

*Study
Guide*

for the
#PandemicPastoring Report

by **Erin Robinson Hall**
in collaboration with Eileen Campbell-Reed

3MMM.US/PPR-STUDYGUIDE

INTRODUCTION

“There were no mentors, no playbooks, and no one further along the path. Every decision was new and complicated. I believe it’s crucial for people who care about the church to understand these complex challenges, personal and communal grief, as well as resilience and grace that went into leading churches through multiple pandemics.” ~Eileen Campbell-Reed

Officials declared Covid-19 a pandemic in March 2020. And everything changed. We hoped it would only last a few weeks... and then a few months.... and then maybe we would be out of the woods in a year? We are not entirely out of the woods. Just look around. A lot has changed. In fact, it feels like we are in a whole new country, a new era of ministry, shaped not only by Covid-19, but also by multiple pandemics. We face unprecedented challenges and a call to renew our communities of faith.

As your faith community continues on the ancient and ever-evolving journey of being the people of God, you will need to understand the new terrain and adapt accordingly. You are their leader. Whether you are paid or volunteer, newly ordained or seasoned and wise, this study guide is in your hands because you are ready to help your faith community become its best self, attentive to the Holy Spirit, and moving with the intention and deliberation into a future that is yet unknown. This study invites you to remember and to imagine. It is filled with provocative questions designed to open up meaningful conversations about how to move forward.

This new era has many features. Surely the ways that your faith community or ministry site navigated the demands and changes since March

2020 are unique. Yet, I think you will find deep resonance with many communities and ministers presented in the study. I am grateful to Erin Robinson Hall for writing this Study Guide and for the Three Minute Ministry Mentor team for contributing to many aspects of its production! We hope this material will support you as you lead your congregation or faith group into the new era with grace, confidence, humility, and authenticity.

Eileen Campbell-Reed
Easter 2023



OVERVIEW AND PREPARATION

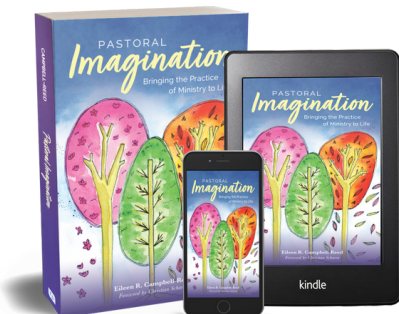
To prepare for leading three sessions with your community of faith, we invite you to read the

#PandemicPastoring Report (PPR).

This private direct link to the 30–page report summarizes the findings of two–plus years of research. The PPR details what we learned from surveying and interviewing over 100 lay leaders and clergy about their experiences.

The PPR is supported by findings from the **Learning Pastoral Imagination Project (LPI)**, a national, ecumenical, and longitudinal study of ministry begun in 2009 and co–directed by Eileen Campbell–Reed and Chris Scharen. Their knowledge of relational, embodied, and integrated practices of ministry is grounded in years of ethnographic research.

The LPI study stands as the backdrop to the entire PPR. To learn more about how ministry is learned across time and in practice, explore the book, ***Pastoral Imagination: Bringing the Practice of Ministry to Life.***



Each session includes five moves

- **Before the Session** provides a short list of items to gather and prepare, things to read and be familiar with, and links for the session videos and/or handouts.
- **Begin** will give you the instructions for how to start your session and get the conversation going about the topic.
- **Explore** will take you into the heart of the lesson, including a variety of engaging activities such as a fishbowl conversation, watching videos, writing prayers, and exchanging permission cards.
- **Expand.** Do you want to take these ideas deeper? Broader? See where it all leads? This section will help you explore more and lead you to additional resources.
- **Reflect and Respond** will help you to wrap up the session and give you something to take with you as you go.
- **Ask.** In many of the sections you'll find words such as Ask, Consider, Share, Invite, etc. These signposts help you keep the lesson moving, and they suggest open–ended questions to foster meaningful conversations.

The buttons below take you to seven videos and presentation slides for the Study Guide.

» Video Collection

» Slide Deck

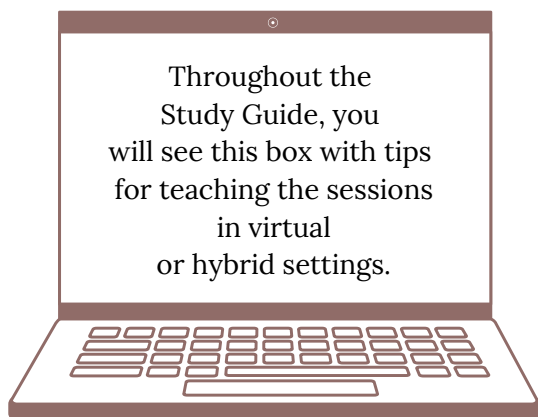
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A FEW TEACHING TIPS AS YOU BEGIN

- Be prepared with knowledge of the #PandemicPastoring Report, Study Guide, and the technological and physical materials needed for each session.
- Be yourself and strike a balance between sharing your thoughts and prioritizing space for learners to share theirs.
- Be a good listener with your learners and ask open ended questions that allow for meaningful conversation.
- Be comfortable with silence, because sometimes people are gathering their thoughts; and be ready (but don't rush in) to restate your question.
- Be open to changing directions if you sense the group needs to go another way.
- Be ready for uncomfortable feelings or differences of opinion to arise.
- Be thinking of your role as guiding rather than controlling the conversation.
- Be aware that some people may be coping with loss, grief, past (or present) trauma, and/or other mental distress.



SESSION 1

FINDING OUR WAY

Before the Session

- Familiarize yourself with some background. Read the 30-page **#PandemicPastoring Report (PPR)**, which was created from qualitative research and data collected by Dr. Eileen Campbell-Reed from 2020–2022. When you read the report, reflect on what was happening in your own church or community during this season. Watch the **#PandemicPastoring webinar (75 min)**. What are some notable changes you experienced that may be in your group’s thoughts during this study? Consider ways you might name and attend to those key changes.

