Fear-Conqueror, Fear-Bearer, Fear-Exploiter, and Fear-Miner

Eric H. F. Law

The fear of others lays a snare but one who trusts in the Lord is secure. Many seek the favor of a ruler, but it is from the Lord that one gets justice.
—Proverbs 29:25–26

On July 22, 2003, U.S. Army Private Jessica Lynch was given a hero’s homecoming. Thousands of cheering residents in Elizabeth, West Virginia, lined the streets, waving flags and holding all kinds of welcoming signs. Since April of that same year, every television news program carried stories of how Lynch was taken prisoner when her Army unit was ambushed after taking a wrong turn near Nasiriya in Iraq in March of that year. The Humvee in which she was riding was hit with a rocket-propelled grenade and crashed at high speed into the rear of an army tractor-trailer. Eleven soldiers died. Five others were taken prisoner. Lynch was taken to a hospital in Nasiriya and treated by Iraqi doctors. Her injuries included three fractures in her left leg, multiple

Eric H.F. Law, founder and executive director, Kaleidoscope Institute for Competent Leadership in a Diverse, Changing World, 840 Echo Park Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90026-4209 (E-mail: EHFLaw@aol.com).

Portions of this article are excerpts from Chapters 4 and 5 of Finding Intimacy in a World of Fear by Eric H. F. Law (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2007).
breaks in her right foot, a fractured disk in her back, a broken right upper arm and lacerations on her head. She was rescued on April 1, 2003, when Special Operations Forces entered the hospital, removed her, and took her to a nearby helicopter before she was flown to safety.

After her rescue, Private Lynch endured months of painful rehabilitation before returning home. Authorities said that Lynch could not recall details of her ordeal from the time she was ambushed until “an unspecified point during her captivity.”

In the days following her rescue, Lynch was nonetheless described as a female Rambo who “continued firing at the Iraqis even after she sustained multiple gunshot wounds.” A story began to develop implying that “she might have been shot after she had been captured, rather than wounded in combat,” and “she survived for part of her time in the hospital on nothing but orange juice and crackers.”

At the same time, questions began to emerge regarding what actually happened. Eventually, it became clear that Jessica Lynch’s story was “one of the most stunning pieces of news management yet conceived.” A Web site article, entitled “Jessica Lynch: Media Myth-Making in the Iraq War,” documented clearly that Lynch had not been shot or stabbed but instead had received good care. Moreover, the U.S. military knew that the Iraqi paramilitary guards had left the hospital before the raid occurred.

Even after the facts surrounding the Jessica Lynch story had been documented, myths persisted. In November 2003, a USA Today article by Rick Hampson reported on a book that described the scars on Jessica Lynch’s body as indication that she had been sodomized even though she recalled nothing. “Jessi lost three hours. She lost them in the snapping bones, in the crash of the Humvee, in the torment her enemies inflicted on her after she was pulled from it.” Hampson added that “the records do not tell whether her captors assaulted her almost lifeless, broken body after she was lifted from the wreckage, or if they assaulted her and then broke her bones into splinters until she was almost dead.”

**JESSICA LYNCH: FEAR-CONQUEROR AND FEAR-BEARER**

The Jessica Lynch story revealed two primary images that the media in the United States consistently instilled in the public mind on how to deal with fear: the fear-conqueror and the fear-bearer. In a period of six weeks, Lynch moved from being portrayed as a “female Rambo” to just “a victim and a
survivor.” In either case, many hailed her as a hero. At the time the story broke, the United States was less than two weeks into the war in Iraq. The media’s coverage of the fighting had taken a negative turn. The nation was fearful whether invading Iraq was the right thing to do. To address this collective fear, the media presented the Jessica Lynch story first with the fear-conqueror image, but when the Rambo-like “facts” were being disputed and discredited, the media moved—first reluctantly, and then wholeheartedly—to depicting her as a victim who survived this horrible ordeal—as the fear-bearer.

