



Becoming a PASTOR

*Reflections on the
Transition into Ministry*

JAMES P. WIND AND DAVID J. WOOD

AN ALBAN INSTITUTE
SPECIAL REPORT



Foreword

During the past 10 years, Lilly Endowment has funded multiple, interlocking initiatives aimed at sustaining and enhancing the quality of ministry in American congregations and parishes. We launched the Transition into Ministry initiative in 1999 as part of this effort. Through it the Endowment has supported more than 30 experimental projects aimed at assisting new pastors in making the transition from seminary student to full-time pastoral leader.

Why concentrate on this transition? Most ministers develop their leadership practices and form their pastoral habits in the critical first years of ministry. During this period, especially, pastors need mentors and peers who help them work through difficult situations and flourish in parish life. Unfortunately, new pastors often experience professional and geographic isolation. Too many lack the kinds of mentoring and support that can help them negotiate the challenges they face in the earliest stages of their careers. As a result, some talented young pastors become disillusioned and consider dropping out of the ministry.

To address these challenges, the Endowment invited a number of congregations as well as regional and national church organizations to create experimental programs to help new pastors make a good transition into ministry. Each group responded imaginatively, designing a program that fit well within its particular theological tradition and utilized its specific strengths and resources. The Endowment provided grants to enable these organizations to launch their programs.

We have enjoyed watching these programs take root and begin to flourish. Scores of new pastors have participated in these efforts, and many credit their experiences with helping them to develop life-giving leadership practices and spiritual habits and to build lasting friendships with wise mentors and attentive peer colleagues. The programs are providing new pastors with support they need to deal with the initial challenges of ministry, and the participating congregations and religious organizations are now attempting to raise the funds needed to sustain them.

Two years ago, we asked the Alban Institute to take a close and careful look at the Transition into Ministry initiative. The Institute is a trusted observer of trends in pastoral and congregational leadership, and it has a long and distinguished record of providing resources for American congregations. It seemed to us that Alban was well positioned to identify important insights emerging from the transition programs and to place them within the context of leadership challenges faced by pastors and congregations today. We are delighted that Dr. James Wind, Alban's president, accepted our invitation.

When we created the Transition into Ministry initiative, we asked the Fund for Theological Education to host a coordination program to assist the Endowment in providing support for the congregations and religious organizations involved in this initiative. The coordination program convenes pastors and project directors regularly to share insights and discuss common challenges with one another and to reflect on the significance of these efforts. The Reverend David Wood, who is the co-author of the special report, directs this coordination program.

As you will see in the following pages, James Wind and David Wood provide a thorough description of the challenges faced by new pastors today, give a rich description of the central characteristics of the experimental programs, and, most importantly, offer insightful reflections regarding ways that all of us—congregations, denominational judicatories, seminaries, and other religious organizations—can work collaboratively to help new pastors (and congregations) thrive.

We hope you will find fresh perspectives and encouragement in this special report. We believe collaborative efforts among many organizations can make a big difference in helping a new generation of young people become excellent pastoral leaders who find deep satisfaction and fulfillment in their ministries.

Craig Dykstra

Senior Vice President for Religion
Lilly Endowment Inc.

Christopher Coble

Program Director, Religion
Lilly Endowment Inc.

Becoming a



TiM resident Quinn Caldwell offers Communion at Wellesley Congregational Church, Wellesley, Massachusetts.

PASTOR

*Reflections on the
Transition into Ministry*

JAMES P. WIND

President, The Alban Institute

AND

DAVID J. WOOD

Coordinator, Transition into Ministry Coordination Program
Fund for Theological Education

DEAR COLLEAGUE:

For more than half a century, the many individuals and institutions that help prepare clergy for their first calls have expressed growing concern about the ways in which new pastors experience the transition from seminary life to parish ministry. This report seeks to put fresh perspective on this pivotal moment in ministry, providing firsthand accounts of what this experience is like at the beginning of the 21st century as well as identifying some of the major factors that shape the transition into ministry today.

However, *Becoming a Pastor* does more than describe current experience. It also calls attention to a variety of promising efforts to turn these first few years into a time of real opportunity and growth for pastors, congregations, and for the church itself. What we report on here is an intentional experiment to provide a kind of practice-based pastoral education and formation that builds on and extends seminaries' efforts to make explicit connections between the learning that takes place in the classroom and the experience that takes place in the thick of ministry. At the heart of this report is the conviction that this period of transition is rich with potential for new levels of collaboration between the domains of congregation, seminary, and denomination as they together become more intentional and skilled at the teaching and learning of ministry. The implicit challenge here is to congregations and their leaders to assume more responsibility for the teaching and learning of ministry.

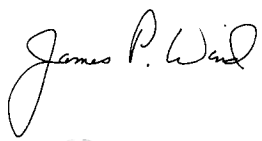

In this report we offer imaginative examples of carefully shaped learning environments that help new pastors learn—like doctors do—from their peers, from mentors and supervisors, and from the people they serve. We also present evidence that, through this work, people in a variety of congregations, denominations, and seminaries became agents of change and new energy in their religious communities. We hope these examples will lead to wider ripples of shared engagement and bold experimentation. As more join in this effort, pastors, congregations, denominations, seminaries, and the ministry itself will become stronger, more authentic, more fully what they were created to be.

What we report on here is not the final or complete answer to the question of how one becomes a pastor. Instead, *Becoming a Pastor* is an invitation to very important work; some might say it is a sacred calling. As the programs we report on make clear, the work of making pastors is not just the work of the seminary, the denomination, or the candidates, but a collaborative effort. We therefore invite you to add your wisdom, resources, and best efforts to help create new conditions for the teaching and learning of ministry in our challenging times.

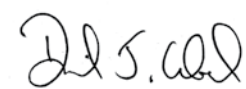

Given our own experience of collaboration in preparing this report, we are confident that taking up this enduring question of what it takes to become a pastor bears great promise for forging a new spirit of collaboration across the life of the church among those who care deeply about the formation of pastors. We look forward to your contribution to this promising work.

Best wishes,




 **James P. Wind**
President,
The Alban Institute

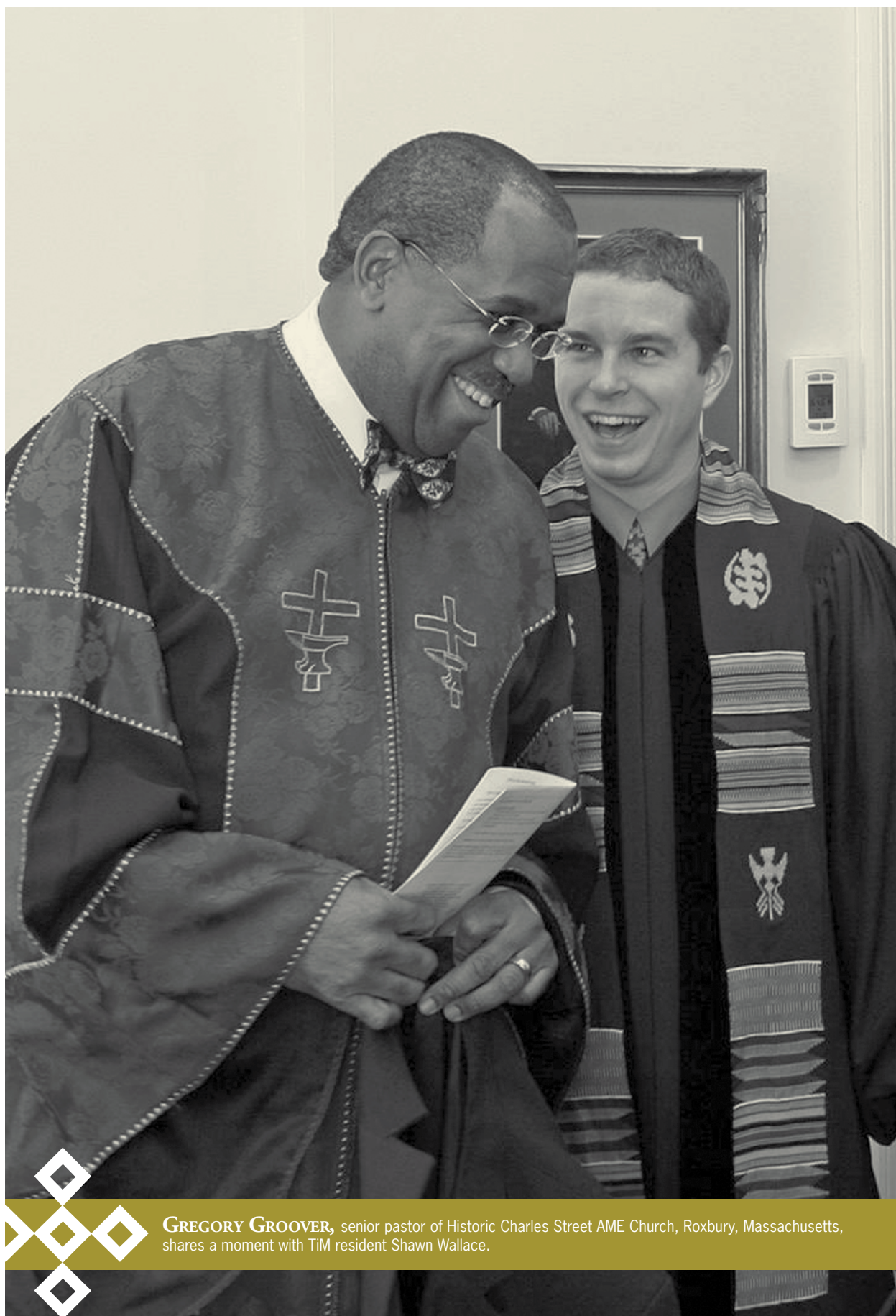



 **David J. Wood**
Coordinator,
Transition into Ministry
Coordination Program
Fund for Theological
Education



CONTENTS

OVERVIEW	5
PART ONE A SPECIAL CHALLENGE	6
Why Should We Care?	8
Paying Attention to the Transition	8
What Is the Transition Like?	9
Why Is It So Hard?	12
The Transition into Ministry Is a Special Challenge Today	13
What Are Communities of Practice?	17
PART TWO THE TRANSITION INTO MINISTRY INITIATIVE	18
Introduction to the Transition into Ministry Initiative	20
Congregation-Based Residency Programs	21
Peer-Based Programs	23
Transition into Ministry Programs—A List	24
A Hybrid Strategy	25
Common Features of Practice-Centered Pastoral Formation	26
The Importance of Pastoral Mentors	29
The Importance of Engagement with Peers-in-Learning	31
The Importance of the Congregation	32
Situating the TiM Initiative within the Longer and Larger Story of Theological Education	33
PART THREE NEW DISCOVERIES TO BUILD UPON	34
Conclusion	39
NOTES	40



GREGORY GROOVER, senior pastor of Historic Charles Street AME Church, Roxbury, Massachusetts, shares a moment with TiM resident Shawn Wallace.

Overview

THIS REPORT SEEKS TO CALL ATTENTION TO A PROMISING set of new experiments that share a common purpose and have the potential to make a collective impact on the way people enter pastoral ministry in the 21st century. In distinctive ways, more than 30 program teams drew hundreds of new seminary graduates, a variety of denominational and judicatory leaders, a large number of congregations, several seminaries, and thousands of congregation members into a shared effort to change the experience of pastors at the thresholds of their ministries. This report will identify some of the motivating concerns that gave rise to this effort and it will highlight significant discoveries that can lay the groundwork for long-term, systemic change in the way people are prepared for practical pastoral leadership.¹

The name for this collective endeavor is Transition into Ministry (TiM), an initiative of Lilly Endowment Inc. participated in by a total of more than 800 beginning pastors. At its core this initiative seeks to reshape the preparation of Protestant pastors by supplementing the seminary training received in the M.Div. program with a focused apprenticeship in a “community of practice.” Based on the assumption that pastors will be better prepared to lead congregations when they have had the opportunity to become reflective participants in a local community of practice, these programs seek to counter a two-centuries-long trend of viewing pastoral preparation as something that is largely completed upon graduating from seminary.

This report has three parts. We begin with an introduction on the special challenge of the transition into ministry, which provides a context for viewing the 34 programs in this initiative (see page 24). Then we turn to the programs themselves, describing their salient features and taking a closer look at a few. Finally, we conclude with a reflection on some of the significant observations and discoveries from this initiative, which together form a foundation on which to build yet more new approaches to the work of preparing a new generation of pastoral leaders.



The congregation offers an Easter prayer at Trinity Lutheran Church in Moorhead, Minnesota.




TiM resident Jennie Barrett Siegal offers Communion to a congregant at Wellesley Congregational Church in Wellesley, Massachusetts.

PART ONE

A Special Challenge

TiM resident Lowell Michelson performs a baptism at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Davenport, Iowa.



