

The Learning Pastoral Imagination Project: A 10-Year Overview

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INTRODUCTION

Begun in 2009, the Learning Pastoral Imagination Project (LPI Project) is a national, ecumenical, and longitudinal study of Christian ministry. This brief introduction shares how the study was designed, how it has unfolded over fourteen years, and several of its key questions and findings. The study's central concept, *pastoral imagination*, identifies the embodied, relational, spiritual, and integrative capacity required for the wise practice of ministry.

BECOMING WISE IN THE PRACTICE OF MINISTRY

How do ministers become wise in the practice of ministry? This simple, disarming question arose out of our own theological education and formation as well as our early years serving congregations as ordained clergy. Yet it also was sparked by our doctoral studies that included ethnographic study of congregations and clergy. For Eileen, this took the form of a question: How are clergywomen coping or even thriving in situations openly hostile to their vocations? That led to a study of Baptist women entering ministry and reinterpreting both a denominational schism and the practice of ministry itself.¹ For Christian, this took the form of studying old congregations in Atlanta, Georgia, and the particular roles clergy played leading worship and mission, seeking the good of the city.² After finishing his doctorate, he simultaneously served a downtown Lutheran congregation in New Britain, Connecticut, and participated in a

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For more about the Learning Pastoral Imagination Project, visit <https://www.pastoralimagination.com>

seminar on practical theology, theological education, and Christian ministry. Convened by Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra, who together sparked a “practices conversation” across North American Christianity with books such as *Practicing Our Faith*³ and *Practicing Theology*,⁴ the seminar invited him to write a narrative of his own learning over time, in what he termed “the long arc of learning ministry.”⁵

Deciding to explore via research what exactly this ‘long arc of learning ministry’ looks like, Eileen and Christian teamed up in 2009 to launch an intentionally longitudinal, national, ecumenical study of learning ministry. At that time, William Sullivan’s Carnegie project on educating for the professions was in full swing, with the influential book by Charles Foster et al., *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination*, sparking conversations across North American theological schools.⁶ With its primary focus on the years of formal theological education in degree programs and the practices of teaching used in those programs, the study illuminated crucial components of forming pastoral imagination.

The concept of pastoral imagination, popularized by Craig Dykstra in his essay “Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination” in *For Life Abundant*, became a north star for our research. For Dykstra, pastoral imagination refers to an individual’s capacity for seeing a situation of ministry in all its holy and relational depths and responding with wise and fitting judgment and action.⁷ We have extended this understanding by drawing upon the notion of phronesis, which is practical knowledge and judgment derived from experience in practice over time.⁸ Through connecting phronesis with the gifts and work of the Holy Spirit, we argue, pastoral imagination emerges as an integrative, embodied, and relational capacity.⁹ Certainly, Charles Foster’s research showed the importance of seminary as a context for learning pastoral imagination. Yet our own experience told us that much of what prepares us for ministry comes from experiences both prior to, and following after, the years of formal theological education centered in the classroom and curricula of a seminary.

As we envisioned the research project, we drew upon two key approaches—one methodological and one theoretical. First, given that we wanted to explore learning the practice of ministry over time, we learned from the Harvard Grant Study. Begun in the 1940s, it has followed 268 undergraduate men throughout their lives to understand what makes for a good life. George Vaillant, for many years the director of the study, describes the scope and methodology in various publications, giving us clues to the fruits of studying lives as they unfold over decades.¹⁰ Second, and as a theoretical companion to longitudinal methods, we adopted a theory of adult human learning developed by philosopher Hubert Dreyfus and his brother, industrial engineer Stuart Dreyfus, both professors at the University of California, Berkeley. By bringing curiosity about the phenomenology of learning in practice to careful observation in various learning contexts, including Air Force pilots and chess players, they elaborate a five-stage process of moving from novice to expert.¹¹ Crucial to this theory is the leap between stage 3 (competent) and stage 4 (proficient) that entails a shift in the kind of thinking needed (and which subsequent neuroscience shows engages distinct parts of the brain).¹² The shift to proficiency and later mastery lines up with the kind of practical situated knowing we call *pastoral imagination*. The Dreyfus' collaborator, nursing scholar Patricia Benner, usefully deployed this theory in her own work regarding becoming a nurse, thus making her research crucial to our own.¹³

