

## **Faltering Steps: limping across the seminary-church divide**

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### **1. What is the problem?**

A couple years ago I led a discussion at Lilly Endowment's Pastoral Excellence Network meeting on "what we are learning about the formation of pastoral leadership." One way of approaching this question is to point to the perceived inadequacy of seminary education for congregational ministry, and this perspective quickly emerged. It usually challenges how we teach for ministry.

Judging by the number of blogs, online comments, conversations with graduates and seminary colleagues and prospective students, the seminary-church divide is a topic of unending interest. In a nutshell, there are two sides: seminary is too theoretical and impractical for real ministry; ministers are too pragmatic, have stopped reading, and have left their education behind. We've heard this lament for decades.

In 1961, Joseph Sittler wrote:

What the schools elevate the actual practice of ministry flattens. The schools urge to competence in the various fields of theological study.... Visit the man (*sic*) some years later in what the man still calls inexactly his study and one is more than likely to find him accompanied by the same volumes he took with him from his student room. And filed on top of even these are mementos of what he is presently concerned with: a roll of blueprints, a file of negotiations between the parish, the bank, and the Board of Missions, samples of asphalt tile, and a plumber's estimate.<sup>1</sup>

In the early 1980s, theologian Edward Farley, in his critique of the "clerical paradigm," commented:

The present ethos of the Protestant churches is such that a theologically oriented approach to the preparation of ministers is not only irrelevant but counterproductive. When we consider what makes ministers upwardly mobile, we suspect that the reward system for professional promotion and success is largely a matter of un- or anti-theological skills.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Sittler, "Maceration of the Minister" (originally published 1961), from *Gravity & Grace*, Augsburg, 1986. Accessed online March 17, 2018, at <http://www.religion-online.org/book-chapter/chapter-5-maceration-of-the-minister/>

<sup>2</sup> Farley, *Theologia. The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*, Philadelphia (Fortress Press), 1983, p. 4. This has been an influential text, but Farley

From the other side of the great divide, some church leadership experts are dubious of the idea that theological considerations ought to be much of a concern for pastoral leadership. I once asked a prominent consultant/author and a group of pastors: what difference does theology make in their planning and programming? The author/consultant laughed: "I think we all can guess that this question is coming from a seminary professor. We don't have the luxury for it. We are dealing with the real world."<sup>3</sup>

Daniel Aleshire, recently retired as President of the Association of Theological Schools, spoke about the differences between the worlds of school and church in his personal experience with more humor and less negativity:

I remember about four months into the pastorate of Bergen Baptist Church in northern New Jersey that the semester didn't end, the congregation didn't change, there were no grades, and the work was not going to start fresh next week. Higher education is an environment where life comes in four-month blocks. I could stick out a professor that I didn't like because I knew the course would end. All the work came to a certain and clean stop every four months. There was a clear indication of achievement at the end of the four months in the form of grades. And after a short break, everything started fresh: new professors, new courses, all with limited carryover from the previous semester.... In the congregation, the people didn't change every four months. My first Sunday, a somewhat troubled member of the congregation (about whom I had been counseled) was the first to greet me at the door after the service and told me my sermon was "the worst damn sermon" he had ever heard.... Four months later, this man was still there and not much more impressed by my preaching. And other than him, the grades the congregation gave were so ambiguous that I was never sure how I was doing. In the fifth month, nothing was all that new.<sup>4</sup>

People on both sides perceive a gulf between educational preparation and the practices of leadership in ministry in the churches. To be sure, this problem isn't limited to education for ministry. The classic expression of the theory-practice divide emerges in other professional schools as well. Lawyers complain about their

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himself has repudiated many of his conclusions in "Four Pedagogical Mistakes: A *Mea Culpa*," in Teaching Theology and Religion, 2005, vol. 8 no. 4, pp 200–203.