There are many paths into pastoral ministry, and many steps along each path. For the majority of those who follow these paths, however, there is one shared step, one challenge that all face in common. It is the time when each individual steps across a threshold from a season of preparation to a life of leadership. A mantle of responsibility is put on, a role is assumed, a different status or identity is conferred.

Throughout the history of the church, this special time of transition has been prepared for in different ways, recognized through different rituals, and supported by different organizational patterns. Each generation takes its turn leading individuals up to and across the pastoral threshold. In each journey great things are at stake: the vocational future of an individual leader, the communal future of a congregation of believers, and the handing on of the faith from one generation to the next. These transitions happen so many times that we can easily take them for granted. They are hard to observe since they involve so many human transactions, so many conscious and unconscious moments, so many personal, social, historical, and spiritual dynamics. Yet, if we look closely, we find that each threshold crossing, each transition into ministry, is filled with numerous actors, many subplots, sharp twists and slow turns, beginnings and endings, accidents and inevitabilities, moments of sin and grace.

Occasionally, pastors who have made this transition reflect back on it in written form, giving us autobiographical glimpses of their journeys. In the earliest days of the church, the Apostle Paul shared some of his experience in his letters. The tradition of pastoral reflection that he started continues to the present day. Occasionally, interested observers who watched others make these transitions—like St. Luke in the book of Acts—chart the trials and errors, the joys and sorrows of those who dare to make the transit. But for most of us inside or outside of the church, the individual stories and the greater collective narrative about the adventure of pastoral ministry remain hidden or, at best, barely visible.

Why Should We Care?

What happens to people as they cross this threshold has great consequences. For the individuals who step into pastoral ministry as their personal vocation, everything is at stake. Some new ministers fall in love with the ministry, find a life's work that gives them great satisfaction, and construct a way of life and a web of relationships of the greatest personal meaning and value. Others never find the joy in ministry and experience their early years as an ordeal that leads to depression, breakdown, even resignation. Many, if not most, clergy live in between the two poles, experiencing an oscillating mixture of high and low moments and emotions. In all cases, characters are set, expectations met or dashed, career paths determined, habits of pastoral practice established, family lives patterned, and worldviews and life stances confirmed in this liminal period of moving into a role and an environment not of one's own making.

For those in congregations who call these newcomers into positions of leadership and responsibility, the stakes are equally high. Will this new pastor be someone I can trust and relate to? Will she respond creatively, competently, and faithfully to the crises,

challenges, and opportunities present in the life of the congregation as a community and in the individual lives of those who live and move within it? Will this person incarnate the Gospel and mediate grace? Will he be a spiritual companion and friend able to help a congregation discern its calling and fulfill its mission in the world? Or will this pastor crush hope, fail to connect, flounder in confusion, and hold the congregation back? Given the enormous energies, time, and resources that go into most "call" processes or appointments of new pastors, these are questions that impact the health and hope of congregations and denominations at many levels.

For those in the wider world around these congregations—who may be oblivious to these pastoral comings and goings—there is a great deal at stake as well. Will these pastors flourish and build congregations of people that love the neighbor, practice compassion, contend for justice, and contribute to the healing of the world? Or will these pastors struggle, lose heart, and fail to call forth all that their congregations have to give to their neighborhoods, communities, and the wider world? More concretely, will there be meals available for the hun-

gry, clothing and jobs for the poor, shelter for the homeless, and other tangible acts of mercy and justice offered to the community and wider world, or not?

Paying Attention to the Transition

With so much at stake in this transition, it is important first to understand why it has become so difficult in the past half century, and then to search for the best ways to help new pastors negotiate it successfully. For many reasons, the transition into ministry has become more complex and, for many, more lonely. The experiments we report on here offer specific examples of ways to provide missing infra-



CLERGY RESIDENTS AND CLERGY STAFF celebrate serving together at Christ Church (Episcopal), Alexandria, Virginia. From left: Jenni Ovenstone, TiM resident; Cathy Quinn, TiM resident; Mary Lynn Dell, clergy staff; Joseph Pae, TiM resident; Mpho Tutu, TiM resident; Duncan Burns, TiM resident; Andrea Bowlby, TiM resident; Beverly Weatherly, clergy staff; Carol Pinkham Oak, clergy staff; Pierce Klemmt, rector; and Shirley Smith-Graham, clergy staff.

structures of support and practical education (which we call communities of practice) which demonstrate that it is possible to change some of the dynamics of the contemporary transition experience.

This report focuses on one coordinated effort to pay attention to this pivotal season in the life of a pastor. In the pages that follow, we report on the experience of more than 800 new pastors, a corresponding number of congregations, many pastoral staff members and teams of resource providers from at least 11 Protestant denominations, thousands of individual congregational members, as well as several seminaries, judicatories, and educational agencies, who together have focused new energy and attention on the process of threshold crossing from seminary to first call. Working in a variety of ways, these individuals and institutions are part of a shared initiative supported by Lilly Endowment Inc. Begun in 1999, the initiative is titled simply “Transition into Ministry.” Through this initiative, Lilly Endowment brought a range of participants, denominations, and strategies into a shared endeavor to improve the way that graduating seminarians make these pivotal transitions. Taken together, this collection of programs can be seen as a significant new approach to the formation of pastoral leaders for American Protestant congregations. While it is too early to measure the full impact of this effort, and while there is much important future work yet to be mounted, there are significant early discoveries in these programs that merit consideration by those who care about the future of the church’s ministry.

What Is the Transition Like?

As mentioned above, the history of the church carries within it considerable evidence about how clergy from various ages crossed the threshold into pastoral leadership.² Our age is no exception. For example, in 2001 Richard Lischer published *Open Secrets*:

A Spiritual Journey through a Country Church (Doubleday), an autobiographical account of his first call experience at New Cana Lutheran Church in southern Illinois. Writing 30 years after he left that congregation, Lischer recalled clearly his first impressions. As he drove up to the church for the first time, “I felt something flop in my stomach. Then a crushing sense of disappointment. *So this is what has been prepared for me.*”² With eight years of high-quality

The net effect of the enormous social transformations of the 20th century, and their accompanying changes in congregational, seminary, and denominational life, was a complete transformation of every step in the transition process.

ministerial preparation behind him (and a Ph.D. from the University of London to ice the cake!) the newly ordained minister beheld a tattered church and a rundown parsonage in the middle of nowhere. He “bitterly resented the bureaucrats who had misfiled my gifts, misjudged my obvious promise, and were about to place me in rural confinement. Whoever they were, they hadn’t even bothered to get to know *me*.”³ *Open Secrets* is a moving and beautifully written account of how Lischer moved from this moment of letdown and anger to a season of discovery about the people of this rural congregation and himself. But the discoveries were not easy. First came a shock of recognition: “eight years of theological education had rendered us [Lischer and his classmates] uncertain of our identity and, like our professors, unemployable in the real world. After years of grooming, we were no longer sure what it meant to be a *pastor* or if we wanted to be one.”⁴

Lischer’s account of pastoral transition in the 1970s sounds themes that transcend his own experi-



PASTORAL RESIDENTS and program coordinators from Wellesley Congregational Church in Wellesley, Massachusetts, and Charles Street AME Church in Roxbury, Massachusetts. From left: Mashod Evans, TiM resident; Chris Braudaway-Bauman, TiM coordinator at Wellesley; Ted Maynard, TiM resident; Catriona Grant, TiM resident; Deyone Douglas, TiM resident; Viola Morris-Buchanan, TiM coordinator at Charles Street; and Quinn Caldwell, TiM resident.

ence. The sense of disappointment, feelings of anger, inability to see any “fit” between self and new situation, doubts about the adequacy of all the years of preparation, and deep confusion about role and identity that he articulates echo in countless other stories of ministerial transition, then and now. As the mere existence of his book vividly demonstrates, the formative power of those first three years in this first call expressed itself long after he left New Cana for future ministry as a pastor of a larger church in Virginia and then as professor of homiletics at Duke Divinity School. That the book has been so widely read and discussed by pastors over the past seven years suggests that he touched a reality that others had experienced as well.

A similar kind of book by another Lutheran pastor, Heidi Neumark, appeared two years later. *Breathing Space: A Spiritual Journey in the South Bronx* (Beacon Press, 2003) is an autobiographical account of 20 years of ministry in a small, urban congregation very different from the three-year first call that Lischer described. The Transfiguration Lutheran Church that Neumark encountered in 1984 was a predominately Puerto Rican congregation struggling to stay alive in a part of the Bronx that served, as one newspaper editorial put it, as “the city’s [New York’s] toilet.”⁵ Murders on the street,

drug dealers, crushing poverty, and hopelessness were the raw material of this first call. Although Neumark had intentionally prepared for this kind of ministry in other urban ministry settings and by a cultural immersion in South America, she described her time of transition as *malabarriga*, or ecclesiastical morning sickness. As she faced the many challenges and instant changes that took place in her congregation, she recounted moments when one parishioner would say to her, “Now, Pastor, please don’t cry,” how another would correct her Spanish grammar for sermons and interpret during pastoral conversations with those who could not understand either her Spanish or English, and how still another would tell her that she was being prayed for. Feelings of insecurity and anxiety left her “ready to fall apart at a moment’s notice.”⁶

Neumark’s moving account goes on to tell a story of a remarkable ministry in a remarkable congregation. At one point she provides an iconic image for the challenge of the transition into ministry. She recalls a visit to Hamburg, Germany, where she came across a statue of Archbishop Ansgar, who brought Christianity to that city in the ninth century. The statue portrays Ansgar as standing with a church building in his arms. For Neumark the statue “served as a reminder of an arrogant ecclesial model

that assumes we carry a prefabricated, everything-included, unquestionably correct model church around in our arms to plop down wherever we find ourselves.” Her ministry required learning to work in a new way—her existence depended upon it. “Claiming to come in knowing everything, possessing the complete package, would be particularly dangerous for a white pastor in the South Bronx. I keep the photo I took of Ansgar as a reminder of what I don’t want to do or to be.”⁷

Like Lischer’s account, Neumark’s sounds themes that resonate far beyond her particular situation. In her case she described the crises of urban, multicultural ministry. Yet the immediate life-and-death challenges, the institutional pain and discomfort that begin as soon as things start to change, the limits of competence, and the great insecurity and anxiety that come with the responsibility of leadership are realities met as anyone crosses the pastoral threshold.

The new pastors who are participating in the TiM initiative are not writing books yet, but they are meeting these kinds of challenges. In a recent special issue of Alban’s magazine, *Congregations*, several young clergy wrote about their early experiences.⁸ Brian Dixon, for example, wrote of the letdown he experienced when he drove up to his San Francisco congregation. Expecting a big reception, he found no one waiting to welcome him. A brief tour of the church building revealed that his office had a leaking ceiling and that neither the phone nor the computer worked. The one member who showed him around said, “Well, I’m glad you are here” and walked away. “I was left there, standing alone on the steps,” Dixon wrote. “There would be no great welcome, no reception, no celebratory lunch. I felt isolated. I felt discouraged. I felt disappointed.”⁹ Another participant, Sarah Griffith, wrote of the invaluable support system that the TiM programs had provided her. But then she described the experience of a friend who

was not in the program: “She quickly began to experience hazardous conditions, unsafe boundary violations, and rapid exposure to the diseases of the church. She lacked significant support from clergy colleagues, she felt overwhelmed and isolated. Her situation-induced depression consumed her, and the work became unbearable. Phone conversations revealed a person in a spiritual, mental, and physical crisis.”¹⁰ That friend left the ministry after a year.

Still another new pastor recounts a surprising discovery that transformed her transition experience. Christina Grace Kukuk tells of the feelings of mismatch that so many clergy experience in this transition: “This congregation often felt like an alien people to me. Roughly 67 percent of the regular attendees held graduate degrees of some sort. Ordained ministers numbered no fewer than 10, sometimes more. In contrast, neither of my parents had completed a bachelor’s degree, and my siblings and I were the first among our many cousins to try college before pregnancy or marriage.

Only when both domains of pastoral formation—the seminary and the congregation—recognize and resource one another can the full range of formation be accomplished.

Starker still were the differences in faith experiences and language about faith, differences not entirely unrelated to class identity.” Yet she found herself “noticing within, and yet coming from somewhere beyond me, a genuine love for a people I found strange and hard to understand.”¹¹ These pastors and their other colleagues in the TiM initiative met all the challenges—ranging from preparing a sermon with five minutes notice to conducting a funeral for the first time to dealing with resistance from lay leaders—that make the transition so challenging.

Why Is It So Hard?