- Know that Eileen’s research followed a pattern of Ignatian questions known as the Examen, which tests the spirit of a time, place, or situation. The PPR asked questions about challenge, change, surprise and delight, grief and desolation, self-care and well-being, and forms of support. **Learn more about the Examen here.**

- Share the download link to the PPR with members of your group. Invite them to read it before you gather. **pandemicpastoring.org**

- Print copies or prepare to show the cover of the PPR with projection or copies to hand around. **[Link to PPR Visual Slides.](#)**

- Prepare to show clips from the video of the PPR Webinar on your computer or projected in the classroom. All clips are part of the:

#PandemicPastoring Video Collection

- For this session cue up these VIDEOS:



**“Embodied Knowing”
with Eileen Campbell-Reed**



**“Responding to Crisis” with
Bishop Teresa Jefferson-Snorton**

- Watch the recommended video clips and prepare your equipment to show learners.

- Gather enough green, yellow, and red colored pencils/crayons/markers for each participant.

- Gather markers or chalk and a board for listing shared insights.

- Make copies of **Handout 1 “10 Significant Findings”** for each participant.

- Copy and cut apart enough of **Handout 2 “A Prayer for Finding Our Way”** for each participant.

SESSION 1

FINDING OUR WAY



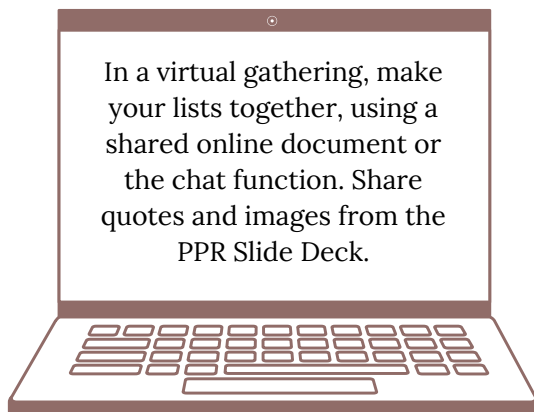
Begin

Show your group the images on the cover of the PPR (printed copies or a projected image). Each image on the cover represents experiences of ministry that emerged in the study.

Ask: Which one of these images resonates deeply with your experience of church and ministry during the Covid-19 pandemic? What is a feeling word (anger, delight, despair, sadness, etc.) that you would use to describe these images?

Give 2-3 minutes for participants to respond with their word. Then, read the quote (right) from the Pastoral Letter in the PPR from author Eileen Campbell-Reed.

Ask: How can we hold a posture of learning as we explore this report? Create a list of three ways your group can hold a posture of learning during your time together. Write your list on a board for the group to hold in mind through the sessions.



From the Pastoral Letter

“Nearly every leader I spoke with since March of 2020, understands that our expectations for church, and ministry broadly understood, need to be reimagined, and our expectations reset. While churches and other religious communities remain among the most stable and lasting human endeavors, we are living in an unprecedented new era of ministry. We can continue to be the church, to love God and our neighbors, to work toward liberation and justice, and to learn from our experiences. At their heart, the most engaged and empowering churches and ministers are places and people who embrace an ongoing process of learning.”

~Eileen Campbell-Reed

SESSION 1

FINDING OUR WAY



Explore

Offer this idea to your group: We are traveling through life in this Pandemic. What we knew as “normal” changed. Some say there is a “new normal.” Some don’t like that idea. Whatever your thoughts are on “normal,” we clearly need to find a new way. Ask big questions. Tell new future stories. Imagine we encounter road signals as we travel forward in our understanding. Sometimes we need to yield and proceed with caution. Other times we need to stop, move forward, or speed up our pace.

Distribute the copies of **Handout 1 “10 Significant Findings”** to participants.

Say: Eileen Campbell-Reed offered this list to highlight findings in the #PandemicPastoring Report. Invite your group to take turns reading aloud each summary paragraph.

To gauge the group’s feelings, invite participants to use the green, red, and yellow pencils, markers, or crayons to mark each finding on their own page.

Instructions:

- For the findings that stop you in your tracks, or cause you to feel like you cannot move forward, circle them in red.
- For the findings that make you curious, or invite you to slow down and give more consideration, circle those in yellow.
- For the findings that feel like a call to move forward, or to go boldly into the future, circle those in green.

Take the ideas deeper. After reading through each finding, invite participants to consider which findings they identified in red, yellow, or green. Allow time for completing these assessments.

Say: For the findings that are red, jot down a question you have about that idea. When we are stopped or stuck, shifting our response to curiosity can dissolve our defensiveness and unclench our resistance to what is in front of us. Consider offering those jotted down questions to God, as a prayer.

SESSION 1

FINDING OUR WAY



Explore (cont.)

Say: For the findings that are yellow, jot down a person or group that can tell you more.

When we are curious and learning more, we may tend to be quick with answers and responses we generate. We may listen to the loudest or most immediate voices. Consider slowing down. Who else can offer a story about what you are wondering? Who are the marginalized voices that you could invite into your learning?

Say: For the findings that are green, jot down the name of someone you might bring along as you move forward. When moving ahead or going boldly, we must remember we are called to be in community. For whom might it be difficult to move forward? Who in your community might need the embrace of friendship and the invitation to come alongside you as you move into this next journey? Who might need the community to slow down or pause?

Discuss:

1. When “normal” church life changed in 2020, lay leader and clergy expectations changed, too. One important thing Eileen learned in her

research is that different groups had different experiences with church work during the pandemic. For example, clergy and laity experienced self-care and spiritual well-being very differently during the months of pandemic. Read page 8 of the PPR with your group.

Notice: Lay leaders reported that they experienced self-care and spiritual well-being through “Bible study, committee meetings, and church activities.” How many clergy described the work of church *as self-care*? (zero)

Ask: What can this finding tell us about what our minister(s) and lay leaders felt in the past or might be experiencing now in their work? Brainstorm ways to complete this sentence: “[Name], we celebrate that your spiritual well-being is strengthened by _____.”

Challenge the group to learn more through conversation with your leaders. What strengthens the ministers and lay leaders in your setting? Consider sending notes, texts, or emails to encourage your pastors and lay leaders.

