

**Learning Pastoral Imagination
A Grant Proposal to the
Lilly Endowment Inc.**

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2481 Como Avenue
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July 1, 2008

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recent studies show that as many as eight out of ten seminary graduates experience significant gaps in their preparation for the actual work of ministry. This proposal is about the need to pay attention to how clergy learn by doing—that is, how they learn by practice over time. This work is needed because much research in theological education has focused on how best to deliver the specific knowledge needed for ministry separated from the practice of ministry. Yet the best recent research on clergy education shows that the complex and distinctive intelligence—a pastoral imagination—exhibited by excellent pastors comes about through years of practicing pastoral work. Understanding more fully how clergy learn to exercise such a pastoral imagination will significantly strengthen the work of persons who care deeply about excellence in ministry and who seek to shape future leaders for the church.

This proposal will support an in-depth study of learning ministry over time, listening to the experiences of seminary students, pastors and congregations they serve at various intervals in seminary and in congregational leadership. The study asks the key question: *“How is pastoral excellence—and the pastoral imagination it requires—formed through practice over time?”* To pursue this question, the project will work with 50 pastors who have between 5 to 25 years of experience working in ministry as well as 50 seminary students as they move from professional training into work in ministry. Research will take place through small group interviews and site visits. Five diverse communities from throughout the United States have been identified. Local site coordinators in each will assist in the selection of pastors and seminarians for inclusion in the study. The project will unfold over five years, with research carried out by Dr. Christian Scharen, Director and an Associate Director, to be hired. Outcomes of the project will show the complexity and coherence of how pastors learn pastoral imagination, strengthen participants in their ministry through reflection on their learning in practice, and through various publications influence leaders in a whole ecology of organizations seeking to inspire, train, and encourage a new generation of pastoral leaders.

The Learning Pastoral Imagination project requests funding support for a five-year research project. The grant supports staffing for the initiative, including salary support for the Director (part-time) and Associate Director (full-time), Administrative Assistant (part-time), and specialized assistance for research and interview transcription. Funds will also provide modest support for all other participants. Research expenses related to the project include travel, hospitality for group interviews, and office resources.

Luther is uniquely positioned to conduct this research as a result of its fundamental commitment to congregations and their pastoral leadership as a touchstone for living faith in daily life. As such, the study of and support for developing pastoral excellence promised in this project will directly align with our mission to “educate leaders for

Christian communities called and sent by the Holy Spirit to witness to salvation through Jesus Christ and to serve in God's world."

PROJECT RATIONALE

The Importance of Practice

Learning to excel at basic skills such as riding a bike or driving a car, not to mention learning complex professions such as law, medicine, or ministry, requires practice. Of course, specific knowledge is required alongside practice. Yet information cannot compensate for the plunge into action where learning to do something—anything—is truly accomplished. The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein was famous for arguing that to know a rule is not to follow it. Following it requires embodied action; you must *do* something!¹

This proposal is about the need to pay attention to how clergy learn by doing—that is, how they learn by practice over time. This work is needed because much teaching and research in theological education has focused on how best to deliver the specific knowledge needed for ministry separated from the practice of ministry. Yet the best recent research on clergy education shows that the complex and distinctive intelligence—a pastoral imagination—exhibited by excellent pastors comes about through years of practicing pastoral work.² If those persons who care deeply about excellence in ministry and who seek to shape future leaders for the church knew more about how clergy learn to exercise such a pastoral imagination, their work shaping future leaders would be dramatically strengthened.

Yet current knowledge about the life-long process of learning the practice of ministry is only partial and fragmented. Why? The answer lies in the fact that the focus in professional education (in ministerial, medical, legal, nursing, and other fields), especially over the last century, was on delivering context-free knowledge, unmoored from actual professional practice. Professionals have been largely trained according to a technical model of education that has emphasized theory over practice.³ While professional practice has at times been included in the curriculum, it has often been a separate and neglected track. If students learn the ideas of law, medicine, or religion, so this model suggests, the practice will largely take care of itself.

In following the technical model of professional education, theological education has misunderstood both the shape of learning pastoral imagination over time as well as the particular role played by the years students spend in seminary or divinity school. As a result, graduate professional education for ministry often fails at exactly the point of the integration of knowledge into pastoral practice.

