



THE CARNEGIE FOUNDATION
FOR THE ADVANCEMENT
OF TEACHING

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THE PROFESSIONS

Media Summary

EDUCATING CLERGY

Teaching Practices and
Pastoral Imagination

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A PUBLICATION OF



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Introduction

Three years ago, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, with funding from Lilly Endowment Inc. and Atlantic Philanthropies, began a study of teaching practices in the academic preparation of clergy members in the United States. Led by Charles R. Foster, emeritus professor of religion and education from Emory University, this study is part of a larger Carnegie effort to examine the preparation of professionals, currently including the study of engineering, law, medicine, and nursing.

Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination, published by Carnegie and Jossey-Bass, is the book that grew out of the Foundation's clergy education study, and it could not be more timely. The power of religion and various traditions of faith to shape public and private life has never been more clear. And the clergy, in turn, plays a central, though unofficial role in shaping our lives today. Through their pastoral and teaching functions, clergy of all faiths share characteristics and important tasks. They help individuals and communities interpret and respond to the events of their individual and family lives. But clergy also shape the ways individuals and groups make sense of the larger events of our common life. The study provided a searching examination of how religious leaders—pastors, priests, and rabbis—are prepared for these challenging times. This media summary attempts to explain the study's rationale, introduce the research design, and identify key findings and recommendations.

Overview

Clergy members have a profound impact and involvement in people's lives. As Carnegie President Lee S. Shulman notes, "we entrust our very souls to them." They visit the sick, comfort the dying, coordinate volunteer and charity work, preside over public rituals for birth and death, join couples in marriage, and offer guidance in matters of faith. As educational institutions prepare future clergy to undertake one of society's most influential and socially responsible roles, it is critical that they meet and instill the highest standards of quality and professionalism.

Unlike engineers, architects, or physicians, clergy do not wield technological skills that automatically alter the physical conditions of life. Instead, clergy are caregivers and guides to meaning. Like jurists, clergy work to discern the ethical import of their traditions. The clergy's primary areas of expertise lie not in physical or information systems, but in the world of social practices structured by shared meanings, purposes, and loyalties.

Clergy are "called" to their work in ways not normally ascribed to law, engineering, or radiology. Rather than emphasizing specific, technical competence, clergy are educated to "address the whole of life." From explaining God and the mysteries of life to managing an organization (attending community meetings, paying bills, ordering supplies for the church or synagogue, etc.), clergy work has a distinctively public character.

Because clergy fill a particular professional role in American life, the education institutions that prepare clergy in the United States face the same challenges as all professional schools: to educate future practitioners for their professional domain. Carnegie's study of clergy education demystified the education of clergy, but found that other professional schools can benefit from the practice of theological education.

Study Focus

Carnegie’s study of clergy education focused on the situations and teaching practices—from classes to field education to community worship to programs of spiritual and vocational direction—through which seminaries intend to help students integrate or, as one survey respondent put it, “fit together” the various elements of their educational experience in preparation for the daily practices of clergy work. To this end, the study examined how seminaries cultivate a distinctive way of seeing and interpreting the world in the activities of pastors, priests, and rabbis that Craig Dykstra of the Lilly Endowment termed the “pastoral imagination.” An effort to understand the educational processes involved in this work of seminaries led to the question that framed the entire study:

How do seminary educators foster among their students a pastoral, priestly, or rabbinic imagination that integrates knowledge and skill, moral integrity, and religious commitment in the roles, relationships, and responsibilities they will be assuming in clergy practice?

Scope

The study involved only institutions with accreditation from the Association of Theological Schools and/or the U.S. regional college and university accrediting associations. This criterion significantly narrowed the scope of the study, as clergy are educated in diverse ways across the many religious traditions—in unaccredited seminaries, monasteries, congregations, or by apprenticeship. Since most Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Orthodox Jewish religious leaders receive their training outside the university system, this criterion also focused the study on the education of Conservative and Reform Jewish and Catholic, Christian Orthodox, and a significant proportion of Protestant Christian clergy. Although the accredited institutions preparing clergy in these religious traditions typically offer a range of academic programs for ordained and non-ordained religious leadership, attention was directed to those academic programs within seminaries specifically designed to prepare persons for ordination.

The Research

The methodology for this study may be best described as an *appreciative inquiry*, a research framework oriented towards fostering organizational change by looking for what is already working in an enterprise and amplifying these aspects—as opposed to focusing on problems and attempting to fix them.