SESSION 1

FINDING OUR WAY



Explore (cont.)

2. Consider the “normal” ways we were present with each other before March of 2020. Show the video clip of Eileen explaining the loss of embodied knowing.

» “Embodied Knowing” with Eileen Campbell-Reed

She says, “We can learn to be present here in ways that are powerful.” Virtual space is a new platform for spiritual practices.

Ask: What virtual platforms do we utilize in our church now? (YouTube, Zoom, Facebook, Instagram Live, TikTok, etc.) How do we cultivate the new virtual platforms of church life in faithful and spiritually wise ways?

3. It is common with grief to feel a desire for “going back to normal” or having things the way they were before. What is the “normal” that your congregation or group longs for and laments? Watch the video clip featuring Bishop Teresa Jefferson-Snorton describing the adjustments that pastors and lay leaders made in the first year of crisis in the Covid-19 pandemic.

» “Responding to Crisis” with Bishop Teresa Jefferson-Snorton

We were unprepared for the longevity of the crisis, says the Bishop. So, we needed to create responses in the moment.

Create a list of experiences that Bishop Jefferson-Snorton observed in pastors. What unexpected things did they encounter? (overwhelm, exhaustion, burnout, and grief)

Create second list of responses that the Bishop did to support pastors and congregations.

- a) focus on working smarter not harder
- b) collaborate and share ministry
- c) make a plan for self-care
- d) permission to grieve

Ask: What do we need to give ourselves permission to do, to grieve, to not do, in this new era of ministry? Even three-plus years later how might we embrace Bishop Jefferson-Snorton’s wisdom for ministry in this moment?

SESSION 1

FINDING OUR WAY



Expand

If you wish to expand this conversation about *finding our way* further, consider exploring these blogs, podcasts, interviews, and videos.

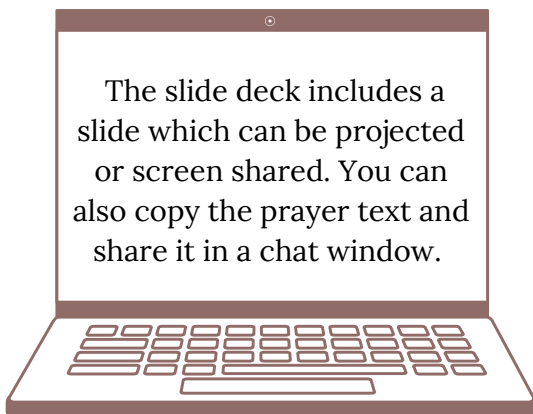
» “Cultivating Questions” video with Eileen Campbell-Reed

» “Self Care in Community” interview with Stephanie Crumpton

» “Hope and Curiosity” podcast with Eric Barreto

Reflect and Respond

Distribute copies of Handout 2 “A Prayer for Finding Our Way” and invite the group to create prayers. Then close with a time of shared prayer.



A Prayer for Finding Our Way

God, when I think of “normal” life before 2020, I miss these ways of being a community of faith:

_____.

I am thinking of times when I felt ...

_____.

I long for and feel grief over the loss of...

_____.

I know you are a God who is present in all things, including, _____

_____.

Help us, God, to find new ways to...

_____.

Strengthen us to seek _____ and find _____. Amen.

Close by inviting participants to voice the prayers aloud in the group.

SESSION 2

BEARING WITNESS

Before the Session

- Write the words “Bearing Witness” on a board/ large sheet of paper, or project the slide.
- Print and cut apart as needed:
 1. The paragraphs for each pastor and lay leader identity to read ([Handout #3](#))
 2. Name tags for each reader ([Handout #4](#))
 3. Recommendations ([Handout #5](#))
- Before the session (or when you gather) recruit volunteers to read each part for the “Bearing Witness” activity.
- Be ready to arrange chairs into two circles (one inner and one outer) for the “fishbowl” conversation.
- Gather paper and pens for group members.

Leading sessions on Zoom?

Create a “fishbowl” by spotlighting each speaker. Ask them to “rename” themselves with the minister /lay leader name.

- For this session cue up these VIDEOS:

» Sarah McClelland-Brown’s Story

» Timothy Peoples’ Story

Begin

Invite the group members to consider what “bearing witness” means in Christian community. Develop a definition for your group.

Consider this working definition: Bearing witness means staying present to listen and receive the experience of another person.

Ask: In what ways is bearing witness a significant Christian practice? What does this practice do to build kinship in a beloved community? Invite participants to share their responses.

Explore

In the PPR, Eileen states that “*We cannot move fully into a new era of ministry without concurrently attending to our grief over what we lost and for all that is passing away*” (PPR, page 26). Invite the group to bear witness to the experiences of grief and loss in the PPR.

SESSION 2

BEARING WITNESS



Explore (cont.)

Each identity name tag represents a group of people from the PPR who responded in the research. Distribute the eight name tags with identities, and invite each reader to sit in the inner circle of chairs facing each other. Invite the rest of the group to gather in chairs around the inside circle, holding a posture of listening and bearing witness to their stories.

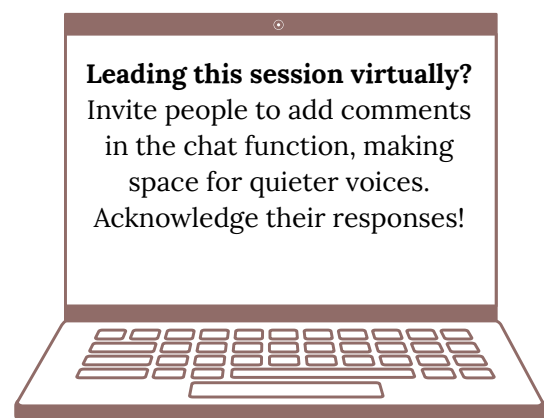
Say: We are going to listen and embody the ways we want to receive these stories in a “fishbowl” conversation. Each person in the circle will share a first-person story from a participant in the PPR research. They will be imagining what it was like for that person to live through 2020 and 2021. If you are sitting in the outside circle, please hold your hands open, palms up, and listen as if you are receiving a gift from these people. When the person finishes their story, we will say together: “What do you want us to know?” Then we will listen.