The Problem of the 80% Gap

Educating Clergy, a recently published study of teaching practices in U.S. theological schools, portrays the challenge of achieving such integration for practice in ministry. In the study, Charles Foster and his coauthors offer a substantial critique of the technical model so influential in professional education. Foster, a Senior Fellow at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, uses an “epistemology of practical reason” to recast “all forms of seminary education as inherently involved in the cultivation of clergy practice” through experiential practice-based learning.⁴ The dominant technical model imagines professional programs that can train excellent professionals, filled with all the current theory—including theory about practice!—of the profession, and send them out into ministry where they gradually learn the skill of applying their reservoir of knowledge. Yet, Foster’s study reports on survey data that shows 80% of former seminary students experience significant gaps in their preparation for the actual work of ministry.⁵ Too often, in such cases, novice clergy either reject the abstract theology they studied in seminary for rough and ready plans of action prepackaged for them by a multi-billion dollar religious publishing market or painfully struggle to make sense of the relation of theory to practice on their own.

The practice model at the heart of *Educating Clergy*, however, strongly suggests that the good professional school should form practitioners who are aware of what it takes to become competent in their calling. A practice model for theological education should coach students as they acquire a nascent pastoral disposition and desire sufficient to pursue the pastoral wisdom the phrase “pastoral imagination” seeks to describe. While reasserting the value of so-called “head” learning, Foster and his colleagues do so by attempting to reorient the role of theory in relation to practice, and how theory’s role changes as one develops professional competence over time. Such an understanding shapes the formation process all the way through the curriculum.

In their description of an alternative practice model for clergy education, Foster et. al. draw on University of California-Berkeley philosopher Hubert Dreyfus and others working in the phenomenological tradition. This important philosophical tradition shows that theory plays a role in learning, to be sure. However, compared to the technical model, in the practice model theory’s role is constrained and humbled as it moves from being context-independent to being an understanding arising from practice.⁶ As richly as Foster et. al. portray such practice-based and integrative teaching, portraying this from the learner’s perspective rather than that of the teacher, would allow deeper exploration of how graduate professional education offers its distinctive contribution as part of a lifetime of learning excellence in ministry. It would also portray the character of on-going learning in partnership with congregations over the years of ministry following graduate professional education.

Foster and his fellow researchers regularly note the impact of variable formations leading into graduate professional education along side the question of what the seminary can and cannot be expected to do.⁷ If the distinctive traditions of seminary

education do indeed have a durable and formative power, one must also assume that the students come to seminary formed by their family, church, school, work and the various significant relationships rooted in these spheres of life. Likewise, we can assume the congregations that clergy serve in the years during and following formal theological education are similarly formative for process of life-long learning entailed in gaining the wisdom we are calling a pastoral imagination.

Attending to the Process of Learning

The idea of learning ministry as a life-long formation process can be seen in two recent books emerging from the *Pulpit & Pew Project* at Duke University. Greg Jones and Kevin Armstrong, in their book *Resurrecting Excellence*, discuss the legitimate desire for a “learned clergy” while at the same time arguing for a process of learning that stretches through three stages: spiritual formation, framed mainly as the fruits of childhood catechesis in local congregational life; education, seen as the moment of formal theological education; and practice, seen as the ongoing professional life in ministry.⁸ Jackson Carroll, in *God’s Potters*, draws on the image of the potter and the three stages of learning a craft: apprentice, journeyman or woman, and master.⁹ The point in both books is that the process of growing towards excellence in ministry does not conclude upon graduation from seminary with a Masters of Divinity degree. It begins before seminary and extends through long years of learning beyond seminary. Furthermore, these books underscore the importance of practice over time in the work of learning pastoral excellence.

This project will extend the work that Carroll, Armstrong, and Jones have begun in attending to the process of learning by practice over a lifetime. A research project exploring learning in such a practice model will gain substantial insight into how over time and by mundane everyday communal practices one embodies practical mastery in the work of ministry.¹⁰ Patricia Benner’s classic research on learning nursing over time offers the most promising model regarding how to study the embodied learning of professional practice.¹¹ Benner, a senior nursing scholar at the University of California-San Francisco, draws on a framework of developmental learning created by Hubert Dreyfus, the philosopher whose phenomenological perspective is mentioned above.¹² This framework describes a learning pathway through six stages: novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, expertise, and mastery. This six-stage pathway provides the basis for a practice model of learning ministry.

