

The Unfolding of Pastoral Imagination: Prudence as Key to Learning Ministry

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade “pastoral imagination” has served as a provocative center for discussions about what makes for faithful and wise pastoral leadership. This essay is organized around two stories of ministry: a student in clinical pastoral training and a senior pastor of a large congregation. Their stories instantiate and characterize the use of pastoral imagination as prudence unfolding over the long arc of learning the practice of ministry.¹ The stories are case studies drawn from the Learning Pastoral Imagination (LPI) Project, a national study of learning ministry seeking to understand instances of pastoral imagination, articulate how it is learned, and say why it matters for the complex context of ministry in the twenty-first century.²

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UNFOLDING PASTORAL IMAGINATION IN LEARNING MINISTRY

In the everyday flow of life, we all make many prudent decisions, mostly without conscious reflection. Prudence, as Aristotle says, consists of wise judgment in particular situations, wisdom that can only be gained by experiential learning over time.³ We constantly make judgments: when to pull out into heavy traffic, how to organize our workday, where to go for the best coffee, how to ask the right questions of our child's teacher, or how to pray. These situational judgments are not only rooted in past experience, they are mostly available to us as if "without thinking." We do not make rational calculations in these instances so much as we know in our bodies what to do. Sight, sound, smell, and feeling all combine to lead us through daily life choices, made mostly beneath our consciousness. However, when we are brought up short by a strange situation, or when we are learning something new, the need for more conscious deliberation arises. In other words, learning to cope with new situations, like those required of a pastor, calls for a different sort of thinking in the beginning. When learning something new we face strange, unfamiliar or crisis situations without the necessary experience to know what prudence requires, so we reach for guidelines or rules. And even with extensive experience, crises can still bring us up short so that we must deliberate, drawing upon the embodied, relational and emotional knowledge and skill that we have accumulated over time.

To develop prudence for pastoral leadership, such that the sights, sounds, feelings, and relational character of the situation effectively tell us what to do, we need time and opportunity to experience the practice of ministry itself. While pastoral leadership requires a large body of knowledge (scripture, history, ritual, doctrine, human tendencies, administration, and more) as well as particular know-how (preaching and leading worship, giving care, teaching a Bible study, organizing and supporting the gifts and people of a congregation), becoming a pastor above all calls for integrating such knowledge and skill so that prudence becomes second nature, as if without thinking. Craig Dykstra has pointed to this crucial capacity for prudence in ministry in his discussion of "pastoral imagination."⁴ This term—and the ways Dykstra and others have developed it—serves us well as we try to articulate what is entailed in learning ministry.

As a novice to the work of ministry, one must both acquire knowledge and learn to make use of that knowledge.⁵ One must both learn and practice rules and guidelines for ministry. However, this kind of general and rule-

based thinking recedes as one builds experiences in the practice of ministry and becomes more competent facing the many complex situations of a ministry context. The unfolding of pastoral imagination takes time and experience within the situation of ministry. Learning the knowledge and skills required for making wise judgments is best accomplished alongside mentors and peers who can share in the deliberative learning. One needs space to try and even to fail, to experience being brought up short and to improvise on the basis of knowledge and skills of ministry to meet the demands of the situation. Increasing familiarity with a wide range of unfamiliar situations will be integrated into a pastor's repertoire of seeing, recognizing, and responding with prudence. The cases in this essay show two ends of this learning arc. At the beginning is the novice who has just plunged into the practice of ministry, and much further along the way is a mature pastor whose imagination draws upon a rich repertoire of experiences in responding to a crisis that arises in her ministry. Before turning to the cases, we step back to comment on the larger context of learning ministry today.

THE SHIFTING LANDSCAPE OF MINISTRY

Two major shifts in the landscape of Christian ministry and theological education over the past century have given rise to new understandings of the person and work of the pastor. The first shift has been part of a widespread revolution in the way professionals are prepared for their work.⁶ During the twentieth century the holistic "apprenticeship model" for learning a profession, a model based upon the apprentice living with and learning alongside a master practitioner, was replaced by multiple apprenticeships of knowledge, skill and character formation.⁷ No longer was learning the practice of ministry and nurturing one's character toward pastoral prudence primarily accomplished through apprenticing oneself to another experienced minister, although some notable exceptions remain. The new model was inclined toward an "educated ministry," which increasingly meant a university-based education.⁸ As the apprenticeship model receded, a fragmentation of learning prudence for ministry also occurred.