Ask each person read their paragraph aloud. The group will respond, together, “What do you want us to know?” Challenge the reader to use their best insight and answer that question, briefly in a sentence. Something like, “I want you to know that I am still grieving this loss.” Go around the circle to let each participant read their story and

share a response to the question “what do you want us to know?”

After hearing from all the readers, invite people observing from the outside of the fishbowl to identify what they noticed. Do this in two rounds.

1. Start with feelings. What feelings came up when you listened to each story? You may have felt them in the room, or in the speaker, or in yourself.
2. What issues came up in the stories that ring a bell in your church or faith group? What stories sounded familiar? What concerns did you hear in the stories that are also lingering in your congregation over the last three years?



SESSION 2

BEARING WITNESS



Explore (cont.)

Lead a discussion about the following ideas.

Say: We may find it easy to forget the challenges we faced since March of 2020. Yet holding those stories and acknowledging our grief will help us move forward with greater energy and freedom. Jesus took time to grieve and weep over the loss of his friend Lazarus (John 11). We are allowed to feel and acknowledge our losses. Facing them with compassion is far more honest and loving than trying to simply forget or ignore what we experienced.

Watch two #PPR webinar featured stories. Each invites us to bear witness to the stories of pastors who experienced intense and overwhelming circumstances during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Video links:

» Sarah McClelland-Brown's Story

» Timothy Peoples' Story

Ask: In Rev. Sarah and Rev. Timothy's stories, how did a church community bear witness and acknowledge the grief that was present? Or where did they miss a chance to bear witness?

Read a quote from Eileen Campbell-Reed about "ambiguous loss" (see below).

"What shall we do with these losses that will not go away and that often do not even have a name? As Pauline Boss points out, the more we can acknowledge, address, and ritualize our ambiguous losses, the less negative effect they will have on us and the more we can build resilience for life. One gift that churches can offer into the malaise of grief is to take the simple steps of acknowledging and honoring that grief, make space for lament, engage the rituals of faith that have for centuries accompanied humanity in its losses and griefs."

~Eileen Campbell-Reed, #PandemicPastoring Report

SESSION 2

BEARING WITNESS



Ask: How does our congregation/group honor grief? How will we bear witness to the experiences of our lay and clergy leaders? Which rituals do we need to accompany loss and grief felt in our congregation and community?

Expand

If you wish to take this conversation about **bearing witness** deeper, consider expanding and exploring these blogs, interviews, and videos.



“Being Pulled Up Short” video
with Eileen Campbell-Reed



“Brick Walls” interview
with Angela Yarber



“Listening” story about
Nelle Morton

Reflect and Respond

Share “Recommendations” from the #Pandemic Pastoring Report (Handout #5). Focus attention on the “Recommendations for Churches.”

Invite participants to name a word or phrase that stands out to them in these recommendations. Ask them to identify any items that capture the need for more “bearing witness,” the theme of this session.

Close with prayer. Ask for God’s guidance to give you insight and courage to see what needs to be grieved, to notice what still needs loving attention, and to receive patience and grace for talking with one another.

Leading this session virtually?

Use the “screen sharing” option for videos so that everyone in your study group can view them at the same time.



SESSION 3

REVEALING HOPE

Before the Session

- Consider the word apocalyptic. Use the [Glossary](#) on page 21 and look up other meanings.
- Gather copies of recent bulletins/newsletters and pens (enough for the group). If you are leading the session virtually, gather digital copies to screen share.
- Preview the video clips and prepare to show them in today's session.



Jake Hall's
Story



"Future Stories"
with Eileen Campbell-Reed

Leading this session on Zoom?

Use the "shared whiteboard" or chat function for shared list making. Be sure to download and save your shared board.

- Print and cut apart copies of [Handout 6](#) "Questions for Renewal" for use by small groups.
- Be ready to share the "[Permission Slip](#)" Cards (shipped directly to you) for the final activity.
- Arrange to use a chalk or marker board, or large paper for making some lists together.

Begin

Invite the group think about a moment in the life of your church/group in the past year that signaled hope to you (a hymn, ritual of baptism, communion, any event).

Say: Imagine that we are creating a "photo album of hope." Where did you witness hope in the past year? What one photo would you include? Invite participants to share, a brief word or phrase, or an actual image from their smartphones, of moments they would include in the album.

Discuss: When we are seeking a picture of hope, we grasp for images that hold out hope. Sometimes, before we crop them, photos are revealing. Perhaps we can look attentively and take in the whole picture. The PPR describes many moments of grief and despair for churches

SESSION 3

REVEALING HOPE



Begin (cont.)

and leaders. Yet a resilient hope was also present.

Some scholars described the pandemic times as *apocalyptic*, similar to the way we understand the book of Revelation in the New Testament as an “apocalyptic” genre of literature. One definition of apocalyptic is the end of illusions, the uncovering of things, a revealing of meaning.

Explore

Say: The Covid-19 pandemic was apocalyptic in many ways. Some saw the disease itself as a plague. The catastrophic losses of human life and “disruption of everything” as one pastor called it, the ripple effects, and economic and political riffs, altogether felt cataclysmic at times. Many multiple pandemics of racial injustice, healthcare disparity, and widespread inequalities were revealed unmistakably during the long season that followed March of 2020. For some churches, the apocalyptic aspect of the Covid-19 pandemic also revealed underlying fissures and conflicts inside the congregation. Listen to Rev. Dr. Jake Hall share his experience.

Pastor Jake identifies a “crisis of identity” felt by many churches during the last three years. In what ways did your congregation or faith group experience an identity crisis? Discuss and name together some specific ways your church or group’s identity changed?

Share: Jake Hall spoke about proprioception, which means knowing where your body is in space and how it is moving. This touches on a big but hard-to-name loss. Consider what Eileen says about “embodied knowing” (PPR, page 22) Read the quote to your group:

“We are in a new era of ministry and we need to move our bodies and arrange our relationships and gather our communities in different and more complex ways.”

