

# *Reimagining Theological Education with a Multivocational Mindset*

DARRYL W. STEPHENS

**B**ivocational ministry is more than holding down another job to make ends meet. This much should be clear to readers having ventured to the end of this book. Intentional bivocational or multivocational ministry is a theological mindset with material implications for how we live and work together. A multivocational mindset is a helpful—perhaps necessary—way to reimagine theological education in light of challenges facing the church in North America today.

A multivocational mindset respects the partially funded pastor as much, or even more, than the fully compensated pastor—for all ministry is full time. In the body of Christ, each member is an individual with distinct spiritual gifts. A multivocational mindset is an intentional missional strategy as well as a calling—an approach to ministry that shares more in common with Cynthia Lindner’s (2016, 115–17) description of “multiple-mindedness in ministry” than her

all-too-accurate depiction of the way denominational leaders, ministry committees, and theological educators often foist “bivocational ministry” on vulnerable candidates, “plac[ing] the burden of congregational life support on clergy, asking them to look elsewhere for employment that will supplement the church’s shrinking budget.” In contrast, intentional multivocationality attends to Lindner’s concept of multiplicity as well as the idea of unique fit as pastors learn to live out their calling within and beyond the church (Watson et al. 2020).

A multivocational mindset has implications for the renewal of graduate theological education in North America, prompting theological educators to consider: What role does theological education play in cultivating this mindset, nurturing the gifts of all Christians, and recognizing a calling to bivocationality or multivocationality? How can theological educators best equip leaders for a thriving multivocational ministry? What are the justice implications of adopting a multivocational mindset? Multivocational ministry is both a challenge and an opportunity for institutions of theological education as well as the leaders and churches they serve.

In this chapter, I adopt a bivocational and multivocational mindset as a way of renewing graduate theological education in North America. I predominantly use the term bivocational because the term multivocational is not yet prominent in the literature. The chapter begins by noting that preparation for bivocational ministry is rarely addressed by professional theological educators in North America; intentional bivocational ministry preparation occurs primarily—though not exclusively—outside of ATS-member institutions. Then, I offer observations about the changing context of predominantly White, Protestant churches in North America and their attitudes, perceptions, and experiences, establishing both the need for and the challenges to educating for intentional bivocational ministry. The work of Justo González on the history of theological education and Daniel Aleshire on the future of theological education serve as conversation partners in the task of reimagining theological education in light of bivocational ministry. Current institutional forms of higher education reveal significant obstacles to adopting a bivocational-friendly model of education, implying the need for institutional changes. Finally, I draw attention to both the necessity and the insufficiency of a multivocational mindset, which must be combined with antiracist and other justice-oriented commitments in order to reimagine and accomplish life-giving change within graduate theological education.

## *Against the Grain*

Educating for bivocational ministry goes against the grain of established, professionalized, accredited institutions of graduate theological education in North America. Daniel O. Aleshire (2008, 137), then executive director of the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS), observed, “How do schools and denominations continue to value theological degrees for those who can obtain them as the number of pastors without them increases? Will there be an increasingly double-tiered understanding of ministry?” In other words, can pastors be viewed as distinctive and equally valued, despite differences in formal education? Elizabeth Conde-Frazier (2021, 123) turned the question around, directing her gaze at the way we perceive theological educators who also serve the church. Recognizing “the importance of bivocational work,” she drew attention to “the remarkable vitality of bivocational scholars and the communities they serve.” Viewing bivocational scholarship as a gift—a charism in which “God is creating . . . a mix of many things”—she argued, “These ‘mixed’ or ‘blended’ vocations are not something to be outgrown. They are sources of strength and insight.” That she felt compelled to defend bivocational scholars is indicative of the adverse climate for bivocational ministry currently found in institutions of theological education.