The same conditions that gave rise to a professionalization of ministry and the fragmentation of apprenticeship also contributed to a second shift in emphasis from the role and identity of ministers and toward practice and prudence in ministry. Christian ministry was traditionally understood as a role undertaken by ordained males in the church, an assumption of duties

and responsibilities that one had already witnessed and experienced as a member of a faith community. However, as mobilization, unsettled lives, and greater shared power became the norms in North America, the paradigms of leadership, the stakes of ministry, and the skills needed for learning to become a minister also changed.⁹ What has not changed, however, is the distinction of ministry from other professions in both what one needs to know and how one comes to know. Despite the changing context, the minister's role and identity, character and disposition for ministry, continue to be central. Thus the shifting focus—from role to practice—emphasizes both how professional education for ministry has been fragmented and how religious life itself increasingly lacks coherence and unity. These dramatic cultural shifts demand a different kind of attention to how one becomes a pastor.

In the first decade of the 21st century, understanding ministry as a practice received significant scholarly attention.¹⁰ Given the context of disintegrating religious unity, fragmented theological education and the shift in emphasis from role to practice in ministry, pastoral imagination emerged as a unifying proposal for understanding both the character of ministry and nitty-gritty of learning pastoral practice. Pastoral imagination has become a way to describe the capacity central to the character of good ministry.¹¹ Out of these major shifts in the landscape of ministry and the growing literature which seeks to articulate the practice of ministry, the Learning Pastoral Imagination Project has taken up the question, *How is pastoral ministry learned in the practice over time?* The study strives to understand how ministers learn the knowledge, skills, and character required for wise pastoral leadership—practical wisdom implied by prudence or phronesis.

TWO STORIES OF MINISTRY

The following cases from our interviews in the LPI Study. One shows emergent signs of nascent pastoral imagination in Father Stephen. The other demonstrates a more fully-formed pastoral imagination in the maturity of Pastor Ginger.¹²

Father Stephen

Father Stephen is now an Orthodox priest and military chaplain on active duty. As a seminarian he was required to make hospital visits and receive supervision from Rev. Joan, the director of pastoral care. She is known and respected for her ability to question, probe, and confront pastoral trainees,

yet allow them to come to answers on their own. Fr. Stephen says Rev. Joan “would not allow me to hide,” something he admits doing all his life. In particular, Fr. Stephen had learned to how to hide behind “symbols of power and authority,” like the “military uniform or a little collar.” In working with Rev. Joan he came to realize how much he was acting ‘as if,’ “It’s all about me!” Rev. Joan helped him learn how to “get out of the way” so he could connect with people, and “bring them into contact with God.” Fr. Stephen described his learning this way: First, he says he recognized how much he had been hiding “in the past” and, secondly, how tempting it would be in the future to continue hiding rather than be authentic. Thirdly, he noted that his process of learning needed “a lot more work.” Finally he wondered how he could continue to learn without Rev. Joan, other mentors, or peers in ministry.

Fr. Stephen told a story in which this learning came into focus. He described an Orthodox patient, Greg, to whom he had “ministered in a complete sort of priestly way” as he transitioned from hospital intern to ordained priest. Greg was “born severely mentally and physically debilitated” living all his life in hospitals or care facilities. Months earlier, Fr. Stephen said he had “literally looked in the man’s room and kept on going” thinking a visit would be “utterly futile.” Although he was embarrassed to admit the initial failure, he says after some weeks of adjustment to the visiting process, he “shoved himself into the room.” He made himself “get in there and try to deal with somebody” who couldn’t offer “the symbols of affirmation” that he wanted.

In ministering to Greg, who could neither talk nor hear, and due to medication was unconscious most of the time, Fr. Stephen says, “I was doing all the things that I knew I was supposed to do, getting all dressed up so to speak, but he couldn’t see or respond to any of it.” To be sure, Fr. Stephen knew at times that Greg “was there,” and felt that when he was conscious, he was responsive in his own way. Yet his distinct disability and illness meant that the normal sorts of conversation and feedback were not possible. He says it would have been easy to hide again and just “play the role,” but he didn’t want that. Instead his “first experience with getting out of the way happened with a guy who couldn’t even really communicate with me.” The fact that Greg couldn’t say, “You’re messing up,” allowed Fr. Stephen to “let his guard down” and over numerous visits explore an authentic pastoral presence centered not on himself but rather on “what Christ wants to do in the midst of this encounter.”

One day when Greg was “at the brink of death,” Fr. Stephen was praying, reading the Psalms, and anointing him with oil when “he took this big deep breath.” Even though the man couldn’t respond in ways easy to inter-

pret, Fr. Stephen says he “felt a real desire not to play a game with him, but to be authentic and serious and real.” As before, Fr. Stephen took the experience of that moment to Rev. Joan. They talked it through, and she asked “her typical kind of pointed questions.” Throughout the experience he says he felt Rev. Joan with him, like a “little angel on your shoulder guiding that process.” He says he could hear her asking, “What are you feeling? Why? Move beyond this if you can. Just take one step farther into the situation.” Because of her guidance and mentoring, Fr. Stephen continued his ministry with Greg until his death, even officiating at the memorial service.