*~Eileen Campbell-Reed,
#PandemicPastoring Report*

Say: Moving into a new era can surely feel overwhelming. Imagine you could come up with one physical, bodily movement that would reassure and strengthen this congregation/group in the new era of ministry. What would that be? Bonus points if you show the move to the group. For example: opening your hand, sliding down the pew to make room, opening a door, holding out a communion cup, etc. Think with gestures, postures, and embodied knowing.



**Jake Hall’s
Story**

SESSION 3

REVEALING HOPE




Explore (cont.)

Consider this quote from the PPR (page 18) about the questions church consultant, Alice Mann offers for moving congregations toward a renewal of identity and purpose. Eileen summarizes Mann’s insights.

“Like all organizations, churches have a natural lifecycle. Congregations begin with a particular time and story and place. And when healthy enough, they grow and reach a pinnacle (often five to ten times the size of their original gathering) and then they plateau and eventually decline, which is all inevitable. However, at the point of decline, renewal and revitalization are possible. . . The dynamics of church life cycles were initially slowed then accelerated in many congregations since March 2020. Now the need for renewal is all too common. Vision for change cannot simply be the pastor’s best ideas, the community’s needs, the prerogative of the congregation, or even a biblical injunction. Learning to ask Mann’s questions in community and listening deeply to each other is crucial.”

Sort


the large group into smaller groups of two or three. Distribute “Questions for Renewal” (Handout #6) to each group. Ask them to ponder the quote and begin answering Mann’s questions.

 **Questions for Renewal**

1) Who are we (especially at a faith level)?

2) What are we here for?

3) Who is our neighbor?

Alice Mann, *Can Our Church Live?* 

Give small groups 10– 15 minutes for discussion. Call everyone back to the large group for sharing responses.

Mann’s questions for renewal move us from being stuck in a crisis of identity toward dreaming new dreams and creating new future stories.

SESSION 3

REVEALING HOPE



Explore (cont.)

Consider: “One of the effects of the multiple shifts – global pandemic, threat to human life, reduction of movement, depletion of social connections – was a serious dimming of future stories... This loss also impacted us on every level” (PPR, page 26). Developing new future stories is key for moving into a new era of ministry.

Here is what Eileen says about future stories in the video clip. ***“Now is the time to start asking the big questions and tell future stories again.”***

Watch this video together:



“Future Stories”
with Eileen Campbell-Reed

Ask: What are some of the big questions we need to be asking ourselves now? What future stories are we creating together? Write responses on a board or large paper so that the group can hold them in mind.

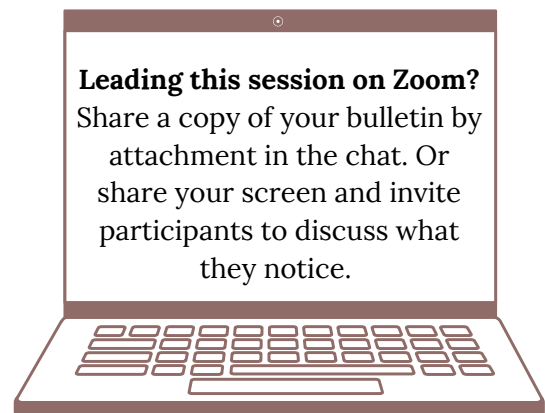
Ask: Who are our best tellers of future stories in this congregation/group? How can we invite them to tell hopeful future stories with us? What needs to be included in a future story from your perspective?

Consider what Eileen shares about hope (PPR, page 26): “Churches are repositories of hope when they are at their best... If we are to lean fully into being ministry leaders in a new era, then we need to make space for lamenting what is lost and then begin singing a new song and telling a new story filled with future possibilities for how to be the beloved community.”

Distribute copies of your church bulletin, order of worship, or newsletter. Look together and highlight as a group the following elements:

- lamenting what is lost
- leading in a new era
- telling a new story of hope

Ask: What stands out to you? What is missing?



SESSION 3

REVEALING HOPE



Explore (cont.)

Permission slips. Sometimes we need to give ourselves permission to do the small things in life that help us have the strength and energy to do the big things we are called to do. Recall how Bishop Jefferson-Snorton came alongside pastors and helped them with permission to grieve? To take time off? To focus on their own self-care and wellbeing?

Ask: Do you ever need to give yourself permission to do simple acts of care and compassion for yourself?

Distribute permission slips, giving one to each participant. Invite each person to open their envelope and imagine something concrete they would do with that permission (laugh, cry, read a book, go outside, take a break, pray, dream, say no, ask for help).

For example, where would you go outside? What book do you want to read next? What kind of help would you request? etc. Invite each person to stand and share their permission slip and specific action, and ask others to raise their hands if they too, would like to give themselves permission in that way.

Move: If you only have 10 cards and more people in your group, then invite 10 people to hold cards

and stand in different places around your gathering space and hold up their card. Ask each person to announce their permission. Invite all people in the group to move and stand near the permission they need most in this moment.

Encourage small group conversations about why they need that particular permission slip for themselves right now.



SESSION 3

REVEALING HOPE



Expand

If you wish to take this conversation about **revealing hope** deeper, consider expanding and exploring these blogs, interviews, and videos.



“Future Stories” blog
by Eileen Campbell-Reed



“Self Compassion” interview
with Joyce Ann Mercer



Pandemic Reflections
on “Spiritual Detachment”



“Permission to Grieve”
video, blog, and download

Reflect and Respond

To bring the study to a close, gather your group into a circle and invite them into a time of guided prayer. Describe how the survey and many of the questions asked in the #PandemicPastoring research were guided by spiritually oriented questions. We will use some of those questions to think back over our conversations and to guide our closing prayer.

Invite your group to begin by emptying their hands, sitting in a relaxed yet alert posture of prayer, breathing quietly, and focusing on how each breath sustains life.

Say: The following questions will guide us to recall insights from our time of study together. Each question will guide a conversation with God to recall what we considered in our three sessions... and over the last three years.

Ask the following questions to guide the prayer, allowing time for silent reflection after each question. (The prayer is also available on the slide deck.)