We wondered about ways to structure our research that would get at the complexity of learning pastoral imagination, and those wonderings shaped the form of our unfolding research. For instance, curious about similarities and differences in learning across denomination, region, gender and sexuality, race, class, and age, we recruited as widely diverse a cohort as possible. Drawing from the women's listening circles of theologian Nell Morton¹⁴ and the circles of trust described by Quaker educator Parker Palmer, we planned for group interviews that invited participants to be co-inquirers with us as well as built a supportive space for participants to be encouraged as

they shared about their learning, both successes and setbacks. While we were starting with those just graduating from seminary, and thus not expected (save those in traditions in which seminary can come after many years of ministry — African Methodist Episcopal or Pentecostal, for example) to exhibit pastoral imagination, we wondered what hints we would see initially. We thought there may be cases where development is blocked, and we were curious about when this happens, and why, when others continue to deepen and grow in their learning trajectories. Lastly, we wagered that, as practical theologians working with ministers, we would intentionally enact our interviewing as practical theology and pastoral imagination in action, not just learning about it but integrating and exemplifying it in the practice of research. Thus, the research was doubly conceived as data gathering and pastoral work, a space in which the participants would access peer learning and mutual support.

BECOMING WISE IN THE PRACTICE OF RESEARCH

Setting out to study the practice of ministry today, we needed to know more of the research landscape, the modes and methods of inquiry used over time to study ministry, and how our work would embody theological, pedagogical, and spiritual commitments. We did not begin the LPI research as novices or beginners, yet every new project has a learning curve. To situate our work, we asked ourselves and our mentors questions about the historical, methodological, and theological pathways we might take. What had gone before us, and how was Christian ministry understood and studied in the past? Which qualitative research tools and methods were best suited to helping us get at our research questions? To which theological questions and spiritual relationships ought we be accountable? Since 2009 we have continued to circle time and again through these questions. With experience and conversations with colleagues, our understandings have deepened and modified, and we also remain open to critique and change.

Social movements and world events shape ministry in powerful ways over time. When we consider historical paths for understanding, we often look to documents to tell us how ministry was practiced, studied, and taught. Yet such documents are the aftermath or summary of changes brought on by wars, religious reformations, sweeping health crises, and mass migrations.¹⁵ Before the nineteenth century, writing *about* ministry, preaching, and priestly duties took didactic forms in church discipline manuals, theological treatises, hagiographies, and canon law.¹⁶ Indirectly, the contours of ministry could be witnessed in pastoral diaries, slave narratives, and personal memoirs.¹⁷ Beginning in the nineteenth century, with the rise of the social sciences, a more critically distanced and rational approach to the study of religion and its leaders emerged. Sociology, psychology, and anthropology put forward new truth claims that competed fiercely with theology and philosophy. The new social sciences aspired to be the voices of authority to interpret and eventually displace religion as a more scientific or realistic way of understanding human beings and their communities.¹⁸ Religion did not die, however; to the surprise and consternation of some social scientists, it continued to exert enormous influence on society and individual belief and behavior.

Twentieth-century Christianity in the United States expanded through professionalism for ministers and progress for denominational bodies, giving rise to studies of ministry education, efficiency, and ethics.¹⁹ Scholars attached to denominations and seminaries began to study ministry more vigorously, approaching it as history, tasks, professional effectiveness, and theological expression.²⁰ New organizations received funding to study the church and its leaders.²¹ And practical theologians in Europe and the United States in the 1980s and '90s took an "empirical turn," leading some scholars to adopt both quantitative and qualitative studies of everyday lives of faith communities and ministers.²² Practical theologians, such as Don Browning, attempted to bring together theological reflection and empirical studies of congregations and their leaders. However, early attempts at integration in these

initiatives often lacked robust theological reflection on method or content, adopting methods and tools from social science and leaving theological reflection to the end of the research process *after* data collection and analysis. In the early phase of the LPI Project, we entered the history of how to study ministry by critiquing this mode of research and offering an alternative process that endeavors, with humility, to instantiate a research practice that is spiritual and theological from start to finish.²³