Nascent Pastoral Imagination: Integrating Self and Role

Fr. Stephen’s story shows a nascent pastoral imagination and the significant kind of learning required for growing in that capacity. To begin learning the kind of perception that is required for pastoral imagination he needed to get beyond both “hiding behind the symbols” of faith and authority and also to stop thinking it was all about himself.¹³ Fr. Stephen says he came to recognize—with the helpful and pointed questions of Rev. Joan—that his perception of himself and the situation of ministry were distorted and inadequate.¹⁴ His capacity to act prudently was blocked because he was hiding from others, himself, and God behind the symbols of his office. He knew these perception problems were rooted in the past, impeding the present, and a potential temptation for continuing in the future. His recognition of the problem and eventual change in perception allowed him to see in greater depth the other person in front of him and the ways that God was present in the situation. This is exactly the sort of perception Craig Dykstra suggests develops as part of pastoral imagination: “It is the capacity to perceive the ‘more’ in what is already before us.”¹⁵

Fr. Stephen’s mentorship from Rev. Joan and his eventual ministry with Greg allowed a new perception, guiding his action in new directions. Initially the situation looked futile to Fr. Stephen and overwhelmed him in such way that he avoided Greg’s room for months. Then Fr. Stephen took a risk and “shoved himself into the room.” In taking that risk the stakes of ministry came into focus. He didn’t want to “play” or “dress up” for his pastoral role any longer. He saw instead how to take responsibility for being a priest. In the last weeks of Greg’s life, Fr. Stephen regularly visited and offered pastoral care.¹⁶ In overcoming his own self-preoccupations and taking action in the situation, he exhibits the kind of experiential learning that with

time gives way to pastoral prudence. This experience is what we have called elsewhere the “birth of pastoral imagination.”¹⁷

Fr. Stephen was initially “pulled up short” by the sight of Greg in the hospital room. His reaction was to stick his head in the room and then retreat, hiding as he was accustomed to doing.¹⁸ Over time, as Fr. Stephen’s experience of patient visits deepened his ability to know the feel of bed-side care, he began regularly to visit Greg and read scripture, pray, and anoint him with oil. He was able to do this, he says, because the fear of judgment was not part of the situation with a patient who couldn’t tell him he was messing up. Fr. Stephen was able to lower his defenses, opening up deeper learning about himself, Greg, and Christ, whose presence was at work between them. But when Fr. Stephen again found himself brought up short—this time by Greg’s gasping—he came face to face with his own limits.¹⁹ He saw clearly his tendency to hide behind the symbols and to play a game, but he wanted a new way forward. He took the situation straight to Rev. Joan and they talked it through. Over time, Rev. Joan’s questions to Fr. Stephen had “pinned him down” as he put it. She had helped him learn to recognize significant moments and convinced him of the necessity of exploring what they were telling him. She helped him face his fears and move with more authenticity into the situation. This began to build in Fr. Stephen a disposition toward noticing what brought him up short, and rather than hiding, to take courage and explore what was at stake.²⁰

In his story, Fr. Stephen recounts his initiation into the demands of ministry, supported by a relationship with a wise pastor and located in a situation in which he could learn a deeper self-knowledge through his early failures (walking right past Greg’s room) and eventually a greater integration of skills and knowledge.²¹ As Kathleen Cahalan has argued, Fr. Stephen learned through an integration of the skills of a pastoral visit, the rituals of prayer and anointing, and the self-knowledge and relational skills for embodying the role of pastor in a way that was not “all about me.”²² The integration shows a crucial transition in learning pastoral imagination.²³ The demands of the situation were underdetermined and open-ended in a profound way, and he had to make use of multiple intelligences to navigate them.²⁴ And at the same time, Rev. Joan’s questions and several experiences of being immersed in the work of ministry continued to bring him up short, and began to give shape to a capacity for noticing what to do in those instances. He learned over months that he could move beyond trying to set things straight or follow a rule, and more fluidly attend to what his body, emotions, and the situation itself were saying. Learning to “minister in a

complete sort of priestly way” to Greg, Fr. Stephen begins to make contact with the sacred in the everyday work of ministry, and for a first time he steps more fully into a situation as an authentic priest.