- What about our time together has brought you a sense of desolation or grief? [silence] *May God comfort and sustain you.*
- What about our time together has brought you consolation or joy? [silence] *May God enliven and inspire you.*
- What in our time has surprised you? [silence] *May God’s love surround and enfold you.*
- What is God calling you to do or be? [silence] *May God sustain and uphold you. Blessings and peace for your journey and our collective life together. Amyn.*

GLOSSARY

DEFINING TERMS



Terms used in the PPR Study Guide

- **ambiguous loss:** “a loss that remains unclear and without official verification or immediate resolution, which may never be achieved” (Boss, *The Myth of Closure*, 17).
- **apocalyptic:** “most scholars would now agree that an apocalypse is an imaginative response to a specific historical and social situation;” apocalyptic literature often aims to reveal something significant to its audience (Collins, “Apocalypse Now,” 2011).
- **Covid-19:** an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, first identified in 2019, and which spread rapidly, creating a global pandemic in 2020 (WHO, 2023).
- **disenfranchised grief:** an experience in which “others do not see the loss as credible and worthy of grief” (Boss, *The Myth of Closure*, 17).
- **embodied knowing:** awareness and knowledge, not limited to one’s mind; the practical wisdom, knowledge, and know-how that resides in human bodies through muscle memory, proprioception, kinesthesia, posture, gestures, and accumulated knowledge as intuition.
- **future stories:** one way to understand identity is with stories we tell to ourselves (and others) about ourselves; stories narrate both past experiences and future hopes, plans, and dreams; stories we tell ourselves about the future also fashion our self-understandings here and now (Lester, *Hope in Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 1995).
- **pastoral imagination:** short-hand for the adaptive, wise leadership capacity that excellent pastors exhibit; 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; an integrative, embodied, and relational capacity; makes use of multiple kinds of knowledge and skill related to self, context, relationships of power, and ritual practices of ministry to take risks and act with responsibility (Campbell-Reed, *Pastoral Imagination*, 2021).
- **spiritual practice:** habits and rituals (such as prayer, meditation, walking, singing) that aim to attune one to the spiritual dimensions, or the “more” of particular situations (such as ministry) and everyday living of one’s life.

HANDOUT 1 | 10 Significant Findings

1 **A new era of ministry**

We are living in a new era of ministry. In March of 2020, the world changed, and church leaders responded, improvised, and innovated. Thirty months of pandemic pastoring ushered in new ways to practice of ministry, including hybrid worship and gatherings, tremendous loss and grief, greater awareness of multiple pandemics, amplified conflict, and widespread needs for renewal.

2 **Loss and Grief**

We lost a lot. Pastors and church communities — and all people — have so much grief work to do. It is sacred and holy work and needs the best of our tradition and new rituals to hold lament, rage, depression, and grief. Losses of mentors, embodied knowing, and future stories are especially hard to recognize and define, leaving us with a sense of ambiguous loss and disenfranchised grief.

3 **The need for ministry as a spiritual practice**

The world and the church profoundly need ministry as a spiritual practice. We need it to resist capitalism and consumerism, to attend to all of life, to be present even on virtual platforms, to find new ways of healing the broken-hearted and re-imagining the broken systems. We need pastoral imagination to embody new ways of becoming and leading the beloved community.

4 **Financial gains and losses**

Many, but of course not all, stable and wealthy churches remained stable, and some got wealthier. Many churches that struggled financially before the pandemic are still struggling. The church on the whole could use a lot more collaboration — even financially — between communities, across neighborhoods, and by learning from each other.

5 **Differences in clergy and lay leaders' experiences**

Ordained clergy and lay leaders experienced self-care and spiritual well-being in different ways. They also experienced different aspects of the multiple pandemics in different ways. They need to learn from each other and understand how capitalism and consumerism are shaping their realities, defining labor for hire and undermining well-being. Clergy and lay leaders can work collaboratively to provide pastoral and ritual care, and to narrate new future stories.

HANDOUT 1 | 10 Significant Findings

6 Ongoing racialized injustice

White leaders and churches in the study were provoked by the summer uprisings of 2020, preaching, protesting, and asking some big questions. The concerns are quieter now. The churches and leaders of color that I talked with remained more willing to talk about the disparities, but in general they continued to focus on the needs of their communities and how to meet them. The injustices and violence remain, raising urgent questions about how to respond.

7 Delayed conflicts

Conflict in many churches was delayed or deferred during the intense months of lockdown while they met virtually. This conflict is often related to subtle or more overt decline. The declines are not inevitable, however. And the possibility and opportunity for renewal and reimagining church for this new era is not only possible but offers a powerful moment to lean into new future stories.

8 Theological Education needs to catch up

Theological education has some catching up to do in order to prepare the next cohorts of ministers for the new era of ministry rather than the old ones that are passing away. Of course, many forms of ministry will coexist, and new pastors and chaplains, ministers and priests need knowledge, skills, and pastoral imagination for all these ways of leading.

9 Intersectional Concerns for leading the church

Sexism and homophobia are alive and well, impacting the work of ministry in particular ways during pandemic season. This includes numbers of women who left their ministry jobs. Both congregations and medical chaplaincy lost women's leadership in the last three years. Globally, 54 million women stepped out of the workforce in 2020. Stories in the PPR show how churches continue to harbor unfair expectations for parents, especially mothers. We also heard stories from LGBTIQ+ ministers who felt elevated stress in both their churches and the cultural climate at the present.

10 Remarkable Resilience

Pastors and leaders are remarkably resilient. They are perhaps far more powerful than they know, and churches are one of the few remaining lifelong institutions to support human beings from birth to death. They deserve our greatest efforts to remake, renew, and envision as beloved community.

HANDOUT 2 | A Prayer for Finding Our Way



A Prayer for Finding Our Way

God, when I think of “normal” life before 2020, I miss these ways of being a community of faith...

I am thinking of times when I felt ...

I long for and feel grief over the loss of...

I know you are a God who is present in all things, including...

Help us, God, to find new ways to...

Strengthen us to seek and to find...