The Learning Pastoral Imagination Project will undertake an in-depth study of learning ministry over time, listening to the experiences of both seminary students and pastors at various intervals in seminary and after graduation. The study will begin by seeking a detailed understanding of each participant’s upbringing and career development. By walking alongside and listening to the struggles and insights of students and pastors engaged in learning ministry, this project will be able to offer a rich portrait of the process of learning “pastoral imagination” – the provocative shorthand term pointing to the very complex capacity excellent pastors draw upon in

their everyday work. In addition, the project will spend time learning from the congregations these students and pastors serve in an effort to understand more fully the complex interplay of ministry and learning that takes place between pastor and people in congregational life.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Goal and Objectives

This project explicitly builds on an understanding of pastoral excellence as *pastoral imagination for the task of shaping communities for living faith as a way of life*. Given this definition of the fundamental purpose of pastoral leadership, our goal is to answer the key question “*How is pastoral excellence—and the pastoral imagination it requires—formed through pastoral practice over time?*” As a part of pursuing this goal, we have three main objectives:

1. *Capture* the complexity and coherence of developmental processes of learning pastoral imagination through interviews with and observations of samples of seminarians, pastors and the congregations they serve in five distinct sites throughout the nation;
2. *Create and foster* relational networks of seminarians, pastors, theological educators, and congregational leaders, encouraging conversation about their work in relation to a practice model of learning pastoral imagination over time;
3. *Publish and Disseminate* materials that portray how one learns pastoral imagination with recommendations of developmentally appropriate tasks at each stage of learning over time, including the specific tasks appropriate to the years of formal graduate theological education.

Methods

The Director of the project will be Dr. Christian Scharen, Assistant Professor of Worship at Luther Seminary. He will provide year-round administrative oversight for the research and staff, as well as engaging in project research and writing during summers (May through August) and other release from teaching (January breaks plus earned leaves from teaching responsibility). A full-time Associate Director will be hired to assist Dr. Scharen in all aspects of the project. Dr. Scharen will convene and chair an Advisory Council composed of several senior leaders in theological education—including Dr. Charles Foster and Dr. Patricia Benner, both Senior Scholars in the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching’s Preparation for the Professions Program, and The Rev’d David Wood, Coordinator of the Transition into Ministry Program as part of the Fund for Theological Education.

The project will carry out its work through three basic components: data collection, relational networking, and publications.

Data Collection

Data collection in the form of in-depth narrative interviews and on-site observations will be carried out in five diverse sites in the United States. In conversation with Lilly Endowment Religion staff and Project Advisory Council members, sites have been selected, each chosen with preference for locations that offer a number of seminaries and or divinity schools from which to draw both seminarians and alumnae at various stages of their careers. Relevant factors for choosing diverse sites include not only the region of the country but also race and ethnicity, population density, denomination or tradition, and type of school (university-related divinity school, freestanding denominational seminary, and others). At each site, a site coordinator will be recruited who is both able to serve as an advisor to the study and as a liaison with the local institutions. In our preliminary conversations we have developed relationships with research sites in Seattle, Minneapolis, New York, Nashville and Dallas/Fort Worth.

At each site, two groups of participants will be recruited based on nominations solicited in cooperation with local site coordinators. We will seek students (Sample A) and pastors (Sample B) respected by their colleagues as wise pastors with capacity to reflect on their pastoral practice. The Director and Associate Director will carry out all interviews in each of the five sites, usually in an annual trip to that site, and coordinated between the site coordinator and our office at Luther.

Sample A will include ten groups of five students each, two groups located at each regional site. These students will be in their last year of professional training. Over three years, with yearly interviews, we will both learn life stories as well as follow each student's transition from seminary to full-time congregational ministry. We will visit a sample of the congregations these students and pastors serve, spending time observing them in their daily work rhythms and hosting conversations with congregational leaders and lay members.

Summary: Participants in Sample A: Seminary Students

Longitudinal study of seminarians and supervisors (N=50)

- 10 groups of 5 seminarians and their supervising pastors
- Diverse settings in 5 distinct study sites
- Beginning their final year of professional training
- Initial interview plus additional three interviews each at yearly intervals

Sample B will include 50 pastors who are in various positions within congregational leadership (senior pastor, youth pastor, etc.). Each of the five sites will have two groups centered on an interval in ministry (for example, one site might have a group of five pastors each with 10 years of experience and another group of pastors each with 20 years of experience). Over three years, we will interview all pastors and visit a sample of the total in their congregations, spending time observing them in their daily work rhythms and hosting conversations with congregational leaders and lay members.

