which in this context would translate into the quantity of new candidates for ministry. The seminal work is Michael T. Hannan and John Freeman, “The Population Ecology of Organizations,” *American Journal of Sociology* 82 (March 1977): 929-966; on the place of ecological discussions in organization theory, see Charles Perrow, *Complex Organizations* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1986), 208-218; and Richard Scott, *Organizations* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1992), 126-132, 215-218.

<sup>4</sup> Peter F. Drucker, “The Theory of the Business.” *Harvard Business Review*, September/October 1994 95-104, esp. p. 100.

focus of executive leadership is formatting and implementing an organization's theory of the business."<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, Peter Senge describes how the best leaders are constantly aware of the "mental models" they carry in their heads. These models describe the purpose of the organization, the role of the leader, and the characteristics of the environment. The strongest leaders, he argues, are the ones who have enough self-awareness to change their unspoken assumptions when the circumstances of their world change.<sup>6</sup> For example, in our earlier discussion of John K., we mentioned that he had a difficult relationship with an interim pastor who supervised him when he was a youth minister. The difficulty turned on a clash of mental models. John believed that his primary calling as a youth minister was to evangelize teens who were not yet part of the church. The pastor, on the other hand, believed that the primary role of a youth minister was to teach confirmation classes for the (admittedly few) children of current church members. Thus she chided him for neglecting his duties because he hung out with local teens at the pizza parlor on a Friday night talking about Jesus. Her mental model said that it was a waste of time (and perhaps set a bad example) for a pastor to be out with kids, even as his mental model of a youth minister said that it was among the most important things he could do. Senge and many others<sup>7</sup> have shown that every leader makes decisions based on the mental models they carry around in their heads.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The quotation comes from Drucker's principal co-author, Joseph A. Maciarello, "Peter F. Drucker on Executive Leadership and Effectiveness," *The Leader of the Future 2 (forthcoming)*, 6.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 174ff.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Donald Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner* (New York: Basic Books, 1993) 321-323 and Chris Argyris, *Overcoming Organizational Defenses* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> Peter Senge, *Fifth Discipline*, 204. Indeed, Senge argued further that the best leaders will need to learn to shift "from mental models dominated by events to mental models that recognize longer-term patterns of change and the underlying structures producing these patterns."

The question, then, for those who care about Christian leadership is this: Who forms the mental models that shape a pastor's view of ministry? The answer, of course, is complicated. One purpose of a seminary education is to instill a healthy model for ministry. Indeed, many of the theology and ministry courses that a student takes focus on shaping the student's view of ministry. Yet the school does not stand alone. Many of these mental models grow out of the ecology of vocation that formed the minister.

Let us look back at the John K example. By the time he arrived in seminary, he carried in his head a number of models both for what constitutes good ministry and for what it means to be a congregation. At the nondenominational Bible church that formed his faith, the picture of good ministry was a pastor standing informally in front of the congregation with an open Bible in his hand expounding on the scriptures verse by verse. Such a congregation does not need to have denominational authority structures. At the large Presbyterian church of his youth, John saw a model of preaching that had well-crafted, thematic sermons delivered from an elevated pulpit. There he saw a congregation that was embedded within a denominational authority structure. Thus he carried at least two models of ministry in his head: an informal, nondenominational model and a structured, denominational one.

When he discerned a call to ministry, he pursued the denominational path. He approached the presbytery and put himself under their care. He did not, however, abandon the other model. Thus, when the presbytery told him that he was too young to plant a church, the alternative mental model blazed for him an alternative path to ministry. He decided to forego denominational ordination and to start a congregation in his living room with neither denominational support nor sanction. The resistance of the presbytery inspired him to shift from one ecclesiological model to another. If, however, he had grown up in a denominational congregation and had never experienced a different model, it likely would have

been much more difficult for him to plant a nondenominational church. His ecology of vocation included a mental model of the church that allowed him to make that move.

Experience with seminarians and newly-ordained pastors suggests that a significant part of their formation as ministers involves sorting out which mental models from their ecology are legitimate and which they will leave behind.<sup>9</sup> When Cormode first constructed the project, the most important question in his mind was this: How does the ecology of vocation form a minister's mental models about the church and the ministry? And when Cormode commissioned the four other studies, he assumed that the mental model's question would be the foremost question.

It did not happen that way. The needs of each school reshaped the purpose of the study for each school. Or, to use the language of this study, the mental model each school held for useful and legitimate research re-shaped the purpose and form of this project at each of the schools. It would be easy for Cormode to complain that the other scholars did not do work that conformed to his mental model of what the study should be. But that would be hypocritical. A premise of this project is that every student comes to our seminaries and reinvents the purpose of theological education for herself. That is why theological education is so powerful. It prepares John K. for church planting, while also preparing, say, Soo-Mi for chaplaincy. The same principle applies to this project. Each school re-invented the ecology of vocation project to fit its own purposes. The project would not have been

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Kegan's work on development – and particularly the development that allows leaders to work in particularly complicated environments – has shown that graduate school is often the time that students are confronted with just this question. The reason most graduate programs are so emotionally taxing, he believes, is that most schools do not have any intention of facilitating this move. See, for example, his *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), esp. pp. 270 and 293. Pag 313ff show how these transitions are related to leadership.

as useful if we expected each school to pursue the goals of the principal investigator. Let us then see how each school re-invented the project and how each school found that the project addressed key questions in that seminary's culture. We will look at the schools in alphabetical order and then comment, at the end, on the common themes.

### **Harvard Divinity School (HDS)** (Emily Click)

This report begins with an excerpt from a draft of our accreditation self-study process, in order to provide the reader with some interpretive context. This section summarizes our nearly unique approach to theological education, which embraces ministry in Christianity as well as other faith traditions. Here is that excerpt:

“Over the past six years, the faculty of divinity and the M.Div. committee have crafted an entirely new M.Div. curriculum. Our M.Div. goals are that M.Div. graduates will...

1. Demonstrate a deep commitment to social justice, as well as the capacity and tools to critically confront structured forms of violence in our society.
2. Critically and compassionately engage the histories, theologies, and practices of their traditions, as well as multi-religious and multi-cultural contexts in which they practice their ministries.
3. Integrate diverse academic, spiritual, and social-cultural resources in their ministerial work, understanding “ministry” as a practice that emerges out of a rich intellectual life brought to bear upon the whole world.
4. Lead and cultivate communities that are characterized by deep spiritual, intellectual, and ethical bonds.
5. Stretch the horizons for the vision and practice of ministry, demonstrating in surprising and yet-unexpected ways creative ingenuity in their ministries.”

Upon revising our M.Div. in 2005, our faculty embraced a significant evolution of the understanding of ministry to include not only Christian and Unitarian-Universalist ministry, as has long been our focus, but to intentionally extend to Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist faith traditions as well. We require each student to begin their program by identifying a religious tradition upon which they will focus their program. The student must then develop extensive knowledge of the religion which is the focus for his or her M.Div., as well develop significant knowledge of another religion.

An overarching purpose for the M.Div. is to enable students to form comprehensive, respectful engagement across traditions, while also developing deep roots within their own religious traditions. Students from diverse religious traditions form a single cohort in the M.Div., enabling comprehensive preparation for engaging ministry within a multi-religious context. However, students also have many opportunities for deep formation and experience within their own tradition, as they learn in community with students, faculty, and staff who share their religious perspective. Thus students develop depth of knowledge and formation within their tradition while also cultivating deep respect for practices, beliefs, and persons from traditions other than their own. We have found (through extensive interviews with alumni) that our Christian students report significant growth in knowledge and practice of Christianity not just in spite of but rather because of this richly diverse engagement with religious traditions.

Our M.Div. curriculum encourages students to imagine creative interpretations of meanings for “ministry.” The de-familiarization created by our students’ engagement with the diversity of our curriculum, including language study, fosters their capacity to stretch ministerial horizons in unpredictable ways. The creative surprises our students experience in engaging the curriculum build capacity to create and engage unpredictable surprises in their ministries. (*Excerpts from HDS Self-Study document, 2011*).

This “Ecology of Vocation” study focused on graduates who had been formed in this new and different ethos. The multi-religious focus of the new M.Div. is significant; however, it remains true that the majority of students in the M.Div. program are in Christian or UU traditions.

### **Methodology for This Study**

Our Ecology of Vocation project has unfolded so far in four stages. First, we developed and administered a survey monkey to alumni from four recent M.Div. classes. We wanted to focus on 2006-09 graduates in order to capture those who had experienced at least some of the new curriculum, rolled out in 2005, and yet had also been out of school long enough to have something to report about post-Harvard Divinity School (HDS) experiences. The inclusion of 2006 graduates helped us meet the target numbers requested by the study coordinator, but may have skewed results because most of them had 2/3 of their HDS experience under the “old” M.Div. curriculum. Over the summer of 2011, I hosted two informal interview lunches with several of our field education supervisors who had supervised the largest numbers of our M.Div. students in recent years. While the data from those lunches was not part of the project, I will quote from those interviews later in this report.

Our project’s next stage involved interviewing respondents by phone. We followed up with everyone who indicated in the survey that they were willing for us to follow up, and then we pursued some others as well. We then analyzed the data in several ways, looking for trends and patterns. Finally, at this stage, I have completed this draft report summarizing analysis and results to date. We have yet not correlated this data with other sources, such as field education final evaluations, nor with admissions materials. Neither have we made any extensive report to the faculty. This will be done in two forms: one will be a lengthy report to the M.Div. committee, and on another occasion I plan to lead a

discussion with a large group of faculty who meet once a month for lunch, ordinarily to discuss one person's scholarly project.

### **Survey and Interview Information**

We received contact information (from our alumni office) for 215 M.Div. graduates from 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009. We developed a survey monkey with 31 questions, based on the survey developed by Scott Cormode for Fuller Seminary, but with some questions re-worded to better suit our alumni. We focused some questions on how students engaged with ordination processes, since we had very little information about how ordination has gone for our M.Div. graduates. Then we followed up with 22 interviews which were all by phone, and took 45 minutes to one and a half hours. Emily conducted three of the interviews, and staff conducted the rest. Most of the interviews were entirely recorded and transcribed, while a few were recorded in detailed note format. The interviews focused on the HDS experience and the after-graduation experience, with less attention on their faith formation prior to coming to HDS. However, late in the process, we began asking what were their undergraduate majors, and we also asked how well prepared they felt they were to engage in critical reading of texts by that undergraduate experience.

#### *General Descriptions of Respondents:*

87 responded to the survey monkey (we eliminated one duplicate response, as well as one with nothing filled in, but included two with no name but some categories filled in). We interviewed one person who did not return a survey, but the rest (21) had already turned in a survey.

50 were female, 35 male, 1 no response to the gender question, and one transgender.

Forty-five were aged 26-30, twenty-seven were aged 30-40, fifteen were aged 41-65, (one had no age given).

13 graduated in 2006, 18 graduated in 2007, 21 graduated in 2008, and 35 graduated in 2009 (one did not give a year of graduation).



## Overview of Findings and Analysis:

As a result of the survey we now have far more detailed data about how many graduates attempt and enter into ordination processes, but we also better grasp the reality that for our graduates, ministerial service cannot usefully be considered identical to ordained ministry. We understood before that this was true for those entering many non-traditional forms of ministry, such as leadership of NGO's, teaching, or other professions. We now understand it is also complicated to summarize the ways in which students enter into traditional forms of ministry, as they tend to continue to follow complicated, non-traditional paths even into ordained, denominationally oriented pastoral leadership.

## Formative Faith Experiences

Our students can be described as being “denominationally challenged” before, during and after HDS. We might even say a high number of HDS graduates develop, somewhere during their journey, multiple roots within distinct religious traditions. While we might have expected this to stem from our requirement that each student take at least three courses outside their own religious tradition, a surprising finding was how many students had already traveled a path within multiple traditions before entering HDS. In describing their formative faith experiences, students described the complicated journeys they traveled before they ever found HDS. Their mother was Roman Catholic, their father agnostic, and they attended a local Baptist youth group on their own initiative. Such apparently diverse roots did not equate to a shallow or cynical understanding of religious affiliation, but nurtured a desire for deeper understanding within and across traditions. They found their home at HDS, where an M.Div. program had been shaped for just such learning.