From the outset, we situated the LPI Project methodologically as a qualitative study of human subjects, with appreciation for denominational studies and benefiting from the wisdom of pastoral and practical theology and qualitative study tools refined by the social sciences.²⁴ We understand the focal point (or objects) of our research²⁵ to be human learning in the over-defined context of Christian ministry in the United States. We also focus on the particular human persons who come into that practice and learn it across time and the encounters with the sacred that happen both in the data and stories we collect and in the very process of collecting data.²⁶ To understand the stories and observations, and to offer insights about them, requires considering how the universal is detectable in the most particular of human lives and stories.²⁷ The LPI Project makes use of philosophical understandings from Aristotle (*phronesis*), William James (the “more”), the Dreyfus brothers and Bent Flyvbjerg (models of expertise), Shaun Gallagher (situated cognition), Deborah Kerdeman (learning theory), and David Perkins (teaching and learning), among others.

Several theological questions and commitments form the spiritual pathway of the LPI Project. Our efforts to approach the study as practical theological work means that from the initial framing to the latest book we see the process—for ourselves, study participants, colleagues, and readers—as one grounded in the presence of God, often perceived in the shared silence of listening. When we conduct interviews, visit ministry sites, or survey participants, we practice the discipline of listening, and we find that our research practice is both open-ended and under-defined, much like the practice of

ministry we study.²⁸ Our learning and knowing are not isolated or limited to what we can perceive on our own. Rather, our research is infused with collaboration and accountability to the following: (1) tried and true methods of data gathering, approaches field tested across multiple disciplines,²⁹ (2) modes of research, analysis, and writing that are exercises in constructing practical theological wisdom,³⁰ (3) LPI participants as our teachers and partners in the learning³¹; and (4) research as spiritual and theological in character.³²

The telos, or end and purpose of the research, is to participate in the very life of God and to share learning about how ministers cultivate a capacity for pastoral imagination that embodies wise, relational, and meaningful leadership. Acknowledging the irreducibility of the people and situations we study in the LPI Project, we aim to increase the collective knowledge about what ministry is and how it is practiced and learned over time. Using articulation and the power of narratives, we aim to make accessible and public a more comprehensive understanding of pastoral imagination as the capacity that animates ministry and how it instantiates itself in a wide variety of complex ministry situations. We also aim to engage our colleagues in theological education in an exercise of backward design, inviting them to imagine their classroom pedagogies from the perspective of how people actually learn ministry in practice when immersed in a rapidly changing world.³³

REVIEWING OUR FINDINGS FROM THE FIRST TEN YEARS

Given the intention for this research to be longitudinal in character, we certainly could not wait till the study's end to articulate what we learned. Rather, we took the opposite tack, trying from the start to transcribe, code, and analyze the interviews. We were helped by the fact that early on, in addition to recruiting the initial cohort of seminarians, we also gathered five groups of senior ministers who were between fifteen and twenty-five years out from seminary graduation.³⁴ Our goal in doing senior

minister interviews up front was to short-cut the whole process of learning over time and see if we could discern what the end of learning pastoral imagination looked like. Listening to experienced ministers and recognizing the wisdom in their perception and action in ministry situations served to fine-tune our listening to beginning ministers as we sought out the evidence of nascent pastoral imagination.

Our sample—both of the cohort of fifty who were finishing seminary and of the twenty-five senior ministers—was as diverse as we could manage. They were from all regions of the country, representing the swath of church traditions from Orthodox and Roman Catholic to Evangelical and Pentecostal, and they included male, female, queer, every major racial/ethnic category, ages from the early twenties to sixties, and a wide variety of ministry goals of ordained clergy.³⁵ A core question for us was, given all the vectors of difference, would the learning trajectories look dramatically different? Would they be so different that we would be reduced to saying, “Well, pastoral imagination, like faith, is a ‘thing not seen’” (Hebrews 11:1)?