Summary: Participants in Sample B: Working Pastors

Cross-sectional study of pastors (N=50)

- 10 groups, 5 pastors in each group
- Diverse in similar ways to pairs in longitudinal study
- Groups at intervals of years in ministry: 3-5, 7-10, 13-17, 20-25, and 30+
- Interviews over three years including site visits

Following the tradition of interpretive social science and in particular the method of “hermeneutical phenomenology” employed by Patricia Benner in her developmental studies of expertise in nursing practice, our approach will gather stories of participants.¹³ Like Benner, we will engage in small group narrative interviews focused on moments when they were convinced they made an important difference, or in which they learned something new relative to their practice in ministry. Asking for such stories, especially in small groups of similarly experienced practitioners, has the advantage of eliciting great detail as well as a sequence of events as they unfolded in time.

Interviews, while open-ended, will focus on sharing 1) life stories as tales of vocational development and 2) critical moments of learning in practice. A baseline assumption orienting the work of the project is that all interviewees are co-investigators with us, invested in and aware of their learning in ministry. Therefore, as interviewers, the Director and Associate Director will offer clear information about the process ahead of time, prompting participants so that they can think about their ideas in advance. We will also coach the group in its interaction so that each participant focuses on questions of clarification rather than judgment regarding the stories of others. In cases where pastors move, or seminary students graduate to take jobs in congregations in diverse locations, we have budgeted to bring these people back together for the purposes of our group interviews. Participants will be asked about their willingness to do this should their circumstances require it during the period of the grant. All participants will receive an honorarium for their participation, as well as warm hospitality and meals when together for group interviews.

The small group setting has a number of benefits for this type of research. First, the group members can be effective partners in drawing out details of the story a participant tells by listening well and asking questions of clarification. Second, because of their similar level of experience, the story one tells can spark similar experiences among others in the group. Finally, the sharing that transpires can be a source of collegial support and confirmation that “they are not alone” in their struggles to learn and to do well in their work. In some of these specific small group strategies, we have followed Parker Palmer, Senior Advisor to the Fetzer Institute for Teacher Formation, who describes a very similar approach in his work with groups of teachers.¹⁴

Benner’s method of “hermeneutical phenomenology,” however, is limited by its

inattention to the element of background knowledge—that set of variables shaping the perception and action that derive from life experience. Knowing the backgrounds of the research participants matters in all sorts of ways, particularly in terms of character and vocation. How did someone become the person they are, and how did they end up following a call to ministry? The question of “how” is intentional here, for it points to the messy and mysterious set of relationships, circumstances and experiences that fit more or less well together within the life course of any person. In order to get at this element, our first round of interviews will seek to elicit life stories from each person. In a small group setting, this activity also plays a role in “breaking the ice” as a group, paving the way for the somewhat risky next step of sharing potentially vulnerable or confidential stories of learning in ministry practice.

Relational Networking

The project will create relational networking from the beginning. First, we will access networks of people working on pastoral leadership and excellence through various Lilly Endowment funded projects (especially the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Project, of which Dr. Scharen was a part, and the Transition into Ministry Program lead by Advisory Council member David Wood, as well as others) in selecting sites, site coordinators, and identifying participants at each site. Second, we will create new relational networks by drawing new partners together in each of our five research sites. These partners will include denominational and seminary officials, faculty, pastors and seminary students, and members of the congregations they serve. We will have a brief PowerPoint presentation to describe our work to these constituencies. Participants in these networks will gain personally and professionally from their interaction in this three-year process of interviews and site visits. We will facilitate their connection to larger networks of people working on pastoral leadership and excellence in various projects across the nation. These various constituencies will be, by virtue of their participation in the project, both stakeholders for a process of on-going evaluation as well as a primary audience as we begin to disseminate findings in various reports, articles, and books in the latter half of the project.

Publications

At present we envision the following papers and books aimed at disseminating findings to various particular constituencies:

Christian Scharen will write a pastoral memoir highlighting his own development in learning pastoral imagination in practice. Written during 2009 with publication in the spring of 2010, this book will be written in a manner attractive to and helpful for pastors seeking to gauge their own learning in ministry over time. Titled *Embodying Pastoral Wisdom: Notes from an Apprenticeship in Ministry*, this book will be an expansion of his contribution (Chapter 11, “Learning Ministry over Time: Embodying Practical Wisdom,”) in Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra, *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry* (Eerdmans 2008).