Pastor Ginger

Ginger has been in ministry for more than 25 years, all of those years in the Southeast. When we interviewed her in a group of five senior ministers, she had served at her current congregation for four years. As she told the group about her life and ministry, she shared a recent story she described as “a kind of a failure/success thing.” While she’d been senior pastor in a number of settings, this was the first time, as she put it, “my leadership was put on a firing squad.” Combined budget stress and personnel issues led to a proposal for staff restructuring. Although there was no advance notice about particular staff changes, the long-time choir director felt the changes were pointed at her. The day after the annual meeting when the proposal was discussed, the choir director called a staff meeting. Agitated, she took out her frustration on Ginger in front of the staff and resigned on the spot. The congregation has deep commitments to liturgy, sacraments, and music and the choir director was highly skilled and well liked, especially by the large (ninety member) choir. Ginger intuitively knew this could be very bad for her own leadership, and although “pretty stunned,” she refused the choir director’s resignation, asking for more time to talk. That evening at choir rehearsal, the director handed out a letter of resignation. By that night, hundreds of angry people were at Ginger’s throat. “I’ve never seen such anger in a parish,” she recalled. The next month—her worst in ministry—was so physically nerve-racking she only survived with “gallons of Pepto-Bismol™.”

Ginger’s first response was a long email to the choir, but that only fanned the flames. The council advised her to accept the resignation publicly and let her go. That did not sit right with Ginger. She said: “As a business person that would’ve been the right thing to do [but] I believed that in the church we could somehow act differently.” She didn’t yet know what acting differently would look like, but knowing she “was out on a limb alone,” she pulled together some key choir members, her pastoral colleague, and a seminary professor, so each might help her sort through next steps. Although she was acting against the advice of the church council, she felt their support and appreciated the freedom to let her pastoral imagination lead the way.

She knew that in the past, the congregation tended to pit staff against one another. After a few weeks, she tentatively approached the choir director

to propose sharing in the opening prayer before choir rehearsal, and serving communion together to the choir. It was a risk, but she knew the power of worship and sacraments to convey the grace and mercy of God. She noted: "It took the power off of either of us because the sacrament carried the power. I think that what made it work, obviously, is that we all kind of admitted our own brokenness in the whole mess." The choir accepted the gesture, participating, and even weeping. While the reconciliation did not resolve everything, it allowed for new agreement on a half-time position and another year of good ministry before the choir director departed on good terms. More than that, it was a turning point for trust in Ginger's leadership with the staff and in the congregation as a whole. She concluded her reflection with this: "In many ways God's grace has shaped all of us through that and the church. That's where I look back and just say, 'Oh, thank you! Help me learn!'"

Mature Pastoral Imagination: Embodying Prudence

Ginger's story demonstrates prudence in a mature pastoral imagination. The situation has three significant aspects: the reality of the crisis situation she faced, along with her intelligence and perception shaped by long experience in pastoral practice. The first thing to say about the circumstance Ginger faced is that she did not expect and was not prepared for the crisis that unfolded from the choir director's angry resignation. It is clear here that Ginger is "pulled up short."²⁵ Her sense of the status quo with the staff breaks apart on the rocks of unfolding crisis, and she must step back for conscious reflection. Interestingly, however, her conscious deliberation follows a grounded pre-reflective perception of the fitting thing to do.²⁶ Her response can put in clear relief the response of a novice who is totally overwhelmed by the situation, as Fr. Stephen initially was with Greg. He did not have an adequate sense of the stakes of the situation and withdrew, only returning after he had more guidelines to make sense of the situation. However, Ginger exhibits the ability to deliberate within her intuitive sense of the situation, remaining relationally and emotionally connected to the various players. She knows the stakes and wants to consider multiple ways of responding. As part of her deliberation, she does step back for reflection and consultation with others but she does so within her intuitive sense that the situation calls for more than simply accepting the resignation and moving on.

The second thing to say is that Ginger has the capacity to perceive the depth present in the situation—especially as that implies theological depth. As Craig Dykstra has argued, pastoral imagination implies an integrated,

embodied capacity for “perception of the ‘more’ present in a situation.”²⁷ One can see in Ginger’s leadership just the sort of complex perception Dykstra describes. First of all, Ginger had been in enough difficult congregational crises to see immediately the stakes in the choir director’s resignation as about much more than the choir director or even the choir program. Dykstra’s conception of imagination, drawing on the philosopher Mary Warnock, proposes just this sort of embodied cognition.²⁸

Situated or embodied cognition has become a key area of study among philosophers and cognitive scientists who are trying to build upon Aristotle’s conception of *phronesis* or prudence.²⁹ For example, Ginger exhibits “perceptual attunement” described as the way one learns one’s way around by body, by action.³⁰ Here learning her way around ‘by body’ gave her the perception of the stakes or gravity of the situation, so that when the flair-up with the choir director occurs, Ginger stays relationally connected, asking for and receiving time to work through the issues together. In this sense perception includes what a host of philosophers describe as interpretation of the world before us, and so action begins even before we act.³¹

That such situations are emotionally wrenching is beyond question, but here again everyday pastoral prudence leads to Ginger’s glugging “gallons” of Pepto-Bismol™ as a response to the somatic stress the conflict caused in her, rather than either withdrawing or prematurely rushing to judgment about the right solution. Perception is not just visual or mental but also somatic and emotional.³² Ginger’s coping within the tensions of the situation allows her to see and act upon a possibility that was not seen by others, a new possibility that opened the church to God’s grace.