We would have liked to have listened to more stories, and to have gathered more data about how they found their ways to youth groups, college chaplaincies, to dharma talks, that held them in a spiritual space and

convinced them they could find a way to dedicate their lives to learned service. We need to better understand the role of college chaplains, of congregational rabbis, of youth group leaders, of NGO founders, in nurturing our students to service before they reach our doors. We know that many professors recognize outstanding students of religion and send those to HDS. Our initial findings suggest that other equally valuable partners go unrecognized, and might be fruitfully cultivated as dialog partners to better understand the journey toward service our graduates begin before they ever encounter our curriculum and participate in our life of worship and study.

### **College and First Career Experiences**

We asked fifteen of those we interviewed what were their undergraduate majors. These included 13 in the humanities, one in business/finance, and another in political science. Seven majored in some area of religious studies. We asked students how their undergraduate or previous graduate programs prepared them for HDS. We heard from most of the students that their previous educations prepared them to read texts critically, and if they had been required to do a thesis prior to HDS, they mentioned that was valuable.

Many students point to the influence of an undergraduate professor in developing an interest in religious studies, and in ministry. One notable interview was with a graduate who came from an under-represented minority, and who had been encouraged to imagine coming to Harvard. She vividly described how this opened up new horizons for her, and how she felt supported in her efforts to succeed at HDS, even though her undergraduate education had not adequately prepared her for the writing challenges. In fact, she shared that she won the Billings Competition, which is a highly competitive preaching contest for M.Div. students. She shared that she now brings groups of students to visit on campus so that they too can imagine they could go to a school like Harvard if that is right for them.

The next steps for expanding the ecology of vocation might be to correlate the undergraduate majors of each of the study participants with their current occupations. Another significant avenue of exploration would be to correlate GRE scores and other relevant admission information such as essays or references with the descriptions of experiences after graduation. It is also probably appropriate to separately track those who enter with prior graduate degrees, and develop a longitudinal description of how those prior graduate studies shape their post-HDS vocations.

It would be useful to contrast the experience of students who enter HDS still in their twenties, but after a break from educational study, versus those who do not interrupt their educational sequence prior to entering HDS. Similarly, it would be important to study the effects of particular types of pre-HDS experiences, such as Teach for America, or other service in church and para-church organizations.

### **Congregation of Call**

We gathered only anecdotal data about student experiences in congregations prior to HDS. Since HDS matriculates students from around the world, it is not uncommon for students to have left their geographic home for undergraduate study, and then to have moved somewhere else to work for a few years, and then to make another geographic shift in coming to HDS. For practical purposes, this often means that relatively few students can tie their present sense of calling for learned service to one specific congregation in a “home” or family-based setting. It is not unheard of for students to receive a call that can be traced from high school through to their present experience of ministry, but such patterns are unusual enough to suggest we must study the influence of congregational life in other ways.

## Experiences of Divinity School

Students had positive things to say about their HDS experiences. Many named professors or staff who had been especially helpful, and gave rich descriptions of this mentoring while at HDS. Students reported high values for the academic rigor of the program, for the relevance of field education in helping them discern the shape for their ministry, and in general they praised the quality of the relationships they formed with the peers within the HDS community.

Here are some quotes in response to our question of how well they feel HDS prepared them for their present work: “My work as a leader and manager are completely transformed and strengthened by the work I did at HDS—it was definitely worth the time and investment.” “Every aspect of my time there prepared me for what I am doing now.” “HDS changed my experience of myself and the world in a way that is inextricably part of every engagement.” “In addition to the faculty support and training, it provided me with a community of peers that I still value today.” “HDS provided me a space in which to explore the various nuances of what ministry meant to me, and could mean to me, in my day to day life. It helped me to discern a call to ministry that was outside of traditional parish ministry.” “I think it gave me a well-rounded ministry education. Classes on preaching and leadership were excellent preparations, while classes on theology and history grounded my ministry.” “I cannot say enough about HDS. Nothing can fully prepare you for ordained ministry, but HDS deepened my faith life, transformed the way I looked at the church and the world, made me a better leader, and a more thoughtful and informed Christian.” “I got a quality theological education that was meaningful and inspiring to me and which taught me to think about pastoral issues and tasks in critical and innovative ways.” “Surprisingly well, given the number of unpredictable situations that arise in parish ministry.” “I felt very well prepared to begin my doctoral studies.”

Among the concerns expressed were some negative experiences with faculty who were “aloof,” some classes that were not valuable, and their lack of preparation for specific ministerial tasks. Many alumni volunteered that they struggled with choosing between a rich array of highly esoteric, academic courses and ministerial practice courses. One said something like, “I probably shouldn’t have taken that third semester Sanskrit poetry class, and instead should have taken the course on Administration,” and that captured the spirit many expressed. However, they also pointed to the reality that their rich intellectual work actually did inform how they engaged in preparation for the specific tasks/skills needed for their present positions. One student put it this way: “The courses that keep coming back to me are the ones that helped me become a pastor, but I appreciate that wasn’t the main focus, but I loved the openness of thought and the push to think through why we were there, and what our sense of call was, and that has continued to feed me all the way through.” Many alumni wish they had taken more advantage of administration, pastoral counseling, and other courses specific to fundraising.

Another significant finding was how many of our respondents reported being active in HDS-sponsored worship services while they were students. The vast majority were heavily involved in one or more of our on-campus worship opportunities, as well as off campus worship experiences. There were many students who had formed some kind of intentionally Christian group, such as a Christian fellowship, or a study group, to reinforce their Christian identity in the midst of the multi-faith context. They expressed how important these groups were to their experience, especially in times of difficulty. Here is one quote illustrating this: “I was really involved in Thursday morning Eucharist, and that was an awesome thing—that we could have a place for a sort of Christian ecumenical kind of thing.” At HDS presently, at least eight student groups organize weekly or bi-weekly worship opportunities within their own faith tradition.

Many pointed to the value of HDS' multi-faith engagements in their present work. One graduate, for example, reports: "Another part of my time at HDS that is very much in play here is denominational goings-on, current PCUSA and the shift that's happening toward ordination of GLBT folks. That is a slow and difficult process and one that's coming to a head right now. I would hope that in my own way some of the things that I learned at HDS about working with folks who think differently from me, and advocating for progressive change in a way that is genuine for my community rather than cavalier and unmindfully defensive, are evident in what I'm doing here."

HDS claims that its multi-faith focus serves to enhance students' involvement in their own faith, and does not decenter students from their own faith and beliefs. We heard many stories confirming this. One graduate put it this way: "I didn't experience becoming disconnected from my faith. You hear these stories...I really didn't feel that. I thought it was interesting learning those things. I never really had a crisis of faith; I certainly was challenged, but I felt I benefited from having the rigorous intellectual experience. I could hold that in tandem with the field ed context, or the real world context. I found it a supportive community."

### *Field Education and CPE*

Many respondents described field education as the best part of their education. Many students pointed to their field education as being strongly influential in their decisions about long term calling into or away from ordination or academic careers. Some who intended to become academics experienced such profound ministerial calling within the context of field education that they moved toward ordination. One quote illustrates a typical response: "I realized the tradition I was raised in was not the tradition that I was called to. I didn't know what it felt like to be so present with God until I started worshipping in a sacramental context."

## Ministries Post-graduation

Among those surveyed, those who had completed or were enrolled in graduate programs included these degrees: diploma in Anglican Studies, MBA (2), STM (2), post M.Div. Lutheran Year (2), MEd, EdM, Master of Social Work, Master of Theology, Doctor of Ecclesiastical Sciences, PhD (6), unspecified (5), sociology, counseling psychology, theology, ThD (3), and New Testament.

### *Ordination*

It is not unusual for HDS graduates to find, in contrast to their original intentions, that they pursue ordained ministerial service. Here is one quote by way of explanation: (In response to being asked whether they had planned on becoming ordained upon matriculation): “No. I had thought about going into ministry, but don’t know that I had equated ordination with ministry yet. But I had really thought at the time that I wanted to be a Hebrew professor. It was through my experiences at Memorial Church for field ed, and the chaplaincy at Dana Farber Cancer Institute, that really helped me formulate my ministerial gifts. I just started using them before I knew that they were there. With morning prayers at Memorial Church, it was an every single day kind of thing...I was just doing my thing and people were saying, have you ever thought about ministry...At that point I did go to (ordained faculty members) and have conversations with them about how they chose-‘You are ordained and yet here you are teaching at Harvard. How did you come to this decision?’”

Another graduate links his journey of denominational wandering to his decision to come to HDS, which eventually has led him to enter the ordination process in the PCUSA, where he presently serves on the pastoral staff of a local congregation: “My denominational background is varied. I grew up Southern Baptist, but in a very ecumenical and moderate family. I left the Baptist church when I was in high school and did a lot of denominational and some interfaith wandering. My wife

grew up Episcopalian. One of the reasons I was interested in HDS was because it is not denominationally affiliated...It was not my intention to be ordained; I thought I was moving into academic study and did not want to work in a church, but during my time at HDS and afterward, while seeking my field education position and then a job, I felt a clear call to serve in a church and in PCUSA churches particularly. I resisted it, but it was definitely the call.”

Of those who responded to the question, 47 intended to seek ordination when they entered HDS, and 38 did not. (Others did not answer the question.) Thirty-three are presently ordained (many are recent graduates who are in the process). The traditions include: Universal Life, Unitarian Universalist, Orthodox, Anglican, UCC, UMC, American Baptist, Baptist, NACCC, ELCA, Cooperative Baptist, Episcopalian, PCUSA, Quaker, Disciples of Christ, Sufi Order International, and Zen Buddhist. Of those who attempted required ordination exams, all passed, with two having required a second round to fully pass. (One of these describes an arduous three year process to finally pass.) Of those presently ordained, 7 indicated they did not intend to become ordained at entrance (many did not answer this question, while others gave extended answers indicating they are now in an ordination process but did not expect to upon matriculation). Fifty-seven indicated they are not ordained. Many of these pointed out they are active in traditions in which they cannot be ordained (due to gender), or are currently somewhere in the process of ordination.

While a significant number of HDS graduates work in “pastoral” positions leading congregations, or in chaplaincy positions, others have defined ministry in very creative settings. One graduate who works for the US Institute of Peace is still recognized as doing ordained ministry by her denomination (UCC). She “works in the religion and peacemaking program...strengthening the role of constructive religion in conflict zones to support religious leaders and the role of the community as they



support justice and public health. We're working in places where religion is maybe the cause of the conflict or making resolution of conflict more difficult. I did a dual degree program at the Fletcher School of Diplomacy. Harvard gave me a lot of theoretical background and the tools to work essentially as a religious actor alongside other religious actors and use theological language. Fletcher gave me the language of international law and diplomacy so it was really the combination of these two that set me up for this position." She explains her journey toward ordination this way: "I chose the M.Div. because I felt like I couldn't just study religion in a classroom but I wasn't necessarily planning on becoming ordained. But as I continued in the program, I realized that the work that I wanted to do was as a minister. I wanted to ground myself in my faith and in my tradition and in my understanding of peace and justice in the religious sense rather than as a secular diplomat. I was led to recognize that this was a call to ministry rather than a call to diplomacy."

A graduate who is not ordained but works as a missionary explains, "I hadn't planned on (being ordained) and I didn't get ordained. Between my undergraduate study and HDS, I took four years off to work as a missionary in southern Africa, and after HDS I went right back to Africa to work as a missionary, so my real focus was on international missions." This graduate links his present work to the "fantastic" financial aid which, he explains, is "the only thing that made it possible for me to come back out working here as a missionary." He also names the significance of his field ed for his present work, especially because he learned about fundraising in field ed, and also in working with the HDS Annual fund.

In conclusion, the many diversities of learned service in pastoral arenas give rise to the question of what we mean by "traditional" or "ordained" ministry.

*General Post-HDS Academic or Work Experience*

Many of our graduates attend some form of graduate school after leaving HDS. Other than graduate school, titles for present positions include: Teacher, Counselor, Grassroots Coordinator, CPE residency, HR Systems Consultant, Minister or Rector or Curate or Pastor (including Assistants), Youth Coordinator, Lay assistant, Multi-faith chaplain, Director of Development, Vice President of Operations, Special Assistant to the Vice President for Mission and Ministry, Director of Volunteer Resources, Campaign Manager, Senior Program Officer in the Religion and Peacemaking Program, Director of Justice Campaigns.