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HANDOUT 3 | Bearing Witness

1

Pastor Gail and the church staff and volunteers

Rev. Gail (she/her) is a Presbyterian pastor. She said due to safety concerns and reducing programming quickly, a practical reality was that staff took on duties typically covered by volunteers. She said it raised an ethical question for her staff: “It isn’t just that we *can’t* get any volunteers, but also, *should we even get volunteers?*” When we interviewed her in September of 2021, Rev. Gail reflected on her church’s first regathering of Sunday School since lockdown in 2020.

A lay leader convening the group asked: “What did you miss about church? What are you excited about for church?” Another lay leader responded, “The staff has continued to feed us during this time. And because of Covid-19 ... honestly because we have fallen out of the habit, we have not been giving back to the church in a way that I have before.” And she said, “The staff is doing all of the work that used to be dispersed among all of us.” She said she had a new goal of “giving back to the church” in response to “the last year and a half.” She volunteered for Vacation Bible School, which in her words, “ended up actually being really fun.”

2

Lay Leader Paul

Paul (he/him) who works in men’s ministry in a Black Baptist church told us about a loss that feels hard to describe. He said, “personally my biggest struggle is the whole concept of disconnect. And I’m not a person that talks a lot. But I like to see people’s faces and their reactions, because their eyes and their facial expressions, often tell you more than what the actual words from their mouth, tell you. When we had virtual services, I found myself getting distracted because there’s so much going on at home (cooking in the kitchen, grandkids running through the house, all this kind of stuff going on). And I found it very distracting. And I couldn’t get that connection that I usually get when I’m [in the sanctuary]. I couldn’t feel the full power of the Holy Spirit, taking over my soul. So, I’m still struggling with that right now, even though our doors are once again open, and we are having in-person services, I’m still struggling with some sort of disconnect.”

3

Pastor Jim

Pastor Jim (he/him) is a new Baptist pastor in North Carolina. He says, “I really felt like I was moving toward a new visioning process. Our team had scheduled to meet late March. They were all excited about this next step of our church’s life. Now that is postponed until ... when exactly? August will be my one-year mark, so in a way I feel cheated from my first real year with my congregation. I’m thankful I did have a few months to build those relationships prior to the pandemic but going into this year I really had different plans. We all did. I’m not sure I’ve even processed that loss fully yet.”

HANDOUT 3 | Bearing Witness (cont.)

4

Pastor Flora

Rev. Flora (she/her) is an African Methodist Episcopal (AME) pastor in rural Texas. She said what, “keeps coming to the top of my mind is being female and pastor in a historical context. While they receive you, do they really receive you? And the education and the theological knowledge that you have? Working with the congregation itself has been very interesting.” She said people on her board have used words like “stubbornness and complacency.” She says her expectations are not leading to any movement. “So, I am,” she says, “just trying to navigate, educate, love, as you say, the people. While yet, implementing the plan and moving forward with the operation at hand. That’s been one of my biggest struggles... to really get movement from the body, from the people, from the leaders, to move the church forward and not let it die. I’m sharing ideas that are not embraced.”

Rev. Flora says the struggle has been, “Getting the people to have a vision, especially with the energy and the excitement of a new pastor coming out of a great seminary, to meet me and to share what I have, and bring them up so that they won’t bring me down, and not lose what I have just received through the years of study. So that can be overwhelming.”

5

Pastor Denise

Pastor Denise (she/her) said, “In January of 2021 my father was hospitalized with COVID-19 and eventually had to go on a ventilator for a week. Thankfully he has recovered. But it is exhausting and demoralizing when I hear congregants speak so flippantly about how COVID ‘isn’t really that bad’ or that ‘the percentage of people who get it is so small. Why are we bothering with any of this?’ My family is a part of that percentage, and somehow for a set of people who claim to care and love their pastor (and who regularly checked in on social media to tell me how they were praying for my father’s recovery), it’s like that whole experience was conveniently erased from their memory.”

6

Choir Member Rhonda

The loss of a sense of place was also palpable especially for lay leaders who often did not have responsibilities that took them to the building in the same way paid staff did. Rhonda (she/her) is a ruling elder and choir member in a bilingual (English/ Spanish) congregation. She said, “sometimes I would just drive and park my car in front of the church because I needed to see our church building. I know church is everywhere. God is everywhere, but I just missed the environment.” She is one of many lay leaders who also lamented the loss of choral music in worship. Rhonda says, “The church had a program for people who lost their jobs, due to the pandemic. We have funds for neighborhood families to help them with their electrical bill, water bill, or their rent. We deliver food to the elderly around the neighborhood. Yet the low Sunday attendance is demoralizing.” Rhonda’s church like many others was thrown into the position of rethinking how to do everything.

HANDOUT 3 | Bearing Witness (cont.)

7

Pastor Lucas

Pastor Lucas (he/him) is a bilingual (Spanish/ English) pastor who was on the cusp of beginning a new call to an immigrant church. He identifies as gay. He discovered in his interview visit, “how hard is it to navigate two languages, including preaching in two languages, with a worshipping community.” He said laughing, “This is gonna be a fun ride!” He went on. “I think the other piece in terms of race particularly, is navigating that dynamic with a predominantly immigrant Spanish-speaking congregation that has a few well-meaning and well-intentioned white folks who have been (from their perspective) keeping the church afloat. And alongside that dynamic is talking about what it means to be an inclusive congregation that affirms LGBTQ folk, because if they call me, they will get a gay Latino pastor.” Pastor Lucas is getting at the complex intersectional questions that are present in many congregations, but not always addressed directly. In his case he was prepared to work directly on these questions of equity and inclusion and complex relational and power dynamics.

8

Pastor Tess

Elder Tess (she/her), a United Methodist pastor in an urban setting, says when it comes to loss and grief in her pastoring work, she thinks about two columns. The first column would be “the creative, innovative things pastors did [like] getting online for the first time, putting Advent boxes together for kids, etc. But there’s also a column of all of the things that did not happen. People died alone because nursing homes weren’t open; people died without a prayer in person because hospitals weren’t letting us in... and what bothers me is that those two columns don’t match up. The Advent box didn’t meet some needs. It was creative. We worked so hard. But there still were ministerial things that didn’t happen. And I think that it will take a while for me to have grace for myself, and I don’t think I’m alone in that. There’s a lot that didn’t get done and naming that grief is one thing... forgiving ourselves in some way, allowing grace for ourselves would be ... a third column.”