I borrow these terms—fear-conqueror and fear-bearer—from Miriam Greenspan, author of the book *Healing Through the Dark Emotions*. She used the term “fear-carrier.” I prefer “fear-bearer” because it is more descriptive of that approach to fear. While she used these terms to differentiate the way males and females typically have dealt with their fears, I apply them more generally to different groups in different communities. Greenspan distinguished these terms in this way: “Fear-conquerors are symbolically linked to heroism and power. Fear-carriers are symbolically linked to victimization and powerlessness.”

Fear-conquerors deal with fear through acts of aggression against ‘others’ who had been defined as enemy. “From the Pentagon to the Mafia, from the streets of the Middle East to the hallway of our high schools, unacceptable fear is conquered through various forms of organized aggression and violence...The pop culture hero is an armored male machine with no fear of injury or death, willing to risk anything to subdue or kill the enemy. His courage is not so much acting despite fear as acting without fear.”

Fear-bearers are taught to “embody vulnerability and fear more overtly.” Fear is “not an enemy to be conquered but a warning tack that says: Go no further...If you’re a [fear-bearer] and you don’t use fear to limit yourself, there is an implicit threat of violence.” Even though Lynch consistently said she did not remember, the media’s image-making machine insisted that something more terrible must have happened if she was not a fear-conqueror. She could not have just lain there and been taken care of by the enemy! She had to be tortured or raped, justifying an exaggerated heroic rescue.

The projected images of Jessica Lynch in the media fit these two archetypical approaches to fear. She was first a fear-conqueror—fearless and strong—and then she was a fear-bearer who had terrible violence visited upon her. She was helpless and in need of rescue by the fear-con-
The reaction of the U.S. administration to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks was a fear-conqueror’s response to fear. The administration immediately went into conqueror mode. Benjamin R. Barber in his book *Fear’s Empire* described this well:

In the epoch-defining speech he gave at the National Cathedral a few days after 9/11, the president said, “We are here in the middle hour of our grief. But our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil.” At the conclusion of his speech...the congregation “stood and sang “The Battle Hymn of Republic.”

We did not know how to face our fear except through the fear-conqueror’s way of aggression. “Violence is often a direct consequence of denied fear, fear acted out because the person has lost the ability to feel it authentically and mindfully, and to express it without shame.” As long as we were striking back, it did not matter whether or not the war was justified—we were conquering our fear. People act out because they are afraid to feel, afraid to speak of their fear.

On the other side of the equation, everyday people were made to conform as fear-bearers while the U.S. government planned to go to war—the heroic fear-conquerors’ approach to fear. We were told to live our lives and hug our children. We were told to support the economy by spending more. We were told to pray. We were told to have patience in facing the inconveniences of tighter security when we traveled; the new rules were necessary for the sake of security. No one could joke about security in the airport. Certain types of people were singled out and searched in the airport, even though the President had said explicitly, “no one should be singled out for unfair treatment or unkind words because of their ethnic background or religious faith.”

Many experienced the appeal to be patient for the sake of security as the condition to become fear-bearers. Follow the rules and don’t complain, or you’ll be perceived as anti-American—or worse, you might be suspected of being a terrorist. We were indoctrinated into becoming fear-bearers, and the best we could hope for was to survive. As fear-bearers, we would give up many things—our rights, our liberty, our integrity, our dignity—in order to survive. Time and again, I heard people being interviewed on television...
saying, “If this can keep us safe, I am willing to give up some of my liberties.” Like Jessica Lynch, survival was enough to make us into heroes.

BEHIND FEAR-CONQUERORS AND FEAR-BEARERS: FEAR-EXPLOITERS

Fear-conquerors and fear-bearers are often presented to us as the only two options in dealing with our fear. If I cannot fight like Rambo to conquer my fear, the only other option is for me to be a fear-bearer, stepping in line in support of the fear-conquerors in order to survive. If one cannot support the fear-conquerors’ approach, fear-conquerors turn inwards and force those who questioned the validity and legality of the wars into fear-bearers. By becoming fear-conquerors, the U.S. government basically insisted that the terrorists become fear-bearers and acquiesce to our demands. When both sides of a conflict insist that the other become fear-bearers, violence is sure to escalate.