We found that despite the diversity there is remarkable similarity in the key learning moments participants experienced over time. As an example, one common moment is when the person realizes they are not only being seen by another as a minister but are expected to offer ministry to that person. Eve helped a family through the death of their husband/father while completing her required clinical pastoral education experience. Just as she was praying with the family over the man, he died, a concrete experience in which she realized, “Holy cow! This stuff is real.”³⁶ In this moment, all the book learning and practice comes together into a felt identity: *I’m the minister here; I’m doing ministry!*

As we listened to stories, and especially in the first round of interviews with seminarians, which were basically life interviews, we found that learning ministry parallels learning in many other areas. It was common, in fact, to hear of the transferability of experiences from other fields into the work of ministry. Trong worked

for years as a bookstore manager and worked hard to build a positive culture among his staff so they, in turn, would create a warm and welcoming experience for customers. As he moved into ministry, he brought a sophistication to congregational leadership exactly because of the homologous skills. While this may be unsurprising, we learned that it was rare that seminaries took seriously the various ways the life experience students brought to their ministry contributed to their ministerial competence.³⁷

By the time we gathered for interviews five years after graduation, we noticed a change across the board: the participants had a kind of gravitas as they spoke out of their ministry experience. We felt it in general, in their personal bearing as people, but we heard it in specific stories as well. Of course, there were still variations, but it was typical to hear early stories full of anxiety and self-consciousness. One new minister we interviewed, Malinda, recalled a Holy Week service gone wrong, and she fixated on the specific aspects of her actions that went awry. New learners can beat themselves up like this, losing the forest for the trees. However, after time in the practice of ministry, a remarkable transformation happens from self-consciousness to an ability to see—and respond to—the room. We have called this developing a sense of salience, following nursing scholar Patricia Benner.³⁸ When just starting out, everything seems relevant and the crashing waves of information in a given situation all feel overwhelming. But over time, ministers develop a sense of what is crucial, the salient factors among all the elements unfolding in a moment. Ministry becomes its own particular spiritual practice that embodies pastoral imagination.³⁹

Yet, sadly, even such wisdom as it develops over time does not protect ministers from what we have come to call “brick walls.” The most obvious form of this is the myriad of ways women face particular challenges. More men told stories of a senior minister who put an encouraging hand on their shoulder and said, “I think you should consider ministry.” Instead, women told us about unsupportive senior (male) colleagues and congregants commenting on their appearance, or, in some cases,

pregnancies, and other reasons they did not receive respect and authority in their roles. Queer ministers told us about the challenge of finding a meaningful call. And the Black and Brown ministers in the study experienced both explicit and implicit bias that took emotional and physical labor to address, often disrupting both ministry and learning.

As we met for the second, third, and fourth interviews, it became abundantly clear that the research project was more than a research project. It required that we, as researchers, embody wise pastoral practice with and for the participants as they navigated in some cases very challenging experiences. The group interviews started with five students recruited from each of ten distinct seminaries, so often they knew each other from the start. Yet over time, the shared space of storytelling, gentle listening, and reflection opened a space for deeper trust, vulnerability, and care.⁴⁰ Tears were not at all uncommon as people shared stories of their lives and ministries, their trials and failures, and their hard-won growth. We came to describe interviews drawing on the Exodus 3: 1–5 story of Moses meeting God in the burning bush and being told to take off his sandals for he was standing on holy ground. Each time we gather with these ministers, hearing their stories, and sharing in their lives, we stand on holy ground.⁴¹

PREVIEWING OUR FINDINGS AT THE TEN-YEAR MARK

In the ten-year round of interviewing, we only met with one group of five participants in person prior to COVID-19 being declared a global pandemic. The remaining interviews at the ten-year stage of the project were conducted on Zoom in small groups or individual conversations. Thus, it will be impossible to talk about the changes in learning and growth we have observed without acknowledging the massive changes to church life and chaplaincy in the new era of ministry since March 2020.⁴² The following five observations point to key shifts we are encountering in the ministers in our study after their ten years in practice.