He will also write, in cooperation with the Associate Director for the project, a series

of articles (especially focusing on pastoral journals such as *Leadership*, *Christian Century* and *America*, among others) regarding the research project in progress. This writing will begin to emerge during the third year of the project after the first two rounds of interviews have been transcribed and analyzed, and observations from the first site visits have been reviewed. These analyses will influence both the final round of interviews and the subsequent books written on the basis of what we have learned.

Additionally, the project will conclude with two capstone books with Dr. Scharen as the major author, but with possible joint authorship. The first of these books, written for an audience of church leaders and published by a major denominational press (Fortress or Eerdmans Press, for example) will seek to portray with rich complexity yet lively narrative the developmental learning that can lead to the capacity for excellent pastoral leadership we refer to as “pastoral imagination.” The second of these books, written for academic leaders concerned with theological education broadly understood and published by a major university press (Princeton or Oxford University Press, for example), will seek to offer the full learning of the project and its many implications for the ecology of institutions and leaders who are working to raise up the next generation of excellent pastors for the church. Both of these major capstone publications will be started during years three and four of the grant and completed during a planned writing year the last year of the project during which other responsibilities will be minimized. As part of the writing project, Dr. Scharen and the Associate Director will host a series of small seminars composed of academics, pastors, and lay leaders to reflect on writing in progress and offer their wisdom on the process of shaping the wisdom emerging from the project for broader distribution.

The Associate Director will create a dynamic website presentation of the project’s work, posting updates as the project progresses, and posting preliminary and final papers written on the basis of the project’s findings.

Summary of Project Timeline (according to academic calendar)

2007-8	2008-9	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-2013
Begin background research, Identify sites, local coordinators, and research participants	Site visits; Round one interviews; Preliminary data analysis; Begin research and writing for pastoral memoir book	Site visits; Round two interviews; Continuing data analysis; Complete and publish pastoral memoir book	Site visits; Round three interviews; Continuing data analysis; Produce popular and academic papers on findings	Site visits; Round four interviews; Continue data analysis; begin initial drafting of final books; host writing reflection groups	Final data analysis; leave from teaching in order to write books; Dissemination through presentations based on publications

Outcomes of the Program

The project will have succeeded to the extent that the complex and multi-staged developmental process of learning pastoral imagination is more widely and deeply understood, shaping therefore not only the development of clergy themselves, but the whole network of stakeholders in the well-being of the church's pastoral leadership including those in theological education. Following are the primary anticipated outcomes.

The project will:

1. *Capture* the complexity and coherence of developmental processes of learning pastoral imagination
 - Select and recruit research sites and participants
 - Complete initial design phase and successfully complete interviews and site visits with participating students, pastors and congregations
 - Carefully inquire into and learn from stories and observation of pastors' lives and learning in ministry practice in the midst of seminary and congregational life
 - Collect and interpret data with an eye to its development in useful forms for pastors, theological educators, church executives, and others
2. *Create and Encourage* relational networks of stakeholders in excellent pastoral leadership
 - Draw together groups of students and pastors for group interviews that encourage mutual sharing about life experience and learning in ministry
 - Foster conversation and reflection on developmental learning in practice that can increase the understanding of pastoral imagination among broader constituencies concerned with training the next generation of pastoral and congregational leadership
3. *Publish and Disseminate* materials that portray how one learns pastoral imagination with recommendations for various constituencies working with pastoral formation
 - Publish scholarly and popular articles as well as three distinct books aimed at various constituencies, making recommendations relevant to their engagement in the formation of pastoral leadership for the next generation
 - Create website of resources and information for participants as well as others interested in the project
 - Share outcomes with churches through the website as well as presentations at academic meetings, local and regional clergy gatherings, and other appropriate venues

Evaluation Strategy

Dr. Scharen engaged the Advisory Council in a conversation about evaluation at its

first meeting, building what the Kellogg Foundation calls a “logic model” of the project as a whole. This entails developing a map of how the whole project works, from inputs through strategies to outputs, outcomes, and impact. Creating this together serves to bind us in a common vision of the work of the project, and allows us to envision together the means to enact regular and ongoing evaluation of the project. Such evaluation “as we go” will help us take seriously our conviction that the interviewees are learners with us, invested in the project and hopeful about the outcomes. We want to check in with these stakeholders at each point along the way to see how we and they think we are doing in achieving our objectives.

Elements that are key to the success of the project also point us to key moments of the project’s development where evaluation is important to our learning.