Many graduates described the ongoing value they place on integrating an academically critical perspective with “on the ground” forms of ministry. An Episcopalian priest who also has earned a PhD from Boston College puts it this way: “the focus of my work has always been making sure that what I am doing is communicable to the congregation, the people on the ground...I guess the idea I have is that I can bring what I’m learning in the academy to people in a ministry setting.”

Another graduate now working in international financial development described a difficult process of finding a job after leaving HDS: “It was...a nightmare!...It took me a long time to find a job. I went to Africa, working for peanuts, because I wanted to do international development. My (field education) summers in Guatemala and then the Philippines gave me a lot of experience ... and really helped me get a job after school. If I hadn’t done that I don’t know what I would have done, but I got a job in Africa...then, from that I eventually got the job I have now which I really love. I also thought it was a little tough for me to tell people that I went to Harvard Divinity. In international development, there are a lot of people who are terrified of religion. I tried to be fair to both them and to HDS when I explained my whole reasoning; it took me three years to come up with that language. I think it was

particularly tough for me, but I landed on my feet, as I suspect most HDS graduates do—it just takes awhile!”

## Conclusions

We have learned a great deal about our students' experiences before, during, and after their time at HDS. We would have benefitted from asking more about their formational faith experiences before coming to HDS. Many expressed a real desire to deepen their ongoing relationship with HDS, and the development office will find this study to be of fulsome value as they build even stronger relationships with alumni. The data here suggests that more of our students are entering work with strong pastoral identities than is the general impression and also at a much higher rate than was quantified by a recent alumni survey. We surveyed some doctoral candidates, but retrieved much less information about what they valued from their HDS experience. We did not survey graduates from long enough ago to determine the value of an M.Div. to academic work.

## The King's University (Susan Maros)

The King's University (formerly, The King's College and Seminary) is a non-denominational, Spirit-filled institution of higher education, founded by Dr. Jack Hayford. Dr. Hayford is probably best known as “Pastor Jack,” founder of The Church On The Way, Van Nuys, CA, where he was senior pastor for more than three decades. The King's (TK) was founded in 1997 and currently has an enrollment of approximately 450 students in college and seminary degree programs through onground, online, and modular delivery systems.

In summer 2011, we contacted all 87 M.Div. alumni by email and telephone who graduated between 2004 and 2009. From this population, 35 completed surveys (40%). We conducted follow-up interviews with nineteen of the survey respondents. The interviews focused on listening to people's stories. Two main topics were explored: 1) Alumni journeys to The King's and onward, including how they processed their sense of call to vocational

ministry, and 2) reflections on what was useful and what would have been more helpful in their M.Div. studies. The interviews paid attention to how people framed their understanding of ministry and their process of becoming engaged in a ministry role (vocational or otherwise). A summary of the findings from the surveys and interviews was presented to the faculty for discussion.

Most TK alumni began their seminary education in their thirties.<sup>10</sup> Most had a career before prior to their seminary studies; for 40% of the survey respondents, this career was in pastoral ministry. A small but significant group of alumni are serving as hospital and military chaplains; for this group alone, the M.Div. was a part of their credentialing process. Finally, while all the graduates are part of the Pentecostal/charismatic community, only 17% were raised in this theological environment.

In the following, I will first outline the map of the ecology of vocation for The King's alumni. I will then discuss two particular points regarding our collective mental models that were highlighted during the course of this research. This summary reflects on the findings from the surveys and interviews as well as the discussion that took place as the faculty considered those findings.

## Mapping the Ecology of Vocation

### 1. *Formative Faith Experiences*

All TK alumni are currently part of the Pentecostal/charismatic community.<sup>11</sup> A percentage of survey respondents (87%) indicated they had attended church as a child. However, this was a Pentecostal/charismatic church for only 17% of the alumni. The largest denomination represented by

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<sup>10</sup> The age range was 21 to 59; women tended to be older (median age: 38) than men (median age: 33).

<sup>11</sup> The largest denominational representation was Foursquare (35%). Approximately 20% of the alumni came from mainline and evangelical denominations but are personally charismatic (e.g., charismatic Presbyterian). Of the remainder, about half are from classic Pentecostal groups and denominations; half are from churches and denominations that are neo-charismatic.

childhood church attendance was Roman Catholic (27%).<sup>12</sup>

The interviews did not explicitly explore conversion or early faith experiences; nevertheless, a number of participants made reference to their faith journey, often describing their childhood religious experience as “nominal.” The narrative arc of nominal church exposure as a child followed by vibrant, personal experience in a Pentecostal/charismatic context as a teen or young adult is a common theme among TK alumni. This narrative carries with it an implicit—sometimes explicit—negative critique of early religious context and an affirmation of a Pentecostal/charismatic ethos as experientially and theologically “superior” along with, at times, a caution about theological education.

David’s story is somewhat typical in this regard. David said his parents would have described themselves as Christian but they did not attend church. David visited a Pentecostal church in his senior year of High School at the invitation of a friend and found it different to anything he had ever experienced prior. David was attracted to the passion for God displayed by the pastor and youth, and continued to attend. It was at a church camp that David “felt a call to ministry.” Upon hearing he wanted to pursue Bible college and seminary, David’s parents were reluctant because they wanted him to get a “real education” and his pastor was reluctant because “if you get too much education, you can’t love God with your whole heart.” David chose TK because he thought “it would be a good balance between academic intellect and spiritual passion.”

Based on early formative experience, students bring with them to The King’s some very specific expectations about the purpose of theological education. Some, like David, are warned specifically by their pastoral leadership that seminary is “dangerous to your faith.” Others come

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<sup>12</sup> Baptist was the childhood theological environment for 17% of the alumni. Other childhood denominational contexts included Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Methodist, and Nazarene.

with an expectation to be taught “the truth”—specifically, “truth” as defined by agreement with what they had been taught in the church context in which they came to faith. Still others come with an expectation of seminary as a powerful, dynamic spiritual experience. For many, their graduate study is the first time they are exposed to church history, theology, and systematic study of Scripture.

## 2. *College and First Career Experiences*

For the constituency served by The King’s, a master’s degree is generally not a requirement for ordination. The one exception to this general rule is those students who are seeking to become hospital or military chaplains. Those pursuing military chaplaincy in particular already had years in the armed services prior to their seminary studies. In an interview, one man spoke about his experience in the military and how the absence of a chaplain motivated him to “be there for” those in service. Another spoke about how his informal ministry of counseling and prayer during one tour of service was especially influential in this decision to become a chaplain. He described that season as one in which he felt especially alive and useful.

As previously noted, 40% of M.Div. alumni were already in pastoral ministry when they began their studies. A further 6% were in other vocational ministry positions.<sup>15</sup> For this group, seminary education was not about entry into vocational ministry; it was about further development, both personal and vocational. For example, Jason was a youth pastor when he began his M.Div.. Jason had not grown up in church and felt a need for a stronger foundation and so pursued the M.Div. at his wife’s encouragement. He described himself as content in

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<sup>15</sup> Of those who were already in pastoral ministry, 64% were men. All of those who were in vocational ministry in other contexts were women. These statistics reflect formal roles, usually paid, rather than informal or lay ministry roles. The impact of engagement in lay ministry roles will be discussed in the following section.

his role of youth pastor—"I was consumed by my call," he said. A year into his studies, however, Jason began to sense that he would transition to a senior pastor role and this strongly impacted how he approached his education. Jason did make this transition subsequent to his graduation and had served as a senior pastor for four years at the time of the interview.

The largest group of survey respondents (51%) had various roles in the marketplace prior to their seminary studies. Those who were in their twenties and early thirties had jobs that "paid the bills" but were viewed as temporary roles while they were in the process of discovering what they should really do with their lives. One finding of this research is that those alumni who were in their forties and above before their M.Div. studies, and thus had a long history in their careers, were much less likely to transition into formal vocational ministry roles (e.g., pastor) than those who were younger or who already had vocational ministry experience. One example is Sarah, who came to The King's in her forties. She had been a vice-president in her real estate firm and came, originally, believing she would complete her degree and go on to plant a church among business people. Post-graduation, Sarah is back in the marketplace, again in a senior role, and has reframed her understanding of her vocational call, even to the extent of completely down-playing her original vocational goals.

### 3. *Congregation of Call*

TK alumni generally did not make reference to the role of the congregation in their vocational discernment process. The congregational contexts clearly played a significant role in shaping their understanding of faith and their mental models of ministry, as noted in the discussion of formative faith experiences. Alumni seemed to be unaware of this impact, however, or perhaps viewed the role of the community as not being a legitimate part of their call narrative. Instead, the interview participants would emphasize their personal "knowing" of call and the decisions they made as a result. Confirmation by and

encouragement from pastoral leadership was referenced as being meaningful, but generally secondary to the individual's personal discernment of call.<sup>14</sup>

The role of the congregation of call seemed more often related to a person's ministry engagement. The pattern appeared to be that if a student was actively involved in a congregation and had significant ministry and/or leadership roles before and during their M.Div. studies, they were far more likely to transition to formal vocational ministry roles following the completion of their degree. An example of this is Lyle, whose active engagement in his church began two years prior to the start of his studies and continued throughout. Two months following graduation, an associate pastor relocated to another state and Lyle was asked to step into his position.

#### 4. *Seminary Experiences*

TK alumni spoke about significant ways in which they were shaped during their seminary experience, most often mentioning the impact of specific faculty or exposure to particular conceptual frames. For one person who was a pastor when she began seminary, exposure to the idea of "pastor as coach" eventually resulted in a role transition into a coaching ministry. For another person, exposure to Messianic Jewish thinking and the opportunity to study in Israel resulted in ministry positions in organizations involved in Jewish-Christian dialog and in ministry roles that involve Messianic believers as well as outreach to Israel.

What surfaced in the interviews was a sense of the complexity of alumni mental models of ministry and what role they expected seminary to play in ministry

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<sup>14</sup> This was an even stronger dynamic in my dissertation research. TK students expect that people will personally know that they are called by God to a ministry role. They *then* expect that that personal knowledge will be confirmed by leaders or other significant people, but the personal knowledge was the necessary first step without which the affirmation of a leader was deemed without value.



development. Carol's story is an example of the complexity of this dynamic. Carol is among those who grew up nominally Catholic and came to personal faith in a Pentecostal/charismatic context. She was heavily engaged for many years in lay ministry in her small Pentecostal church as well as involved a national ministry based in a larger church in the same denomination. As she was asked to take on a larger role in the national organization, she saw the need for equipping herself with a stronger theological basis for ministry. Her expectation was that if she had experienced profound growth in her church and in the ministry environment, then "when I come to seminary, I'm going to *really* escalate in spiritual growth." While deeply appreciative of the broader theological formation she experienced in completing her M.Div., Carol expressed her grief and pain that the faculty did not do more to help her learn more of the "things of the Spirit" and about spiritual authority. Her mission post-M.Div. is "speaking into lives of people who have book knowledge but are hungry for practical experience of the things of the Spirit."

##### 5. *Ministry*

The pattern of ministry engagement before and during M.Div. studies being a predictor of vocational ministry role following degree completion has significant implications for The King's. The faculty discussion of this data included a lively interchange regarding student expectations. One faculty member commented, "[The students] think they are just going to come here and then somebody is going to [say], 'Oh! You went to The King's? I want you!'" We recognize that students come with an expectation that a degree from TK will result in a paid ministry position. What is more difficult to determine is how to challenge this expectation and, furthermore, how to help students be engaged in ministry during the course of their studies in a way that will enhance their development.

Having summarized something of the map of the ecology of vocation for The King's students and

alumni, I turn now to reflecting on two points where the experience of this research and the discussion of the faculty highlighted some of our institutional mental models.

### **Mental Models—Defining “Ministry” as “Pastor”**

As a faculty we are aware that within the Pentecostal/charismatic community there is a tendency to equate “ministry” with “man in the pulpit.”<sup>15</sup> To varying degrees, members of the faculty deliberately seek to expand this paradigm, both in terms of gender and in terms of defining ministry more broadly. The findings of this research suggested where we are not as effective in this area as we might hope. Furthermore, it suggests that there is a gap between the theology we espouse and the theology we live.<sup>16</sup>

As a faculty, we espouse a theology of ministry that is broader than just the pulpit. Furthermore, we profess to value the work of the pastor irrespective of the size of the church. On the other hand, our behavior suggests that we esteem the role of pastor above all others. One comment from an alumnus was particularly telling in this regard. He commented how he heard from professors that “the size of the church doesn’t matter; people matter” yet pastors were typically introduced with reference to the size of their church. His point was that the contradiction between what we professed in the classroom and what we demonstrated in our behavior communicated was, at best, a mixed message.