1. *We are observing the shift from competency to proficiency in pastoral practice.* When we meet with pastors and ministers in the study, we see people who have aged ten years, maturing in their bodies and their pastoral presence and habits. We often detect a kind of calm and grounded energy that was far less in evidence when they were seminary students. Notable exceptions include pastors like James, who came to seminary while working as a bivocational pastor in an African Methodist Episcopal church. Seminary became an occasion for integration of knowledge and practice. He was able to leverage his learning into powerful ways of changing his community.⁴³

A decade out of seminary, we hear stories and questions with a different level of complexity and nuance about the work of ministry, and there are many shifts regarding which issues are foregrounded and backgrounded. For example, when we met Mary in 2009, she was wondering aloud about how to dress, socialize, and date when she joined a pastoral staff. She and her peers had an honest and nuanced conversation around her question, “What ways am I going to have to change who I am in order to fill this role?” Now Mary is a senior pastor, married, and she asks increasingly complex questions about her church’s place in the world; however, she reminds us that she also still wrestles with questions about performance and boundaries. This shift in emphasis is characteristic of learning that moves beyond novice and beginner questions and also beyond achievements of competency.

Many ministers at the 10-year mark demonstrated an important third shift to proficiency of practice. Their attention to concerns about their own ability or performance, which are completely natural at the early stages of learning, shifted to the background without going away entirely. Instead, interview responses foreground the ministry situation itself, raising difficult, perennial, and complex questions and asking how they need pastoral attention. Some of those dilemmas

are unresolvable, yet ministers at this stage of learning and practice are willing to take a risk and responsibility for their actions even when no simple solution is available.

2. We are learning what 'change over time' in ministry looks like phenomenologically.

On interview days, we begin by reconnecting informally, making sure consent forms are complete, and then we move into speaking and listening guidelines for our time together. After prayer and silent meditation, we invite ministers to bring us up to date on changes in their work and other aspects of their lives since we were last together. We learn about job changes, births and deaths, relationship break-ups, encounters with illness or grief, and vocational shifts. Occasionally, we hear of big surprises and major changes in life direction.⁴⁴

Following life and ministry updates, we ask our study participants to talk us through a particular practice of ministry and how it has changed since they began their work. They tell us about preaching and leading, giving pastoral care and supervision, how they manage conflict and plan complex projects. For instance, when we met Monica in 2010, she told us she felt very unsure about how to take the path to become a chaplain. Her pastoral theology professor assigned her to visit a hospice facility and practice listening skills for one hour a week. When she started it felt “superficial and a little bit awkward,” although it turned out to be transformative.⁴⁵ A decade later, Monica is a senior chaplain, a CPE educator, and mentor to ministry students. She told us she knows so much more about listening now. “I need to listen for understanding, be curious, and have unconditional regard for the person. I must set aside my assumptions and refrain from judging people. What I have learned is that there is healing and meaning when someone deeply listens to us.” Vignettes like

Monica's are proving extraordinarily useful in showing us how pastoral imagination *changes and grows over time*.

3. *We are witnessing how ministers overcome the problems of marginalization, power differentials, and theological exclusions with resilience*. In making these moves they demonstrate capacities for powerful and effective pastoral imagination. For example, Naomi lamented the lack of welcome in churches of her Mennonite denomination in 2009, but in 2020 she was serving her Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregation with a calm delight even in the face of the pandemic and political challenges to her social location. However, we also see how patterns of discrimination and marginalization repeat themselves, particularly where theologies do not clear a path for enfranchisement, where parenting while pastoring is still not valued, and where church and denominational systems remain ensnared in oppressive and harmful structures. Mothers raising children at home continue to face added layers of complexity and brick walls in their pathways.⁴⁶