- Key moment: determining Associate Director staff person, the research sites and local site coordinators. Reviewing the “logic model” with the Advisory Council will help us assess key needs in relation to candidates for Associate Director, top candidates for research sites, and site coordinators at each site. Making these choices well, and with the project as a whole in mind, is crucial.
- Key moment: first round of interviews when the process of group interviews actually takes place, seeking to build a collegial environment for collaborative learning, story-telling, and support. Feedback from every one of these first-round groups will be gathered by the local site coordinator so that the Advisory Council can, at its next meeting, assess what works and what insights from participants might make the next round of interviews stronger.
- Key moment: first data analysis and writing on the basis of learning thus far. Upon reaching the mid-point of the project, initial ideas and reflective writing will be shared widely with participants for responses. The Advisory Council will review these responses to see if early analyses are on target, and if not, where to follow up in conversations either during subsequent rounds of interviews or in shifting the developing analyses.
- Key moment: drafting and publishing final books, one for pastoral leadership and one for a general academic audience concerned about the pastoral excellence, theological education, and formation in the professions more generally. Research participants and interested scholars will be invited to reflection seminars during the last phase of the project, helping focus on key issues as the capstone books for the project are being drafted. It is essential that participants play active roles in giving shape to the final products that portray their lives and ministries for a broader public audience. Working in partnership with the Advisory Council and with participants in each site location will strengthen the coherence and winsome nature of publications. Such partnerships will also offer platforms for broad and vibrant dissemination of the findings of the project.

The aim of the publications will be to encourage use of the findings to reframe thinking and thus allocation of human and material resources. The ideas emerging from this project will impact theological education and the whole ecology of support for the development of excellent pastoral leadership for the church. The project's impact can be measured by citation indices as well as by formal reviews and responses to the work as it circulates more widely in its published form.

The Advisory Council will assist the Director and Associate Director in reviewing the project and making regular reports to the Lilly Endowment according to grant requirements, drawing widely upon the evaluation materials used for our internal process of learning as we go through the key moments outlined above.

Institutional Appropriateness and Resources

Luther Seminary is uniquely positioned to conduct this research as a result of its fundamental commitment to congregations and their pastoral leadership as a touchstone for the living out of faith day to day. As such, the study of and support for developing pastoral excellence promised in this project will directly align with our mission to "educate leaders for Christian communities called and sent by the Holy Spirit to witness to salvation through Jesus Christ and to serve in God's world."

Luther Seminary's newly approved strategic plan places heavy emphasis on the preparation of excellent pastoral leaders. Perhaps most importantly, the plan commits Luther Seminary to developing and implementing a rigorous assessment process that will both embed the seminary even more deeply with its congregational partners and provide new learnings that will continually inform the seminary's teaching. The following citation from the plan lifts up this importance:

"... our partners and constituencies press us to prepare graduates up to the task of mission in the present world – leaders who can preach and teach, serve and guide, lead worship and provide pastoral care, counsel and administer faithfully and well, foster the faith and vocations of the laity, envision and lead transformational processes. . . . assessment requires honest mutual conversation and public accountability, transparent to one another and open to the Spirit; we will join this conversation fully, humbly, and expectantly."

The research we propose in this grant request will inform the seminary's ongoing program of assessment.

Luther Seminary is increasingly known for innovative teaching, research and professional support in the area of pastoral leadership. Through its Center for Life-Long Learning, the seminary engages a wide range of ministry leaders through continuing education and resource development. Similarly, the new Center for Biblical Preaching and Center for Stewardship Leadership reach thousands of

ministry leaders through their programs and websites, workingpreacher.org and luthersem.edu/stewardship. In addition, a major focus on congregational mission and leadership has led to unique degree offerings at the MA, D.Min., and Ph.D. levels.

The physical and academic resources of Luther Seminary will provide an excellent setting for the project and its program needs. The library resources are substantial and students have access to over a half million volumes through the Minnesota Consortium of Theological Schools. The broad resources of one of the largest theological schools in the United States offers strengths in areas such as the sociology of culture and religion, as well as Bible, theology, ethics, religion and the media, preaching, pastoral care, liturgy and philosophy of religion. In addition, the seminary's robust Ph.D. program will insure a pool of doctoral students from which student research assistants may be drawn.