Perception of God’s grace manifests itself in Ginger’s leadership by her mature self-perception, something not fore-grounded in the pastoral imagination literature.³³ Yet clearly her ability to articulate her shared brokenness in the situation, as well as a need to learn in and through the difficult relational and organizational dynamics, shaped her way forward. She knew whose advice to seek, how to listen to the situation, and how to weigh the advice she got. For example, she took from the council what she needed (their trust, affirmation, support) but rejected their advice (to accept the resignation and move on) when she knew that wasn’t right. In addition, she took her pastoral colleague’s advice (about family system dynamics at stake in the situation) and went to discuss the situation with a pastoral care professor at a near-by seminary.

Perception of God's grace shows itself in Ginger's leadership in another way as well. She sees and seeks God in the situation. Living the life of faith, within the life of a congregation and its practices over time, one's perception is changed, Dykstra argues. Drawing on theologian Edward Farley, Dykstra writes that through "the eyes of faith, pastors come to see the abundance that is before them and that surrounds them already. Through the eyes of faith, they can see what gifts they have been given in the people who, however flawed, are the members of their congregations."³⁴ Ginger combines her sense of humility before God and her congregation with her knowledge of God's forgiveness and mercy present for them all through prayer, word, and sacrament. Her proposal to serve communion to the choir alongside the director is a bold, faithful, and ultimately healing action that could only be made with her perception of God's promise and presence undergirding all she did. "[God's presence in the sacrament] took the power off of both of us," she said.

The third and last thing to say in drawing out aspects of pastoral imagination present in Ginger's leadership is that she clearly exhibits a particular intelligence rooted in pastoral practice. While related to perception, this intelligence is a capacity that, in a sense, undergirds and allows the sort of perception described above. It is partly an intelligence shaped by faith in and deep knowledge of God, a willingness to reject the business solution as not right, and her eventual choice of the sacramental response as the right kind of risk. Dykstra and Cahalan rely on the idea that pastoral imagination or prudence in ministry emerges from ministry practiced long enough and well enough. Living within these communal, pastoral practices shared over time with others (interpreting, teaching and preaching scripture, leading worship, providing pastoral care, leading in mission, administering organizational life, and more) shapes a kind of practical intelligence that knows the "more" possible in a situation, a "more" that is available only by opening to the work of God's grace. As Cahalan puts it, theological knowledge and know-how in ministry are not ends in themselves, but rather are means "to inform the minister's discernment of the most fitting response in each situation."³⁵ Furthermore, this development of prudence is a result of the gift and continued work of the Holy Spirit within a person, so that human effort finds an aid and advocate in God's own work in and through us.³⁶

The intelligence pastoral imagination requires and shows is rooted in communal practices and shared leadership. Ginger knows she cannot lead while "out on a limb alone" so she intentionally reaches out to diverse constituencies—choir members, council members, staff colleagues, and re-

source persons beyond the congregation. Alongside her engagement with community members, she also draws upon her knowledge of the community over time—its past practices, habits, and character. Because she knows of their history of pitting the staff against one another, she can see the dynamics for how they impact the whole congregational system, and she seeks to respond in a way fitting to those broader dynamics. Finally, her long discipline of learning the basic skills and knowledge of ministry—administration, worship, pastoral care, and so on—undergird her ability to pull from a repertoire of possible ‘fitting’ responses. Ginger humbles herself, risks embarrassment, and allows God’s presence and power to work through prayer and sacrament to resolve the crisis in ways that multiply good—for Ginger, for the choir director, and for the congregation’s life and ministry.

Pastoral Imagination: Prudence, and the Character of Good Ministry

Both the literature and two cases of learning in ministry from the LPI study articulate pastoral imagination as a capacity vital to the character of good ministry. Each case portrays the distinctive kind of intelligence and perception that allows Father Stephen and Pastor Ginger to see situations in greater depth, to see the ‘more’ that is attuned to the presence and possibility of others and of God. Pastoral imagination is wise judgment in action that is situated in a faithful practice. The cases of nascent and more mature ministry demonstrate the texture of pastoral imagination and open up key aspects of this crucial capacity for good ministry.