<sup>3</sup> This comment will remain anonymous. Another milder comment comes author/consultant Gil Rendle: "I am still struck by how few seminaries even acknowledge leadership as a discipline and don't address it in any way, or address it only in tangential ways." "Leadership Means Pushing People to Purpose," accessed 3.22.18 at <https://www.faithandleadership.com/gil-rendle-leadership-means-pushing-people-purpose>

<sup>4</sup>Daniel Aleshire, "Thoughts on the Transition into Ministry Program," unpublished remarks, February, 2005, to the gathering of the Lilly Endowment Transition into Ministry Initiative Programs, Indianapolis, Indiana.

impractical law education, teachers complain about their teaching programs. The problem may be less acute in music or medical education where the practices themselves are so much more a focus of the extended educational experience than music theory. But ministry and education for ministry, especially in leadership, is our concern. A connection that once may have been intimate and vital seems to have broken. How do we understand the relationship of education for ministry to practice in congregations? How are we thinking about the gap, and how might that thinking influence our practices of teaching for ministry? That's the focus of this paper.

I want to discuss two resources that help me make new sense of the continuities and discontinuities between theology and practice, between classroom and church, and how these different seasons relate in the formation of good pastors.<sup>5</sup>

## **2. What we can and cannot learn in the classroom**

My location for teaching leadership in ministry is within an ecumenical, mostly mainline Protestant, Divinity School attached to a research university. Inevitably that context shapes my work and life, as does any specific theological context and location. In my location, it looks like we've recognized the gap between education and practice in some ways. We have addressed it with varied degrees of effectiveness. The gap is likely more severe where I teach than in institutions that have remained closer to the church. However, even though theological schools are very different, I suspect we've all perceived and tried to bridge the gap in our own ways.

Most schools include an important practical component in their curriculum. In part it happens in coursework, such as preaching or leadership classes. In part it happens in an experiential/reflective component that involves experience, reflection, case studies. We all do something similar.

Many schools or judicatories also have seen the need for more practical training and formation than the schools provide and require candidates for ordination to take at least one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education outside the classroom. Some denominations require year-long fulltime congregational internships. Some seminaries are trying to move the classroom into the congregation. All of these efforts show a recognition of a gap and a need to address it. Besides the theoretical, we acknowledge the need for the practical, where we often talk about how to apply the theoretical stuff we have learned. Still, our students report, it isn't enough.

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<sup>5</sup> For 15 years, I worked as a solo pastor. For 22 years, I have worked with ministry students. My theological education at first seemed to prepare me hardly at all, and I scrambled to learn to survive. It irritated me. Then, at some point, my inner compass changed. Now I see the need for a whole range of learning, in school and, later, in the church. Because of my formation, I'm oriented toward action more than scholarship. So, I'm looking primarily to glean insights for our teaching practice and see this paper as primarily pedagogical.

Is there something inherently limiting to the classroom context and the learning that happens there? The work of Patricia Benner suggests to me that there is.

Building on learning research by Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus, Benner has studied growth toward practical expertise in nurses. Chris Scharen draws on Benner to understand growth in ministry as well.<sup>6</sup> Expertise, for nursing or ministry, requires experience and time to develop. Benner identifies and names stages through which nurses (and by extension other professionals) pass: novice, advanced beginner, competence, proficiency, intuitive expertise. Each stage exhibits common characteristics; novices, for example, rely in new situations on rules or step by step instructions, while the expert simply understands and acts.<sup>7</sup> Scharen traces similar stages in the experience of new pastors in the first years of ministry. It's a helpful way to understand the learning that happens *after* the formal schooling ends.<sup>8</sup>

Of importance to my question about the gap is Benner's fundamental understanding that professional practices like ministry are *complex, situated, and engaged*.<sup>9</sup> A minister enters a scene with intent to act. But it is not simple or straightforward to determine what to do or say. The situation exceeds the predetermined application of a technique or theory learned in school. Something must be done, but what?<sup>10</sup>

Classic classroom teaching and learning, if I may stereotype it so, tends toward the *simplified, abstracted, and disengaged*—in order to generalize, organize, and communicate a body of knowledge. It usually lacks the demand, disorder, uncertainty, and urgency of ministry. The classroom is appropriately calm and orderly. It focuses on the reflective. And that is not a bad thing.