Finally, Luther Seminary, one of the eight seminaries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, is the largest Lutheran seminary in the world and trains leaders for the global church. It is also an ecumenical seminary both in faculty and student makeup. This ecumenical context has allowed Luther faculty and students to draw upon the breadth and experience of various Christian traditions in worship, study, forms of community, and spiritual formation. Increased forms of dialogue with other religions, particularly through the seminary's program in Islamic Studies, along with conversations with religious leaders from various traditions, expand Luther's ecumenical context into a multi-faith context. The seminary's location in the Twin Cities area, with its large African immigrant and Hmong populations, enhances a multi-faith environment. The Global Mission Institute, housed at the seminary, provides access to Christian leaders – clergy, religious workers, youth ministers, theological educators, artists, and lay leaders – from around the world.

Leadership

Christian Scharen, **Director of the Project**, works at the intersection of worship, practical theology and pastoral leadership, focusing on the relationship between congregations and culture. As a professor of worship at Luther, he teaches courses in worship and contemporary culture. His most recent book, *Faith as a Way of Life: A New Vision for Pastoral Leadership* (2008) is representative of his ongoing commitment to congregations and pastoral leadership. This book is the capstone of a four-year Lilly funded Sustaining Pastoral Excellence project he led as part of Yale Divinity School's Center for Faith & Culture. As well, over the past four years he has participated in a working group of pastors and scholars from key institutions of theological learning in this country (e.g., Duke University, Harvard University, Vanderbilt University, Yale University, Princeton University) in exploring the shape of teaching, research, and ministry from the perspective of a revitalized practical theology, the results of which have just been published in Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra, *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry* (Eerdmans 2008). Dr. Scharen's chapter in the volume is entitled, "Learning Ministry Over Time:

Embodying Practical Mastery.”

The position of **Associate Director** will be posted nationally, with the expectation that the successful candidate will have theological education, church, and project management experience. The person will need to have training and experience in qualitative research. Preferably, the person will have a Ph.D. in practical theology or a related field and, if so, will have the opportunity to teach a course at Luther Seminary subject to approval by the Dean and Faculty.

The **Administrative Assistant** position for the project will be responsible for clerical tasks and general project support.

At all stages of its work, an **Advisory Council** will support and advise the project. Its membership will be composed of:

- Dr. Richard Bliese, President, Luther Seminary, *Ex Officio*
- Dr. Christian Scharen, Director of the Project
- Associate Director of the Project
- Dr. Patricia Benner, University of California, San Francisco
- Dr. Charles Foster, Emory University
- Rev. David Wood, Fund for Theological Education

The whole Advisory Council will advise the Director in implementing the work of the project at regular intervals, usually twice yearly. One meeting will take place in St. Paul, the other by conference call.

Institutional Support and Partnership

This project finds a very appropriate institutional location at the seminary’s Center for Life-Long Learning. The Center houses an exceptionally deep program of support for pastors through classes, workshops, research, and web-based, print and multi-media resources. The Center is also home to the Centered Life program that is a congregationally-based effort to strengthen the vocations of the laity. The Center’s newly-named director, David Lose, has just stepped down from his position as Academic Dean of Luther Seminary to teach in the seminary’s preaching program as the Marbury Anderson Professor of Biblical Preaching and to lead continued expansion of the Center for Life-Long Learning. This move further integrates the work of the Center with the core academic program.

One of Luther Seminary’s hallmarks has been its commitment to listening to congregations to learn their needs, particularly those that relate to pastoral leadership. Faculty colleagues at Luther, along with alumni/ae and friends of the seminary name this as a priority for their work and support. This project will build on this long-standing commitment and will extend it in new directions.

Faculty at Luther with whom I have shared this proposal have expressed great excitement and look forward to providing a home for this research on their campus. Luther Seminary's president, Richard Bliese, and incoming Academic Dean, Roland Martinson, are particularly encouraging and have committed to making available the time necessary for me to devote to the research and writing outlined in this proposal. Faculty colleagues and pastors responding to drafts of this proposal and its core ideas represent a variety of disciplines and denominations and share a commitment to grow in our common understanding of how pastors learn and deepen their capacity for excellent ministry for the sake of the church and the broader common good.

Sustainability

While this is a finite project, its impact will have broad and sustained influence. Luther Seminary can effectively foster this influence. Luther Seminary has deep commitments both to research and leadership development, and has dedicated significant energy to the area of congregations and pastoral leadership. This grant proposal, while a time-limited project, fits within an ongoing programmatic commitment to foster the capacity of pastoral imagination in future and current leaders.