Much of the challenge in this threshold-crossing process is of a personal nature. In any human transition there are developmental challenges that are made complex by personal histories, personality dynamics, temperaments, maturity, life circumstances, and other factors. For many pastors the personal work of transition into ministry is sizable. Often the transition is a first encounter with the full reality of adulthood, as the new minister leaves behind old patterns of student life and dependence on parents or others for financial support and takes on all the responsibilities of independence. Part of the change is usually a physical relocation, with all that moving entails. New work schedules and stresses often collide with attempts to shape a lifestyle of ongoing spiritual growth, exercise, and self-care. There are economic dimensions, ranging from salary negotiations to debt management to health care and pension benefits to learning how to structure a new lifestyle. There are complex and shifting family and relationship dynamics to be attended to: marriages, births, the careers of spouses and partners, and increased time away from the family.

These predictable coming-of-age challenges sit in a larger cultural context of identity formation processes that make personal life transitions much more complex. For more than a half century a sizable phalanx of social scientists have sought to clarify the difference in identity formation between simpler premodern times, when identity options were fewer and more distinct, and modern and postmodern contexts, in which personal identities are no longer givens but have become complex personal and social constructions, assembled through a dizzying variety of social, cultural, economic, vocational, and lifestyle choices. As the seminary graduate moves into a first call, she or he is very much a work in progress, an identity that is still under construction.

In the midst of these personal and cultural transition issues that each new minister must address, however, lies an especially important and not yet fully understood identity transformation that is more than personal or cultural. One moves from the status of seminarian to that of pastor. Each of those two words contains layers of meaning. Fundamentally, a seminarian is a student, someone who is preparing for a future role of congregational leadership. As a student, each seminarian is introduced to an enormous range of knowledge from biblical, historical, theological, cultural, and practical fields. In a variety of ways, the seminaries of America lead their students through an ever expanding maze of knowledge that some have called a theological encyclopedia.¹² Over the centuries, and especially in the era following the Enlightenment and the invention of the modern university, this theological encyclopedia has become so large, so complex, so specialized and technical, and so multidimensional—covering more than a dozen fields from traditional disciplines of bible, history, and theology to modern disciplines of psychology, education, and the social sciences—that the old goal of mastery now seems naïve or quaint. At best, perhaps, seminaries today lay the foundation of the various disciplines, which pastors may then engage in further reflection, study, and growth that is more attuned to their practice setting.



TiM RESIDENTS

Mark Furlow, Erika Takacs, and Daniel Lennox at Christ Church (Episcopal) in Alexandria, Virginia.

But seminaries do more than download huge bodies of knowledge into new generations of students. As *Educating Clergy*,¹³ an important recent study of professional theological education, demonstrates, seminaries also form students spiritually, train them to perform an ensemble of pastoral tasks, and expose them to a variety of ministry contexts. In each of these different educational dimensions, the seminarian assumes the posture of a novice, an explorer, a trainee, or a student. As she or he matriculates, a wide range of knowledge and experience is gained, along with varying levels of competency in pastoral arts. But all of this work—including even the “practical” courses of field work, clinical training, and internship—is anticipatory and preparatory.¹⁴ The knowledge, skills, and identity norms of being “trained as a pastor” have not yet been tried, tested, and confirmed by a community that shares in this ministry and looks to the seminary graduate as its pastoral leader.

At the time of ordination or installation into pastoral ministry, the seminary graduate suddenly experiences a shift in self-perception. The shift has two sides to it. The first shift is external, as the world begins to see the seminary graduate differently. The congregation that calls her, the denomination that places his name on a clergy roster, the seminary that now sends “Dear alumni” letters, and the larger society no longer see the seminarian as a student or novice. Instead, they regard these newcomers as biblical and theological resources, as institutional managers, as spiritual and moral guides, as pastoral leaders. At the same time that the external environment shifts its perspective, the person crossing the threshold into pastoral ministry must negotiate the second shift, a parallel internal change in perspective that meshes with those external expectations even as it seeks to differentiate the individual from the role. New clergy ask things like, “Do I have specialized knowledge and skills that can help them? Can I live up to their expectations? Will I find fellow sojourners here for my own spiritual journey? Can I actually lead these people?” The new minister begins to perceive her- or himself in new ways in relation to this community.

Part of these role negotiations and shifts in identity relate to adjusting to a congregational culture after a period of schooling. Seminaries have different community norms and expectations for “leadership” than do local churches. Being a self-starter, taking initiative, and carrying out individual projects are all rewarded in the theological school. But congregations expect more collaborative leaders: someone who consults with others, listens carefully to a range of views, and invites others to share in a project’s design and implementation. Shifting roles from the community of scholarship to the community of ministry practice requires significant shifts in one’s personal style of initiative taking, collaboration, and decision making. Thus, an unresolved question remains for most seminaries: how to teach students to become the local leader of a community.

The Transition into Ministry Is a Special Challenge Today

In contemporary America, a particular set of social and cultural challenges has shaped the transition into ministry in powerful ways. Both the time of preparing for the ministry and the actual transition environment have changed in ways that pose significant challenges. While the Corinth of Paul’s time or the London of Wesley’s era experienced their own forms of cosmopolitanism and change, the environments of the early 21st century make the forming of ministers an especially daunting task. The story of the changing nature of the transition into ministry in the past half century is far too complex to recount fully here. In the section that follows we will identify only some of the most salient factors in that story and point to a net result.

We begin with the recognition of the complex mix of social, religious, cultural, educational, and economic changes that have converged to create a situation that some might call a “double bind.” On the one hand, explosions in knowledge, the emergence of American pluralism, a powerful consumer economy, and many other of the classic elements of modernity have exponentially increased what a

pastor needs to know to minister effectively in our time. A variety of kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing are now demanded of the entering minister. One side of the double bind, then, is that every entering pastor is being pressured to learn more and integrate more different kinds of knowledge than ever before. At the very same time, the once thick religious subcultures that naturally passed on traditions of ministry and pastoral practice and supported new clergy as they

assumed their roles lost a great deal of their formative power as the 20th century progressed. So the other side of the double bind is that the new minister has fewer sources of practical wisdom to draw upon. At the same time that their transition from seminary to first call demands that they learn how to practice ministry in a world of greater complexity and diversity, the communities of practice that their predecessors could count on have disappeared. Increasingly, they are on their own.

In America's history, various Christian traditions formed denominational "feeder systems" for ministerial leadership. These distinct ministerial pathways shaped fledgling pastors from cradle to ordination to lifelong service in that denomination. Parsonages were primary incubators where pastors' sons and other apprentices carefully observed a minister's practice and absorbed the clerical way of life, both in the study and at the dinner table. In America's open spaces, new communities of faith found the space and eventual religious freedom to build their own congregations and develop their own ethnic and religious subcultures, which shaped rising generations of new leaders. Over time, denominations built their own systems of preparatory schools, colleges, and seminaries where scripture, confessions, and theology could be studied and particular denominational cultures transmitted

and offered as contributions to American society.

In the 20th century, the changes of modernity disrupted these relatively homogenous feeder

How one learns ministry in these early years is as important as what one learns. ... If the initial experience of being a novice is generative, it sets the stage for embracing the need for learning that one encounters in the course of a lifetime of ministry.

systems. America became an urban nation, the frontier closed, and powerful social processes like higher education, social mobility, suburbanization, immigration, affluence, the media, and modern transportation blurred the subcultural lines that previous generations had drawn. Over the course of the century, the ethnic, class, and cultural substructures that supported much of American denominational life gave way. Ideological divides between small town conservatives and cosmopolitan liberals further weakened denominational identity and stability. People came into ministry from a variety of contexts, such as parachurch and student ministries, not just one approved denominational path. Denominations tried to adjust by becoming more diverse and ecumenical, but this only widened the pathways into ministry and the various forms that ministry could take.

Local congregations increasingly reflected the pluralism of the land, ceasing to be places where everyone believed and practiced the same things. More and more often, congregations took on the individualistic ethos of America and developed their own distinct identities and cultures, often quite at odds with the official denominational traditions or structures of the past. As their members experienced the blessings of higher education, mobility, and

multiple lifestyle and job choices, they formed new expectations of their pastoral leaders, turning some into managers of complex programs, structures, and staffs. Seminaries and denominations could no longer assume that “one size fits all.”

Seminaries experienced their own dramatic changes. At the dawn of the 20th century, these once simple institutions became increasingly complex, incorporating new disciplines and knowledge from powerful universities. Specialized forms of “practical” training, such as pastoral care and counseling, religious education, and field and clinical education, struggled for curricular space with a growing number of auxiliary disciplines—sociology of religion, comparative religions, anthropology, psychology of religion, ethics, etc.—in addition to the established curriculum of Bible, theology, history, and preaching. Seminary faculty evolved from being primarily made up of seasoned pastor-scholars to consisting almost entirely of professors trained in academic specialties, often with little or no first-hand experience as a pastor of a local congregation. Larger seminaries took on the dual mission of preparing local pastors and future professors, groups with sometimes different educational needs.

In the second half of the 20th century, student bodies became increasingly diverse as women and minority candidates came from a variety of pre-seminary pathways to campus. They came with different backgrounds, learning styles, and visions of future ministry. Increasingly it became more difficult—but perhaps also more interesting and creative—to teach and learn an intact tradition on our seminary campuses.

Economic realities also changed. More and more, seminarians came to school with larger amounts of debt—and with greater family obligations. Specialized faculty, larger plants and libraries, and more complex programs increased the costs of theological education exponentially at the same time that denominations began to experience major “restructuring shifts” due to cultural disestablishment, multiculturalism, and decline in membership and resources. These economic developments changed seminaries in many ways, as presidents and boards took on new roles, as development offices proliferated, and as students scrambled to support themselves with off-campus jobs, larger debt loads, and the help of working spouses. Student life, once viewed as peaceful withdrawal from the world for a time of disciplined



TIM RESIDENTS Meghan Gage and Amanda Adams at First Presbyterian Church in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

theological education and spiritual formation, had now become another version of modern life, complete with multitasking, compartmentalization, and piecemeal experiences of community, education, and formation.

The net effect of the enormous social transformations of the 20th century, and their accompanying changes in congregational, seminary, and denominational life, was a complete transformation of every step in the transition process. America itself became more diverse and complex as a nation. Denominations had become different kinds of institutions than they had been in America's formative years.¹⁵ Local congregations were made up of more complex and diverse people who acted in different ways than their predecessors had, leading many to wonder if America had entered a new era of “*de facto* congregationalism.”¹⁶ Seminaries taught a much larger array of subjects, used a range of teaching methods, and had a richer mix of teachers and students. And the new pastors they graduated had different backgrounds, lifestyles, needs, and gifts than previous generations.

One way to frame the difference between the way new clergy entered their pastoral ministries a century ago and the way that they do today is to see the transition into ministry as a story of the loss of natural communities of practice and repeated attempts to compensate for that loss. As the Protestant denominations have witnessed the decline of their clergy feeder systems, as they have experienced the weakening of the old ethnic and confessional subcultures that once provided their distinctive identities, and as they have participated in the cosmopolitan ecumenical theological movements of the 20th century, the established communities of pastoral practice have lost much of their salience. Meanwhile, theological education, influenced as strongly as it has been by the explosion of knowledge in the modern university and the strong currents of professionalism, specialization, and individualism that were the hallmarks of American modernity, has come to have less and less connec-

tion to the daily life of congregational practice. At the same time that new generations of pastors have received the increasing bounty of theological scholarship, they have less and less connection to the world of pastoral practice in which they will live out their ministries.

In the second half of the 20th century, a growing number of pastors, theological educators, and denominational leaders began to focus on this loss. They did not employ that language of community of practice that is current today. Instead, they spoke of a perceived “gap” between seminary and first call. A number of experimental programs were tried in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s to address a transition that had become increasingly difficult for the new ministers and increasingly serious for the congregations and denominations they served. The fact that so many participants are involved in this new effort—seminarians, pastors, congregation members, judicatory leaders, seminary faculty, denominational executives, foundation leaders, and others—is also evidence that this is not just a personal developmental challenge or a technical problem in the American clergy system. Instead, the transition into ministry process is an urgent task, a fundamental challenge in which everyone who belongs to a religious community, works in a religious institution, or lives in American society has both a stake and a responsibility.

As we turn to the description of the TiM initiative in the next section, this framework of viewing the transition into ministry as a move into a community of practice is crucial. All of the programs undertaken in this initiative participate in a shared effort to build new, intentional communities of practice where entering pastors have the chance to learn pastoral ministry by doing it and reflecting on it. These programs put the congregation at the center of the learning experience and return practicing clergy to a central teaching role, while making reflective practice rather than academic study the pivotal way of learning pastoral ministry. As they enter these communities of practice,

the participants in these programs are challenging dominant trends in the preparation of American clergy. By insisting on a lengthy, collaborative, practice-based season of pastoral formation, they are seeking to rebalance the 20th-century emphasis on theological education that placed a premium on the individual's acquisition of knowledge.