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<sup>6</sup> See Christian Scharen, "Learning Ministry Over Time: Embodying Practical Wisdom," in For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry, Eerdmans (2008), pp. 265-288.

<sup>7</sup> This radio/podcast interview with a dialysis nurse captures the power of intuitive expertise: "Design for the Real World: Dialysis Machine," Studio 360, accessed 3.22.2018 at <https://www.wnyc.org/story/209610-design-real-world-dialysis-machine/>

<sup>8</sup> Scharen and co-author Eileen Campbell-Reid co-direct the Learning Pastoral Imagination Project. They are studying the development over time of a cohort of 50 pastors. See "Learning Pastoral Imagination: A Five-Year Report on How New Ministers Learn in Practice," Auburn Studies, No. 21, Winter, 2016. Accessed and available for download at <https://auburnseminary.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Learning-Pastoral-Imagination.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Benner, Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society, June 2004, pp. 188-199

<sup>10</sup> A fine example of this type of experience for a new chaplain is found at [mag.uchicago.edu/law-policy-society/chaplains-compassion](http://mag.uchicago.edu/law-policy-society/chaplains-compassion). I'll point later to other examples from books that I use in a course, including episodes from memoirs such as Open Secrets and collections such as This Odd and Wondrous Calling.

The classroom approach is most helpful in conveying a discipline or a set of techniques which is systematic and organized. But it is clearly different from the situation of practice. It isn't always a good container for the dynamic messiness of engagement, which requires numerous sophisticated interactions: readings and interpretation of a situation, weighing a range of options, choosing what seems most appropriate, attempts at competent actions, assessment of their effect, adjustments or refinements, and, continuing the interpretive/active cycle, potential new readings, decisions, and action.

No wonder that it takes actually *doing ministry over an extended period* to hone the capacity to see, understand, and act wisely and well. It's not simply a matter of learning theory and applying it. Growth toward expertise takes reflective engagement in the complexities of a specific situation.

Benner helps me understand in a new way our intuitive recognition that ministers *must* learn crucial aspects of their craft on the job, immersed in doing the work of ministry. The classroom provides a good foundation for the practice of ministry, but significant aspects of doing ministry can be best learned—perhaps can *only* be learned—outside the classroom. “You don't know what you need to know until you need to know it.” This is a kind of learning that more time, more content, and more nuance will not address.

Wise and mature practice requires a longer trajectory of learning than most professional education can offer (and students afford). The school can do its part exceedingly well, but it cannot do it all. Experience has a critical role to play, and Benner helps me understand why there are good reasons for this. There are benefits in the classroom, but there are limits as well as. The school is different from the congregation.<sup>11</sup>

If this description of the limits of the classroom in preparing students for ministry is accurate (and I think it is), then we might ask: what are the implications for our teaching? How do we make sense of a school curriculum in the face of discontinuity with the subsequent practice for which it's intended to prepare students? How can we prepare students more adequately for the move from one context to the next, so that they might fulfill the aim of theological education?<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The classroom and the church differ in other important ways. The values, ethos, and characteristic practices important in one context are very different in the other, as Dan Aleshire pointed out, e.g., the question of plagiarism or borrowing/imitation in preaching. And even the calendar: though finals week and Advent come about the same time, ministers don't start vacation on December 15. No wonder the transition from school into church can be so jarring. And no wonder that focusing on this critical early developmental stage of ministry can enable more pastors to thrive.