Sociologically and organizationally, there are dynamics that support equating “ministry” with “pastor”

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<sup>15</sup> The use of the male term here is deliberate. While The King’s mission statement affirms preparing women as well as men for ministry, both among the faculty and among the student body, there is a tendency to view the male pastor as the “standard.”

<sup>16</sup> I am adapting here Chris Argyris’ idea of “espoused theory” and “theory-in-use” from Chris Argyris, “Teaching Smart People How to Learn.” *Harvard Business Review* (1991) 69:99-109 and Chris Argyris & Donald A. Schon, *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1974)

in our institution. Dr. Hayford served for decades as a senior pastor of a flagship church and has a personal passion for mentoring and equipping pastors for the local congregation. Within the faculty at large, many have served or are currently serving as pastors of local congregations. A significant percentage of students coming to The King's are already in pastoral ministry roles.

The lively faculty discussion of this topic raised the suggestion that we have not explicitly considered what it is that we believe about ministry and whether or not this is reflected in our structures, curriculum, and behavior. In the midst of the conversation, the tendency previously noted of students expecting a degree to lead automatically to a job was discussed. A faculty member said, "My fear is that we'll graduate students who think they're going to get their degree, walk through the doors of a church, and start pastoring full-time on a \$50,000 salary. I'm telling them it's not going to happen." The focus of the conversation, however, was about shifting the students' expectations for how they would support themselves, not shifting their understanding of ministry. Faculty wanted students to realize that ministry positions do not pay well and they would either need the support of a spouse or need to be bi-vocational. The tacit assumption was that "ministry" would still be the role of "pastor" whether in that role in a church or in that role in a different context (e.g., teacher as "minister").

This led to an animated conversation about marketplace ministry—the extent to which our graduates are bi-vocational, and what we are doing to prepare people for the inherent challenges. Two interesting points arose. First, the default "solution" to a perceived problem is to create a new course. Second, because a course on marketplace ministry has been offered several times without drawing sufficient enrollments, the default is to throw up our collective hands over the obtuseness of our students.

We have not considered how we define "ministry" and how what we model in that regard impacts our

students. We have not grappled with what the realities of the marketplace mean for our graduates and what that, in turn, means for our curriculum. The image of “ministry” as “pastor in the pulpit” is strongly engrained, in the larger community, in our students, and, recognized or not, in the faculty and administration of The King’s.

### **Role of the Founder in Attracting Students**

A second area where our mental models as faculty are engaged relates to the role of our founder. Dr. Hayford has been a profoundly impactful person on shaping the mental models of ministry for individuals who serve on the administration and faculty of The King’s. He is the founder of the institution; it is his ministry ethos that we seek to embody and live out. There is an assumption among the administration and faculty that he has a similarly significant impact for students.

Senior faculty regard Dr. Hayford’s ministry philosophy and style as central to the work of The King’s. One faculty member specifically asked how many of the alumni came to The King’s because of Jack Hayford. Another senior faculty member, in the course of the discussion, stated “Jack Hayford *is* our story.”

The alumni interviewed, on the other hand, did not view Dr. Hayford as a primary model for their own ministries.<sup>17</sup> When asked to tell how and why they came to The King’s, alumni would narrate their life story, generally prefacing the tale with comments such as, “Well, I was called to ministry at fourteen” or “I was

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<sup>17</sup> I first noted this trend in a leadership class I teach in the undergraduate program where I ask people to talk about a leader they admire. Fifteen years ago, I had to explicitly ask them *not* to talk about Dr. Hayford. Today, most people in the room would mention other leaders in even without this restriction. Fifteen years ago, half or more of my class would be made up of people who had attended The Church On The Way. Dr. Hayford resigned as senior pastor of TCOTW in 1999; few students now attending The King’s have experienced him in this role. Furthermore, he no longer has a daily radio show in Southern California. Jack Hayford is simply less visible as a ministry model to students coming to The King’s today than he was fifteen years ago when The King’s was founded.

pursuing a master's in public administration when God interrupted my career path." The specifics of the story of how they came to work on an M.Div. at The King's were framed within the context of a sense of direction from God toward a vocational ministry role. Alumni do reference Dr. Hayford in telling their stories, particularly those alumni who moved to Southern California to complete their degree or who completed the degree from a distance. However, Dr. Hayford's role had more to do with the reason why people *knew about* The King's rather than the reason people chose to attend this specific institution.

This finding is very significant as we face the day when, like every other young institution, we must transition into the second generation of leadership. Dr. Hayford's role in the founding of the institution will always be a part of our story. It may not, however, be a useful part of our future recruitment efforts. If it is the case that students do not come to The King's because of Jack Hayford, then we are in danger of misdirecting our resources when we make him the focus of our recruitment.

Furthermore, it would be beneficial for us to consider further the ramifications of the reasons alumni give for attending The King's. The stated reasons were evenly divided between personal development and vocational development (42% each), with a significant minority completing the M.Div. as part of their chaplaincy certification process (16%). Two interesting dynamics were seen when looking at the interview data concerning motivations. Almost all of the people who gave personal development as a motivation for completing the M.Div. were in Southern California already, and *all* of the people who were at The Church On The Way—where they had experienced Dr. Hayford's leadership and preaching—when they began their degree (including two on pastoral staff) gave this as their reason. Secondly, women (71%) were more likely than men (25%) to give personal development as a motive for pursuing the degree. *All* of the women who gave vocational development as a motive

are currently in vocational ministry roles. This begs the question of whether this is a case of retrospective rationality—with people framing their motive based on the actual outcome—rather than a reflection of their initial ministry focus.

## Conclusion

This research represents an ongoing effort to hear our students' stories and understand our impact, as faculty and as an institution, in the shaping of those stories. This experience highlighted some ways in which our tacit assumptions about who we are and what we are doing do not match our students' experiences. The challenge going forward is to listen to the voices of our students and alumni, especially where they are telling us a story that is different than the one we tell ourselves.

## Luther Seminary (Terri Elton and Theresa Latini)

The opportunity to participate in the Ecology of Vocation research project came at an opportune time for Luther Seminary. Cognizant of changes occurring within the mainline church, the ELCA in particular, anticipating changes in accreditation standards, and discerning the need for a new curricular design, Luther's faculty, staff, and student body had just engaged in a year of communal listening and conversation. While exploring the challenges facing theological education today, issues around vocational formation, leadership competencies, and contextual learning continually surfaced. Luther Seminary's lead researchers for this project—Terri Martinson Elton, associate professor of children, youth, and family ministry, and Theresa F. Latini, associate professor of congregational and community care leadership—folded these issues into this research project. In short, Elton and Latini sought to learn how Luther M.Div. alumni have been formed as public Christian leaders in various dimensions of the ecology of vocation.

In Fall 2011, forty-seven alumni who were five, six, and seven years out of seminary responded to a fifty-question electronic survey, an adaptation of a survey

developed by Scott Cormode of Fuller Seminary. This survey provided a base record of the kinds of leadership experiences, including but not limited to congregational and parachurch involvement, of Luther M.Div. alumni and the leadership competencies developed in various settings prior to seminary, during seminary, and after seminary. Follow-up phone interviews were conducted with eleven alumni, inviting them to expand on the top three leadership competencies needed in their current ministry position. Data from the survey and interviews was analyzed, noting demographics, themes, and trends. The results were shared with key faculty, staff, and students at Luther Seminary, with the alumni who participated in the research project, and with other participants in the Ecology of Vocation project.

#### *Demographics of Alumni*

The basic demographics of the M.Div. alumni participating in the survey, presented in Table A, were not surprising. While Luther's student body has changed slightly in recent years—for example, becoming more ecumenical—this sample remains fairly representative of the current makeup of the M.Div. program. This data also confirmed a central commitment of Luther Seminary—i.e., that it exists in an interdependent relationship with congregations to prepare M.Div. students for ministry in the church. The high percentage of M.Div. alumni who sought ordination (95.7%) and served in a ministry position after graduation (91%) is evidence of this commitment. It also points toward the strong mental model of congregational leadership that shapes Luther's faculty, staff, and students. One noteworthy demographic is that all of those who were single (8 respondents) were women, meaning all of the men were married. As the findings unfolded, this called for more attention around gender differences. While the range of ages between men and women was similar, the men were, as a whole, younger in age.

**Table A: Ecology of Vocation –  
Demographics of Luther Seminary Alumni**

<b>Gender</b>	44.7% men	55.3% women
<b>Average age starting seminary</b>	32 years old	Range: 19-54 years old
<b>Grew up in church</b>	97.7%	
<b>Denomination</b>	89% Lutheran (primarily ELCA)	
<b>Ordained</b>	95.7%	
<b>In ministry after graduation</b>	91%	Currently in pastoral/ordained positions – 64%
<b>Current marital status</b>	83% married	17% single

*Formation of Leadership Competencies in the Ecology of Vocation*

One of the most significant findings from our data analysis had to do with where, within the ecology of vocation, alumni developed particular leadership capacities and competencies.<sup>18</sup> M.Div. alumni reported the top ten leadership capacities and competencies needed in their *current setting*. Nine categories emerged from our analysis of the survey and interview data: personal formation and self-care; working with and developing leaders; communication and listening skills; setting mission and vision and leading change; administration and management; preaching and worship leadership; pastoral care; Christian education; and conflict

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<sup>18</sup> It is important to note that we are assuming a slight difference between leadership capacities and leadership competencies. The latter refers to actual skills, while the former refers to internal resources and dispositions—or, the spiritual, emotional, relational well from which competencies emerge. In the surveys and interviews, however, we did not define these explicitly. Likewise, the questions were intentionally left open-ended, letting respondents both define leadership capacities and competencies and articulate them in their own words. While this made coding a bit more difficult, it enabled us to not impose or prescribe any particular leadership categories, but rather to let the respondents use their own voices. Nevertheless, clusters or themes did emerge, and if this survey were to be repeated, it would be possible to use this data for creating such categories.



mediation.<sup>19</sup> While these findings were not surprising, alumni also noted that they developed similar categories of leadership capacities and competencies in ecclesial, educational, and occupational settings *prior to and during seminary*. Those settings included: the congregation in which they grew up and the one involved in when coming to seminary (ecclesial); the congregation they attended during seminary (ecclesial); college and graduate school, including involvement in parachurch ministries at that time (other educational settings); previous work experiences (occupational); and contextual educational experiences while in seminary, i.e., field education, internship, and Clinical Pastoral Education (seminary education). One additional theme surfaced in response to questions about these settings: pastoral identity formation.<sup>20</sup> Hence, in mapping M.Div. alumni leadership roles, capacities, and competencies across the lifespan, it became clear that (1) leadership competencies and capacities are similar across the lifespan, and (2) certain

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<sup>19</sup> Note the following expanded definitions of the themes. *Personal formation and self-care*: development of virtues (e.g., patience, humility, integrity, boldness, fortitude); setting boundaries, practicing Sabbath, managing time, maintaining health and well-being; and ongoing practice of the Christian faith and cultivating one's connection to God. *Working with and developing leaders*: motivating teams, facilitating committees, recruiting and training volunteers, supervising staff, and assessing others' gifts and capacities. *Setting mission and vision and leading change*: strategic planning, visioning, creative discernment, understanding overall mission, and implementing change. *Administration and management*: office management and organizational skills; financial knowledge, competence, management, and budget oversight. *Pastoral care*: visitation, responding to and intervening in crises, dealing with grief and loss, caring for the sick, understanding family systems, and being a pastoral presence. *Worship leadership and preaching*: identified simply as preaching and worship leadership. *Christian education*: passing on the faith, teaching confirmation, creating an educational program, and empowering others to teach the faith. *Mediating conflict*: getting along with others, being calm and non-anxious, having difficult conversations yet staying in dialogue, dealing with bullies, negotiation, mediating between persons and groups in conflict.

<sup>20</sup> Pastoral identity formation could be considered a sub-category of personal formation. We have included it here as a new theme, because it was named with such clarity and precision when alumni discussed the significance of their internships and CPE placements.

dimensions of the ecology of vocation were more conducive to the formation of particular leadership competencies and capacities than others, as indicated in Table B below. The following narrative highlights some of these discoveries.