Among the key aspects of pastoral imagination implied by the connection to prudence, are the notions of wise situational perception and judgment that is skilled and makes use of multiple kinds of knowledge about self, situation, relationships of power, and ritual practices of ministry. The particular character of ministry in a community of faith entails among other things core practices of ministry. As Fr. Stephen’s story shows, initial moments of integration of the tasks of ministry alongside greater self-perception and within the overwhelming demands and risks of ministry practice allows for the emergence of a nascent pastoral imagination. Dwelling in and leading these practices over time is a necessary precondition to pastoral leaders gaining a more sustained awareness of sacred depth or possibility in a moment. As Pastor Ginger’s story shows, the particular knowledge needed for pastoral prudence is not primarily the rational-reflective knowledge prized in the modern era, but an intuitive embodied everyday knowing that sees this or that action is

the fitting one. Such knowledge must be learned and put to use in a situation where the demands and risks of ministry are immediate and open-ended.

Mature pastoral imagination is cognitive, but in a mostly pre-reflective, embodied, relational, emotional, and time-situated sense. As our cases show, the novice minister needs constant deliberation and space for both failure and reflection on learning. However, a mature minister engages in deliberation primarily in novel or crisis situations. The novice will step back and recall rules and guidance or questions from teachers, whereas mature pastoral imagination allows a deliberation rooted in the knowing 'at hand'—grounded in one's embodied understanding of particular situations and relationships. Fr. Stephen genuinely saw for the first time "what Christ wants to do in the midst of this encounter;" and Pastor Ginger saw "many ways God's grace shaped" the situation in, with, and through the sacramental response to crisis. Through each case, and by noticing the differences that time and experience make, one sees prudence as key to the unfolding of pastoral imagination.

NOTES

1. Chris Scharen describes the "long arc of learning ministry" in "Learning Ministry over Time: Embodying Practical Wisdom," in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education and Christian Ministry*, Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 265–288.
2. The Learning Pastoral Imagination (LPI) Project is following a diverse ecumenical group of 50 seminarians from their seminary studies into their post-graduation ministry careers. We are simultaneously interviewing a diverse group of 50 Christian pastors from around the United States whose experience serving in ministry ranges between five and 35 years. The research takes place through small group and individual interviews as well as follow-up congregational visits across five regions of the United States and includes experiences from Protestant, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, and Orthodox perspectives. We have been surprised by the resonance of our findings reported in this article across these diverse traditions, regions of the country, and life circumstances. The LPI project is generously funded by the Lilly Endowment (Grant # 2008 1196-000). For critical reading and reflection on this essay we are indebted to our advisory board—Patricia Benner, Charles Foster, and David Wood—and to the following colleagues: Dorothy Bass, Kathleen Cahalan, Craig Dykstra, Rick Foss, Bonnie Miller-McLemore, and Jim Neiman. We also thank the editor of *Reflective Practice*, Herbert Anderson, for his generosity both in critique and encouragement.
3. Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, David Ross, trans., J. L. Ackrill and J. O. Urmson, rev. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 1142a–12. *Prudence*, the English term for the Latin *prudentia*, is used in this essay interchangeably with the Greek term, *phronesis*, the term used in Aristotle's classic discussion in *The Nicomachean Ethics*. *Phronesis* is one of the four key virtues in ancient philosophy (the others being temperance, courage, and justice). In the Christian tradition, these four moral virtues are complemented by three theological virtues: faith, hope, and love. A basic overview can be found in Romanus Cessario, *Virtues, or The Examined Life* (New York: Continuum,

um, 2002). While some translations and discussions of Aristotle use the term “practical wisdom” as an English translation of *phronesis*, we do not primarily use wisdom or practical wisdom.