These programs could be misunderstood as attempts to roll back modernity and return

to the “good old days” when pastors learned primarily by apprenticeship. While elements of apprenticeship are clearly present in these programs, the TiM programs seek to incorporate the gifts of modern theological education with the creation of new types of communities of practice that are suitable to our times and environments. As such, they seek to rebalance pastoral preparation in a way that closes the gap that has widened over the past century.

What Are Communities of Practice?

Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, a group of engineers working on similar problems, a clique of pupils defining their identity in the school, a network of surgeons exploring novel techniques, a gathering of first-time managers helping each other cope. In a nutshell:

Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.

Not everything called a community is a community of practice. A neighborhood, for instance, is often called a community but is usually not a community of practice. Three characteristics are crucial:

1. **THE DOMAIN:** A community of practice is not merely a club of friends or a network of connections between people. It has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership therefore implies a commitment to the domain, and thus a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people.
2. **THE COMMUNITY:** In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other. But members of a community of practice do not necessarily work together on a daily basis. The Impressionists, for instance, used to meet in cafés and studios to discuss the style of painting they were inventing together.
3. **THE PRACTICE:** A community of practice is not merely a community of interest—people who like certain kinds of movies, for instance. Members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short, a shared practice. This takes time and sustained interaction.

It is the combination of these three elements that constitutes a community of practice. And it is by developing these three elements in parallel that one cultivates such a community.

From Etienne Wenger's Web site: www.ewenger.com/theory/. Used by permission.

PART TWO

The Transition into Ministry Initiative



TiM resident Kent French preaches at Wellesley Congregational Church, Wellesley, Massachusetts.



For many years Lilly Endowment Inc. has lent its support to a wide variety of interconnected efforts aimed at enhancing and sustaining the quality of ministry in the U.S. Recently Lilly focused its grantmaking on programs that supported, trained, and nurtured clergy during the period immediately following their graduation from seminary, an effort that came to be known as the Transition into Ministry initiative. The Alban Institute has worked on this challenge of helping new pastors make the transition from seminary to pastoral leadership since the 1980s. In 2005 we were invited by Lilly Endowment to look over the shoulders of the young clergy, the various program teams, the congregations, clergy and staff, evaluators, and program coordinators involved in this initiative to learn more about this effort and to share early discoveries with religious leaders. What follows is a first report, based largely on the self-reporting of the program's participants. We believe that there is much more to be learned from this effort as the body of experience and reflection grows. In Part Three of this report (see page 34) we identify several areas we believe to be of special promise. But even from these earliest reports we find there are signs that this work has the potential to lead others to join the effort to strengthen pastoral ministry at one of its most formative moments.

If there is a debate concerning pastoral formation, it is not about the importance of the actual practice of ministry to the formation of pastoral leaders. There is broad agreement about this. However, discussion continues about how theological schools can shape their engagement with academic disciplines and practices of formation in ways that more effectively connect with the practice of ministry. One of the reasons this debate continues is that the dominant frame of reference for integrating issues of ministry practice remains the academic ethos and established curricula of theological schools. Even though the congregational (or clinical) ethos and work of pastoral ministry has been widely regarded as invaluable to pastoral formation, schooling remains the primary context for thinking about the teaching and learning of ministry.¹⁷

The TiM initiative and this report, on the other hand, situate practice-centered pastoral formation squarely within the time, space, and content of congregational life in the company of seasoned practitioners. The intention of this report is not to critique the preparation for ministry that takes place in and through the seminary curriculum. Rather, it is to mount a strong argument for the critical importance of congregations to the teaching and learning of ministry. For too long, the concerns about pastoral formation have over-focused on seminary education and tended to place in the background, and thereby diminish, the role of congregations and the expertise of seasoned practitioners. Only when both domains of pastoral formation—the seminary and the congregation—recognize and resource one another can the full range of formation be accomplished. As Daniel Aleshire, president of the Association of Theological Schools, said in a recent address, “Each setting, if it is doing its work well, provides a powerful educational venue for a kind of learning that is crucial to effective ministry.... I also think that the multiple kinds of education that are needed are most effective when each educational setting deeply respects the contribution, educational capacity, and intelligence of the other.”¹⁸

The Transition into Ministry initiative was begun in 1999, when Lilly Endowment began supporting programs addressing the transitional time, as part of its larger effort to strengthen the preparation of pastoral leaders. The innovation that emerged in the TiM grants program was the move to actively develop partners and promote creative agency among those involved in pastoral formation beyond the context of formal theological education. Thus, the program funded entities in the domains of pastoral practice—congregations, denominational bodies (both regional and national), and other congregationally related organizations—with the hope to both strengthen their capacity to assume responsibility for this dimension of pastoral formation and to learn from how they approach this work.

In relating the learning for ministry that takes place in the setting of formal theological education to the learning through ministry that takes place in the setting of congregational life, Aleshire claims that:

TiM RESIDENTS

Catriona Grant and Quinn Caldwell preside at a Sunday morning Communion service, Wellesley Congregational Church, Wellesley, Massachusetts.



Congregational and other ministry settings create the environment for a different kind of learning. They help students learn to think more clinically, administratively, organizationally, and interpersonally. These settings don't teach novice ministers how to “apply” what they learned in school. Rather, these environments evoke different “intelligences” and students engage in a different kind of intellectual work. It is intellectual work that deals with the kind of wisdom that accrues from practices, from skills that get better with repetition and reflection, from perceptions that are informed and enriched by coaching. These lessons are not learned well in a classroom; in fact, they *can't* be learned in a classroom.”¹⁹

Introduction to the TiM Initiative

The initial TiM grants in 1999 and 2000 funded a handful of programs in congregational and denominational settings. In 2008, there are 30 programs (see page 24). When the initiative began, Lilly Endowment staff recall, it was informed by the following assumptions:

- The initial years of ministry contribute to a trajectory for pastoral development over the course of one's ministry. Habits and practices (both good and bad) established in this period tend to endure.

- The experience of the transition from seminary to parish, from classroom to congregation, can be abrupt, untutored, and haphazard. As a result, beginning pastors tend to feel isolated and unprepared, lacking crucial support and guidance when they most need it.
- Often in Protestant church life, recent seminary graduates can find themselves situated as solo pastors in struggling congregations, with limited collegial or institutional support. This can, and often does, result in a professional, relational, intellectual, and cultural isolation that can be detrimental to the formation of one's vocational identity.
- A sustained, reflective, undivided engagement with congregational life and ministry is critical to the formation of pastoral identity and skill.
- The mentoring of new pastors by seasoned and excellent pastors is an important dynamic in the formation of pastoral identity.
- Learning with and from peers in ministry is a significant experience in vocational formation.

Working from these assumptions, TiM programs have developed an approach that is centered in congregational ministry and depends upon the close collaboration and interaction of congregations, mentoring pastors, and the beginning pastors. Strategies that integrate these three “players” in various ways have been devised. Some seminaries require a yearlong internship, either through clinical pastoral education or a local congregation, and these entail full-time immersion, but then only for nine to 12 months. The TiM programs, on the other hand, involve at least two years of such immersion and position the pastor as a called pastor in ministry rather than a student pastor in training. The key difference between this undertaking and the more traditional approaches to practice-centered pastoral formation found in seminaries—most notably field education and clinical pastoral education—is that the TiM program allows for a full-time, sustained immersion in the practice of ministry after graduation from seminary.

The central, organizing center of participants' daily life is not the academy but the life of the congregation. The principal teachers of ministry are coparticipants in the practice of ministry. Since the first TiM programs were funded in 1999, Lilly Endowment-funded programs addressing the transition into ministry have included almost 20 congregation-based “residency” programs and more than a dozen institution- or judicatory-based “first-call” programs. To highlight the distinctiveness of the TiM settings and their practice-centered pedagogies, this report will describe a sampling of the strategies and practices employed.

Congregation-Based Residency Programs

In the congregation-based programs, seminary graduates participate in full-time, two-year residencies in local churches. These programs are designed to give seminary graduates a sustained, reflective, and challenging encounter with the full range of pastoral roles, duties, and expectations within congregational life. In each program there are at least two and as many as four new pastors in residence, which allows for peer learning and shared reflection on the experience. Residents are paid full-time salaries, participate as members of the pastoral staff, and are mentored by a network of people, including the senior pastor, a program director (in many but not all settings), and lay committees. Here is how two congregations have embodied this approach.

Wilshire Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas

Wilshire Baptist is a large multiple-staff congregation in a Dallas suburb. As part of the TiM program, Wilshire has, since 2002, provided full-time two-year residencies for newly graduated seminarians. The residents enter into an open-ended rotation system where six core areas are explored: worship and preaching, discipleship, fellowship, stewardship, witness, and ministry.

Residents also attend two weekly seminars. One, in homiletics, is led by the senior pastor and gives the residents the opportunity to evaluate worship and preach-

ing, explore sermon preparation, and consider improvements in scripture reading, pastoral prayer, and worship leadership. The other seminar, on the life of the minister, is led by another member of the pastoral staff and explores topics such as staff dynamics, managing volunteers, family systems theory, and soul-care of the minister. These peer-learning experiences help to dispel the competitiveness that years of academic pursuit may have instilled; instead, the residents all go through their moments of success and instances of correction together and learn not only from their own performance but also that of others. In addition, the residents participate as members of the worship planning team that meets weekly to plan Sunday services.

“I feel like I’ve learned so much through conversations with [my pastoral mentors] as well as by watching them ‘in action.’ ... I’m constantly learning in ministry—learning about myself, the congregation, God, and the community.”

—a pastoral resident in the
Transition into Ministry program

The involvement of the congregation in the program is also crucial. Each resident has a faith partner to pray and reflect with regularly. Each has a host family that sees to his or her social and emotional needs during this young adult time of life that is filled with newness. Residents also meet monthly with a lay mentoring committee that provides honest and encouraging feedback on their ministry.

In the course of their two years, pastoral residents experience a supported and reflective immersion in the roles, duties, and challenges of pastoral life. Upon completion of the program, it is expected that the residents will seek placement in permanent pastoral positions. Of the seven residents to complete the program to date, one has stepped back from ministry

for the time being, one is currently leading a church plant effort, another has enrolled in a Ph.D. program, and the remaining four have been placed in pastoral positions in established congregations.

Christ Church (Episcopal), Alexandria, Virginia

Christ Church is a large, historic, multiple-staff Episcopal congregation across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C. The program accepts three residents per two-year cycle and is coordinated by a part-time program director. There are four rotations through the ministries of the parish: stewardship and outreach; evangelism and pastoral care; faith formation for adults, youth, and children; and parish leadership development. Residents maintain an ongoing practice of preaching (usually weekly), weekly sermon feedback seminars, pastoral visitation, and teaching with children, youth, and adults. Careful attention is given to preaching and celebrating the Eucharist—rotating between Sunday and mid-week services. Weekly peer group sessions and seminars

include supervision, mentoring, spiritual direction, and other topics on the practice of ministry.

The program relies on extensive lay leadership through the admission and oversight committees, lay support teams, lay pastoral caregivers, and professional staff. The congregation has grown to see itself as a teaching congregation, one that helps to create the “conditions for success.”²⁰ The core of the vocational formation process addresses the identity of a deacon and a priest (Episcopalians are first ordained to the diaconate and then to the priesthood), especially through the key relationships at the heart of parish ministry: relationship to God in Christ, relationships among the people of God, and relationship with self. As their experience in

ministry grows, the residents reflect upon the pastoral vocation around these key relationships.

Since the program began in 2001, 13 residents have completed it. All are now serving in parishes across the country.

Strengths of the Congregation-Based Residency Approach

- Makes pastoral residents and mentors coparticipants in a single community of shared practice, thus setting up the conditions for direct and unfiltered exposure to one another's practice—from new clergy to experts.
- Directly incorporates laity and the ethos of the congregation into the fabric of pastoral formation, thereby reframing the lay/clergy divide as a constructive partnership.
- Takes seriously the congregation as a primary site for the practice, learning, and mentoring of ministry.
- Cultivates practitioners who are skilled at making expertise intelligible and accessible to new clergy through pedagogies of mentoring and coaching.
- Keeps in balance the demand of assuming the role of pastor with the experience of becoming a pastor, so that the new minister moves from “role play” to “role identification.”

Peer-Based Programs

Denominations, local judicatories, seminaries, and other church-related organizations operate the peer-based programs, employing a variety of strategies for convening, mentoring, and nurturing (in two- or three-year cycles) pastors who are already ministering in first-call situations. The focal point for these programs tends to be interaction with peers and mentors in ministry—usually

in a context beyond the actual ministry setting. Here is how some of the programs have pursued this approach.