The research team conducted a comprehensive review of the literature on Jewish and Christian clergy education; surveyed faculty, students, and alumni/ae from a cross-section of eighteen Jewish and Christian seminaries; interviewed faculty, students, and administrators, observed classes, and participated in the life of the community in ten of the eighteen seminaries; and collaborated on a survey sent to half of all United States and Canadian seminary educators by the Center for the Study of Theological Education, Auburn Theological Seminary.

Central to the research, however, were interviews, classroom observations, and focus group conversations with faculty members who had been identified by their deans as reflective about their practice as teachers and respected by colleagues as teachers. A research agenda was developed to address four key questions:

1. *What classroom and communal (outside the classroom in a community setting) pedagogies do seminary educators employ as they seek to foster in their students a pastoral, priestly, or rabbinic imagination?*

When a professor of homiletics says that he hopes students in his class will “build upon their homiletical skills, establish good habits of exegesis and Biblical interpretation, and discover the power of language for creating transformative sermons,” terms like “building upon,” “good habits,” and linguistic “power” convey implicit expectations for dispositions, habits, skills, knowledge, and communicative competencies. They reveal images of clergy work that influence this seminary educator’s decisions about what and how to teach and reflect his expectations for the pastoral, priestly, or rabbinic imagination he seeks to cultivate in this course. The study emphasized the exploration of how faculty members like this one draw their students into their expectations for their learning toward professional practice, encourage them to embrace those expectations, and then assess their effectiveness as practitioners of those expectations.

2. *How do the various historic traditions of clergy education perpetuated in seminaries’ missions and institutional cultures influence the classroom and communal pedagogies and students’ experience?*

Seminaries prepare clergy to be religious leaders in a wide array of Jewish and Christian denominational traditions. They also perpetuate assumptions about educating clergy that can be traced back to the monastery, the yeshiva, the academic centers at Cambridge and Oxford in the seventeenth century, the University of Berlin and the normal schools for teacher training in the nineteenth century, and to the various approaches to clergy apprenticeship in all religious traditions. Any effort to understand how clergy are educated today requires an understanding of the influence of these historical precedents on the relationship of the mission, culture, and teaching practices of the faculty in any school.

3. *Does clergy education have a “signature” classroom pedagogy (teaching practice), distinctive to it among the professions?*

Researchers looked for distinctive approaches to teaching, as for example, in the Socratic dialogue in the analysis of legal cases in law schools or the mathematical analysis of structures in engineering schools. Lee Shulman has called these distinctive approaches to teaching “signature pedagogies” because they function as “windows” into “what counts most significantly as the essence of a profession’s work.” Shulman notes that it includes four dimensions: strategies and methods that create a “surface structure” for the interaction of teachers and students; a “deep structure” connecting the concreteness of practice with the more conceptual, social, or ideological aspects of the profession’s essential character; and a “tacit structure” that includes the attitudes, values, and dispositions modeled by the instructor and other students regarding professional practice; it may also be distinguished by what is missing—what is not taught and what methods and strategies are not employed.

4. *How does clergy education emphasize and integrate the cognitive, practical, and normative apprenticeships of professional education?*

Professional training has its historical roots in apprenticeship. Learning as an apprentice typically meant exposure to the full dimensions of professional life, not only the intricacies of esoteric knowledge and peculiar skills but also the values and outlook shared by the members of the profession. Around the turn of the last century, this ancient mode of professional education was altered with the establishment of schools explicitly designed to train doctors, lawyers, and clergy. One consequence of this new approach to professional education was the differentiation of cognitive, skill, and professional identity learning.

A second consequence followed. Professional schools became hybrid institutions—part of the tradition of “cognitive rationality” at which the academy excels. They are part of the world of practice, emphasizing the craft know-how which marks expert practitioners of the domain. And they operate with the inescapably normative knowledge contained in the identity of being a particular kind of professional.

Key Findings

1. *Clergy Education is Shaped by Five Traditions*

Contemporary seminary education has its origins in several different traditions. Prominent among these traditions are: among Christians, the professional freestanding seminary, the religious training school, the school of emancipation, and an Americanized European seminary tradition; and among Jews, a seminary renewing its religious tradition in relation to the modern university.