4. *We have a front row seat on how unprecedented changes in the multiple pandemics since 2020 are constituting a new era of ministry*. We are witnessing how changes such as the enduring character of hybrid worship and ministry, extensive losses and grief, and massive shifts in ministry employment and theological education are reshaping ministry as a practice. These changes pushed chaplains and pastors in our study to adaptive moments where no simple solutions were available and a new range of challenges seemed to arise every few days, weeks, or months. In this new era of ministry, we are witnessing ongoing concerns of grief, burnout, and decline, as well as powerful moments of resilience and encounters with God's grace.⁴⁷

5. We conducted a survey using questions particularly focused on experiences of the multiple pandemics and learned more about concern levels, grief and desolation, surprise and delight, challenges of the new era of ministry brought on by the pandemics, and how ministers are caring for their own well-being. The following summary of recommendations in the #PandemicPastoring Report urges ministers to embrace and improvise ministry in the new era:

- Bring together ancient wisdom of your tradition and a willingness to improvise, take risks, and make new partnerships.
- Tend to your soul with spiritual practices, patience, and grace.
- Acknowledge and honor grief, making use of ritual, the power of naming, worship, teaching, creative space-making, and conversation.
- Put learning at the heart of ministry as an embodied, relational, spiritual, and integrated practice.
- Look for grace; notice what is life-giving in your location, and put your love and energy into those places.⁴⁸

¹ Eileen Campbell-Reed, *Anatomy of a Schism: How Clergywomen's Narratives Reinterpret the Fracturing of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2016).

² Christian Scharen, *Public Worship, Public Work: Character and Commitment in Local Congregational Life* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2004).

³ Dorothy Bass, ed., *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997).

⁴ Miroslav Volf and Dorothy Bass, eds., *Practicing Our Faith: Belief and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

⁵ Christian Scharen, "Learning Ministry over Time: Embodying Practical Wisdom," in Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, eds., *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 265–89.

⁶ Charles Foster, Lisa E. Dahill, Lawrence A. Golemon, and Barbara Wang Tolentino, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005). Chuck served on the initial advisory team for the LPI Project.

⁷ Craig Dykstra, "Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination," in Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, eds., *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2008), 41–61.

⁸ Dorothy C. Bass, Kathleen A. Cahalan, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, James R. Nieman, and Christian B. Scharen, *Christian Practical Wisdom: What It Is, Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

⁹ We follow Kathleen Cahalan here, who in her book *Introducing the Practice of Ministry* expands pastoral imagination in relation to phronesis and the gifts of the Holy Spirit undergirding the wise practice of ministry. Kathleen Cahalan, *Introducing the Practice of Ministry* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2010), 140–42.

¹⁰ George E. Vaillant, *Adaptation to Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977); George E. Vaillant, *Triumphs of Experience: The Men of the Harvard Grant Study* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2012).

¹¹ Hubert L. Dreyfus and Stuart E. Dreyfus, *A Five-Stage Model of the Mental Activities Involved in Directed Skill Acquisition*, Research Report of the Operations Research Center, University of California Berkeley, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA084551.pdf>, expanded in *Mind Over Machine: The Power of Human Intuition and Expertise in the Era of the Computer* (New York: Free Press, 1986).

¹² Hubert L. Dreyfus, "A Phenomenology of Skill Acquisition as the Basis for a Merleau-Pontian Non-Representationalist Cognitive Science," <https://philarchive.org/archive/DREAPO>.

¹³ Patricia Benner, *From Novice to Expert: Excellence and Power in Clinical Nursing Practice* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1984). Patricia served on the initial advisory team for the LPI Project.

¹⁴ Nell Morton, *The Journey is Home* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985); Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Press, 2009).

¹⁵ Thanks to Tom Beaudoin and Edward Foley who helped us arrive at this insight. The history of ministry and how it has been understood, taught, and studied is a much larger topic than this brief article can contain. See also Christian Scharen and Eileen Campbell-Reed, "The Learning Pastoral Imagination Project: A Five-Year Report on How New Ministers Learn in Practice," *Auburn Studies* 21 (Winter 2016): 6–8.

