

## **The Ministerial Imagination**

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College and post-graduate training for volunteer and professional ministry in the last thirty-five years has had two foci: Academic courses on scripture, theology and related subjects of intellectual study, similar to those courses traditionally offered in seminary training and “practical” courses (including field work and internships) on “methods of ministry”: how to preside at liturgies, how to preach, how to be a hospital chaplain, how to effectively administer not-for-profit religious institutions and related tasks.

In those practical courses, much of the “offered wisdom” is gathered from social service and business models, with an emphasis on how to be an honest, efficient administrator. In the academic courses, often pursued with fellow students whose goal is to teach or do research apart from ministry, the goal for the ministerial student is to become intellectually competent in the historical and documentary annals of religious thought.

The problem with this model of education and formation is that the development of ministerial identity, thinking and imagination is neglected and students leave with a degree or certificate in ministry believing that they have not learned enough to be either scholars or well-prepared administrators. What is being “in ministry” all about? And how does one cultivate a life in ministry, as part of academic and practical study, and then beyond?

This proposed presentation, based on research and writing in my M.Div. project (degree granted in May, 2004), focuses on the IMAGINATION of ministry, which is the intersection and synthesis of traditional academic learning, practical pastoral concerns, contemporaneous (“current”) socio-political events and mass culture (the world according to *PEOPLE Magazine*) in dialogue with members of congregations, inquirers, curious outsiders and others who have questions related to spirituality or faith.

The Ministerial Imagination goes beyond the concerns of pastoral theology to “make the big ideas understandable to the masses” to re-imagining theological questions in the light of contemporary events and culture that take into account both the ancient traditions of wisdom and draw from the head, the heart and the supermarket check-out line.