<sup>12</sup> I do not intend to set up a straw man. I acknowledge that some classrooms are structured differently. Sharon Daloz Parks shows how Ronald Heifetz uses

### 3. Bridging the Gap?

Benner points to the importance of acknowledging how different learnings emerge from different contexts. William Sullivan of the Carnegie Foundation has written about the processes and seasons through which professionals mature. In focusing on the developing professional, he mitigates the sense of gap that Benner's context-attentive perspective accentuates. As much as it is important for us to acknowledge the limits of our efforts in the classroom, it is also important for us to look for approaches that build continuity. Sullivan uses the concept of *apprenticeships* to describe growth toward wisdom and expertise in a way that is helpful to that end. Sullivan says that all growing professionals serve three distinct apprenticeships. He describes them as "a cognitive or intellectual apprenticeship, a practical apprenticeship of skill, and an apprenticeship of identity formation."<sup>13</sup>

The first apprenticeship, knowledge, is easy to recognize and widely accepted. We in the theological school give most of our attention to it. The school is the place of thinking, reading, library study, writing, examinations, papers. Its curriculum offers education for ministry through the appropriate academic disciplines, with the teaching and learning of discrete and specialized subjects and methodologies: Bible, theology, church history, ethics, usually presented in something like that order. Ministry students are expected to become competent at some level in the knowledge basis of their profession, much as medical students must learn all the bones of the body. It is critical to the work ministers will do.

The second apprenticeship, that of skills particular to a profession, is also presented in the school, with more or less attention depending on the school. Here we are thinking about the central practices of ministry such as preaching, pastoral care, Christian education, or administration and leadership. This knowledge of skills is also critical for pastors, but since much must be learned in the praxis of doing and reflecting and refining, the school often seeks more to prepare the way for later practical learning and competence. Just as books in these "practical" areas often appear further to the back of publishers' catalogues, it is often the case that these areas or disciplines are less centered in the curriculum.

Sullivan's "third apprenticeship" describes identity formation: the growing assimilation of the normative values or ethic that characterizes a distinctive

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classroom teaching to embody adaptive challenges and responses within the class in Leadership can be Taught (Harvard Business School Publishing), 2005. Many of us use case study or other forms of experiential education or praxis. Others might experiment with importing role play, spiritual practices, or clearness committees. All are excellent ways of trying to get around the confines of the usual classroom. My proposal is a similar experiment.

<sup>13</sup> See Sullivan's "Introduction" to Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination, Jossey-Bass 2006, pp. 1-16, especially pp. 5-8. This phrase comes from p. 5.

profession and guides its practitioners, such that they know who they are and why they do what they do—and affirm it. The third apprenticeship shapes identity and values within the confrontation of the particular demands of engaging a set of practices over time. Repeating the everyday acts that are central to a profession, building on the profession's distinct knowledge base, mastering its expertise, assimilating its norms—these mold the values and outlook and identity of a practitioner. A growing professional develops a distinctive way of being in and seeing the world and her/his role in it.

Such an apprenticeship occurs for a new pastor as they begin to face congregational responsibilities fully: the weekly preparation and preaching, hospital and home visits, leading worship, allocating resources, managing time, working with volunteers or organizing activities in groups, dealing with accountability, all within a community rather than in solitude, with an aim of faithful life together.<sup>14</sup>

Instead of the disciplinary boundaries found in the school, ministry in practice is whole, seamless, made up of distinct but not separated moments of attention to a range and variety of practices and tasks leading toward common ends or commitments. A *preaching* moment might serve pastoral or missional ends, as well as educate and inspire. Pastoral *leadership* is often shaped by concern for theological integrity, informed by scriptural and ethical dimensions, and offers teaching opportunities. A *pastoral* encounter often leads to a sermon or a focus in worship or research. The *study* becomes the *office*, the *confessional*, the *sanctuary*, and the *classroom*. Moral considerations, theological questioning, biblical and historical understanding, the contributions of the social sciences and the arts—all inform and guide and flow into ministry; but they serve a shared telos, not their separate ends.

Through the lens of differing apprenticeships, the school offers education in the critical theological knowledge base—the first necessary apprenticeship—and augments that knowledge with education and training in the skills for doing ministry. Field education helps with skills practice and brings with it the beginnings of a distinctive outlook growing out of actions and reflection, as well as from relationships with professionals in practice. The school gets the ball rolling. Within our constraints—the limits of the classroom--we do first and second apprenticeship preparation well. But how do we prepare students for the third apprenticeship?