A Seminary Peer-Based Strategy

Virginia Theological Seminary's First Three Years program brings recent alumni together for peer learning, relationship, engagement with spiritual disciplines, and ongoing reflection on priestly identity and practice. Graduates are convened six months after graduation and each of the following three springs for weeklong residencies on campus. As part of the program, they are required to find a mentor and to form a pastoral peer group in their region; they are also provided funds to resource their continuing education.

The residency week has a reunion component as well as a retreat component. During residency week, mornings are often spent in classes and seminars exploring the ministry and mission of the church. The question-and-answer time in these seminars is always rich. The basic programmatic structure also includes case studies in small groups, which encourages theological reflection on the practice of ministry in areas of pastoral care, administration, preaching, and “engaging the world.”



TiM RESIDENT Jeremy Walloch greets members of the congregation at Trinity Lutheran Church in Moorhead, Minnesota.

Tools for building self-care and self-awareness for leadership have included explorations of emotional intelligence, appreciative inquiry, family systems theory, and personality assessments. Also included are opportunities for participants to reflect on the context and culture of their ministry by attending public and cultural events in Washington, D.C., followed by a time for theological reflection.

Finally, there is individual time with the program directors and an afternoon for assessment and evaluation. In between the gatherings, participants meet on a regular basis with supervisors and mentors. They submit periodic reports that include reflections on personal and professional goals, and they receive encouragement from the program directors to take part in other forms of continuing education.

A Denomination Peer-Based Strategy

Company of New Pastors, convened by the Office of Theology and Worship of the Presbyterian Church (USA), is a covenant-based vocational formation and nurture program for candidates and newly ordained pastors. Participants gather regularly with colleagues for study, prayer, encouragement, and accountability under the guidance of wise mentors—first as seminarians with professors, and later as parish pastors with seasoned pastors. The covenant includes regular participation in group gatherings and specific commitments to a daily regimen of prayer, scripture reading, and study of the Presbyterian Confessions. During yearly retreats, participants engage in fixed-hour prayer, explore readings and participant papers, and share concerns of ministry.

In 2008 there are 19 cohort groups of 10 each, from eight Presbyterian seminaries, plus one at Fuller, an independent

Transition into Ministry Programs*

Residency-Based Programs

Approximately 150 new pastors have participated in residency-based programs.

1. Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania
2. Central Christian Church, Lexington, Kentucky
3. Central Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, Georgia
4. Christ Church (Episcopal), Alexandria, Virginia
5. Church of the Servant (Christian Reformed Church), Grand Rapids, Michigan
6. Community Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Kansas City, Missouri
7. Concord Baptist Church of Christ, Brooklyn, New York
8. First Presbyterian Church, Ann Arbor, Michigan
9. Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago, Illinois
10. Historic Charles Street African Methodist Episcopal Church, Roxbury, Massachusetts
11. Hyde Park Union Church, Chicago, Illinois
12. National City Christian Church, Washington, D.C.†
13. Plymouth Church (United Church of Christ), Des Moines, Iowa
14. Plymouth Congregational Church, First Congregational Church, and Mayflower Community Congregational Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota
15. St. James Episcopal Church, New York, New York
16. St. Paul Lutheran Church of the Quad Cities, Davenport, Iowa
17. Trinity Lutheran Church, Moorhead, Minnesota
18. Wellesley Congregational Church (United Church of Christ), Wellesley, Massachusetts
19. Wilshire Baptist Church (Cooperative Baptist Fellowship), Dallas, Texas

Peer-Based Programs

Approximately 575 new pastors have participated in peer-based programs.

1. Bethany Fellowships, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
2. Company of New Pastors, Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (USA)
3. First Parish Project, Hinton Rural Life Center
4. First Three Years Program, Virginia Theological Seminary
5. Institute for Youth Ministry, Princeton Theological Seminary†
6. Making Connections, Lewis Center for Church Leadership, Wesley Theological Seminary
7. Ministry Residency Program, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
8. New Clergy Excellence Program, Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ
9. Office of Pastoral Formation, Nashville Episcopal Area, United Methodist Church†
10. Peer Learning as a Pathway to Excellence Program, Institute for Clergy Excellence, North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church
11. Vocation of First Call Congregations Project, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Hybrid Programs

Approximately 30 new pastors have participated in hybrid programs.

1. Congregational Immersion Project, Disciples Divinity House, Vanderbilt University
2. Making Excellent Disciples, Episcopal Diocese of Chicago
3. Northern Indiana Conference, United Methodist Church†
4. Pastoral Residency Program, McAfee School of Theology, Mercer University

* See www.transitionintoministry.org.

† Program no longer active.

seminary with a large contingent of Presbyterian students. The peer groups are formed at the end of the penultimate year, and they meet with their faculty mentors monthly through graduation for table fellowship, prayer, and study of the ordination vows they are preparing to take. Following graduation, they are reconfigured into quasi-geographical groups (by place of call) that gather for six four-day meetings over the course of the four years following graduation. These meetings are convened by mentoring pastors. Together the group shapes the agenda, timing, and reading list to fit its particular needs, following a basic curriculum framework established by the Office of Theology and Worship. Begun in 2000, the program has involved 250 participants to date.

An Interdenominational Peer-Based Strategy

First Parish Project at Hinton Rural Life Center is a program that takes on the dissonance many new pastors feel as they are thrown into the cultural realities of small membership church life—often a congregational reality alien to their prior church experience. Hinton, a mission agency of the Southeastern Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church located in southwestern North Carolina, seeks to provide a space apart with peers and mentors where the skills for ministry in a small membership congregation and the formation of a strong pastoral identity can be explored and cultivated. The program is open to clergy of all denominations.

Within a four-year grant cycle, the program is designed to convene three cohorts of 25 participants each and is centered around retreats at the Center three times a year. Each retreat lasts five days and includes sessions on the practice of ministry (led by experienced pastors, pastoral counselors, and professors of pastoral ministry), formation of colleague groups (which are maintained throughout—and hopefully beyond—the program), table fellowship, worship, and free time. A cohort will continue for two years, with three weeklong meetings each year. The participants are divided into colleague groups

of five to seven members each. The cohorts run in overlapping years.

A vital part of the program is the annual consultation visit by a Hinton staffer to each parish. Six consultants have made over 40 on-site visits to date. There is also an Internet support system, directed by the new clergy participants. Begun in 2003, the program has involved 78 participants to date.

Strengths of the Peer-Based Strategy

- Because the participants are already placed, they feel the full weight of pastoral responsibility, which often gives an urgency to their readiness to learn.
- Participants' salaries are paid by their congregations, not the programs.
- When seminary-based, these programs build upon the learnings and ties developed during the seminary years, thus creating a reflective and relational bridge between the domain of schooling and the domain of congregational practice.
- The interaction with those in other congregations cultivates the skills for developing communities of practice among peers in ministry.
- The gatherings heighten the new ministers' sense of being incorporated into a wider, often ecumenical professional community.

A Hybrid Strategy

Several programs combine aspects of both residency-based and peer-based programs. In these hybrid programs, beginning pastors are placed in teaching parishes for two years, much like those in residency-based programs. However, because this is happening in parishes around the diocese, the new pastors are also able to convene regularly with other program participants in their area, much like those in peer-based programs. The participants continue this peer-based interaction after they have left the teaching parishes to lead congregations on their own.

The Episcopal Diocese of Chicago: Making Excellent Disciples

The Episcopal Diocese of Chicago has developed a program that combines aspects of both residency-based and peer-based programs. Seminary graduates are placed in teaching parishes as curates (assistant pastors) for two years, after which they are placed as rectors (pastors) in midsize developing congregations (“mustard seed” parishes) within the same diocese. During the first two years, beyond the daily practice of ministry in their teaching parishes, they convene periodically with curates from other teaching parishes and develop a strong peer-learning network, as do their mentor priests. As the curates move on to assume their roles as rectors, they continue to connect with mentors, peers, and lay leaders. By accepting these new clergy, the congregations commit themselves to a period of self-assessment and redevelopment, including their learning partnership with the mentoring congregation.

The heart of the program is the mentoring done by the rector of the teaching congregation, which continues after the participant has moved to the new congregation. Mentors and their new clergy meet weekly; peer groups of all participants meet monthly for reflection and skill-building; and all participate in an annual continuing education conference. The curates also participate in the diocesan Fresh Start program of yearly retreats, which serves both newly ordained clergy and those new to their current positions. Begun in 2002, the program has involved 18 newly ordained clergy, 10 mentoring clergy, and 19 congregations to date.

Strengths of the Hybrid Strategy

- Brings pastors, congregations, judicatories, and seminaries into creative collaboration around pastoral formation and congregational development.
- Makes constructive use of existing collegial ties between clergy within a diocese to build a

learning community around the teaching and learning of ministry.

- Generates collaboration between congregations as ties between mentoring congregations and developing congregations continue after curates are placed.
- Provides a strategy for recruiting high-quality priests for hard-to-place parishes with appropriate support from the wider ecclesial community.

Common Features of Practice-Centered Pastoral Formation

A common feature of all these programs is what we have begun calling “reflective immersion”: the provision of structures and processes that allow new pastors to learn from the immersive nature of first-call situations. There are three key players who help create the conditions for reflective immersion: mentoring pastors, peers-in-learning, and congregation members. The balance of these three catalysts—whether contact with the mentor is daily or occasional, whether peer groups are gathered or scattered, whether congregants are part of transition committees or just part of the congregation the participant leads—varies between the programs, but their presence and their care for the transitioning pastor distinguishes reflective immersion from the more common sink-or-swim style of immersion.

Reflective Immersion

Immersion, for our purposes, results when one is wholly situated in the daily responsibilities and rhythms of pastoral work in the life of a congregation. The beginning pastor inhabits the time, space, relationality, activities, and expectations intrinsic to the role of a pastor. The practice of being a pastor is no longer a part-time, episodic excursion but a full-time occupation. Being identified with the domain of practice sets up an essential, albeit incomplete, condition for pastoral formation. As crucial as immersion is to pastoral formation, immersion requires a structure that will allow for reflection.



PARTICIPANTS IN A WRITING WORKSHOP held for TiM participants at the Collegeville Institute in Collegeville, Minnesota gather for a photo. Roy and Mary Nilsen (top left) served as workshop leaders.

Only by being immersed in practice, then stepping back to reflect upon judgments made, can the goal of developing a spontaneous capacity for “reflection-in-action” take place.²¹

By contrast, *unreflective* immersion in the experience of ministry has as much potential to truncate and arrest pastoral formation as it does to foster it. Over the course of the past five years, the coordinators of the initiative have gathered large and small groups of beginning pastors who are participants in the TiM program. On these occasions, those present have been asked how many of them have one or more peers with whom they graduated who are struggling to find their way into pastoral life—to the point of seriously questioning their call or actually choosing to seek an alternative vocational path. It is not uncommon for every hand in the room to go up. Sarah Griffith, as noted earlier, wrote about one friend, whose “situation-induced depression consumed her, and the work became unbearable.”

Reflective immersion allows space for observation and critical reflection along with full participation. This reflective space allows a new pastor to enter the initial experience of immersion in ministry with

a dual identity: as a pastor and as a pastor-in-training. The new pastor takes on the pastoral authority that is conferred by the congregation and/or denomination and, at the same time, enters into a shared understanding with the congregation that he or she is a pastoral apprentice-in-residence.²² This duality provides an ideal setting for the formation of a pastoral identity. By providing a calibrated, graduated, reflective initiation into the pastoral life and the pastoral office, assuming the role of being a pastor is integrated with the emerging experience of becoming a pastor. One moves from “role play” to “role ownership” and identification. One resident described his experience as a “slowly coalescing understanding—through experience—of the multifaceted, multidimensional work of ministry.”

When the framework for reflection is gradual and calibrated with ministry involvement, a series of layered learning and support experiences move new clergy toward a new identity as practitioners. Lee Shulman of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Learning claims that learners need this careful, calibrated support: “Learners are scaffolded—that is, supported, legitimated, and nurtured,

in the process of activity, reflection, and collaboration with a community or culture that values such experiences and creates many opportunities for them to occur and to be accomplished with success and pleasure.”²³ Without such scaffolding, the pressure to demonstrate one’s competence often overwhelms the freedom to learn from and through experience. Another TiM pastor describes her experience as being given the room for “intentional learning and room to make mistakes and learn from them; opportunity to forge and develop friendships that encourage accountability and foster nurture and care. The opportunity to be engaged in practice of various types of ministry has been helpful in identifying both areas of giftedness and growing edges.”

When one’s sense of legitimacy is acquired through the course of one’s actual experience of ministry, it creates the conditions for a deeper resonance between role and identity. As one resident put it, she experienced “a growing sense of ‘this is what I do’ and ‘I belong’ in these settings, when at first I felt like an imposter, someone pretending to be a pastor.” Over time, as the community of practice calls on the new pastors to take on this new role, mirrors their performance back to them, and tests or confirms them,

the new pastors internalize that community feedback into fashioning that role as their own.