I have used the Jessica Lynch story and the Iraqi conflict because it dramatically illustrates the problem when we have two options for dealing with fear. The fear-conqueror/fear-bearers scenario occurs in our daily lives—in our relationships at home and in the workplaces, on the streets, in our community and religious organizations, in our education systems, and in the political arenas. Behind the interplay between the fear-conqueror and the fear-bearer is the fear-exploiter, who uses fear to control others in order to maintain and increase power.

The fear-exploiters give the illusion that they are powerful by evoking fear. Through fear, they manipulate others to become fear-conquerors, using aggression and punishment to instill fear in others. If we unreflectively respond to their projected fear and act as fear-conquerors, we become puppets of the fear-exploiters, who use aggression to escalate fear, thereby increasing their power and control. If we respond by being fear-bearers and stay within the status quo, we simply reinforce the power of the fear-exploiters. Fear-conquerors and fear-bearers are co-conspirators with the fear-exploiters, part of the system that not only does nothing constructive to address our fear but continue to expand fear’s grip on us in order to benefit the fear-exploiters.

In the ministry of forming and supervising for ministry, we need to enable others to recognize these three destructive approaches to fear. A competent leader in a fear-filled world must refuse to become a fear-conqueror and resist any efforts to be put in the role of fear-bearer. More importantly, a competent religious leader must resist the temptation to become a fear-ex-
exploiter. The authority and influence that come with many roles in ministries can easily lure us into the path toward becoming a fear-exploiter. Instead, a competent leader must have the knowledge and skills to expose the fear-exploiter and the courage to find an alternative to the binary approach to fear. Christians learn another alternative from Jesus.

**Jesus, the Fear-Miner: A Positive Alternative**

Jesus was not a fear-bearer. He did not stay within the safety boundaries set by the religious and political institutions of his time. In fact, he broke many rules for the sake of recognizing the humanity of the poor and powerless people. Jesus refused to practice rituals that were harmful to himself and others. He refused to be a fear-bearer. As predicted, even by Jesus himself, violence would visit him as a result.

Jesus was not a fear-conqueror either. Jesus refused to buy into the assumptions that the Messiah was supposed to be like a rebel or revolutionary, using violence and aggression to liberate the oppressed. When he predicted his suffering and death, his followers—Peter being the most vocal one—were surprised and reacted with disbelief. How could their Messiah be killed? At the time of his arrest, followers of Jesus were about to react as fear-conquerors, using aggression and inciting violence. But Jesus stopped them. Jesus taught them that the fear-conqueror’s approach to fear was not the way to deal with our fear.

Nor was Jesus a fear-exploiter. He did not seek to manipulate people to follow him out of fear. Instead, Jesus offered an alternative. I call people “fear-miners” who follow Jesus’ way of addressing fear. Time and again, Jesus taught fearful people around him to mine from their fears the wisdom and knowledge of grace, forgiveness, justice, and the seeds of ministry:

The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to [Jesus,] “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?”

This was a fear-filled situation—and not only for the woman, who was facing death. Judging from the reaction of the people around Jesus, their proposed action to punish this woman stemmed from fear as well. Their fear came from their knowledge of the law. The woman was cast as the fear-bearer and must be punished because she had broken the rules. The people
watching this situation—I presume most of them were men—were the fear-conquerors. They would conquer their fear using aggression and violence justified by the law. But the law was not applied equally to everyone. Where was the man who committed adultery with this woman? Maybe he was hiding. Maybe he was one of the men standing around watching. He was not subjected to the same rules. Because of his power, he would never be cast as a fear-bearer.

When they kept on questioning [Jesus], he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground.\(^\text{12}\)

Jesus’ intriguing response exposed the hypocrisy of situation set up by the fear-exploiters to “test” him. He forced the fear-conquerors to look inward at their own fear that had caused them to act with aggression toward this woman. If they had broken the laws themselves and if the laws were applied equally to everyone, they could be rejected and publicly humiliated, and would face the possibility of being killed. His statement invited them to ponder their fear, linking it to its terrible destination, which would be what the woman was facing. They dug below their fear and found the gifts of compassion and mercy and perhaps a sense of justice.