Specifically, by participating in this research, various pastors and ministry students will gain insight into their own professional development. They will also gain a broader framework for considering the arc of learning extending from their past out into their future. Yet as much as the small-group interviews at each of the five research sites are a finite feature of the project, the experiences and conclusions reached therein will live on in the unfolding lives and vocations of participants.

Secondarily, the book and publications will sustain the project by bringing the idea of learning pastoral imagination as a developmental and practice-based process to a wide audience.

Lastly, web resources and data from our research will inform others interested in the project. The website may include articles of interest on topics relating to leadership and will provide links to other relevant sites, studies, and partner organizations. The website will be a part of Luther Seminary's website (www.luthersem.edu).

SUMMARY

The Learning Pastoral Imagination Project will undertake a series of focal studies at sites both with experienced mentors working with student ministry candidates and with excellent pastors at various intervals of years in practice. Our interviews will focus on key learning moments in congregational leadership as well as observations of ministry practice. We will show with more care and subtlety the long formation

process, occurring across multiple contexts and apprenticeships, through which the reflective capacity, perception, and practical skills that lead to “pastoral imagination” develop and advance.

By developing and deploying careful research protocol drawing on a phenomenological model of skill development, we can portray the full scope of the formation of pastors in congregational leadership—especially how they learn to incorporate theological knowledge in and through the preparation for the practice of ministry. Such findings will be essential for the ongoing learning and professional development of pastors. These findings will also inform and possibly redirect initiatives in theological education and the church more broadly as leaders of a whole ecology of organizations seek to inspire, train, and encourage a new generation of pastoral leaders shaping communities of disciples for the sake of the world.

Endnotes

¹ See discussion of this point in Charles Taylor, "To Follow a Rule . . .," in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 165.

² Charles Foster, Lisa E. Dahill, Lawrence A. Golemon, and Barbara Wang Tolentino, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 22.

³ The influence of a technical understanding of professions and professional education in the university is discussed in detail by William M. Sullivan in *Work and Integrity: The Crisis and Promise of Professionalism in America, Second Edition* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2005). Sullivan is Director of the Preparation for the Professions Program at The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and worked very closely with Foster et. al. on their study of clergy education.

⁴ Foster et. al. *Educating Clergy*, 377. Also see phenomenological critique of cognitivist thinking in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Stuart E. Dreyfus, *Mind over Machine: The Power of Human Intuition and Expertise in the Era of the Computer* New York: The Free Press, 1986, as well as Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge: MIT, 2005) who argue that action gives rise to perception or Patricia Benner *Expertise in Nursing Practice: Caring, Clinical Judgment, and Ethics* (New York: Springer, 1998), who *shows* action giving rise to perception the case of nurses in training.

⁵ Foster, et. al., 376.

⁶ This is just as well the case for theology in relation to practice. See Kathryn Tanner, "Theological Reflection and Christian Practices," in Miroslav Volf and Dorothy Bass, *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 229-230.

⁷ Foster, et. al., *Educating Clergy*, 73, 101, 376f. and passim.

⁸ L. Gregory Jones and Kevin Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), p. 111ff.

⁹ Jackson Carroll, *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Communities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), p. 238.

¹⁰ See Daniel F. Chambliss, "The Mundanity of Excellence: An Ethnographic Report on Stratification and Olympic Swimmers," *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Spring, 1989), pp. 70-86; Craig Dykstra, "Keys to Excellence: Pastoral Imagination and Holy Friendships," *Sustaining Pastoral Excellence eNewsletter*, at <http://www.divinity.duke.edu/programs/spe/articles/200506/dykstra-p1.html>.

¹¹ By this phrase I do not mean body *versus* mind, but body-mind, a holistic understanding of one sense-perceiving organism acting in the world. See Bent Flyvbjerg, "Sustaining Non-Rationalized Practices: Body-Mind, Power, and Situational Ethics. An Interview with Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus" *Praxis International* 11:1 (April 1991): 95f. See also Shawn Gallagher, *How The Body Shapes the Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹² Dreyfus and Dreyfus, *Mind over Machine*; Hubert L. Dreyfus, *On the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

¹³ Patricia Benner, Christine A. Tanner, and Catherine A. Chesla, *Expertise in Nursing Practice: Caring, Clinical Judgment, and Ethics* (New York: Springer, 1996) esp. 351-358.

¹⁴ Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 145-156.