¹⁶ For example, see an overview of the Council of Trent (1545–1563), which reassessed the Catholic priesthood in the wake of Reformation, in Kenan B. Osborne, *Priesthood: A History of Ordained Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 248–79. For a Protestant theological treatment, see Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study: Revised Translation of the 1811 and 1830 Editions*, translation, essays, and notes by Terrence N. Tice, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011). Early Baptist historian and pastor Morgan Edwards published *The Customs of Primitive Churches* (Philadelphia: n.p., 1768), listing duties and responsibilities of Baptist pastors, deacons, deaconesses, and other church leaders. The *United Methodist Book of Discipline* first appeared under the title "Minutes of Several Conversations Between The Rev. Thomas Coke, The Rev. Francis Asbury and Others . . . Composing a Form of Discipline for the Ministers, Preachers and other Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America." It was adopted at the Christmas Conference of 1784, and it has been revised every four years to the present. It includes descriptions of the work of ministry, roles of laity and pastors, sacraments, salaries, and spiritual practices.

¹⁷ For example, see Boston King, "Memoirs of the Life of Boston King, a Black Preacher, Written by Himself, during His Residence at Kingswood-School," *Methodist Magazine* (London: March–June 1798); Sojourner Truth and Olive Gilbert, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth, a Northern Slave, Emancipated from Bodily Servitude by the State of New York, in 1828*; Evan Pugh, *The Diaries of Evan Pugh (1762–1801)*, transcribed by Horace Fraser Rudisill (Florence, SC: Saint David's Society). From 1520 to 1574, English country priest Sir Christopher Trychay kept a diary of his small parish and its transitions through the English Reformation; see Eamon Duffy, *The Voices of Morebath* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

¹⁸ For example, see Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. W. D. Robson-Scott (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957). One year after Freud's book was first published, in 1928, Freud's friend, Swiss pastor and trained psychoanalyst Oskar Pfister responded with "The Illusion of a Future: A Friendly Disagreement with Prof. Sigmund Freud," ed. Paul Roazen, *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* (1993) 74: 557–79. See also Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons and Anthony Giddens (London: Unwin Hyman, 1930. Later, Weber published *Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963).

¹⁹ Several studies of ministers and theological schools led to the formation of the Association of Theological Schools. See William A. Daniel, *The Education of Negro Ministers* (New York: Doran, 1925); William Adams Brown and Mark A. May, *The Education of American Ministers*, 4 vols. (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1934).

²⁰ See Eileen Campbell-Reed, *Pastoral Imagination: Bringing the Practice of Ministry to Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021), 5–7.

²¹ The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University was founded in 1964, and Hartford Institute was founded in 1974 and formalized in 1981.

²² Johannes van der Ven, *Entwurf einer empirischen Theologie*, *Theologie en Empirie* 10 (J. H. Kok-Kampen / Deutscher Studien Verlag-Weinheim, 1990. For an English version, see Johannes van der Ven *Practical Theology: An Empirical Approach*, trans. Barbara Schultz, Kampen (The Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1993), vii. See also Hans-Günter Heimbrock, "Emirische Hermeneutik in der Praktischen Theologie," in Johannes van der Ven and Hans-Georg Ziebertz, eds. *Paradigmenentwicklung in der Praktischen Theologie* (Weinheim: Deutscher Studien-Verlag, 1984), 49–69.

²³ Eileen Campbell-Reed and Christian Scharen, "Ethnography on Holy Ground: How Qualitative Interviewing Is Practical Theological Work," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 17, no. 2 (2013): 232–59. Now a decade later, our critiques of Browning and others may also be seen as pointing out an evolution of a new kind of inquiry in the field of practical theology that was in its beginning stages. The new theological ethnography was preoccupied with following rules borrowed from other disciplines and was not yet fully integrative. This mirrors the process of learning any complex practice. The field itself must begin somewhere, and following rules does not often lead to substantial integration or wisdom but is nevertheless necessary in the beginning.