**Table B: Ecology of Vocation – Leadership Capacities and Competencies Formed in the Ecology of Vocation**

Personal formation – 28%	Communication – 30%	Working w/leaders – 38%	Christian education – 38%	Administration or management – 46%	<b>Congregation – grew up</b> <i>(97.7% grew up in church)</i>
Administration / management - 22%	Working w/leaders- 26%	Preaching/ worship - 30%	Communication/ listening - 30%	Christian education - 30%	<b>Congregation - college</b> <i>(70.3% attended)</i>
Communication/ listening - 24%	Mission/vision/ leading change - 29%	Personal formation/ self-care - 47%	Administration or management 76%	Working w/leaders - 76%	<b>Previous work experience</b> <i>(65% worked before seminary)</i>
Mission/vision /leading change - 13%	Communication/ listening - 26%	Preaching/ worship - 39%	Administration or management 57%	Working w/leaders - 70%	<b>Congregation – seminary</b> <i>(93% attended)</i>
Pastoral care - 14%	Communication/ listening - 14%	Working w/leaders - 21%	Preaching/ worship - 43%	No competencies – 50%	<b>Contextual education</b> <i>(26% participated in contextual education, other than CPE and internship)</i>
Christian education - 21%	Personal formation - 21%	Pastoral care - 24%	Pastoral identity - 31%	Preaching/ worship - 38%	<b>Internship</b> <i>(72% participated in internship)</i>
Working w/leaders - 9%	No competencies - 16%	Communication/ listening - 31%	Personal formation 41%	Pastoral care - 59%	<b>CPE</b> <i>(92% completed CPE)</i>

Preaching/ worship - 14%	Mediating conflict - 17%	Pastoral care - 24%	Pastoral care - 13%	Mediating conflict - 14%	Working with leaders - 17%	Pastoral identity - 6%
Pastoral care - 3%	Personal formation - 13%	Christian education - 18%	Christian education - 13%		Communication /listening - 17%	Mission/vision/ leading change - 3%
Mediating conflict - 3%	Mission/vision/ leading change - 4%	Mediating conflict - 18%	Personal formation - 9%		Mission/vision/ leading change - 10%	Administration or management - 3%
		Preaching - 6%			Administration or management - 10%	Preaching/ worship - 3%
						Mediating conflict - 3%

*Formative Faith Experiences*

Almost all (97.7%) M.Div. alumni surveyed grew up within the life of the church, as noted above. While the experiences and denominations varied, the majority (88%) engaged in some leadership role. These roles were centered on traditional congregational engagement, i.e., leading ministry with children and youth, serving on council and committees, and leading worship. While men and women equally noted leading worship and serving on leadership teams, women listed being involved in more leadership roles and were more involved in leading in ministry with children and youth. For example, twelve women taught Sunday School and ten led in the area of youth ministry, compared to only two men teaching Sunday School and five being involved in youth ministry.

During this period, the top three leadership capacities and competencies named were administration and management (46%), Christian education (38%), and leadership (38%). Teaching was by far the highest competency learned in these early church experiences, but was closely followed by discovering the inner workings of a congregation, ministry planning, and working with people. The significance of these early years was noted by one alum, “I think a couple of things that have been helpful and encouraging are opportunities where I was invited to be a leader when I was still a student, whether it was in high school youth group or in college.” Clearly leadership formation was taking place in these early experiences, shaping alumni’s view of church and ministry, but also impacting their mental models of leadership.

#### *College and First Career Experiences*

Church attendance continued to stay high in college, as M.Div. alumni reported that 70.5 percent were active in a congregation, with 74 percent having leadership roles. Again, the leadership roles were fairly traditional. The top leadership capacities and competencies developed were Christian education (30%), leadership (30%), worship leadership/preaching (30%), and communication (26%). Just over one-fourth (27.9%) were involved in some parachurch ministry and just over one-third (37%) were involved in leadership within the college/university itself. One alum noted that he “worked a number of summers at a summer camp during college, those summers and the skills learned there were positive.” He goes on to say that by “simply working with kids and teaching to kids and teens [then] they [pastors] can do it with anybody.” Another alum noted that teaching competencies and capacities were developed in these kinds of settings rather than at Luther Seminary: “I love to teach and I know how to teach, but I didn’t learn any of that at Luther.”

Two-thirds (65%) of M.Div. alumni did not come to seminary directly from college. On the one hand,

previous work experiences are a rich asset for developing leadership capacities and competencies. One woman said, “I think coming to seminary in late life, as I did, was good. I worked in a variety of settings, everything from door-to-door sales to being an administrator in a large congregation. I developed skills that served me well.” Another woman echoed her sentiments saying, “I think the experience of having a long running marriage and raising children and all that comes and goes with that helps develop a sense of resiliency and boundaries. Life experience is important.” On the other hand, this reality poses particular challenges within Luther Seminary. The seminary’s culture and implicit curricular assumptions focus on “pipeliners,” or students coming directly from college with little or no work experience. This mental model does not invite (or perhaps value) lived experience adequately.<sup>21</sup> One woman named it this way, “I walked in with an elementary [degree] and special ed. experience for ten years, and I still had to take two teaching classes. Not that I didn’t learn anything, but I sure wish that I didn’t have to take those classes and could have used something else... I am [a] lifelong learner and a lifelong educator, but it is very frustrating to not have had my past experiences taken into account.”

Interestingly, administration and management and working with and developing leaders were overwhelmingly the capacities most highly developed in previous work experience settings (both at 76%). These two competencies and capabilities ranked the highest of any, at any time in the lifespan. (The next closest was working with leaders at 70 percent during their time in a congregation while in seminary.) This raises important concerns. For not only do these experiences of second-career students go unrecognized and untapped during their seminary education, but also how (or where)

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<sup>21</sup> One key exception to this is the Distributed Learning M.Div. program. This has only been in existence for the past six years, or after the time when these alumni were students.

pipeliners will gain these leadership competencies and capabilities goes unaddressed.

When deciding to attend Luther, 93 percent of M.Div. alumni were active in a congregation, with most having leadership roles. The leadership competencies and capacities were similar to those named before, but one surprising finding was that one third held staff positions. One alum noted, “When I came out of college I was a youth director in California and when I look back on that I see how fortunate I was.” And he was not alone. Many of those that held staff positions worked in children or youth ministry, gaining valuable practical ministry experience. With this reality, it was not surprising that leadership (66%) and administration/management (33%) were the highest competencies and capacities.

### *Experiences During Seminary*

Luther M.Div. students participate in several “non-classroom” experiences that inform and shape them as leaders. Congregations continue to play a significant formative role, and 92 percent of alumni reported being active in a congregation during seminary. Interestingly they don’t report much difference in the leadership roles they had in these congregations, though they did indicate that they developed more competence in preaching during these congregational experiences. The top leadership competencies and capacities developed were leadership (70%), administration (57%), and preaching and worship (39%).

With the majority of M.Div. students being Lutheran, and intending on being ordained (97.7%), most students were active in a candidacy process. The primary focus of ELCA candidacy is the formation of candidates as spiritual leaders, which fits within the primary mental model of Luther Seminary. As part of this formation, students participate in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), contextual education, and a year-long internship. It is important to note, however, that there is not a shared understanding of how contextual education, internship, and CPE contribute to the formation of Luther students.

As indicated below, the data reflects these institutional tensions.

CPE had the highest participation rate (92%) and was significant for exercising one's pastoral care competencies (59%), for personal formation (41%), and for gaining the capacity for listening (31%). Seventy-two percent of alumni participated in an internship experience. Preaching and worship leadership (38%), pastoral identity formation (31%), and pastoral care (24%) were the top leadership competencies and capabilities developed during this time. One alum who did not have a meaningful contextual education experience said, "Internship helped a little, and in some ways more from some than others. I got sent to a week-long leadership training, which not too many interns have the opportunity to do so. That did more to prepare me for the tasks of leading than any other class I took in seminary." As this alum notes, internship has operated more from the mental model of pastor as shepherd and/or chaplain than pastor as public Christian leader. Here it's important to note that internship supervisors seem to be the primary drivers of this model.

Contextual education (26%) had the lowest participation rate among alum, and their responses to this experience varied greatly. It was important for some, especially if it was accompanied by actually leading. One alum, involved in community organizing during his contextual education experience, recognized how important that experience had been for him. "Community and labor organizing shaped me (in addition, to being a youth director). But the organizing was most helpful because I was forced out of my comfort zone regularly. Having doors slammed in your face is 'real' conflict, not passive aggressive. Leaders get in a rut—community organizing sees it very differently." Overall, the leadership competencies and capabilities developed in contextual education were low, though preaching and worship leadership (43%) was rated similar to internship.

Several alumni noted that their overall time at seminary challenged their mental models of ministry and leadership. One woman alum said, “I went to an Assemblies of God church. This was a different experience...Not all grew up Lutheran...I always thought there was only one way to worship, and that that was what I saw. There are people who worship differently, and some people I would talk to at Luther or in our congregations thought there was only one way to worship. I was thinking to myself, what about this other person who doesn’t use instruments, or a choir, or whatever. What about the people who don’t have a clue about how you worship. Would they know what you were doing without getting lost...That made me think if my own worship service would be inclusive enough to help others fit into what is happening.” Another alum put it this way, “When I was fifteen, I announced to my whole church that I was going to be a pastor [and had a particular idea of what that meant]. And now, everything has changed and we are having conversations about what it means to be a missional church. It’s not me as pastor doing everything, it me as pastor empowering people to see their giftedness and use it.”

### *Current Ministry*

While most M.Div. alumni are ordained (95.7%) and have received a call to ministry within the first year of graduation (86.4%), we were surprised to discover that only two-thirds (64%) are currently serving in pastoral positions.<sup>22</sup> This raises questions about the need to develop a wider set of mental modes for ministry leadership at Luther Seminary. Likewise, while the top leadership capacities and competencies that alumni identified as needed in their current roles points toward the enduring mental model of pastoral leadership,

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<sup>22</sup> Eleven alumni that answered this question were not serving in a pastoral role. Of those eleven, four were in non-ministry jobs, two were in graduate school, two were on leave, two were in other ministry leadership positions, and one was in mission work.



it points toward the need to expand what is meant by pastoral. Table C shows the percentage of alumni who referred to leadership capacities and competencies that fall into each of the nine identified categories. It also shows the percentage of alumni who identified these categories as the top three capacities and competencies needed in their current ministry positions. Because Luther has the opportunity to rethink its M.Div. curriculum, listening to these alumni and understanding their current leadership experiences was critical, and hence, why this area became the focus of our phone interviews.

**Table C: Ecology of Vocation –  
Top Leadership Capacities and Competencies  
Needed in Current Ministry**

<b>Leadership Categories</b>	<b>Respondents identifying this category in their top ten (10) leadership competencies</b>	<b>Respondents identifying this category in their top three (3) leadership competencies</b>
Personal formation, self-care	65%	35%
Working with and developing leaders	58%	13%
Administration and management	48%	23%
Preaching and worship leadership	42%	26%
Communication and listening skills	42%	19%
Pastoral care	42%	16%
Setting mission, vision, leading change	39%	16%
Mediating conflict	35%	19%
Christian education	32%	13%

Looking at the leadership capacities and competencies, note that personal formation and self-care (65%) was consistently the most highly identified category. This reality carried through in the interviews. For example, one alum discussed at length the importance of balance, wellness, navigating unhealthy systemic dynamics in congregations, and discerning when power dynamics are influencing people's reactions to church leaders. She shared a story. "It's a lesson I learned almost too late. It turned out that the chair of the call committee turned out to be—and I have a professional assessment on this—one with a toxic personality. She has a major personality issue going on. With a better sense of boundaries and self-care, I would not have been sucked into her drama. This is not me, and it was her, and I needed to create space for me." Others shared the struggle of developing confidence. One directly linked his work as a church planter with his need for ongoing practice of discipleship. He shared, "The most necessary leadership competency for me is living a life of faith, being a disciple first, having a faith life and nurturing that. I think as a church planter people do not know what it is to be a disciple. Doing the work of ministry and having a faith life or personal relationship is number one. I can talk the talk without really walking the walk."

When counting the top three responses, certain categories move toward the top (following personal formation and self-care): preaching and worship leadership; administration and management; communication and listening skills; and, mediating conflict. One alum summed it up well: "They throw you out there and say, 'Go, be pastor.' They don't tell you what to do." And he goes on to say, "Some of what I feel like I have needed is some of that practical leadership stuff. So much was focused on theology and Bible, which is all good stuff. But, it doesn't help you when there is a staff meeting or when the council is fighting about the budget." This tension, between providing M.Div.'s with a solid biblical and theological foundation and empowering them to develop a wide range of needed leadership

capacities and competencies, is not only a theme in this research, but also it is present within competing mental models held by Luther's faculty, students, and alumni more broadly.