Timothy Dwight significantly influenced the development of the professional, freestanding seminary. Emma Dryer was a leader in founding the Bible, or religious training, school. Daniel Payne set the pace in founding schools of emancipation. John Ireland led the movement to the modern diocesan seminary. Solomon Schechter distinctively shaped the future of the rabbinical seminary in the United States.

2. *Clergy Education Has a Wide Diversity of Teaching Practices*

While the variety of clergy education traditions contributes to the diversity of classroom and communal teaching practices across the spectrum of Jewish and Christian seminaries, clergy educators share, for the most part, a set of intentions for student learning. They configure these intentions in many different ways, contributing to a wide range of teaching practices. These intentions include:

- Developing in students the facility for *interpreting* texts, situations, and relationships.
- Nurturing the dispositions and habits integral to the spiritual and vocational *formation* of clergy.
- Heightening student consciousness of the content and agency of historical and contemporary *contexts*.
- Cultivating student *performance* in clergy roles and ways of thinking.

These four intentions in seminary teaching—interpretation, formation, context, and performance—are so persistent and cross so many boundaries, that they may be considered a *signature pedagogical framework* directed to developing in seminary students the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and habits they will need as clergy.

3. *Clergy Education Emphasizes the Formation of Professional Identity*

It is a truism that we become what we habitually do. Learning by doing, therefore, forms a person's dispositions in that such learning unavoidably weaves relationships with others similarly engaged and so encourages loyalty to a group of fellow practitioners. More aware of this, perhaps, than in the past, seminaries across the religious spectrum have been giving increasing attention to the integration of their students' knowledge and professional skills in a stable personal synthesis. This attention to professional identity takes several forms in different institutions. Some seminaries have developed programs that attend to individual development. Through formal systems of counseling and peer activity, seminaries seek to provide guidance to students in integrating the various facets of their seminary experience toward the very specific end of forming a ministerial, priestly, or rabbinic identity.

Other seminaries pursue the goals of professional identity in a less direct, often more communal manner. In these institutions, the emphasis is often upon shared activities outside the formal curriculum. Worship is prominent among these activities. However, creating common practices of identity formation beyond the classroom or required field placement is often difficult. Commuter students and the denominationally mixed populations of many seminaries make collective formation experiences difficult.

In the seminaries' approaches to forming professional identity, the specific religious traditions become most visible and important. Practices of formation, it turns out, are hard to transplant from one religious context to another. Nevertheless, the contemporary seminary scene is conspicuous for the increasing degree of attention—and experimentation—that marks this important unifying aspect of professional preparation. It is in their serious and imaginative engagement with forming professional identity that seminaries have the most to offer to other domains of professional education.

4. *Clergy Education Emphasizes Preparation for Daily Practice*

Future clergy spend a good deal of their preparation learning in classrooms, reading and studying texts, and being assessed through written examinations, usually in the form of essay questions. Still, educators of clergy generally work hard and creatively at linking this cognitive or intellectual apprenticeship with the demands of future clergy practice.

Seminaries help students learn by engaging in the actual activities of clergy practice. Simulations, case studies, field placements, and clinical pastoral education are common in today's seminaries. Because the professional work of clergy is always tied to situations of human interaction and often of dialogue, the skills developed in practical situations—such as the capacity to listen effectively, to find the religiously significant features in the lives of congregants and their problems, or the ability to render an insight derived from religious tradition—is essential.

5. *Clergy Education Seeks to Integrate the Cognitive, Practice, and Normative Apprenticeships in Student Learning*

Generally, seminary educators do not isolate the educational tasks traditionally identified with the cognitive, practical, and normative apprenticeships in professional education. In some seminaries, the interdependence of these three apprenticeships is built into the fabric of a student’s total curricular experience. In every seminary observed, seminary educators engage students in the mutuality of the three apprenticeships through teaching practices consisting of pedagogies of interpretation, formation, contextualization, and performance. In this regard, seminary education provides a model for other forms of professional education.

Lessons for All Professional Education

The strengths of practice found in seminaries studied suggest lessons for any institution educating professionals and could well be applied to schools of engineering, education, social work, nursing, medicine, or law.