When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on, do not sin again.”\(^\text{13}\)

Jesus then addressed the woman, the fear-bearer who had been spared judgment and death. She was no longer condemned by others; nor was she condemned by Jesus. She had moved from potential death to resurrection in the presence of Christ. Jesus helped her unearth a primary yearning of God—that she should not sin—because of the grace and love and forgiveness she received from the people in the community and from God. From this fear-filled situation, Jesus, the fear-miner, invited the fearful parties to dig inward and extract the gems of love, mercy, forgiveness, and justice, and the essence of living in the community of God.

Jesus, rejecting both the fear-bearer and fear-conqueror approaches to fear, took us on a journey to face our fear through his betrayal, suffering, death, and most importantly resurrection. In his facing the ultimate fear, Jesus exposed the system of injustice created by the fear-exploiters. He ex-
posed the unjust application of rules and rituals that oppressed and divided people by casting them as fear-conquerors and fear-bearers. As he arrived at the destination of his journey, he showed grace and forgiveness, even to those who hurt him. He showed us another way, not about conquering fear with aggression or enduring out of our fear of punishment. The remarkable story of the life of faith is not about being afraid of punishment, but facing it head on. We are to approach fear as an opening, as an invitation to mine from it the gifts and treasures buried deep below the surface. When we dig down through fear’s openings, we can discover from fear the God-given gift of wisdom, courage, dignity and self-esteem with which we can face any adversity that comes our way. When we see our fear as a gift, we will discover that underneath our fear is the knowledge of God. Beyond our fear is the hope of resurrection, with new visions for us, our communities, and our nations. Buried below our fear is the seed of ministry. The work of formation and supervision in ministry is to discover fear as a gift from which we may mine the hidden wisdom of God.

FORMING FEAR-MINERS IN THE MIDST OF COMMUNAL CONFLICT

Two years ago, I was invited to write a proposal for a regional church organization to continue their work on combating racism. This organization initiated an annual antiracism training event several years ago. When people completed the training each year, they joined with the people from previous years to form a community to combat racism. This community met at least four times a year. Yet, it was clear from the correspondence that something had not gone well with previous events. Out of the sixty initial members, only fifteen were coming to this training, and the rest of the participants were new. Two previous coordinators of this ministry had left and would have nothing to do with the group again. In previous trainings, many participants, especially Whites, felt manipulated and felt that there was no hope for anything positive or constructive coming out of these trainings. I suspected that underlying this request for a new proposal was fear. We eventually agreed on a two and a half days of training.

In preparation for the training event, I imagined that in the last two years, this organization, in its effort to address racism, had entered into a fear-conqueror/fear-bearer pattern. Facilitators of previous trainings had no doubt pointed out the indisputable facts that, in the United States, Whites were the dominant and powerful group. They had used their power and
influence to enforce their prejudice and discrimination. Once Whites were exposed fear-conquerors, they simply reversed the roles. Whites were now becoming fear-bearers while the people of Color were the fear-conquerors. This is one consequence of a binary approach to race relations. If this analysis was correct, then my challenge was not to repeat this pattern. I had to find ways to invite this community to experience a third alternative—that of the fear-miners. As we began, I outlined Respectful Communication Guidelines (see figure 1) and explored how we would practice them in the work ahead.

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<td>S</td>
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<td>TRUST ambiguity because we are NOT here to debate who is right or wrong</td>
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Figure 1. Respectful Communication Guidelines

One of the most important functions of the Respectful Communication Guidelines is to address the fears people bring with them to any communal conversation. The first guideline proposes that we take responsibility for what we feel or say without blaming others. Some might be fearful that if they speak the truth about their experiences of racism, no one would listen or they could be misinterpreted. The second guideline proposes that we listen empathetically to each other. Some might be fearful that people will gossip about what they heard and this might ruin their reputations. The sixth guideline proposes that we keep confidentiality. Some might be fearful that people will argue over who has the right definition of racism and put down others who have a different understanding and experience. The seventh guideline proposes that we trust ambiguity and not debate who is right or wrong.