In my personal experience, it took five years of full time pastoral work for me to grow into a sense of proficiency and self-identity and to gain an image of excellence by which I might measure myself; and which resulted in the self-recognition that “I

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<sup>14</sup> Craig Dykstra uses the term “pastoral imagination” to describe what we see in “a good pastor at work.” See “Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination” in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, Eerdmans (2008), pp. 41-61, especially the opening paragraph.

am a good minister.”<sup>15</sup> The learning curve was steep and hard. So, it does not surprise me that our students talk about a gap between school and practice.

But Sullivan’s work suggests to me that we might do better to think less of disconnected experiences, “during” and “after” seminary, and instead consider a longer trajectory of formation involving all three apprenticeships. Beginning before the season of seminary education with intimations of a call; moving through the moments of formal classroom learning during which students primarily serve the first apprenticeship; then into the second and third apprenticeships, as new pastors work and learn and do the tasks of ministry and are shaped by them toward wise practice and pastoral identity (and, we hope, do not neglect the first apprenticeship).

I would like to stress again that I am not criticizing the value of the school as a place for preparing students for ministry. Sullivan’s approach helps precisely because its focus moves us past the typical but misleading theory-practice dichotomy. All three apprenticeships are necessary for the development of expertise, wisdom, and excellence in ministry. They happen at different intensities, at different times, in different contexts. Ministers flourish best when church and school work well together.

That said, the seminary is still a time and place of preparation. Do we complete our usual work in knowledge and skills and send our students on their way to take their chances with developing pastoral identity, or is there something else we can do?

Sullivan suggests that a different pedagogy is needed for a different apprenticeship. Thus, my proposal centers on an attempt at such a pedagogy using the ways of imagination to prepare students for later growth, and I offer an example for that purpose.

#### **4. A modest proposal: “Pastoral Lives: Novels and Memoirs of Ministry”**

My questions: How do we pay attention *within* the school to fostering a kind of learning that happens primarily *outside* the school, shaped by experiences students will not have until later? How can we assist our students in moving successfully toward a mature pastoral identity?

My experiment centers on trying to awaken the nascent pastoral identity and imagination by immersing students in *narratives of ministry*. It focuses on novels

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<sup>15</sup> Matt Bloom talks about this process in terms of recognizing one’s “membership.” See Bloom, *Flourishing in Ministry: Emerging Research Insights on the Well-Being of Pastors*, Notre Dame: The Flourishing in Ministry Project (2013), esp. pp. 34-41 on “membership” in “the community of pastors.” Accessed 3.24.18 at [https://wellbeing.nd.edu/assets/198819/emerging\\_insights\\_2\\_1\\_.pdf](https://wellbeing.nd.edu/assets/198819/emerging_insights_2_1_.pdf). Also see footnote 19.



and films, essays and memoirs by and about pastors in an attempt to escape some of the classroom's limits and prepare the soil for the growth of the third apprenticeship.

There are a number of advantages. This sort of learning experience seems less didactic and analytic than its cousin, the case study. Reading or watching the experiences over time of pastors engaged in the complexity of ministry draws our eyes to the *integrity and wholeness of pastoral experience*, rather than to the separate events or disciplines associated with study for ministry.

It is *less direct and threatening*. Students can read and experience vicariously, without fear for their vocational and personal well-being. They can try on the role of pastor in ways not available to them otherwise, consider options, and hold them in reserve for later wise discernment.

And it is *anticipatory and open-ended*. Reading a narrative sows seeds for later growth. It is driven by the concerns of students as they begin to get a hint of how they might—or might not—want to do ministry in the complexity of human interaction with God and community. Bringing students into conversations with excellent pastor-authors exposes them to inevitable struggles with necessary competencies and the perspective on the world that wise or unwise pastors have developed.

Finally, these are just *great reads*. At a certain point I decided: if I was going to teach a book, I had to love the book. If it had a powerful impact on me, it would likely have a powerful impact on students as well.