This interplay between role and identity is not a short-lived process. It is a dynamic negotiation that is essential to pastoral formation over the course of a lifetime of ministry. However, if in these initial years there is no context for sustained reflection on the integration of role and identity, the formation of a healthy pastoral identity is imperiled. *How* one learns ministry in these early years is as important as *what* one learns. If being a beginner is regarded simply as something to be overcome, this sense will undermine one’s ability to learn from those occasions when even an experienced practitioner encounters the limits of his or her skill or “know-how.” The movement from novice to expert is not a path once traveled; it is a pathway traversed again and again—always breaking open a fresh encounter between role and identity. Ongoing pastoral formation requires the capacity to re-engage the experience of being a novice without being intimidated by it. If the initial experience of being a novice is generative, it sets the stage for embracing the need for learning that one encounters in the course of a lifetime of ministry.

Reflective immersion also seems to set the stage for an increased capacity to interpret congregational culture. Several programs are intentional about teaching congregational discernment skills—neighborhood walks, community timelines, small group interviews, and the like—to help new pastors gather as much information about the culture and character of their congregation as possible. One young pastor said his experience of reflective immersion allowed him to develop “a new hermeneutic for congregations, a new lens through which to see both myself in ministry and to see into and beyond the activity in congregational dynamics.”²⁴

The strategies discussed earlier provide at least two versions of reflective immersion: congregation-based and peer-based. In both versions all the players are involved—pastoral mentors, peers-in-learning, and congregants—and the center of gravity is the actual practice of ministry. The strategies diverge



TiM RESIDENT

Nicole Lamarche at
Wellesley Congregational
Church, Wellesley,
Massachusetts.

on where and when the reflection on ministry takes place. In the residency-based programs, the daily interaction between peers and mentors and congregants takes place in a single context. In the peer-based programs, the specific context of one's immersion tends to be one step removed from the context of explicit reflection, while remaining immersed in a community of practitioners.

All of this requires a readiness for learning by the new pastor. What reason do we have to believe that practice-centered teaching and learning is well-suited to the new generation of pastors coming up through the ranks? The responses by new pastors to these experiences have been overwhelmingly positive. This kind of learning experience is welcomed by those who participate in it and yearned for by those observing it. It seems to answer the question of what is needed to move from the context of formal education to the world of practice where professional identity and competency are forged. In all of the contexts, new pastors have expressed deep appreciation for the opportunity to network with peers and mentors (lay and ordained) and the reflective engagement this makes possible as they take up pastoral life. The beginning pastors value their seminary education; they also recognize the importance of being able to step back and reflect upon their unfolding experience as they step into the role of pastor.

In order to explore further the conditions essential to reflective immersion, we will take a closer look at the three key players: pastoral mentors, peers-in-learning, and congregants. The ways these players are engaged in the reflective process vary according to the model. The fact that they are all in play, to one degree or another, is crucial to creating the conditions for reflective immersion.

The Importance of Pastoral Mentors

Seasoned practitioners who have learned to communicate to others the wisdom they have gained

through practice are crucial catalysts in creating the conditions for reflective immersion. The strength or relative weakness of a TiM program often turns on the effectiveness of mentoring pastors.

One of the key learnings in the TiM initiative has been the way coparticipation shapes mentoring. The relationship between mentor and new pastor is experienced differently when mediated through the experience of being coparticipants in a community of practice. This allows for a freedom of modeling, imi-

...when practice-centered teaching and learning of ministry are situated in the domain of congregational practice rather than the domain of schooling, a whole new range of innovative possibility opens up.

tating, and experimenting on one's own in a shared ministry. This does not diminish the importance of experience or the wisdom of the seasoned practitioner, but it does create the conditions for that wisdom and experience to be shared in a spirit of collaboration, mutual discovery, and service to a shared community. The following three reflections from TiM participants illustrate how the proximity of mentor and mentee to a shared field of practice greatly enhances the learning that comes through mentoring.

- *[My mentor, the senior pastor] welcomes reflection on his own work and he knows how to and feels comfortable talking through his work and ours. I know his work will always be a solid foundation for me to adapt my own practices. When he is present, he totally is present with you and understands your needs and concerns.*
- *What has been most helpful is that I feel as if, by watching [my mentor], I've gained a new "language." I have learned how to talk about things in*

new ways. Many days I watch myself thinking, I've only worked here for eight months and I'm turning into a little version of him. It is extremely helpful to have a positive role model you respect.

- *I feel like I've learned so much through conversations with [my pastoral mentors] as well as by watching them "in action." I appreciate their willingness to share their own ministry experiences or even the thinking behind decisions they've made. I'm constantly learning in ministry—learning about myself, the congregation, God, and the community.*

...a new sense of shared agency and possibility has arisen from the multitude of players in the TiM programs. ... This recovery of shared agency and responsibility for the formation of new pastors is foundational for the church's flourishing in the new millennium.

When mentor and mentee are both situated in a shared community of practice, there is a level of exposure to one another's practice that incorporates a more indirect, informal type of learning into the mentoring relationship. What is learned by the new pastor in relationship to seasoned practitioners cannot be limited to occasions of explicit instruction. There is a whole range of tacit learning as one observes up close and over time the life and world of the pastor. In essence, the new pastor is drawn into the *habitus*, or mode of life, of ministry in and through coservice to a community of practice. Two prominent learning theorists describe the range of tacit learning that is available within the context of apprenticeship:

What everyday life is like; how masters talk, walk, work, and generally conduct their lives...what other learners are doing; and what learners need to learn to become full practi-

tioners. It includes an increasing understanding of how, when and about what old timers collaborate, collude, and collide and what they enjoy, dislike, respect, and admire.²⁵

One young pastor in the program identifies the range of learning about pastoral energy and performance when describing the impact of working alongside a gifted mentor:

Pastoral ministry is a juggling act. I knew that (in theory), but I now understand (in reality) just how many balls a pastor has to keep in the air and keep moving, all the while having a performative positive energy about her. This continues to be a growing edge for me as I learn how my own energy and personality match with the daily demands of ministry. I need more down time than most—so finding key minutes in the day to recharge away from people has become essential. The ministry takes a stamina that I am still working to develop.

In many ways, this relationship becomes the nexus of negotiation of one's pastoral identity. In relation to seasoned practitioners, new pastors are able to see what expert practice looks like and thus more gladly undertake the pathway of formation required for their own maturing.

It is also true that wherever identity is being negotiated there is an intensity that is certain to engender conflict along the way. Stories of this intensity and of related occasions of conflict are not uncommon. However, as coparticipants in a shared community of practice, it is equally common that these conflicts become a constructive part of learning for both mentor and mentee. Jean Lave and Étienne Wenger, the learning theorists, argue: "Shared participation is the stage on which the old and new, the known and the unknown,

the established and the hopeful, act out their differences and discover their commonalities.”²⁶

A senior pastor in one of the TiM programs recalls the first time he met in seminar with his residents. He was anticipating it as an occasion when he would be called upon to draw from his reservoir of wisdom distilled from years of pastoral practice. Instead, when he opened the floor for conversation, he was confronted with an array of suggestions for how the practice of ministry in his congregation could be improved upon. His skill as a mentor was expressed in his capacity to utilize their perceptions as a pivot point for reflection on their shared engagement in ministry rather than to become defensive or threatened. The effective negotiation of continuity and change in the life of a congregation is a crucial dimension of mature pastoral leadership. A good mentor/mentee relationship provides an indispensable context for growing one’s capacity for this kind of negotiation on an intensely personal, less public level.

Additionally, the experience of a shared community of practice establishes the conditions for noncom-

petitive collaboration among pastors. When identity is formed individualistically, centered around authority figures and involving little peer reflection, the practitioner is less open to critique and collaboration. In the context of schooling, learning is often measured and rewarded as an individual achievement. The kind of teaching and learning that can take place for new clergy through their participation in a community of practitioners increases their capacity to learn ministry through the performance of ministry.

The Importance of Engagement with Peers-in-Learning

The importance of peer relationships to the learning of ministry has been a consistent and dominant theme in the feedback from participants themselves. Too often the significance of these relationships has been overlooked because of an emphasis on the mentor/mentee relationship as the principal relational context where learning takes place. Peer relationships have tended to be viewed as supportive of such learning but not essential to it. Others see it differently.



TiM RESIDENTS serving at Trinity Lutheran Church in Moorhead, Minnesota, and St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Davenport, Iowa, gather for a reunion at Flathead Lake in northwest Montana. Eugene Peterson (second from top left) was the keynote presenter.

Lave and Wenger assert that “where the circulation of knowledge among peers and near peers is possible, it spreads exceedingly rapidly and effectively.”²⁷ The experience of the TiM program strongly echoes this view of the importance of peers to learning.

“Eighty percent of what I’ve learned has come from working with and observing the four residents one year ahead of me,” said one resident, reflecting on the importance of peers. This comment was especially noteworthy in light of the high regard this resident had for her relationship with her pastoral mentor. As important as relationships with mature practitioners are to the learning of ministry, being incorporated into a community of *maturing* practitioners is equally important. As another pastor remarked, “It is important not only to learn ministry with veteran pastors who are well ahead of me on the learning curve, but also to learn from new pastors who are just ahead of me on the learning curve.” The TiM program has intentionally cultivated the conditions for the mutual learning of ministry. The shared risk and anxiety the participants experience, as well as their mutually discernable growth in skill and identity, establish a deeply formative experience of collegiality.

Increased self-knowledge is a common refrain in the benefits of peer engagement. One young pastor expressed this well: “I have learned how to discern my strengths and weaknesses. I believe part of this is the ability to put myself beside equally well-trained resident peers and see where their gifts are. I have been able to appreciate the diversity of ministry more easily.” Peers are often able to hear things from each other that they cannot from mentors because of the solidarity they feel in this new learning environment.

Some programs are very intentional about using peer-learning formats in their programs. Presenting case studies and ministry reflections (written and oral) to one’s peer group for common reflection and feedback has been widely used. Skilled facilitators use the group’s own process to develop a “community of learners” that is trusting, honest, and mutually supportive. Several peer-based programs also use peer groups as the primary venue for a mentor’s feedback, reflections, and guidance.

Engagement with peers goes a long way to countering the social, cultural, and generational isolation new pastors are prone to experience. In the voice of one pastor, “Being a pastor is a relatively odd thing to do for a living, and if you feel like the only one from your generation taking it on for miles around, it could get quite lonely. I was blessed with terrific peers in this program, who taught me a great deal and provided a wealth of understanding and good humor.” The generational solidarity among pastors in the program was widely viewed as an asset.

The Importance of the Congregation

These programs have helped to clarify the difference lay involvement makes to pastoral formation. The response of congregational members to these programs has been striking. Where lay committees have been formed to participate in the formation process, members have been energized by the experience, finding themselves caught up in a new understanding and regard for pastoral leadership and their relation to it. The dual identity of pastor and pastor-in-training intrinsic to these programs creates the conditions for a more open-ended encounter between pastor and laity. The typical division of labor that so often characterizes congregational life is reframed as a partnership of collaboration and coparticipation in the teaching and learning of ministry.

Reflecting on how his experience of congregational life had changed, one young pastor said that “the lay leadership is very active in many ways, and mentoring me is just one example. It is encouraging to know that this kind of community can and does exist, and to be mentored by an entire community is truly a living out of everyone’s baptismal call.” As long as new pastors stay open and “teachable” in their attitude toward the congregation, an unusually strong learning relationship can be formed. Maintaining this kind of mentoring relationship between laity and clergy is sometimes more difficult to do when laypersons are confined to roles as the beneficiaries of skilled pastoral leadership.

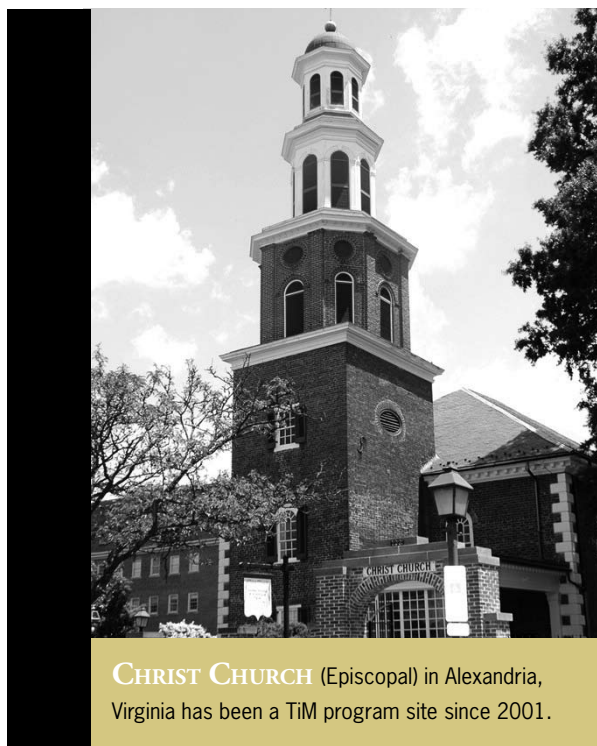
In the residency-based models especially, laypersons have been intentionally incorporated into the

process of pastoral formation. Through the development of lay committees, interactions between pastors and congregation members are structured into the programs, adding another dimension to the reflective immersion they encourage. Pastors and laity become acquainted with each other's lives both in and beyond the context of congregational life. These new pastors are immersed in the life-worlds of everyday Christians. This experience challenges the tendency to generate a clergy culture as a form of protection against the overwhelming demands of laity or a lay culture that is structured as a protection against the power needs of clergy.