Bivocational ministry is often a null curriculum among educators discussing the state of theological education. ATS does not mention bivocational or part-time ministry in either its standards of accreditation or *Self-Study Handbook* (ATS 2020). Full-time, fully funded ministry functioned as the implied norm for the “common profession” of “diverse practices” examined in a study of clergy education sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, which made no mention at all of bivocational ministry (Foster et al. 2006). The topic was also absent from a special journal issue on “The Current and Future Directions of Theological Education” (Scharen 2019). Bivocational ministry also went unmentioned in a volume of essays in honor of Aleshire’s tenure at ATS (Wheeler 2019). In a special issue of the American Academy of Religion’s *Spotlight on Theological Education* on the theme, “Theological Education between the Times: Reflections on the *Telos* of Theological Education,” only two contributors mentioned bivocational ministry (Cascante-Gómez 2017, 5–6; Wong 2017, 19–20).

Bivocationality does not fit comfortably within discourse about graduate theological education. Of the 95 contributors to the extensive *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity*, only three mentioned bivocational ministry, and then only in passing (Werner et al. 2010, 475, 511, 692). Of the three, Aleshire (2010, 511) provided the most engagement. He contrasted bivocational ministry preparation with the mission and purpose of the primary institutions of theological education in North America—ATS-member schools, all of which “grant graduate professional degrees for a variety of areas of ministry practice.” As an aside, he observed, “Other [non-ATS] schools offer theological education at the baccalaureate degree level, and a growing number of educational programs offer non-degree study for bi-vocational and alternatively credentialed clergy.” Clearly, he considered these “other” schools and programs offering bivocational ministry preparation as falling outside the scope of his chapter, “Theological Education in North America.”

Bivocational ministry preparation cannot be ignored simply because theological schools and seminaries feel ill-equipped to meet this need. Aleshire (2008, 136–37) acknowledged that “alternative patterns for credentialing part-time and bi-vocational clergy are emerging rapidly” (see also Aleshire 2011, 72). This caused him to question how ATS-member schools might navigate this future: “Can theological schools continue to operate alternative educational models out of their back pockets as these models become increasingly dominant?” (2008, 137). At the time, Aleshire’s questions implied a greater concern for maintaining the validity of a master’s degree than meeting the educational needs of bivocational pastors. Changes in the landscape of ministry and education for ministry can be anxiety-producing for persons and institutions invested in the “standard model” of univocational clergy.

Noticing these changes is a necessary first step in reimagining theological education. Researchers at Auburn Seminary recognized a disjunction between seminary education and bivocational ministry preparation, observing “a whole world of theological education outside the ATS member schools,” primarily serving students who are “bivocational and already in ministry, either lay or ordained, when they seek out theological education” (Scharen and Miller 2016, 8). They went on to say,

Rather than certification for ministry, as in the old mainstream denominational model, these ministers are seeking deeper knowledge

and skills for ministries in which they are already immersed and which they usually continue to lead all through their coursework. This model of community-based, contextual theological education is a hallmark of the Bible Institute system and offers a way for other theological schools to rethink both curricular structure and pedagogy, which too often separates coursework from the practice of ministry. (Scharen and Miller 2016, 8)

The Bible institute, judicatory licensing school, and non-degree life-long learning program each have something to offer to the theological education and formation of pastoral leaders. Likewise, the congregation is no less a contributor to the vocational formation of pastors, despite not having any accreditation as a school of theology. As these multiple pathways of education increase in influence in churches traditionally served by degree-bearing pastors, Aleshire's observation about the rise of "alternative patterns for credentialing" becomes even more relevant.<sup>1</sup>

Scharen and Miller's invitation to rethink, and perhaps redesign, "curricular structure and pedagogy" is a tall order for ATS-member schools. Complexifying this task are embedded, racialized dynamics, in which the "whiteness" (Jennings 2020, 9) of the "old mainstream denominational model" contrasts with the diverse forms of education arising from communities of color, immigrants, and others. Less difficult to name is the array of pragmatic hurdles. Assessing the 2017 ATS Graduating Student Questionnaire, Jo Ann Deasy (2018, 70) suggested that theological schools will need to address new questions relating to skills development for bivocational ministry (see also Deasy, chapter 15, and Stephens, chapter 14, in this volume). Needed is a discussion of bivocationality as a central part of the story of theological education.