²⁴ As noted, our theological conversation partners have included Craig Dykstra, Charles Foster, Patricia Benner, David Wood, and the Collegeville group (Kathleen Cahalan, Dorothy Bass, Bonnie Miller-McLemore, and Jim Neiman). We've also engaged with British theologians David Ford, Paul Fiddes, Elaine Graham, and Pete Ward and in the American context with books and

articles about ministry by Christy Neuger, Dan Aleshire, Emilie Townes, Stacey Floyd-Thomas, Patrick Reyes, Jaco Hamman, Bruce Epperly, and Jeffrey Tribble, among others.

²⁵ Jennifer Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002).

²⁶ Campbell-Reed and Scharen, "Ethnography on Holy Ground," 257–58.

²⁷ Nursing scholar Patricia Benner gave us a simple but elegant example of the particular universal knowledge that comes from following something—a starfish—over time. We learn more from following the full lifecycle of one starfish than from knowing how many are in the ocean or any statistical data about the creature. Learn more about Benner's work at her website Educating Nurses: <https://www.educatingnurses.com/>.

²⁸ Campbell-Reed, *Pastoral Imagination*, 158-62. Patricia E. Benner et al., *Educating Nurses: A Call for Radical Transformation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 42.

²⁹ Christian Scharen and Aana Vigen, *Ethnography as Theology and Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed. (New York: T and T Clark, 2023).

³⁰ Ted A. Smith, "Theories of Practice," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 244–54.

³¹ Eileen Campbell-Reed, "Reflexivity: A Relational and Prophetic Practice," in *What Really Matters: Scandinavian Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. J. Ideström and T. S. Kaufman (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018), 77–98.

³² Campbell-Reed and Scharen, "Ethnography on Holy Ground," 244–50.

³³ Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, #*PandemicPastoring Report*, 2022, <https://pandemicpastoring.org>; see also Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, "New Era of Ministry Calls for Theological Educators to Ask New Questions," *ATS Colloquy Online*, <https://www.ats.edu/files/galleries/new-era-of-ministry.pdf>.

³⁴ Eileen Campbell-Reed and Christian Scharen, "The Unfolding of Pastoral Imagination: Prudence as Key to Learning Ministry," *Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry* 32 (2012): 71–86.

³⁵ Study participants included in this essay identify as white, African American, or Vietnamese American. They are from denominations including Roman Catholic, African Methodist Episcopal, Baptist, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and Mennonite; when the study began, they ranged in age from 24 to 53, and currently they are aged 37 to 66. All names are changed to preserve anonymity.

³⁶ Eileen Campbell-Reed and Christian Scharen, "'Holy cow! This stuff is real!' From Imagining Ministry to Pastoral Imagination," *Teaching Theology and Religion* (2011): 323–42.

³⁷ Scharen and Campbell-Reed, "LPI Five-Year Report," 34-36.

³⁸ Benner, *Educating Nurses*, 109–20.

³⁹ Eileen Campbell-Reed and Christian Scharen, "Ministry as Spiritual Practice: How Pastors Learn to See and Respond to the 'More' of a Situation," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 12, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 125–44.

⁴⁰ Campbell-Reed and Scharen, "Ethnography on Holy Ground," 255–58.

⁴¹ Scharen and Campbell-Reed, "LPI Five-Year Report," 11.

⁴² Campbell-Reed, #*PandemicPastoring Report*, 11-21.

⁴³ Christian Scharen, "Interviewing Interpreted as Spiritual Exercise and Social Protest," *Ecclesial Practices* 4, no. 2 (2017): 218–36. See also Campbell-Reed, "Transforming Injustice," in *Pastoral Imagination*, 105–09.

⁴⁴ We also receive regular life and vocation updates through email and phone contact.

⁴⁵ Campbell-Reed, "Aha Moments," in *Pastoral Imagination*, 84-87.

⁴⁶ Campbell-Reed, #*PandemicPastoring Report*, 20.

⁴⁷ Campbell-Reed, #*PandemicPastoring Report*, 4-7.

⁴⁸ Campbell-Reed, #*PandemicPastoring Report*, 27.