- Apprentice patterns of teaching and learning dominate the teacher–student interactions among seminary educators reflective about their practice. Although seminary educators employ many different teaching styles across the disciplines of the seminary curriculum, they both model and coach students into ways of thinking, being, and doing that are integral to their visions of clergy identity and practice. They sustain, model, and coach students in practices connecting academic and practical knowledge; they use insight and resourcefulness in forming in their students a pastoral, priestly, or rabbinic imagination and guiding them in its necessary practices.
- Seminary educators emphasize in their teaching the importance of the apprenticeship concerned with the formation of professional identity. This emphasis is found in the attention given to the normative dimensions of religious traditions in educating the leadership of religious communities; in specially designed programs of spiritual and human formation; in the commitment of seminary educators to the integration of academic and practical learning in classes, clinical pastoral education, and field education; and in the judgments that faculty in many seminaries make regarding the “fitness” of students as candidates for professional practice. This may well be one of the most distinctive features and contributions of seminary education to discussions of professional and liberal education.
- Seminary educators engage students in a community of teaching and learning practice. In classrooms and other educational settings, in ways that may be a model for professional education generally, they explicitly seek to foster “learning communities” to facilitate the collaborative patterns of apprenticeship into particular ways of knowing, doing, and being. These learning communities are expanded in many schools to include field education, chapel, and other programs of community life and student governance. When aligned with the mission and culture of the school, they contribute significantly to the integration and cohesion of student learning.

Recommendations for Clergy Education

The study identified three issues for seminaries seeking to enhance the effectiveness of their preparation of clergy for their professional roles and responsibilities. These three issues focus on giving more attention to institutional self-consciousness, institutional cohesion, and curricular balance.

1. ***Institutional self-consciousness*** refers to the capacity of the faculty and administration of a school to reflect on its educational purposes and practices in general, and about the ways in which their classroom and communal teaching practices convey their values.

From site visits and survey responses, the study found some variation across schools with respect to the level of introspection and dialogue among school administrations and faculties around goals, purposes, structure, and effectiveness of educational programs and teaching. Some seminaries seemed to be continuously reflective about what they were doing, so much so that a few teachers reported being overwhelmed by workshops and evaluations. (Since the study selected schools in part for the degree to which they seemed invested in improving their effectiveness in the training of future clergy, it is not surprising to encounter this level of self-reflection.) The impact of the Association of Theological Schools and regional accrediting agencies has been significant: self-evaluation and strategic planning are built into their accreditation processes.

In spite of this, some faculty reported that their institutions—either for lack of interest, time, personnel, or funding—seemed to have a very low level of commitment to the collective examination of their educational objectives and how they were being accomplished. Often these seemed to reflect the culture of an institution. For example, one professor commented that a focus on improving educational effectiveness at his institution was hampered by “a reward/promotion system that uses only academic criteria.”

Respect for this quality of self-consciousness comes not from being wedded to a culture or ideology of reform, but rather from appreciation for institutions that place at the forefront of their mission the needs of the world in which their graduates would be serving as clergy. The research team witnessed the powerful and transformative effects on students participating in educational programs that were underscored by a commitment to authentic and earnest engagement with the issues and struggles of congregations and the pressing needs of our times. This kind of self-reflection, regarding the efficacy of an institution’s educational structures and programs in promoting a model of courageous and committed ministry should be applauded and encouraged.

2. ***Institutional cohesion*** refers to the degree to which a school shows internal consistency and coherence in its programs.

Institutions that train clergy are acutely aware of various accountabilities under which they operate. They develop and implement programs that must be attentive to denominational ordination processes and standards, to theological and doctrinal frameworks, to the hierarchies and policies of religious and church bodies, to their own institutional history and ethos, to disciplinary and academic standards of higher

education, to their understanding of Divine will, and to the people and contexts that define the purpose of their students' future ministry. In each of the schools visited during the study, it was apparent that balancing these accountabilities in the framework of a purposefully focused program was a challenge.

Several of the seminaries exhibited a particularly strong sense of cohesion, a palpable sense of purpose with regard to the end-to-end preparation of students for the ministerial role. Cohesion is arguably easier to develop in more denominationally homogenous settings where the range of variables is smaller. On the other hand, the study also discovered in large and diverse institutions a coherence of ministerial focus that students, faculty, and administration can articulate with relative clarity.

But suggesting that schools work toward cohesion does not imply a promotion of homogeneity. The potential for ultra-cohesion, where rigidity supplants the concept of a purposeful focus, is of concern. Cohesion refers to the manner in which the school can be seen to implement an educational program that clearly attends to the ethos of the school and in which various courses, resources, and programs can be seen to reinforce or build upon each other.