This sustained, close encounter between congregants and clergy around the teaching and learning of ministry sets the stage for pastoral identity to be shaped and mediated ecclesially. Seminary graduates sometimes are schooled into an identity that is often more reflective of the clinical world and its client/patient typology than it is of the congregational world of mutual ministry. In the TiM programs, pastors come to experience themselves and congregation members as coparticipants in Christian community, partnered in making their way together in the world.

Situating the TiM Initiative within the Larger and Longer Story of Theological Education

The question of how to integrate practice-centered pastoral formation into formal theological education is an enduring one. Following each major study of theological education in the United States, new strategies were developed: settlement houses, ministry specialization, field-based learning, professional skills development, and clinical pastoral education.²⁸ Those who are familiar with the historical narrative of theological education in mainline Protestantism over the last century will recognize aspects of these within the TiM models, as there were numerous episodes of experimentation with practice-centered, field-based pastoral formation.²⁹ Many such experiments tended to run out of steam, in part because they were separate from wider ecclesial institutions, practices, and funding.³⁰ Only supervised field education and the clinical pasto-



ral education movement survived in force, partly due to creative funding partnerships with local churches, hospitals, and clinical settings.

One of the principal findings in the TiM effort has been that when practice-centered teaching and learning of ministry is situated in the domain of congregational practice rather than the domain of schooling, a whole new range of innovative possibility opens up. Furthermore, the communities and practitioners who take on the challenge of teaching and learning in the midst of practice begin to develop the necessary confidence and competencies that resource their capacities for continuing innovation. Denominations, judicatories, congregations, and seminaries come out of the “blame game” mentality for failed pastoral formation to join hands in developing new strategies of collaboration.

Cultivating the kind of approaches we have described in this report has a way of awakening and developing the wisdom intrinsic to congregations and their leaders. We are not suggesting that this wisdom is inevitably present in each and every congregation or pastor. However, we are proposing that it is present in many congregations and pastors (albeit in varying degrees) and that initiatives like these can help such wisdom become evident and transferable.

PART THREE

*New Discoveries
to Build Upon*

TiM resident Laura Gettys talks with members of the congregation on the lawn of Christ Church (Episcopal) in Alexandria, Virginia.

Taken as a whole, the Transition into Ministry initiative yields a number of early discoveries that ought to be kept in mind by all parties involved in the ongoing work of preparing new pastors. The following are those we currently see.

1. The lone ranger can ride off into the sunset.

Participants in these programs express again and again the joy of joining others in exploring the nature and practice of ministry. Without them, many would feel overburdened with new expectations and isolated in how to respond to them. Congregations, judicatories, and, increasingly, seminaries want to avoid this “lone ranger” syndrome by increasing the resourcefulness, networks, and collegial contacts of new clergy, as accomplished by the TiM programs.

In each case, these programs refuse to leave entering clergy alone to sink or swim on their own. Young clergy are surrounded by peers, guided by mentors, and gathered by judicatories, denominations, seminaries, and foundations into communities where they can worship together, build bonds of friendship, and reflect on ministry as a shared practice. In essence, each of the TiM programs seeks to locate young clergy in relational ecologies that are generative and paradigmatic for the remainder of a vocation—a shared one.

2. These programs recover collaborative agency and commitment.

The TiM programs provide a new pattern of collaboration and commitment to the formation of new clergy in their first call. Instead of referring ministry preparation to “someone else”—a seminary, a judicatory committee, or the “school of hard knocks”—a new sense of shared agency and possibility has arisen from the multitude of players in the TiM programs. The programs provide vivid examples of the various ways congregations, judicatories, seminaries, and other communities of practice take on this important task. This recovery of shared agency and responsibility for the formation of

new pastors is foundational for the church’s flourishing in the new millennium.

3. New communities of practice are forming.

Various communities of practice centered around new pastor formation have been created by the TiM programs. Each of the peer-based programs puts a special emphasis on creating strong, well-resourced groups that regularly convene new clergy to reflect on their practice. Each of the residency programs creates a new, more intentional local community of practice that supports regular, if not daily, opportunities for the new clergy and the existing pastoral staff to reflect on the practice of ministry going on in that particular congregation. Pastoral institutes, denominations, and seminaries create long-distance processes for mentoring new clergy between convened meetings. Additional communities of practice are emerging as the program directors meet to reflect on the programs they lead and as Lilly Endowment convenes larger gatherings of all participants for special moments of reflection, challenge, and celebration. Each of these communities is bringing its own “practice of the faith” to bear on the specialized practices of pastoral formation in ways that allow one set of practices to enrich others.

Another important dynamic in the life of these communities of practice is ongoing ecumenical exchange. Young clergy are becoming peers to people within and beyond their denominational systems. The same reality takes place as the program teams work across denominational lines to share resources and learn together. As new clergy complete their TiM programs and move into the next phase of their pastoral careers, they do so with strong expectations and motivations to build similar

peer groups, opportunities for reflection, and networks into the basic structure of their pastoral lives.

4. Churches can become teaching congregations.

The residency programs provide the clearest examples of how churches can come to play new roles as teaching congregations. The multi-staff congregations that have participated in the program made significant changes to their organizational structures so that they could better live out their calling to teach a new generation of pastors. Senior pastors and other staff members revised their roles, new program directors were hired, staff meetings and agendas were adjusted, and new lay committees and groups were created to provide the optimum learning environment for the residents.

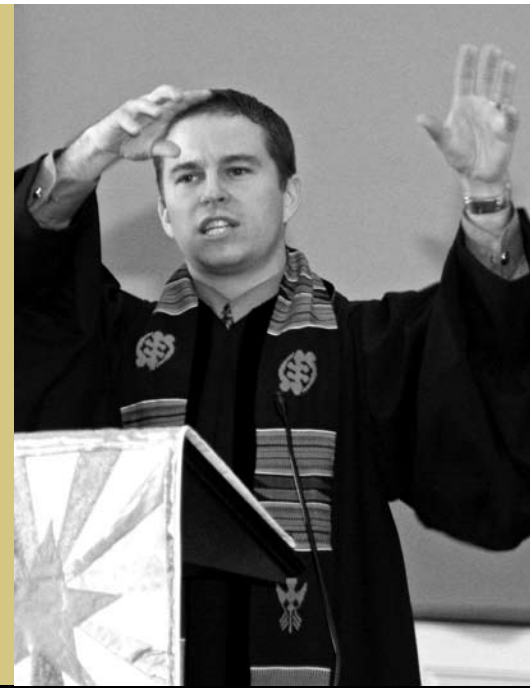
Interestingly, as various congregations become more fully engaged with teaching new residents, they discover that the residents are not the only ones who are learning. As every part of a congregation's life and practice is reflected upon, the clergy, staff, and congregation members discover just how much they have to teach and learn together. They begin to live into a larger understanding of their work and life as one of continuous teaching and learning. In essence, as the congregations work with their new pastors, a new, local ecclesial imagination develops about what the church is and what ministry can be.

Not every congregation in America will be capable of mounting the ambitious residency programs described in these programs. But alternatives exist: a residential-learning component can be built into a new assistant or associate position, or multiple congregations can join together to share the joys of (and resources for) mentoring new pastors. Here it is important to remember that many of the congregations in the TiM initiative have not made major staff additions or introduced cohorts of residents into their lives. The majority of congregations—those in the peer-based programs—are, in fact, smaller congregations with single-pastor staffs. But these congregations, too, can become teaching congregations as they welcome new clergy into their lives.

5. Seasoned pastors are recovering their indispensable role in the apprenticeship of future clergy.

In these programs we see evidence of experienced parish clergy playing larger and different roles in the shaping of future pastors. As recent studies of the history of

SHAWN WALLACE,
TiM resident at
Historic Charles
Street AME Church
in Roxbury,
Massachusetts.



theological education remind us, one of the early ways that new clergy were shaped in America was by “reading divinity” with seasoned clergy. Throughout the history of the church, learning by shadowing, imitating, and understudying with a practicing pastor—which some would call apprenticeship—was a primary means for preparing for pastoral ministry.

The TiM programs are deliberate attempts to create a new space for a fuller encounter with the practical dimensions of learning with experienced practitioners in the actual situation of pastoral action. Beyond short-term immersion or exposure, these encounters provide long-term, side-by-side encounters with seasoned pastors. These programs demonstrate that those who do *can* also teach in numerous ways: by modeling, by critical reflection, by exploring new paradigms of ministry and leadership, and more. Testimony from both the “apprenticing” clergy and from those who are supervising and mentoring them reveals that new wisdom and confidence about pastoral practice are being generated.

6. New clergy bring the gifts of a new generation.

By focusing special attention on a sizable cohort of new pastors, these programs bring the gifts and life-giving possibilities of new clergy into view. These

new seminary graduates bring commitment, energy, experience, passion, freshness, and sometimes irreverence to those who work with them. As mentors and supervising pastors have been interrupted by a question, as congregations have witnessed a new way of doing things, as institutions used to doing things a certain way stopped for a moment of reflection on practice, space has opened up for the ministry to be examined, adjusted, improved upon. In the surprising encounter with a new generation that wants to step into leadership, even naiveté and mistakenness become occasions for the church to learn and to teach about ministry. New clergy elevate the calling and mission of the churches to join in the task of forming a new generation of leadership.

In addition, the TiM programs highlight the distinctive gifts of this particular generation of new clergy. Many in this generation think beyond the box of congregational systems and custom. They exhibit an entrepreneurial capacity to reframe traditions in ways that redefine denominations beyond established customs or hierarchies. They also invite new forms of networking and connecting with others through a deft use of media and the Internet that is second nature to them. In many ways, the TiM programs mentor this generation of clergy to take on the charge of leading the local congregation and denominations into the future.

If we dare to break out of short-term thinking, there is a potential gift in this way of preparing new clergy that reaches into generations that are just coming on the church's stage—generations that most congregations and denominations are finding difficult to reach. As congregations experience the new energy and imagination that these clergy bring, and as they go deeper into the adventure of pastoral ministry by helping launch them, their children and young people are given new reasons to consider pastoral ministry as a vocation and different opportunities to consider whether this kind of calling speaks to them. By sharing in the work of teaching these new pas-

tors, these rising generations may learn about a way of life that answers their deepest yearnings.

7. Forming pastoral identity today requires innovative communities of practice.

The TiM programs recognize the abiding dynamics and tasks of forming pastoral identity: integrating multiple roles into one's own ministry practice, identifying one's own leadership style and how it relates to others', making a religious tradition one's own, and moving from basic competency to the improvisational quality of "thinking on one's feet." What is new here is the importance of placing the pastor in the context of a community of practice—one that is focused, healthy, and open to new ideas.

The most generative programs in this initiative have been in congregations that both trust and challenge their leaders, that exhibit resiliency amidst conflict, that know and believe in their mission, and that have confidence that God has new things in store for them. Strong teaching congregations and judicatories become true "communities of practice" that generate new practices and paradigms of ministry in and through their formative practices with new clergy. While drawing on paradigms and traditions of the past, they realize that the calling to raise up new leaders is a call to raise up new patterns of mission and Christian practice.



TiM RESIDENTS Elizabeth Lerohl Hiller, Lowell Michelson, and Lorin Darst at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Davenport, Iowa.

8. Flexibility and improvisation open up possibilities.

The range and diversity of programs undertaken in this initiative are a testimony to the creativity, flexibility, and improvisation of people working together. Congregations put their residency programs together in ways that reflect their differences in staffing, structure, and educational approach and that take advantage of their character, tradition, location, community partners, and people. These programs provide evidence of the possibilities present in congregations, waiting to be unleashed.

The peer-based programs also demonstrate diversity, flexibility, and creativity. Their meeting rhythms and content vary; some place more emphasis on theological study, others on spiritual disciplines, and still others on ministry skills and practice. Some organize their cohorts on the basis of alumni groupings of seminaries; others use existing denominational or regional patterns. One judicatory uses the transition program as an opportunity to develop a regional strategy for congregational renewal. Again the various organizations draw upon the resources they have and then color outside of existing lines, old assumptions, and conventional wisdom to create programs with fresh energy and possibility.