As an example, I will describe a seminar in leadership I teach at the Divinity School called “Pastoral Lives: Novels and Memoirs of Ministry.” In the syllabus, I begin by offering students the same rationale for this class that I have offered in this paper (the syllabus is on the ARL website):

So how can we in the school more fully prepare for work as ministers? I suggest that, in the classroom setting, “third apprenticeship” aspects can be best engaged imaginatively, through such means as storytelling among colleagues and friends, case studies with experienced mentors, and true narratives (fiction and memoir) of ministers’ lives and experiences. *The pedagogy of this classroom-centered learning experience builds on this insight.*

There is a wonderful and rich body of writings for us to enjoy, enough to fill a year of classes. I have consulted widely with ministers and academic colleagues in gathering resources. I have also tried to take into account various diversities—race, gender, culture, tradition/denomination, demographics, rural-urban setting, geography. I am confident you will find these readings challenging, informative, generative of insight, and satisfying.

The class is a seminar with an enrollment target of 12-15. The format is simple. We read a book each week and meet once for 3 hours to discuss it. There's a short break in the middle. In the first two hours, I try to focus conversation on the story itself. I invite students to lift up and discuss: what is going on? What episodes or events do you find striking, surprising, confounding? Why? In the second part, we try to think more theologically and personally: what do these readings mean for ministry as you understand it? How do they impact your sense of vocation? What theological connections or implications do you see? What learnings might you take away?

We usually begin with a student led moment of prayer or a meditation in a wide variety of forms, and someone brings a snack. But mostly we sit and talk about books—decidedly low-tech.

The course goals are stated: to *focus on a text* with an end in mind, that end being an encounter with the lived experience of being a pastor that can inform our becoming a pastor. Other goals are to expose students to this body of literature and thus to give them the blessing of mentors (in the readings) and colleagues (their fellow students). Students write a three-four page reflection each week in preparation for the class, with the intent of mimicking the length and tone of a sermon. These short writings constitute half their grade, and the other half comes from attendance and participation in discussion. I am trying to locate the learning value not in a research paper or exam or case that might reflect first or second apprenticeship values; but in the interaction of the group in conversation with the lived experience of ministry. I hope to emphasize the importance for ministers of a shared text (living or written), thoughtful reflection and questioning, and a common search for meaning and support in the company of colleagues.<sup>16</sup> Another hope for the class is a nudge toward the realization that learning is not limited to the school. Indirectly I am saying: "Of course, your academic preparation is only partial—see this complex, beautiful work you're called to do?"

Obviously, the heart of the class is in the readings. There really are amazing narratives about ministers -- memoirs, novels, essays, and films. It is difficult to choose the top thirteen for any given semester.

The best choices illumine particular aspects of the pastoral life, especially those with an explicit focus on the development of a pastoral identity:

I often begin with [A Lesson Before Dying](#) by Harold Gaines for its beautiful depiction of the formation of professional identity in an African-American teacher in segregated Louisiana. There is a pastor central to the story, but students often ask: "who is more the minister here?" as the teacher struggles with his call to walk with an unjustly condemned man and ultimately helps awaken in the prisoner an awareness of his humanity before execution.

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<sup>16</sup> See p. 14 and especially footnotes 20 and 21.

A number of readings depict what it is like to answer a call and begin as a pastor. Best known might be Richard Lischer's Open Secrets. Students empathize with stories about forgetting to bring the elements to the hospital; or gathering church leaders to build a better team, asking them to share their hopes, only to hear "Well, I didn't vote for you, but I'm sure you'll be fine." I've also used Good News from North Haven (Lindvahl), This Odd and Wondrous Calling (Daniel & Copenhaver), and Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic (Niebuhr), all of which allow students to overhear what it is like to begin in parish ministry, or to be married and living in the parsonage, or to be learning to do many things in which you have little or no experience or training, but are expected to be an expert. These readings allow students to see the process of identity formation, the third apprenticeship, at work.