4. The most developed version of Craig Dykstra’s thinking can be found in “Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination,” 41–61 in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education and Christian Ministry*, Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008). In this essay Dykstra also describes the concept of ecclesial imagination, which space does not allow us to address. An earlier incarnation of Dykstra’s thinking can be found in “The Pastoral Imagination,” *Initiatives in Religion: A Newsletter of the Lilly Endowment, Inc.* 9 (Spring 2001): 1. He also presented a second version as a keynote for a gathering of leaders in the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Project in January 2004, published as “Keys to Excellence: Pastoral Imagination and Holy Friendship,” available online at <http://faithandleadership.com/programs/spe/articles/200506/dykstra-p1.html> (Last accessed January 18, 2012).
5. On this, see: Scharen, “Learning Ministry over Time;” Kathleen Cahalan, *Introducing the Practice of Ministry* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2011), 130–141. See also Hubert Dreyfus and Stuart Dreyfus, *Mind Over Machine: The Power of Human Intuition and Expertise in the Era of the Computer* (New York: The Free Press, 1986); Patricia Benner, *From Novice to Expert: Excellence and Power in Clinical Nursing Practice* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall Health, 2001).
6. An excellent resource for sketching this history in a broad sense is William M. Sullivan, *Work and Integrity: The Crisis and Promise of Professionalism in America, Second Edition* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005); For a description of the changes in relation to work explicitly on the practice of ministry, see Cahalan, *Introducing the Practice of Ministry*, 120–129.
7. See 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), 7, 25–26, *passim*. Foster, et al, following Sullivan’s observation of professional education, argue that educating clergy requires three apprenticeships to prepare ministers for their work: 1) a cognitive apprenticeship to gain necessary knowledge; 2) a practical apprenticeship to learn the requisite skills of ministry; and 3) a “normative apprenticeships of professional identity.” Not all Christian traditions have given up the apprenticeship model. Notable exceptions include schools (Lutheran, Episcopal, and Roman Catholic) that continue to require year-long internships as part of seminary training. Black church traditions, among others (Vineyard, some Pentecostals), still uphold an apprenticeship process, sometimes alongside a seminary education.
8. Clark Gilpin describes the changing purpose and shape of theological education in America in the twentieth century: “By mid-century, belief that raising educational standards could improve the quality of the ministry had led the mainstream churches to insist on genuine graduate education in theology as the prerequisite for ordained ministry, an insistence that paralleled the general expansion of American higher education following World War II. A three-year graduate professional degree (today the Master of Divinity) became the formal standard of ministerial education. The classical encyclopedia of biblical studies, church history, systematic theology, and practical theology persisted...” W. Clark Gilpin, *A Preface to Theology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 114. Additional factors in the shifting landscape of ministry and theological education include 1) the “explosion of knowledge” in the nineteenth

- and twentieth centuries in textual studies; 2) the expansion of understandings in the psychology and sociology of human behavior; and 3) changes in the context, expectations, and demands of clergy by the churches and institutions where they serve. See Foster, et al, *Educating Clergy*, 26–27, and Jackson Carroll, *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 31–56.
9. For instance, Jackson Carroll notes that the greatest change to the face of ministry in the last half of the twentieth century is the growing number of women who have entered the pastorate. Actually he sees the shift as one of the most significant changes history of the Christian church. See Carroll, *God's Potters*, 7.
 10. See, for example, Jackson Carroll, *God's Potters*; L. Gregory Jones and Kevin R. Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2006); Daniel O. Aleshire, *Earthen Vessels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008); Allan Hugh Cole, Jr., ed., *From Midterms to Ministry: Practical Theologians on Pastoral Beginnings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008); Eugene Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011); Bruce Epperly, *Starting with Spirit: Nurturing Your Call to Pastoral Leadership* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2011).
 11. In addition to Dykstra's work and *Educating Clergy*, the most important development and analysis of pastoral imagination is Kathleen A. Cahalan's, *Introducing the Practice of Ministry*. In it she develops her understanding of pastoral imagination in relation to a rich theological discussion of prudence.
 12. Names and some non-essential details and characteristics have been changed in each case to provide anonymity.
 13. The kind of intelligence that is intrapersonal is crucial for good pastoral imagination argues Dykstra, "Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination," 51.
 14. Evelyn and James Whitehead have pointed out the potential dangers and violence of imagination which can't be avoided entirely when trying to understand pastoral imagination. James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, "By Virtue of Imagination," *Reflective Practice* 32 (2012): 22–35.
 15. Dykstra, "The Pastoral Imagination," 1. Pastoral imagination as a distinctive intelligence suggests the integrated, embodied capacity for perception of the "more" present in a situation. Dykstra writes that imagination "involves what one might call 'seeing in depth;'" Dykstra, "Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination," 48.
 16. Fr. Stephen was making use of knowledge from his courses in seminary and from his learning from Rev. Joan.
 17. We have argued previously that these are regular features of the 'birth of pastoral imagination.' Risk and responsibility, taking action in overwhelming circumstances, and overcoming the challenges to one's thinking in order to see the stakes of a situation leads to seeing and knowing the right thing to do in a moment. See Campbell-Reed and Scharen, "'Holy cow! This stuff is real!' From Imagining Ministry to Pastoral Imagination," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 14, no. 4, (October, 2011).
 18. Literature on pastoral imagination implies, but doesn't explicitly address, situations of crisis or even failure. For additional understanding about what happens in moments of crisis, both at emerging stages of learning ministry such as Fr. Stephen, and more mature stages such as Pr. Ginger, see: Scharen, "Learning Ministry over Time"; Hubert Dreyfus and Stuart Dreyfus, "Peripheral Vision: Expertise in Real World Contexts,"

Organizational Studies 26, no. 5 (2005): 779–792. Dreyfus and Dreyfus distinguish the calculation between rules typical of the novice and the deliberation within a situation which is typical for a proficient professional. See also: Francisco J. Varela, *Ethical Know-How: Action, Wisdom, and Cognition* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 17–19. Varela describes how breakdowns cause the emergence of conscious, reflective thought that nonetheless still depends on the preconscious embodied knowing of one's situation.