### *The Findings*

Some of the findings we expected. For instance, we were not surprised that pastoral care was the highest identified set of leadership competencies and capacities developed during CPE (followed by personal formation and self-care). Similarly, the development of preaching and worship leadership skills during students' year-long internships is expected in our curriculum (and coincides with previous research). It was also not surprising to see the majority of leadership capacities and competencies being nurtured in the congregation in which they grew up. Not only does this data confirm our expectations, but it also fits within the mental model within which many faculty and students operate.

This data, however, did enable us to identify where and to what degree these capacities and competencies were nurtured over the lifespan. For example, 32% of interviewees identified Christian education as a leadership competency needed in their current setting. The highest percentage of alumni developed this competency in the congregation where they grew up (38%) and in college (30%). After this, the development of Christian education competencies drops off, with the exception of 21% of alumni developing this during their internships. This reality alone is startling, but in addition, there is a significant disparity between men's and women's development of this competency. Sixty percent of women and 12% of men developed Christian education competencies in the congregations in which they grew up. This raises questions about the way vocational formation is gendered, about the differing educational needs of men and women during their seminary careers, and calls into question the difference between operative mental models of ministry for men and women.

Some findings surprised us. Administration and management and working with and developing leaders were overwhelmingly the capacities most highly developed in previous work experiences, in the congregation where one grew up, and in the congregation of call. As noted before, for pipeliners, this leaves a significant gap in their vocational formation, since these were identified as the second- and third-highest sets of leadership capacities and competencies needed in their current ministry positions. But it also invites the seminary to be in dialogue with second-career students around these competencies and capacities. One second-career alum, in talking about the need for listening, said, “There is a whole different kind of listening needed in congregational life. In the corporate world you know who is in charge and who makes decisions. In a congregation you are leading, but they often are the ones who make the decisions—at least I think so.”

Another somewhat surprising finding was that 50 percent of interviewees who answered the question about contextual education indicated that they learned nothing positive and failed to develop leadership competencies during their contextual education placement; 16% said the same about CPE. One alum simply said, “My contextual education was meaningless. They wouldn’t let me do anything...They were great at talking to me if I had questions and they would use me to lead small groups. [But] they didn’t let me preach or step into the pastoral role as much as I would like.”<sup>23</sup> Another noted, “It (congregational leadership) is one of the weak points in seminary curriculum—they do not teach the nuts and bolts of congregational leadership.” Her suggestion? “Give contextual ed[ucation] a purpose—how to lead and move a congregation.” Concerning CPE, one interviewee identified her concerns as having to do with a lack of

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<sup>23</sup> By way of historical context, in terms of the former, the contextual education office and program were in the midst of significant transition during the time period in which these interviewees were students at Luther Seminary.

theological integration. She stated, “The overall experience [of CPE] in my opinion was negative because there were people in my group who seemed to always focus on the negative side of life. I couldn’t see the gospel in their speech.” Yet, CPE is highest for pipeliners (41%) and second-highest for second-career students in developing leadership capacities and competencies related to personal formation and self-care.

*Going forward: tending the ecology of vocation at Luther Seminary*

As part of the interview process, we asked alumni how, if at all, Luther Seminary contributed to the formation of the top three leadership capacities and competencies that they need in their current ministry context. They most frequently identified internship, followed by CPE, pastoral care classes, congregational mission and leadership classes, Bible classes, preaching classes, and spiritual direction groups. Though neither the survey nor interview asked about seminary courses, alumni repeatedly teased out the importance of such courses, especially those most relevant to their contextual education and congregational experiences. One alum said, “I think Luther is doing a good job for preparing pastors for what the church should/could be, but the congregations want to be the church that was. What is the church that will be viable for the future and how can we change it so pastors are prepared for it?”

We also asked them how, if at all, Luther Seminary could have better helped them to develop these particular leadership capacities and competencies. Five themes emerged in their responses to this question:

- (1) place greater emphasis on the practice of ministry, with more practical courses and overall attention to the development of concrete ministry skills;
- (2) place greater emphasis on formation (e.g., developing confidence, managing time, living in greater balance, learning boundaries, and nurturing their own life of faith);
- (3) teach students how to deal with conflict;

(4) honestly explore the multiple challenges of ministry in and out of classroom settings; and

(5) accept the limitations of a seminary education.

In regard to (1), we have recommended that, in the current curricular review, Luther Seminary consider the importance of addressing students' needs to develop capacities and competencies in administration and management. The issue of interdisciplinarity is critical here as elsewhere in seminary education. That is, students need support in integrating ideas and practices from business into a theological framework and within a ministry setting. One interviewee put it this way: "I'm trying to replicate what I've learned in the software world...being an agile leader. This might look like anarchy, but it's really a focus on values." This second-career alum then went on to explain how he is translating to the church world administrative and managerial skills that he practiced in the business world. In doing so, he didn't simply translate; rather, he placed these competencies in a larger theological framework, conceiving of his leadership as a kind of kenosis. Another alum referred to a similar kind of dynamic. As mentioned earlier, she developed the capacity to listen in her first career before coming to seminary. But as pastor, she had to learn to critically adapt her skills to the congregational context.

In regard to (2), "living one's calling," or vocational formation, is one of four emphases in Luther's current curricular structure. It is widely recognized among many administrators, faculty, and students that Luther needs to address how and in what ways the curriculum can support formation for ministry for M.Div. (as well as other masters' level) students. We have recommended a careful consideration of the importance of Clinical Pastoral Education, one of multiple non-credit requirements that may be modified in our curricular revision. And embedded in this tension is a collision of mental models. One mental model views the congregation as not only the primary catalyst for formation *before seminary*, but the primary catalyst period.

Yet at least four of the eleven alumni interviewed mentioned a particular spiritual discipline group led by a faculty that was formative in their time at Luther. And this formation is not just about the leaders themselves, it is also about those they serve. One alum said it this way, “My setting needs spiritual direction of a congregation and small group, not one-on-one. I am trying to help people learn to pray. So, for example, we have evening events during Lent where I introduce people to various prayer styles—like I used praying in color. It was an emotional thing ...[I] gave people new ideas about prayer and spiritual practices.”

Theme (4) is related to vocational formation as well. During the interviews, alumni expressed a desire for more opportunities to discuss honestly and openly challenges in ministry, particularly those challenges that they did not anticipate, such as ageism and sexism. One pipeliner alum said, “I was surprised to find that at the congregation, I was the first woman, the first single person, and the first person under age thirty in sixty years. I left Luther Seminary thinking that these were issues from the past. It never dawned on me that I was single and that would be suspect. I almost dropped out of the call process because of this.” The pedagogical task force in the curricular review process is discussing how these issues might be addressed throughout the ecology of vocation.

Theme (3) raises this question: how can Luther Seminary prepare students to constructively encounter the conflict that exists in and among congregations, denominations, and the larger culture? Respondents suggested that this might involve courses in conflict mediation, mentoring in contextual education and internship, and public modeling among faculty and administrators. In regard to the latter, two out of eleven interviewees referred to long-standing, underlying tensions among faculty. A pipeliner female alum reported, “There were times when faculty talked about one another in a veiled manner in classes. I learned to listen to [what wasn’t being said]. This led me to develop

the skill of listening. [But] I came out of seminary not knowing how to disagree with someone publicly in a way that could be constructive.” A second-career, male alum passionately shared: “If we can’t [have respectful dialogue] at the seminary, then we can’t do it in the open in the church.” He then went on to share that he didn’t experience a safe learning place in a particular course focused on a Lutheran theology because he didn’t experience openness to a variety of theological perspectives.

In regard to (5), alumni repeatedly expressed appreciation for what they learned through M.Div. education at Luther Seminary. They noted the importance of their involvement in congregations as well as the formative significance of previous work experiences. Yet none of this fully prepared them for all the challenges and opportunities of pastoral ministry. One alum drove home this point: “My experience is that there is nothing that prepares you for the reality of parish life fully until you are in it. Part of this is unavoidable because every context is so different. Even the ins and outs of church government are different, and then when you throw in history, systems, and personalities...I’m not sure there is something that can ever fully prepare someone for that.”

In conclusion, all of this poses critical issues that will need to be taken up by particular task forces and the faculty as a whole as Luther Seminary continues its curricular review and program redesign over the next two years. Some of these issues are meta-theoretical concerns about theological education in the twenty-first century; some function at the level of program/curricular design; and others have to do with distribution of courses and individual course design. Some of the meta-theoretical issues include the *telos* of and theological rationale for Luther’s M.Div. program: is it formation? How is formation understood theologically in a Lutheran school that is also ecumenical? What understandings of God’s work in congregations, students, and culture must shape our curriculum as a whole? What impact, if any, does the changing population have on mental models that have



been longstanding? Questions about curricular design include how to more deeply integrate classroom learning with contextual education, internship, CPE, previous work, and congregational experiences. How can a program attend to the lived, embodied wisdom of students, while also taking into account the need for significant differences in their leadership formation? Does attention need to be given to the experience of second-career students? Do gender differences need to be addressed? In terms of actual course distribution, we are considering how (and to what degree) particular courses can shape competencies in educational leadership, conflict mediation, and administration.

As a particular exercise at a particular time in the life of a seminary, this research has been helpful; helpful as an exercise in listening, as a feedback loop around leadership competencies and capacities in our changing church landscape, and helpful in beginning to tease out the various mental models that coexist at Luther Seminary. For all of those reasons, this research has been worthwhile. Yet as Luther lives into its new future, it is the hope of these researchers that these findings do not mark the end of a project, but become part of a new curiosity and ongoing learning.

## **Methodist Theological School of Ohio (MTSO)**

(Lisa Withrow)

How does the ecology of vocation form a minister's mental models about the church and the ministry? Scott Cormode posed this question as the basis of his study at Fuller and the subsequent study conducted at Methodist Theological School in Ohio (MTSO) among other seminaries. To ascertain formative faith influences on MTSO alumni (M.Div. degrees, serving in six denominations) throughout their lives, this survey drew response from fifty-four persons, most of whom were targeted as graduates from 2000-2010, and also a random sample of graduates who earned their degrees prior to this timeframe. Additional interviews (fourteen) followed the survey to deepen the data with alumni illustrations

about formative experiences leading to their ministerial calls and ongoing formative events affecting their ministries today. Analysis of the gathered information is based on assessment rubrics defined by Cormode's chart, in the method established for faculty at MTSO during self-study in 2007-2008.

### *1. Formative Faith Experiences*

The vast majority of the survey participants grew up in the church (85%), but only half remained in the same denomination of their childhood church. Follow-up interviews with fourteen alumni who had grown up in the church indicated that major influences on faith formation included parental or extended family participation, clergy and lay pastoral leadership, youth group participation, recognition of interviewees' leadership abilities, and opportunities to use such leadership skills. In eight cases, females indicated that they might not have pursued professional ministry as a vocation without lay and clergy prompting.

Specific influences on faith formation based on church life itself varied significantly in interviews. The main foci for pre-college formation named by alumni included participation in youth group, bible study, and Sunday School. Rev. F. illustrates by telling her story: She attended a Presbyterian church as teenager, where she was active in youth group activities. She claims that the primary influence in her life at that time was the youth minister, who taught "theological ways of thinking." The group itself also became her circle of friends at school and they "hung out together at other times" too. In addition, using leadership skills to create new worship experiences mattered to the majority of the interviewees, although several indicated that worship had little meaning for them at all. For Rev. H. (United Methodist), who grew up in the Roman Catholic Church, worship was the most important element of her faith formation. She claims that she "loved being in the church, wanting to pray," and found the rituals and practices to be highly meaningful for her faith journey. She started playing the

organ as a teen, and contributed significantly to the musical life of the Mass and funerals.

Application to theological school occurred after college and in most cases, after first—sometimes even second—career work. Two interviewees knew that they were called to some form of ministry in their teen years, having been greatly influenced by church leaders. Other interviewees understood their call internally later in life, while others were invited to consider theological school by laity or peers (mostly females in the latter case). The most important factor in pursuing the call to theological school was encouragement by pastoral leadership, followed by lay encouragement. Family support was named next, followed by college professors or advisors.