While institutional cohesion in and of itself is no guarantee that students will be optimally prepared for ministry, students do self-select for a given school on the basis of their perceptions of the ministerial emphases promoted by the institution. To this end, coherence in philosophy and practice appeared to provide students and alumni/ae with a valuable integrative framework both for their educational experiences and for future ministerial practice.

3. **Curricular balance** is one way to talk about curricular emphasis and the relative breadth and depth of various aspects of clergy preparation programs. The study suggests that it is necessary to go beyond the dichotomy of theory (classroom) versus practice (field education), and instead view *all forms of seminary learning as inherently involved in the cultivation of clergy practice*, achieved through apprenticeship.

Alumni/ae surveyed cited classroom instruction as an important formative influence on their growth as future ministers, but three-fourths of those surveyed cited learning in the form of field education, internships, non-supervised ministry experience, peer groups, and clinical pastoral education as also having been key to their professional formation. Several used the word “tools” to refer to the body of skills, knowledge, and experience they gained in seminary. They appreciated the opportunities that seminary provided for them to acquire the theological, textual, and social understandings and skills they viewed as germane to the clergy role.

But when asked if they had encountered any particular post-graduation challenges for which they did not feel adequately prepared, more than 80 percent of the alumni/ae responded in the affirmative. While fully appreciative of their seminary experiences, many felt underprepared for the leadership and management roles into which they were quickly cast after graduation. It was not surprising that often-cited concerns surrounded administration, management, and finance. Some were quick to also say that they did

not expect this kind of training in seminary. A notable number of alumni/ae called out insufficient preparation for pastoral care and handling the difficult and painful situations for which people sought ministers for counsel.

It became apparent that some clergy education programs are heavily skewed toward certain aspects of clergy practice and apprenticeship. Clearly, socio-historical and structural influences have contributed to the reinforcement of this circumstance. It seems, however, that in light of the responses from alumni/ae seminaries who spoke of the serious challenges facing working clergy today, that this kind of curricular stiltedness is neither desirable nor justifiable.

Is Good Teaching Enough?

One of the most pleasant discoveries of the study was the realization that “good” teaching abounds in seminary education. The research team came away from each site visit enthused, even inspired, by the rigor and vitality of the teaching observed. The comments of students and seminary graduates, and the experience of the site visits, however, suggest that the answer to the question, “Is good teaching enough?” is “No.” Sustained and focused conversation among colleagues contributes an important “something more” to the cultivation of good teaching.

Lee Shulman noted: “Teacher collegiality and collaboration are not important merely for the improvement of morale and teacher satisfaction....they are absolutely necessary if teaching is to be of the highest order... Collegiality and collaboration are also needed to ensure that teachers benefit from their experiences and continue to grow during their careers.”

The study leaves seminaries four questions to begin the process of fostering the collegiality that sustains and renews the seminary as a community of teaching and learning practices. These questions are offered as catalysts to conversations among colleagues, for they seem to be particularly important to strengthening the teaching practices of seminary educators committed to cultivating the imaginations of their students for the professional responsibilities they will be assuming as rabbis, priests, or pastors.

- Since seminary educators understand the vocation of clergy to mediate, embody, or interpret God’s religious leaders, how are we to speak of God in and through our classroom and communal teaching practices?
- Since seminary educators also assume that their graduates will be engaged in the leadership of religious communities that have something to offer the public, what images of their practices at the intersection of religious tradition and public life inform their decisions about what and how to teach?
- Since seminary educators are committed to cultivating an imagination that integrates knowledge, skill, moral integrity, and religious commitment in clergy practice, what is the relationship of the pedagogies of interpretation, formation, contextualization, and performance in their classroom and communal teaching practices?

- Since institutional self-consciousness, cohesion, and curricular balance facilitate the interdependence of the cognitive, practical, and normative apprenticeships in the education of clergy, how do the mission and culture of the school influence the shape of classroom and communal teaching practices?

Conclusion

The aim of the clergy education study was to understand the resources that educators of clergy draw upon in their efforts to maintain the relationship between theory and practice, intellect and commitment. Their example and experience provides insight not only into their own endeavors but for other forms of professional education, as well. If this study succeeds in making the achievements as well as the challenges faced in educating clergy more widely understood and appreciated, it will have fulfilled one of its greatest aspirations.



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