19. Deborah Kerdeman, "Self-Understanding as a Focus of Teaching and Learning" in *Education and Practice: Upholding the Integrity of Teaching and Learning*, Joseph Dunne and Pádraig Hogan, eds. (London: Blackwell, 2004), 144–158. Kerdeman observes that being "pulled up short" is a "deep recognition [which] confronts the fundamental limits of what human beings know and can do," 154.
20. *Ibid.*, 155–156. Although one can't choose how and when to be pulled up short, Kerdeman argues, one can choose to "recognize, avoid, or resist" the moment and face one's limits. Over time one can cultivate a disposition toward recognizing rather than avoiding moments of being pulled up short.
21. In *Educating Clergy*, Foster, et al, discuss this kind of integrated learning as a part of practical reasoning: "students find themselves involved in a way of thinking that begins in practice and is shaped by practice." 345–348.
22. Kathleen Cahalan, "Introducing Ministry and Fostering Integration" in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education and Christian Ministry*, Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 112–113.
23. *Ibid.*, Cahalan points out that "Integration is an auspicious goal for theological educators" in regard to seminary students who only have a limited amount of time in ministry. Yet experiences of integration are important benchmarks in the development of character for ministry.
24. Patricia Benner describes how entering into situations that are open-ended and under-determined requires recognizing what is salient in the moment and demands one's attention. Patricia Benner, Molly Stuphen, Victoria Leonard, and Lisa Day, *Educating Nurses: A Call for Radical Transformation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 94, 114–115.
25. Hans Georg Gadamer, *Gadamer: Truth and Method*, Joel Veinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, trans. (New York: Continuum, 1975), 270, uses this conception to describe how our unconscious, pre-understanding of a text "does not yield any meaning at all or its meaning is not compatible with what we had expected." Benner, in describing how one learns nursing, and Kerdeman, in education, use this conception to describe situations that, in Gadamer's words, "break the spell of our own fore-meanings." In order to understand, one must then consciously engage in the work of understanding.
26. Dreyfus and Dreyfus, "Peripheral Vision: Expertise in Real World Contexts."
27. Dykstra, "Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination," 48.
28. *Ibid.* Dykstra draws upon Mary Warnock, *Imagination* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976).
29. See Shaun Gallagher, "Philosophical Antecedents of Situated Cognition," 35–51 in *The Cambridge Handbook of Situated Cognition*, Philip Robbins and Murat Aydede, eds.

- (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); also *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
30. Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 21.
 31. Warnock, *Imagination*, 193. See also Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations, Third ed.*, G. E. Anscombe, trans. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1958), 212–213. Recent work on “embodied cognition” draws explicitly on Wittgenstein (along with Dewey, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty). See Gallagher, “Philosophical Antecedents.”
 32. Dykstra, drawing from Warnock, argues that imagination is cognitive, a means of human understanding, but in an integrative, embodied way that arises “from the emotions as much as from the reason, from the heart as much as from the head.” Dykstra, “Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination,” 48; Mary Warnock, *Imagination*, 196.
 33. Dykstra, “Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination,” 51, mentions “intrapersonal intelligence” as described by Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).
 34. Dykstra, “Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination,” 59. Farley, *Ecclesial Man*, 214–215. Farley’s thinking also gives substance to Dykstra’s conception of ecclesial imagination, implied in this quote, which space does not allow us to elaborate here.
 35. Cahalan, *Introducing the Practice of Ministry*, 123. While not explicitly saying it here, Cahalan is implying with the term ‘fitting,’ her connection of pastoral imagination with experiential learning that teaches *phronesis* or *prudentia*, an idea that picks up aspects of seeing and interpreting situations so as to do what is fitting in the moment. She elaborates this idea in chapter 6. Edward Farley’s admission of teaching theology as an end in itself rather than toward the horizon of ministry central for most students is instructive: “Four Pedagogical Mistakes: A Mea Culpa,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 8, no. 4 (2005): 200–203.
 36. Cahalan, *Introducing the Practice of Ministry*, 146.