HANDOUT 4 | Fishbowl Name Tags

HELLO
MY NAME IS

Elder Tess
she/her

HELLO
MY NAME IS

Paul (Men's
Ministry) he/him

HOLA
MI NOMBRE ES

Pastor Lucas
he/him

HELLO
MY NAME IS

PASTOR DENISE
SHE/HER

HELLO
MY NAME IS

REV. FLORA
SHE/HER

HELLO
MY NAME IS

Rev. Jim
he/him

HOLA
MI NOMBRE ES

Rhonda (choir)
she/her

HELLO
MY NAME IS

Pastor Gail
she/her

HANDOUT 5 | Recommendations

Recommendations for Ministers

For this new era of ministry, you will need both the ancient wisdom of your tradition and a willingness to improvise, take risks, and make new partnerships. Here are five concrete recommendations growing out of the #PandemicPastoring research:

- Tend to your own soul with the spiritual practices of your tradition, and perhaps beyond, extending patience and grace to yourself and your beloveds
- Look for opportunities to acknowledge and honor grief, making use of ritual, the power of words for naming, the container of worship, opportunities for teaching, creative space-making, and your calendar for conversations
- Put learning at the heart of what you do in ministry by noticing where you're pulled up short and how you lean into ministry as an embodied, relational, spiritual, and integrated practice
- Look for the places grace shows up, notice what is life-giving in your location, and put your love and energy in these places
- Take a risk and responsibility as you lead and bring partners along the way

Recommendations for Churches

In this new era of ministry begin by recognizing you're not the only game in town. You are part of a larger ecology of spiritual organizations and religious identities. Use the findings of the #PandemicPastoring Report to consider the following:

- Understand the lifecycle of your church
- Engage questions that lead to self-understanding and meaningful purpose
- Use tools like appreciative inquiry and asset mapping to think from where you are and create new future stories
- Resist the consumeristic and capitalistic definitions of work and money that undermine the spiritual community you are called to be
- Question the way your traditions have been shaped by privilege and white supremacy and marginalization and seek wisdom to decide what to maintain and what to let go
- Know your neighbors and look for ways to partner in this new era of ministry

Recommendations for Lay Leaders

You are the backbone and lifeblood, institutional memory, and bearers of embodied faith. May these gifts serve you and your community well in this new era of ministry. Please consider these five recommendations growing out of the #PandemicPastoring Report:

- Prioritize your spiritual well-being and engage in practices of prayer and spiritual formation
- Embrace your gratitude for being part of a community of faith and remember to speak that gratitude aloud
- Look for ways to partner with your pastors and church staff, because they need you and you need them; collaboration is the way forward
- Mentor young people and adults to help them pay attention to God's call -- not so they can do things the way you have done them -- but so they can notice the ways God is calling them into this new era of ministry
- Keep learning and choosing love and life

Recommendations for Theological Education

In this new era of ministry, you have a great responsibility and burden for our future leaders. Please consider the following recommendations:

- Embrace case-based teaching with stories and examples that help students imagine how it will be to lead
- Focus on teaching ministry *as a spiritual practice*
- Cultivate pastoral imagination by always asking: So what? Why does this matter? How will we integrate practice and knowledge?
- Listen to your graduates and pay attention to studies of ministry in practice; then think backwards to what is needed in your classroom and the curriculum as a whole
- Hire professors who are interested in the church and ministry broadly understood alongside their disciplinary specialty
- Train people for this new era of ministry rather than the one that is passing away

HANDOUT 6 | Questions for Renewal

“Like all organizations, churches have a natural lifecycle. Congregations begin with a particular time and story and place. And when healthy enough, they grow and reach a pinnacle (often five to ten times the size of their original gathering) and then they plateau and eventually decline, which is all inevitable. However, at the point of decline, renewal and revitalization are possible. . . The dynamics of church life cycles were initially slowed then accelerated in many congregations since March 2020. Now the need for renewal is all too common. Vision for change cannot simply be the pastor’s best ideas, the community’s needs, the prerogative of the congregation, or even a biblical injunction. Learning to ask Mann’s questions in community and listening deeply to each other is crucial.”

#PandemicPastoring Report 2022

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#PandemicPastoring Report 2022

Questions for Renewal

1) Who are we (especially at a faith level)?

2) What are we here for?

3) Who is our neighbor?

Alice Mann, Can Our Church Live?



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THREE MINUTE MINISTRY MENTOR TEAM

Eileen Campbell-Reed (MDiv, PhD) is the founder and host of Three Minute Ministry Mentor (3MMM). She is also an academic entrepreneur, which means she combines research, seminary teaching, and writing with consulting, coaching, mentoring, preaching, and advocating for people who are marginalized. Her interests come together in seeing how new pathways open for renewed opportunities to approach age-old dilemmas and emerging problems.

Eileen is married to Lynn Reed, and they are raising a teen daughter and two spunky cats. She is the author of *Anatomy of a Schism* (2016), the State of Clergywomen Report (2018), *Pastoral Imagination: Bringing the Practice of Ministry to Life* (2021), and the #PandemicPastoring Report.

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Erin curates conversations about the rhythms of work, parenting, ministry, and trauma-informed care. Erin and husband Jake, also a minister, enjoy laughing and learning while parenting four children.

Erin enjoys designing programs, curriculum and experiences for learners that invite imagination and spiritual formation. She worked with a wide range of organizations before joining the 3MMM Team.

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Eileen Campbell-Reed
3MMM founder & host



Erin Robinson Hall
Study Guide Author



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3MMM Web & Tech



#PandemicPastoring Report (2022) by Eileen Campbell-Reed

#PandemicPastoring Study Guide by Erin Robinson Hall

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Pastoral Imagination: Bringing the Practice of Ministry to Life
is available where books are sold.