Hopes for theological school included desire for an affirmation of call through discernment process, gaining skill sets for ministry, and delving into academics as its own joyful practice. One interviewee desired to enter school as an attempt to sort out the gaps between what the church calls people to do and the church's own praxis. Rev. B. says it this way: "I applied to seminary to have a place to wrestle with the fissure I experienced between my work in the domestic violence and sexual assault prevention movement and the faith 'resources' the churches claimed to provide my clients. I was deeply angry and worked on that anger throughout seminary." Rev. B. stated clearly in the interview that she wanted to reconcile the church's claims about itself and its practice.

## *2. College and First Career Experiences*

Humanities, religion/theology, and the helping professions constitute the vast majority of studies in college or university embraced by participants. The next highest category includes the sciences, followed by majors and minors in several other professional degrees.

Attractive components of faith-based and/or musical organizations in the college or university setting repeatedly surfaced, demonstrating a relationship orientation that was supportive and gave the interviewee the chance to use leadership skills. Pastor J. lifts her own

home church youth pastor as her major influence throughout college; this youth pastor encouraged Pastor J. to continue faith-based conversations as well as develop leadership in a College Ministry Team (CMT) that initiated youth ministry events for local churches. This kind of response to college-age formation reinforces findings from interviews that similarly identify “support and developing leadership roles” in participants’ early years in the church as crucial for pursuing a ministerial vocation, even if they pursued other careers first. At the same time, a little over one-third of the participants had little or no activity in faith-based organizations in college/university. For these participants, influencers were more personalized or came later. For example, Rev. A. tells his story: “I wouldn’t describe my college church experience part of my faith journey...I joined a fraternity while in college and I think that experience and people in leadership of the chapter were a greater influence. Our chapter advisor was a local attorney who, during that time, was also elected to the state legislature and later to the United States Congress. He was a very strong ethical influence on all of us and remains a friend to this day. He was a man of faith, but he didn’t ‘preach’ to us—he never required us to go to church, although many in the chapter did. He just modeled his faith in his life and in his call to service. He was a father figure and role model for me in many ways.”

Second- or third-career participants had varied careers prior to theological school. Thirty-one percent of survey participants were already involved in some form of ministry or helping profession prior to enrolling in theological education.

### *3. Congregation of Call*

Descriptors for congregations that supported interviewees’ calls indicate that most were highly supportive communities that encouraged leadership in the interviewee. One response indicated that the congregation was multicultural; all the rest were primarily white, though in different economic echelons and

geographic locations, including white churches in neighborhoods populated primarily by people of color. Two participants named their churches as progressive and one as theologically diverse.

Congregational input for those thinking about theological school was generally described in positive terms. However, five interviewees identified no real discernment process present in their congregation as they considered their call. Formal procedures required for those pursuing ordination candidacies were identified as supportive in five cases. Those in leadership positions cited working with pastors or lay leaders in the church before entering theological school. Rev. A. is a good example. He “grew up in faith” in a mid-sized congregation (150 average worship attendance, diverse ages and theological viewpoints, mostly Caucasian), where he claims that the formative parts of his faith development occurred through bible study, youth leadership, and teaching adult Sunday School. He “served in just about every capacity that one can serve as a lay person at one time or another. That is to say, I was a known quantity to them and they helped shape me into a person who was able to discern a call into ministry. When I approached the pastor at the church, a new pastor, about beginning the ministry inquiry process, it was a formality really, because the SPRC Chair and members were totally in support, as were the lay leader and the former pastor.”

#### *4. Experiences of Theological School*

The data indicate that the largest number of students in the sample entered theological school during the ages of 36-40 and all of these students were female. Most males entered in their twenties immediately after college, with another group entering in their forties.

The survey included an inquiry about CPE. The majority of participants in the survey was United Methodist and not required to take CPE by denominational standards. Two interviewees found their professional call through CPE and continued to work in

chaplaincy as a result. Rev. S. valued CPE: “I learned that I have a particular gift for crisis work and for work with staff who work in crisis, and that my call is outside the institutional church.” The remaining interviewees were grateful to learn pastoral care skills, particularly in times of crisis and especially at times of patients’ deaths.

Field experience proved important to interviewees, both in terms of ministry setting and in the classroom. In the ministry setting, interviewees learned about their gifts for ministry, time management, integration of academic work with practice of ministry, and leadership. In the classroom, interviewees found support, accountability for self-care, theological reflection time, and discernment about the future. Rev. F. said that her Field Education instructor made her want to be a Field Education instructor too. Rev. T. indicated that his field placement integrated his degree work with his call, helping him realize how well-prepared in Christian education he was, and gifted in pastoral care as well.

With one exception, interviewees were pursuing or considering pursuing the ordination track during theological training, so were also spending time meeting credentialing requirements. United Methodist credentialing bodies received mixed reviews in terms of helpfulness; the process seemed cumbersome for most interviewees and the theological stance requirements were deemed rigid. United Church of Christ interviewees also gave mixed reviews, with the majority finding the credentialing process reasonable. The vast majority of interviewees appreciated having assigned mentors when they were available.

More than half of the interviewees indicated that, as commuters, they had limited or no connection to student life at MTSO. Student relationships were cited as very important for those who were not commuters or who were commuters with flexible schedules. These informal relationships provided support, discernment help, peer affinity groups and/or conversations, and provided an alternative forum for sharing practical skills for ministry. Rev. T. tells how student life afforded him the

opportunity, for the first time in his life, to develop deep personal friendships with people in similar circumstances and who could discuss theological issues with him. Further, connection with faculty and discussions in the classroom were equally important to him. Rev. C. stated that student life at seminary made the experience “the most blessed three years of my life.”

### *5. Ministries Post-Graduation*

Data about ordination and employment yield interesting results in terms of gender differentials. Ordination demographics indicate that slightly less than three-fourths of the females surveyed are ordained, and less than half of the ordained are serving in childhood denominations. Pastor J. indicated that she chose not to pursue ordination, while valuing her M.Div. degree. Two others are in the ordination process. All males are ordained and the majority is serving in childhood denominations.

Over three-quarters of the participants (only one male), were employed immediately after graduation or were employed before graduation in a ministry setting. Two females have not been employed fulltime in ministry at this point despite efforts to find work: one in a ministerial call system and one pursuing music ministry. The majority of males are pastors, with one campus minister in the mix. Less than three-quarters of the females are pastors, while the roles of youth minister, church musician, and chaplaincy are majority female.

Vocational development post-graduation included interviewees citing a significant maturing process both personally and in their understandings of leadership roles in church and community ministry. Rev. B., an urban community minister, describes how her concept of ministry has developed since seminary: “Ministry is much more difficult. I often joke that I have no job description other than to tell the truth. I do a thousand new things before breakfast and make everything up as I go...Ministry is so much more about trust, truth, and finding the right resources than anything. Everything is

theology on the fly and life balance.” Rev. B2 says, “Ministry is the hardest job you will ever love.”

Personal maturation descriptions included balancing time and self-expectations, learning new skill sets, finding resources, and doing ministry with people rather than to or for them. Professional maturation included learning from experience, reading expectations that are unstated, understanding conflict and politics in the church, and resourcing ministry in creative ways. Some of this maturation process resulted from life-transitions, including divorce, death of a loved one, job loss due to church financial hardship, ill health, conflict with authorities, significant geographical moves, or shift in call. Rev. B2 claims that learning is a balance between the personal and the various roles in the church. She describes having seventy-five “bosses” with varying expectations about the future; therefore, surprises and demands are the elements of the balancing act.

### *Initial Conclusions*

To explore conclusions from this study, we return to the question, “How does the ecology of vocation form a minister’s mental models about the church and the ministry?”

Ecology of Vocation includes several phases of action-reflection, as shown by this study. The significance of participation in faith community or support community early in life or as late as college is the primary starting-point for most participants in the survey and interviews. Formative experiences were varied, though the majority of participants had some church background, so there is implicit connection to church as formational space. More relied on personal relationships with church leaders for discernment. Discernment continued through seminary, shaped by peers and professors into possibilities for praxis. Ecology of vocation continued informally after interviewees graduated from MTSO. Several persons indicated that they matured regarding human relationships and expectations in their ministries. Others gained skill sets



through practice and by tapping resource programs or people who could help them. Still others look forward to continuing education and life-long learning with MTSO and other organizations.

One important answer to the question posed by Cormode is the importance of relationships influencing people in discernment. Mental models develop through observation and leadership practices in church, college, seminary, and in professional settings. No mental model is identical with another. Much like the development of personal character, the development of mental models issues from vocational influencers based on praxis and the wisdom of mentors. Action-reflection throughout maturation in ministry creates a cumulative, dynamic mental model, which in turn influences others who may pursue ministry.

Mapping the ecologies from first call through professional ministry helps MTSO determine our own mental models for education. Faculty and staff assumptions about ministry can shape the possibilities for students in ways that we may not understand fully. This study challenges us to describe our own explicit and implicit curricula in the midst of the full ecology of vocation. Such work begins in the description below, outlining faculty response to this study.

**Ecology of Vocation Table: MTSO**

	<b>Mapping the Ecology: Goals</b>	<b>Mapping the Ecology: Methods</b>	<b>Using the Ecology to Prepare Seminarians</b>	<b>Nurturing the Ecology of Vocation</b>
<b>1. Formative Faith Experiences</b>	Demographics in chart below.  Experiences in churches and especially campus ministries or college/university mentoring – mission trips and conversations.	Application to seminary includes call statement and recommendations, informal exploratory conversations with MTSO personnel.  Certification in pastoral mentoring program is optional and perhaps not concurrent.	Educated Spirit introductory course for theological education.  20% student body – persons of color. Lower percentage in M.Div. degree  Diversity addressed in most courses.	Connect with ministry settings through CPE and FE.  Cross cultural immersions.  Partnerships with urban churches working with poor.

<b>2. College and First Career Experiences</b>	Parachurch organizations, campus ministries, occasional campus-connected church fostered most students.	Exploration of seminary possibilities with campus chaplains.  Continue seeking mentoring in call process.	Call stories encouraged in intro course. Affinity groups formed.	Partnerships with campus ministries and departments of religion.
<b>3. Congregation of Call</b>	Congregations have few if any mentoring programs. Participate in formal procedures for candidacy when asked.  Congregations supported calls and provided pastoral mentoring in many cases.	Building partnerships with training congregations.  Congregational visitation by various school instructors.	Mission trips in some cases.  Majority congregations foster leadership roles and allow participation in worship creation.	Connecting with congregations through events and visits. Special invitations to congregations for seminary events.
<b>4. Experiences during Seminary Field Education</b>	Ministry placements often in new contexts for student.  FE raises questions about ability and authority. Also about competency and willingness to deal with ongoing conflict. Issues of resilience.  Understanding of staff dynamics.	Site visits Ongoing theological reflection Support and challenge in small groups Case studies  Supervisory feedback (committees and supervisor in field)	Dialogue with previous conceptions of ministry.  Practical Theological Method (action-reflection)  Leadership and conflict courses/family systems work.  Psychological Counseling as needed	Curriculum revision 2010, including adding new degree in practical theology  New courses designed yearly for non-parish ministry including practicum/FE component
<b>Relationship with Credential Bodies</b>	Student-initiated, not necessarily concurrent with seminary  Expectations include good articulation of call story, sense of ministerial vocation, theological stance, relational competency, and biblical competency	Denominational leadership in conversation with seminary on a yearly basis, minimum. Faculty connects with denominational leadership regularly.  A number of ordained faculty aid students in writing process for judicatory requirements.	Feedback opportunities tell us that expectations include good communication skills, including preaching (for churches), good pastoral skills, ability to manage conflict, resilience and growing churches.	Guidebook for Credentialing Bodies -with articles by pastors, judicators, and seminary professors (including references to credentialing bodies' own source books)  Publish as special issue of the <i>Journal of Religious Leadership</i> and as on the Web
<b>CPE</b>	Traditional action-reflection models in hospitals, prisons, hospice care	CPE Day occurs every year on campus with representatives from all area accredited CPE	Denominational expectations outlined for students regarding CPE – students also required to	Keep up with denominational changes

		programs	check with credentialing bodies	
<b>Student Life</b>	Mostly informal Director of Student Services sponsors events	Student feedback ongoing through informal channels and exit interviews. Occasional surveys.	Working on anti-racism training  Developing new student groups based on academic specializations and resulting social action.	Foster student participation in creation of knowledge for our time.  Social network use.
<b>5. Ministry Tracking the Life course</b>	In process of new survey for summer	Good data base in Alum office – staff person dedicated to this work.	Survey regarding education feedback in process for summer.	Online communities in process through life-long learning initiative
<b>Five Years Out</b>	Survey will cover formation and development of ministerial life.	a. Goal: interview each graduate from the Class of 2002 b. Focus Groups	Seminary developing life-long learning goal and process this year. Two pilots complete.	Annual evaluation of life-long learning pilots in play.
<b>Graduating Students</b>	Graduates wonder about positions, appointments, call and worry about debt.  Some wish to create their own jobs.	ATS Graduating Student Survey (focuses on education but not on formation) – can enhance  Exit interviews in play.	Create a bookend to orientation that is a day-long event preparing students to leave the school.	Match with Mentors who live in their new locale – often the church does this work.