The first step to addressing fear constructively is to invite members of a community to come in from their ‘fear-zone’ and enter into a gracious environment, where there will be honest sharing and compassionate listening. One of the best ways to accomplish this is to present and affirm a set of ground
rules that specifically address their fears. To further enable respectful sharing, I introduced the Mutual Invitation process: each person is invited to speak without interruption and then invite another to share (figure 2). Then I invited them to form small groups of eight to introduce themselves, bearing in the mind the Respectful Communication Guidelines. The introduction topics included: their names, meanings of their names, their ministries, what they had to do to get to the training workshop, one value they would pass on to the next generation, and one thing they will not pass on. That was the first night.

In order to insure that everyone who wants to share has the opportunity to speak, we will proceed in the following way:

The leader or a designated person will share first. After that person has spoken, he or she then invites another to share. Who you invite does not need to be the person next to you. After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share. If you have something to say but are not ready yet, say “pass for now” and invite another to share—you will be invited again later. If you don’t want to say anything, simply say “pass” and proceed to invite another to share. We will do this until everyone has been invited.

Figure 2. Mutual Invitation

The second step to addressing fear constructively is to invite people to practice respectful speaking and listening by giving them clear guidelines and parameters. In this training program, we began Saturday morning with Scriptural reflection using the Kaleidoscope Bible Study. That conversation built on what we had learned the day before because imbedded in the Kaleidoscope Bible Study are Respectful Communication Guidelines and Mutual Invitation. Studying sacred texts invites a community to focus on something beyond itself. In this instance, we invited God, as revealed in Christian Scriptures, to be presence among us. Participants were asked to reflect on what was God calling them to do, to be and to change.

The third step in addressing fear is for a faith community to invite participants to reconnect with God’s unconditional love in order to be secure enough to take the risk of facing their fear—fear of others and fear of God. This awareness of unconditional love is a prelude to the next step in the process. The fourth step to addressing fear constructively encourages participants to look inward and to know their internal culture—beliefs, values, pat-
terns, and myths that conditioned the way we relate to others and perceive the world. To be fear-miners requires the ability to be introspective and discover the wider context of our fear and the deeper meaning fear holds for us.

When I perceived that the community was ready to engage each other honestly, openly, and respectfully, I invited them to enter into an activity called Photolanguage in order to address racism. Participants are invited to sit in three concentric circles of twelve participants. Using Mutual Invitation, each person was invited to select one or two photographs to answer the questions: What is racism? And how has racism affected your life?

In this training event, the fifth person invited to speak was an immigrant who shared his experience of being rejected as a Christian in a Muslim nation. He spoke of his hope of being accepted when he moved to the United States. To his disappointment, he was discriminated against because he was of Middle-East origin. He tried to hold his tears back, but he could not. We returned later to hear his full story. More intense emotions were shared honestly by others and received without any judgment. There were no fear-conquerors present, and no one was forced to be a fear-bearer. They were in the process of being formed as fear-miners.

For three hours, no one left. They used photographic images, such as masks, railroad tracks, locks, keys, money, light and darkness, lonely bench, children playing, and swimming pool to describe their experiences of racism. The sharing ranged from intellectual to highly emotional, descriptions of external events to deeply personal and sometimes fearful experiences. All were accepted. The room was hot at times, and cold at another time. But the whole group stayed. They stayed to listen. They stayed to tell their stories. They stayed to support each other. They stayed to learn. The most important part of this experience was that they stayed.

The fifth step to addressing fear uses tools, such as Photolanguage, to assist the community to speak from a deeper place with concrete and symbolic images. In the process of honest sharing and active listening, the roles of fear-conquerors and fear-bearers diminish. In this moment, we became a community speaking the truth and yearning to expose the fear-exploiter that seeks to divide and manipulate us. The fear-exploiter was racism itself. Everyone was invited to learn at their own pace allowing others’ sharing to affirm, surprise, and challenge them.