Primary issues in forming pastoral identity also emerge in other readings that depict being a pastor as one alternative among others. Barbara Brown Taylor's Leaving Church is fascinating to students as well as challenging. It speaks a faith language many understand and affirm but comes out in a different place than they hope when Taylor leaves her congregation. Eugene Peterson tells his own call story in The Pastor and gives a rich account of the theological depth he found within the life of his congregation. But another specific question his story raises is about how the pastor's role differs from that of a helping professional such as a counselor and how he turned from a therapeutic outlook to a theological view of his people. Students sincerely want to help people, and these narratives lead them to consider how the pastor's role is distinctive.

Issues related to staying a long time in one place come up in The Pastor as well as in Gilead (Robinson). Gilead also contains one of the best stories about what it means to be prophetic in one's context when John Ames discusses the one sermon he burned without preaching. Gilead is full of other richness as well. These and numerous other narratives raise the challenging and existential question: what is success in ministry? It's a good question to ponder before the popular cultural versions of success begin to shape us.

Heidi Neumark's Breathing Space: A Spiritual Journey in the South Bronx is a rich account of a ministry that seeks faithfulness and neighbor love in a life and death urban setting. Neumark's twenty years as a pastor and her integration of theological, ecclesiastical, communal, and pragmatic concerns is among the best. Adam by Adam, the autobiography of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., explores another form of urban ministry that mixes pulpit and public service in politics. Ralph Ellison's Juneteenth is an amazing novel that also looks at the mix of politics and preaching, but it is such a challenging read that it is tough for students to finish and process in a week.

The nature of pastoral and priestly power is present in Upon This Rock: The Miracles of a Black Church (Freedman), as well as The Power and the Glory (Greene). Pastoral *abuse* of power is present in Elmer Gantry (Lewis) or Updike's A Month of Sundays and in Robert Duvall's film, "The Apostle." And where could you find a better way into the implications of the Donatist controversy than "The

Apostle?” Well, perhaps in Louise Erdrich’s Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse, in which the protagonist is, first, a religious sister; then a wife; and, finally, a long-time Catholic priest on a reservation—a gender-challenging story.

Other books and questions they help us explore:

- Self-care or suffering? Bernanos’ Diary of a Country Priest, Endo’s Silence (both film or book versions)
- Women as pastors, new forms of church, and must I *really* be *this* disclosive? Pastrix (Bolz-Weber)
- The mixed heritage of Christianity and colonialism? Death Comes for the Archbishop (Cather), Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse, Silence

I hope it is clear that this is not a class in “religion in literature,” but a set of texts with a sharp focus on the lives of ministers for the sake of stirring the pastoral imagination, raising pastoral questions, and planting seeds for later growth of a pastoral disposition, beyond the confines of the classroom.<sup>17</sup>

And I hope this brief trip through some of the readings whets your appetite. I fully anticipate that you will be making further recommendations to me when we meet. I love to collect more titles.<sup>18</sup>

## 5. Additional observations on fostering growth

What else can we do in the seminary to foster and nourish students for the third apprenticeship beyond it?

First, we can *recognize and critique the dichotomies* we use. Our habits of making distinctions between theology/practice or theory/application are useful in some ways, but they also distort. When we are considering the telos of formation for ministry as well as ministry itself, the moments we distinguish in school flow together. Can we try to talk more in terms of continuities and seasons, not separation? Can we *give a new and different account of the fullness of the formation process*? In our orientations to the school for students, do we focus on the school or on its place within a longer trajectory, and the need to remember those larger horizons?

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<sup>17</sup> I work to make these readings diverse, which for this purpose include race, gender, gender orientation, culture, tradition/denomination, era, demographics, rural-urban setting, geography. I am aware that each selection is not fully adequate.

<sup>18</sup> I had hoped also to discuss a second class, “Prophetic Ministry in Mainline Churches,” which uses a similar approach to open up the conversation about “what is prophetic?” among students who are certain they already know. Its syllabus is also available on the ARL website.

Second, a shared understanding of the limits of the classroom might helpfully move schools and teachers toward *the virtue of humility* about our work and what it can accomplish. Humility is a hard virtue to cultivate in our current performance culture and in an institution in which mastery is prized and hierarchies and power differentials are heightened. However, if we can openly, honestly, and vulnerably acknowledge what we can and cannot do, to our students and to the churches they serve, it will free us to do more adequate preparation. And practicing humility will allow us to tell students to expect much valuable learning to continue after they have degree in hand, and why that is appropriately so.