9. Resources are being found.

The programs we report on here are the result of a

major commitment by one of America's largest foundations, Lilly Endowment Inc. The congregation-based residency programs have been supported by grants of around \$800,000 each over five years. The peer-based programs have had similar-sized grants over the same time frames. This significant commitment of resources and energy was essential to launching this new pattern of pastoral formation. While some might consider this a one-time effort, we have been amazed by something more. We think it is important to notice how this initiative, like the miracle of the loaves and fishes, has multiplied resources.

Clearly, external funding created an environment of possibility and generated momentum. But now congregations like Wilshire Baptist Church and Christ Church, Alexandria, are well on their way to raising the funds needed to continue their programs when support from the Endowment ends. Because they have seen the response of clergy to peer-learning programs, several denominations are considering allocating funds to support them. Some local congregations are experimenting with new ways to add pastoral staff by linking a position to a "residency period" of learning and apprenticeship in the life and ministry of that particular church. And some judicatories—beyond these programs—are exploring ways to strengthen the collaborative nature and network of resources that enable their first-call and transition programs to flourish, including attempts to "cluster" together participating congregations in a given area to facilitate connections among the new clergy serving there or to share their resources to support one new clergy person.

A half century of cutbacks and downsizing in mainline Protestantism have created a scarcity mindset about resources that can blind congregations, denominations, and seminaries to the new sources of abundance that these groups are learning how to tap. Further, it is important to recognize that while money really matters, this program has also been rich in other resources, including time, talent, energy, and gifted people. In fact, as these programs have unfolded, they have very carefully drawn on existing resources of past wisdom and experience in their own traditions and mobilized them in fresh ways. Many of the core ideas of this initiative—especially mentoring and peer learning—have been deployed in the past. Here they have been reinvigorated and mixed with other resources—ideas, people, money—in such a way that new possibilities are emerging.



RICHARD WESLEY CLARKE, TiM resident at Historic Charles Street AME Church, Roxbury, Massachusetts, preaches to the congregation.

Conclusion

The challenge of shaping a new generation of pastoral leaders is as old as the church itself, and indeed has its parallels in other religious traditions and histories. For a number of reasons, this work is especially difficult today.³¹ However, we believe the transition into ministry presents a significant opportunity for the church in the current age. Helping new generations of pastors make their way into leadership is one of the ways that the church perpetuates and reinvents itself. This work is one key way by which the faith tradition crosses the threshold from generation to generation. In this view, the challenge of the transition into ministry is not a problem but a key ingredient of the work of the whole church. As close observation of these programs reveals, the transition into ministry can become a shared opportunity for congregations, denominations, seminaries, clergy, laity, and new pastors to work together to project the church and its ministry ahead into a new generation. The day-to-day struggle involved in that work is the arena in which the heritage of the Christian faith adjusts itself to the ever-changing realities of human history.

Because each generation faces fresh challenges, the work of helping pastors make the transition into ministry will always be incomplete, unfinished. But it will also provide occasions for the church to refresh itself, to correct itself, and to discover new dimensions of its giftedness. At this point in these programs, several challenges call us to go further and deeper:

- We have learned that inviting groups of people to engage with the challenges of raising up pastors releases energy in both the new clergy and in the people who seek to support them. How can more groups be invited into this work and supported with the appropriate resources?
- We have learned that new resources create energy. The great surprise in this initiative is that there were more resources available to take on the challenge of transition into ministry than most expected. In an age of unprecedented wealth, how do we find new sources of support and invite them into this important work?
- We have learned that the task of shaping pastoral identity and pastoral imagination cannot be relegated to just a few but must be the work of all. We have also learned that such shaping takes place in a variety of ways and with a much larger “faculty” than our seminaries can provide. How do we create new patterns of partnership and new divisions of labor in the shaping of our clergy?
- We have learned that seasoned pastors have something important to teach new clergy. Further, when they are given opportunities to teach new pastors, a profoundly valuable kind of knowledge becomes available to the church. How can we effectively call forth this contribution and help experienced pastors make their maximum contribution to the overall formation of new pastors?
- We have learned that people are formed for ministry not just in classrooms but by practicing the work—and reflecting on it—with others. We have much still to discover about how to create optimal learning environments, about how to relate different kinds of formation, how to create better peer groups, and how to develop stronger patterns of mentoring and supervision. How can we keep working intentionally to create the learning environments that the church most needs?
- We have learned that the church and its ministry is always a work in progress. Amazingly, despite all of its shortcomings and failures, it keeps rising to its calling one generation at a time. How can we discern what is coming to life and give it maximum room to flourish?

- ¹ In 2005 the Alban Institute was invited by Lilly Endowment Inc. to look over the shoulders of those involved in its Transition into Ministry initiative to learn more about this effort and to share early discoveries with religious leaders. The result is this report. The principal authors are James P. Wind, president of the Alban Institute, and David J. Wood, coordinator of the Transition into Ministry Coordination Program for the Fund for Theological Education. The preparation of this report was supported by a grant from Lilly Endowment Inc.
- ² Richard Lischer, *Open Secrets: A Spiritual Journey through a Country Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), p. 8.
- ³ Lischer, *Open Secrets*, p. 11.
- ⁴ Lischer, *Open Secrets*, p. 40.
- ⁵ Heidi Neumark, *Breathing Space: A Spiritual Journey in the South Bronx* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), p. 8.
- ⁶ Neumark, *Breathing Space*, p. 24.
- ⁷ Neumark, *Breathing Space*, p. 15.
- ⁸ *Congregations*, Fall 2006, pp. 26–40.
- ⁹ Brian Dixon, “An Underwhelming Welcome,” *Congregations*, Fall 2006, p. 29.
- ¹⁰ Sarah Griffith, “A Way to Flourish,” *Congregations*, Fall 2006, p. 28.
- ¹¹ Christina Grace Kukuk, “An Anatomy Lesson: Discovering Where My Heart Is,” *Congregations*, Fall 2006, p. 33.
- ¹² See Robert Wood Lynn, “Notes toward a History: Theological Encyclopedia and the Evolution of Protestant Seminary Curriculum, 1808–1968,” in *Theological Education*, Spring 1981, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 137–140; Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1983, 1994). See also W. Clark Gilpin, *A Preface to Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
- ¹³ Charles R. Foster, Lisa E. Dahill, Lawrence A. Golemon, and Barbara Wang Tolentino, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006).
- ¹⁴ It is important to note here that the participants in the Transition into Ministry programs expressed great gratitude for what they learned during their seminary years. But the value of what they learned did not diminish the difficulty or the importance of the transition challenges they faced.
- ¹⁵ I (Wind) recall a story (probably apocryphal but nonetheless revelatory) that I heard frequently when I was a seminarian in the 1970s about how the president of my denomination was able to keep the essential files for the denomination in his desk drawers up until the 1930s. Now, of course, those records take up floors of office buildings and megabytes of computer memories.
- ¹⁶ *De facto* congregationalism is a term used to describe the increasing tendency for people to form congregations for reasons other than denominational loyalty. Key to this definition is the notion that congregations are *voluntarily* gathered communities. See R. Stephen Warner, “The Place of the Congregation in the Contemporary American Religious Configuration,” in *American Congregations, Volume 2: New Perspectives in the Study of Congregations*, edited by James P. Wind and James W. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
- ¹⁷ The notable exceptions have been clinical pastoral education—situated primarily in health care facilities—and field education in local congregations. But most of these programs do not engage the regular faculty of a seminary in ongoing reflection upon ministry.
- ¹⁸ Address by Daniel Aleshire, February 28, 2005, Indianapolis, Indiana, at a gathering of Transition into Ministry program directors.
- ¹⁹ Unpublished lecture on Transition into Ministry, February 28, 2005, Indianapolis, Indiana.
- ²⁰ Carol Pinkham Oak, “Creating the Conditions for New Pastors’ Success,” *Congregations*, Fall 2006, pp. 20–25.
- ²¹ See Donald A. Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: BasicBooks, 1991).
- ²² Although this is most evident in the residency programs, one of the hopes of this program is that the participation of a congregation’s pastor in a program specially geared for new pastors will help the congregation become more aware of its role in the transition.
- ²³ Lee Shulman, *The Wisdom of Practice: Essays on Teaching, Learning, and Learning to Teach* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), p. 477.
- ²⁴ Written reflection by a program participant on confidential evaluation materials.
- ²⁵ Jean Lave and Étienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 95.
- ²⁶ Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, p. 116.
- ²⁷ Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, p. 93.
- ²⁸ A review of several studies of theological education over the last century reveals just how enduring this question is: “The instruction in pastoral methods and practices is usually treated academically and theoretically. It is rare to find a case where the student is really trained in actual parish work; especially as an ‘intern’—an assistant to an experienced minister.” (Robert Kelly, *Theological Education in America: A Study of One Hundred Sixty-One Theological Schools in the United States and Canada* [New York: George H. Doran Company, 1924], p. 145). “To the question asked of all seminaries, ‘What supervision do you give to the field work of your students?’ a wide variety of answers was returned, nearly all revealing practical neglect. Many schools failed to reply.” (Ibid.) “In theological education, our question has usually been put this way: we have learned pretty well how to teach Bible, doctrine, ethics, and the other ‘content’ (that is, specialist) materials; but how can we teach the men to use these properly in practice? The one thing I am sure of about theological education is that it will never answer this question so long as ‘practice’ is considered as an addendum.” (1954, Seward Hiltner—quoted in *Education for the Professions of Medicine, Law, Theology, and Social Welfare* [New York: McGraw Hill, 1973], p. 185). “The greatest defect in theological education today is that it is too much an affair of piecemeal transmission of knowledge and skills, and that, in consequence, it offers too little challenge to the student to develop his own resources to become an independent, lifelong inquirer, growing constantly while he is engaged in the work of the ministry.” (H. Richard Niebuhr, Daniel Day Williams, and James Gustafson, *The Advancement of Theological Education* [New York: Harper, 1957], p. 209).
- ²⁹ For an excellent review and analysis of this history, see Robert Wood Lynn, “Notes toward a History: Theological Encyclopedia and the Evolution of Protestant Seminary Curriculum, 1808–1968,” *Theological Education* Spring, 1981, pp. 118–144.
- ³⁰ The notable exception would be the Lutheran (ELCA) pattern of theological education for pastors (M.Div.), which requires a four-year program of study, including an off-site, full-time “residency” in a congregation during the third year. Following the residency, students return to the seminary for their fourth and final year of academic work. For a description of the effectiveness of this pattern as it plays out at Trinity Lutheran Seminary, see Foster et al., *Educating Clergy*, pp. 321–322.
- ³¹ See James P. Wind and Gilbert R. Rendle, *The Leadership Situation Facing America’s Congregations: An Alban Institute Special Report* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2001).

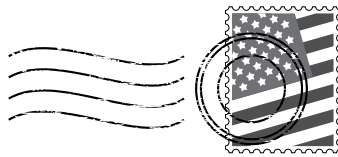
Produced with the generous support of Lilly Endowment Inc.

HOW TO OBTAIN ADDITIONAL COPIES OF THIS REPORT.

Download Report 

Visit <http://alban-transitionintoministry.org> to download copies of this report and share questions, challenges, ideas, and stories with others interested in the transition into ministry.

ADDITIONAL COPIES OF THE PRINTED REPORT WILL BE AVAILABLE WHILE SUPPLY LASTS. WRITE TO:



TiM Report
The Alban Institute
2121 Cooperative Way, Suite 100
Herndon, VA 20171
tim@alban.org

ABOUT THE TRANSITION INTO MINISTRY INITIATIVE

The Transition into Ministry initiative is funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. and coordinated through the Fund for Theological Education. Visit www.transitionintoministry.org to learn more about the individual Transition into Ministry programs and explore resources that support new pastors and their mentors.

ABOUT THE ALBAN INSTITUTE

The Alban Institute builds up congregations and their leaders to be agents of grace and transformation to shape and heal the world. We do that by acting as an independent center of learning and innovation. Alban interprets, synthesizes, and generates knowledge and makes it available to congregational leaders in ways that are accessible and motivating. We are a trusted voice with valued approaches to learning and leadership development. As a safe place to do vital work and help people make connections with peers and learning facilitators, Alban helps create vibrant learning communities.

Copyright © 2008 by the Alban Institute, Inc. All rights reserved.

Explore the Transition into Ministry report online....



<http://www.transitionintoministry.org>



<http://alban-transitionintoministry.org>


THE ALBAN INSTITUTE
 2121 COOPERATIVE WAY
 SUITE 100
 HERNDON, VA 20171