Many expressed gratitude the following morning as we debriefed the previous experience that they had been enabled to address racism in an in-
depth way without anyone being hurt in the process. Even though the process was not intellectual, we covered all the facets of racism. We then engaged the community again in theological reflection in the form of liturgy. We again studied sacred scripture and asked once again what God was calling us to do. Then we prayed for each other and the communities from which we came. We confessed our sin to each other and to God. We asked for forgiveness. We then shared communion together reconnecting each other as the body of Christ. In a sense, the entire training event was a liturgy—listening to God, through scriptures, prayers, music, and one another, and then, responding to the God’s call in spiritual and concrete practical terms. Having had this fear-mining experience, the community was invited to explore what God was calling them to do.

Instead of running away from their fear of racism and because of racism, participants in this event stayed and mined from their fearful experiences deeper understanding and new commitment to continue the struggle. Members of this community were now eager to share what they had learned and how they had arrived at this constructive place with those who had left the group because of the divisive experiences in the past. They were excited about learning how to facilitate this kind of fear-mining experience. They were ready to share this way of approaching fear with more people in their church organization. They were more equipped to stop themselves from being pushed into being fear-conquerors or fear-bearers, but were more able to speak the truth together in order to expose the fear-exploiters’ scheme. They were more ready to trust in God—the ultimate security that would give them the courage to continue in their ministry in the world of fear.

**Implication for Pastoral Supervision**

Despite extensive training in pastoral supervision and despite preparing the student for the work of supervision, the supervision process may fall into the fear-conqueror/fear-bearer dichotomy. Students often become fear-bearers because (a) they expect a positive evaluation by their school of a successful contextual education, (b) ecclesial endorsement may depend on a successful contextual experience, and (c) the cultural background of the student might make approval a necessary result of the contextual experience. In addition, the student may have expectations of perfection that make failure the only alter-
native to already knowing how to do ministry. Being fear-bearers prevents students from becoming learners who are willing to take risks and learn how to put theory and practice together in a creative way. Students may not choose the best site for contextual learning if they are afraid to fail as fear-bearers.

Pastoral supervisors may become fear-conquerors because their own experience of being supervised might have engendered fear. When pastoral supervisors are unwilling to have their authority challenged or if their understanding of leadership has residues of old hierarchical models or when their view of ministry has predetermined images of what success looks like, they are more likely to embody a fear-conqueror approach to supervision. If the student is expected to replace the youth director or fill in an empty space on the staff, learning is replaced by performance, and the student’s fear may even be exploited in the process. Once the supervisor uses fear to force the student to conform to a set of predetermined boundaries, the supervisor becomes the fear-exploiter.

The power differential in supervision may foster the fear-conqueror/fear-bearer dichotomy. In order to avoid that pattern, both the student and the supervisor need to become fear-miners. Several dimensions of supervision might need to change so that the supervisory relationship is characterized by appropriate, mutual vulnerability and trust:

1. Both supervisor and student need to name and claim the fears of their roles in the relationship.

2. Both supervisor and student need to be clearer about the definitions of success or effectiveness that get in the way of creative understanding of the learning process.

3. Beyond the fundamental conversations about roles and success, both the student and the supervisor need to foster greater imagination about the work of ministry.

The way out of the fear-conqueror/fear-bearer dichotomy in supervision depends on the willingness of both the supervisor and the student to be open to mutual challenge for the sake of growth. This requires a conscious effort in creating a time and place in which trust can be developed and maintained. Through this trusting relationship, the supervisor and the students are more willing to take risk in facing their fear. By working through the named fear, the supervisory relationship will then model a new way of using power for the recipients of ministry that will foster a community of fear-miners.
NOTES

1. NRSV.


6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., 182.


9. Greenspan, Healing Through the Dark Emotions, 186.


15. In Eric H. F. Law, Inclusion (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2000), I described other techniques and processes to create what I called the “Grace Margin.”


17. For a full description the Kaleidoscope Bible Study, see Law, The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, 121–131. For a shorter version, go to the web site of the Kaleidoscope Institute at http://www.ladiocese.org/ki.

18. For a full description of the tool Photolanguage, see Law, The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, 89–97, 115–119.

19. I am indebted to Dr. Connie Kleingartner for her contributions to this closing section. Dr. Kleingartner is Logos Chair of Evangelism and Church Ministries and director of Field Education at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.