**Demographic Table: MTSO**

<b>Gender</b>	Female: 35		Male: 19	
<b>Age Entering Theological School</b>	21-25: 12	26-30: 5	31-35: 1	36-40: 14
	41-45: 9	46-50: 10	51- 55: 3	
<b>Denomination</b>	UMC : 33	UCC: 11	UM/UCC: 1	Disciples: 2
	ELCA: 2	PCUSA: 3	UU: 2	
<b>Ordained</b>	Yes or on track: 46		No: 8, All persons not ordained are female	
<b>Churched</b>	Yes: 46		No: 8, 6 females and 2 males	
<b>Ministry Position</b>	Yes: 51		No: 3, All persons not in ministry roles are female.	
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married/Partnered: 41		Single: 13, All single persons are female.	

**Part Three - How Mapping Helps a School: MTSO**

*1. Celebrated Findings*

Life-long learning seems to be a priority for many professional ministers in this study. Theological school requirements initially may have been simply goals to

accomplish on the way toward credentialing, but participants in this study found that school itself became a crucial aspect of formation and ongoing desire to evolve as person and as minister. To that end, MTSO has been developing innovative ways to invite cohorts of persons together for entrepreneurial learning. Data and narratives here indicate that we are moving along a path that will address vocational formation for ministers more effectively.

Informal formational work occurs all the time at MTSO. Interviewees and survey participants indicated that personal support and mentoring relationships were the most important aspects of their formation up to and including theological school. Our advising procedures, one-on-one mid-program review between faculty advisor and student, and development of student support structures continue to strengthen this work in the areas of formation. We notice that increasing numbers of students are drawn to faculty who are addressing social justice issues more publicly than ever; these students wish to explore non parish-based ministry in many cases.

## *2. Suggestions or Critiques*

One lesson from this research is that life-long learning can be provided in a much more interesting and in-depth way than lectures at the seminary. A whole network of learners can connect with faculty in new ways with new technologies to continue the educational and spiritual formation, begun early in the local church and subsequently through college/university and theological school. MTSO is developing a new model for life-long learning at present. The ecology of vocation includes retaining relationships post-graduation, and making explicit the conversation about mental models graduates and faculty have for ministerial work.

It is additionally clear that we need to pay more attention to women's work and family loads than we do at this point. Women in general carry heavier loads than men when attending theological school, despite some men also working full time. Even single women are

usually in some caring ministry that takes much time while they attend school and work another job; fewer single men claim the same level of workload.

### *3. Correcting Misinformation/Interrupting Assumptions*

Despite emphasis on the role of churches providing formational experiences and support prior to persons answering calls to ministry, there seems to be a greater emphasis on college or university campus ministry as primarily influential. Denominations are cutting funding to campus ministries while calling for “younger generations” to follow calls to parish work. Campus ministries seem peripheral to denominations, but we see here that they are crucial for young people (and in many cases, second-career persons who do not forget their campus experience) furthering their own paths into ministry.

Formational focus has changed from those who entered seminary in the 1970s (right out of college) and those who have enrolled recently (right out of college). The significance of local church influence has waned for younger generations; some of their faith experiences occurred through campus ministry or on their own rather than in the church setting. Seminary is a place where some students are doing their first formative work in terms of faith. With this phenomenon in mind, faculty are encouraged to be more intentional about the work of formation and the outcomes: what mental models do we encourage, what do we discourage, and what is our motivation? How much of our own vocations are set in certain beliefs and practices and why? How much influence do our students have on our own mental models of education and ministry? These questions have been on the table since MTSO’s last self-study, but we have not pursued them as deeply as could be helpful.

### *4. Reception with the Faculty*

Several faculty members, an admissions officer, and a retired bishop-in-residence responded to the invitation to look at the study results. The Dean has the results in his

hands as well. They added their observations to the study about students in classes. First, faculty members noticed that more students had less certainty about their calls to ministry in the last five years compared to earlier student bodies. One faculty person indicated that through taking classes and discussing the call with peers and faculty members, students often chose the M.Div. degree several courses into their studies. It seems as if increasing numbers of students choose to attend seminary *to be formed* spiritually and in terms of leadership. If that is the case, then educational and vocational ecology become even more important factors of the seminary discussion regarding mental models.

All persons in the conversation noted that those who did not find jobs right away after theological school were women, with one exception. They also discovered that all the single people in the study were female. Finally, they wondered if particular life-stressors were gender-specific. Acknowledgment of shifting gender roles and public cultural models contributed to the conversation regarding women in ministry.

One faculty person noted that, based on her own observations, students “pushed to come to seminary by a church” tended to be the weaker students, while students coming of their own exploratory volition tended to fare better in academic studies. The bishop-in-residence added that theological schools needed to spend more time with college and university chaplaincies. Her book about thirteen female bishops indicated that ten found their calls to ministry through such chaplaincies.

Additional topics the faculty would like to entertain:

- Whether more women than men fill out surveys because women have been marketed TO via survey since they were young girls, especially in areas of beauty and self-image.
- Further exploration of the differences in formation for graduates from the 1970s and 1980s versus the 2010s and beyond—pre-/during/post-theological school.

- Why no men were single in the survey group and what proportion of men in ministry is single as compared to women.
- How social media contributes to life-long learning and ministerial support.
- How mission trips inform vocational choices and further, how cross-cultural programs in theological schools, like many mission trips, seem to be formative or transformative, perhaps changing or enhancing vocational choices.
- What mental models faculty carry about theological education in seminary versus study of religions in a graduate school.

### *5. Final Thoughts*

This Ecology of Vocation study has revealed that we have further work to do in terms of understanding the changing context of ministry and from whence students of ministry come. Our mental models (connections between intuition, perception, action, and consequence) have already led MTSO to curricular self-assessment on an ongoing basis with formal rubrics and regular discussions about the correlations among academics, contexts for ministry, and effective leadership. What we continue to work on is life-long learning through connections between faculty and the outside world, as well as among various publics connecting with MTSO, for the purpose of contributing to public theologies. So, for MTSO, Ecology of Vocation is striving to move beyond privatized learning to public forums and public knowledge creation. We are living into our second year of significant curricular revision, new programs for student and faculty enrichment, and are developing a new life-long learning model that we have not seen in other theological schools to date. Our technological updates are ahead of the curve at the moment, so we have the tools to expand our understandings of vocational formation far beyond traditional methods; we simply need to learn how to do so effectively and fully as a faculty. Another alumni

survey is in the works to aid us in our endeavor and to keep the discussion alive.

## Conclusion

Each of the schools in this project focused on the Ecology of Vocation. And each of the schools reinvented the process for themselves. It seems wise to make a few concluding remarks about what we can learn by looking at the schools as a unit.

### *1. Reinventing the Process*

Each school interpreted the project in light of its own agendas. For Harvard, this project was influenced by their accreditation self-study process. For King's, this project was part of a larger project studying the sense of call. For Luther, this project was a first step toward re-accreditation and curriculum redesign. And, for MTSO, this project was interpreted using the self-assessment procedures established during the 2007-2008 self study.

It is not surprising to organizational scholars that each school reinvented the process. Cohen & March taught us a generation ago about what became known as "garbage can theory."<sup>24</sup> Their idea explains many of the debates in academia that would not otherwise make sense. They argue that we should see each person as "a solution in search of a problem." Each person carries with them a series of agendas that matter greatly to them. And each person is constantly looking for opportunities to interpret situations in light of those agendas. For example, the debates within theological faculty often get carried out along disciplinary lines. A New Testament scholar sees an issue being about the interpretation of a particular text. Meanwhile, an ethicist might see the same

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<sup>24</sup> Michael Cohen, James March and Johan Olsen, "A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice," *Administrative Science Quarterly* (March 1972): 1-25. Within higher education, Cohen and March found, any decision point acts "as a garbage can into which various problems and solutions are dumped by participants." Cohen and March, *Leadership and Ambiguity* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1974), 81.



issue as an ethics question, and a leadership professor sees it as a question about her discipline.

In this project's case, each school's faculty already had a set of agendas it was pursuing. It only makes sense that they would bend the project to fit their agendas. This "bending" is not the same, however, as distorting; think of it more as focusing in the ways that an eyeglass bends light so that its particular owner can see things in focus. The project was originally constructed to pursue the agendas that matter most to the principal investigator. It only makes sense that each subsequent investigator would focus the project on her school's agendas.

## 2. Retrospective Rationality

One caution that should be made to each of the schools—or to anyone who pursues such a project—is Karl Weick's warning about "retrospective rationality."<sup>25</sup> He warned that people often do not know in the moment why they are taking a particular action. But if you ask them later for a rational explanation, they will create, in retrospect, a plausible reason for their action.

This project often asks graduates to think back on a time in the past and asks them to describe what they did, why they did it, and what would have been helpful to them. Weick warns that their current agendas will likely influence their description of the past. For example, say a school interviewed a graduate named Consuela when she was a children's minister at a large, multi-ethnic church. And imagine that a year later Consuela left that church to found a house church in a poor neighborhood. Weick's work would suggest that a school's interviews with Consuela about her experience in and before seminary would likely be quite different if they interviewed her when she was in the first job as opposed to the second. It is important to note that the past did not change. The

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<sup>25</sup> Weick, Karl, *Making Sense of the Organization* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001); cf. Karl Weick, "Enactment Processes in Organizations," *New Directions in Organizational Behavior*, ed. by B. Shaw and G. Salancik (Chicago: St. Clair, 1977)

events that happened during her seminary years did not change. But the meaning of those events changed greatly. We have to be careful to acknowledge that a graduate's description of their past experiences is strongly shaped by their social location and their agendas as they tell the story of their past.

### *3. Mental Models*

The project's intent was to show how the ecology of vocation formed the mental models of students. But this project ended up showing how important it is to pay attention not only to the mental models of students, but also to notice how students are shaped by the mental models of professors, congregations, and seminaries. For example, students at the King's University describe an individualized experience of calling ("God told me..."). But they use very similar language to describe it. That means that students appropriate the mental models they hear in their Pentecostal congregations (a communal act) and then use that language to describe something that they think of as deeply individual. In other words, they use communally-constructed language to describe their individualized experience. The mental models of the churches become the mental models of our students.

There is another term that we should introduce to help us understand how the idea of mental models goes much deeper. At various points, each of the schools discussed students' expectations. Expectations depend on mental models. Students have expectations about how seminary should work, about how their seminary education will prepare them for a particular kind of ministry, and indeed what it means to be prepared. These are all based on mental models. But seminaries and their faculty work out of mental models as well. And those mental models often differ from those that students bring. Let us continue the King's example from the last paragraph. Students come to King's expecting that a seminary degree will set them up to be hired by a larger (and therefore, more important) congregation. The faculty, on the other hand, knows that there are many

factors that go into a hiring (and a degree is only one of them) and the faculty espouses a theory that says that larger churches are not more important than smaller churches. That disparity of expectations means that faculty are hoping to accomplish something quite different from what the students thought they were getting.

Faculty themselves carry all sorts of mental models. For example, at Luther Seminary the system seems to be constructed around a mental model that says that “pipeliners” are the standard for students. The school could thus benefit from reflecting on how non-pipelined students experience the school. The mental models of faculty are as important as the mental models of students in understanding how seminaries form graduates for ministry.

Each of the schools in this project came with an agenda. And each of the schools found a way to meet that agenda by studying the ecology of vocation that shapes its students. We would invite other schools to engage a similar study and see how it allows them to meet its agendas.