Third, an understanding of formation as a longer trajectory continuing after the time of school will help us to think in different ways about our pedagogy. In our efforts to be helpful, exercises that invite students to “apply” what they have learned in a theory-laden class to a ministry setting often feel forced and contribute to a sense of practice that is demeaned.

I think it is possible in school to *anticipate* the future challenges of the second and third apprenticeships. Teachers can explore new ways to foster “anticipatory learning” that point beyond school, especially in what has been called “practice-centered pastoral formation.”<sup>19</sup> How can we bring students more into contact with masters of the craft, who are using the knowledge and skills they have acquired in a fully formed way characteristic of excellent ministry? I think of narratives, of course, but also personal interactions such as “master classes.”

Fourth, we can encourage our students toward help through two developmental processes. David Wood, former director of the Lilly-funded Transition into Ministry programs, notes that novices need mentors: “experience in and of itself, garnered by individuals who are isolated from mature and maturing practitioners, is not the wisest teacher.”<sup>20</sup> To thrive, numerous studies suggest, ministers need guides and fellow travelers who can help steer their ongoing journey toward faithfulness, excellence, and wisdom. The function of mentors who can model, exemplify, and guide is critical, especially in the early years of becoming a pastor. And the role of a community of professional peers to which one belongs is also essential.<sup>21</sup> As Matt Bloom of the Flourishing in Ministry Project notes, “One of the most alarming results that is emerging from our study... (is that) Unfortunately, membership (in a colleague/peer group) appears to be in rather short supply for many pastors.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Wind and Wood, *Becoming a Pastor: Reflections on the Transition into Ministry*, Herndon, Va.: Alban Institute Special Report (2008), p. 33. Accessed 3/24/18 at <https://alban.org/uploadedFiles/Alban/Bookstore/pdf/TiMReport.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, Eerdmans 2008, p. 302.

<sup>21</sup> See Wind and Wood, *Becoming*, pp. 29-32 and 34-38. See also Bloom, *Flourishing in Ministry*, esp. pp. 30-34 on mentors and 34-41 on “membership” in “the community of pastors.”

<sup>22</sup> Bloom, p. 40.

As part of teaching what we can and cannot do in the long trajectory of formation, we in the schools can tell our students repeatedly how important it will be for their flourishing to find mentors and peer groups for ongoing growth and development and as a way to further their formation of professional identity. We can also *ask the churches to pay more attention to the importance of mentors and colleagues, in communities of practice*, so that new ministers can continue the learning they must do throughout their ministries.<sup>23</sup> This is a different sort of continuing education than we usually do, but it is equal in importance to the “lecture by an expert” approach that has characterized much continuing education for pastors. Both deserve our support and advocacy.

## **6. Finally**

In relation to long-time perceptions of a gap in preparation for ministry and the needs of practice, I have described limits to the classroom approach that go beyond the constraints of time and complexity. If we can’t escape the classroom walls, I have suggested that we pay attention to the longer and broader trajectory of formation, especially in relation to forming pastoral identity. We in the school have an opportunity to make our excellent contributions even more adequate by seeding the imagination with pastoral narratives; by preparing and pointing to the need for mentoring; and by giving students practice with colleague communities essential for thriving in ministry.

Ministry is an amazingly complex vocation. Those who become and thrive as wise pastors will use their learning base, enjoy guidance while gaining proficiency in the many practices of ministry, continue to learn in the company of good colleagues, and develop an intuitive outlook and understanding that is a thing of beauty. Living with pastoral narratives can help get that process started.

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<sup>23</sup> See the work of Etienne Wenger, briefly presented at <http://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice>; also <https://www.learning-theories.com/communities-of-practice-lave-and-wenger.html> for another brief description; accessed 3/24/18. Also, Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, Cambridge 1998.