## *Observations about Bivocational Ministry*

Churches and schools are recognizing and responding to the needs of bivocational students and pastors in structured as well as improvisational ways. Before his retirement from ATS, Aleshire (2021, 108–9) recognized Wesley Seminary of Indiana Wesleyan University and Pittsburgh Theological Seminary as examples of ATS programs designed primarily for bivocational students. As discussed in this vol-

ume, Earlham School of Religion (Baisley, chapter 16 in this volume), Lexington Theological Seminary (Bentley, chapter 7 in this volume), and Lancaster Theological Seminary (Stephens, chapter 14 in this volume) are among the ATS schools turning their attention to bivocational ministry preparation. There are others, though these efforts have yet to be coordinated and reported in a comprehensive way. To inform these efforts, I offer observations about the changing context of predominantly White, Protestant churches in North America and their attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of bivocational ministry.

### *Changing context of the church*

Bivocational ministry in North America is helpfully viewed within the context of churches undergoing tremendous change. Four observations provide a broad-brush description of bivocational ministry within this context. First, bivocational ministry is an umbrella term for many different arrangements of pastoral ministry combined with other paid and unpaid employments—arrangements that go by a variety of names. Second, bivocational ministry has been the norm for ministry across many cultures, denominations, and historical eras. It is “new” within the context of the White, North American mainline denominations that have professionalized ministry during the past 150 years, paralleling the historical emergence of ATS-member schools. Third, the norm of fully funded pastoral ministry is a structural feature of many predominantly White denominations, in which bivocational ministry is considered aberrant and exceptional by tradition, ethos, and polity. Fourth, when fully funded pastoral ministry declines as a statistical norm, expectations and structures no longer match demographic and financial realities within White mainline denominations. This situation creates systemic challenges to ministry.

Discrepancies between the way things used to be and the way things are indicate the need for change, contributing to already-present anxieties over declining membership rolls, congregational vitality, missional clarity, societal presence, and institutional clout (Stephens 2020). The increased visibility of bivocational ministry in recent years among Episcopalians, United Methodists, United Church of Christ, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Southern Baptists, the Christian Reformed Church in North America, and other predominantly White

denominations signals a sea change in these churches' relation to society and self-perception. Simply put, the old White North American Christendom is over (Jones 2016).

### *Attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of bivocational ministry*

It should be no surprise that an anxious church during a time of significant cultural change expresses a wide range of attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of bivocational ministry. Bivocational ministry challenges individualism and self-sufficiency within the pastorate and can contribute to a renewed missional vitality when the congregation becomes a partner in ministry (Edington 2018; MacDonald 2020; Stephens, chapter 1 in this volume). Bivocational ministry can also involve distinctive stressors. Factors that can reduce stress and increase satisfaction among bivocational pastors include: vocational integration, congregational receptivity, intentionality in employment, discerning a unique fit, and being psychologically prepared (Watson et al. 2020). Bivocational ministry thrives with whole-life integration of vocation, employment, ministry, family, and other aspects of our “multiplicity” (Watson et al. 2020; see also Lindner 2016). There is some evidence that younger generations are more open to partially-funded ministry as part of the new gig economy, particularly as enabled through digital technologies (New Leaf Network 2020).

Nevertheless, bivocational ministry is widely considered deficient compared to the fully-funded (White, middle class) ideal within aged, White mainline churches. This perception reflects discrepancies and anxieties embedded in denominational polities and ethos and cannot be disentangled from reigning social biases regarding race, gender, class, educational levels, financial success, marital status, and material realities in North American societies. Women, persons of color, immigrants, differently abled persons—these groups are more likely than others to be partially funded in ministry (Perry and Schleifer 2019). Percentages of bivocational pastors are much higher among immigrant and non-White communities. Women face greater hurdles balancing multiple demands and commitments vocationally and personally than men (for a brief discussion, see MacDonald 2020, 27; Deasy, chapter 5 in this volume).

Seminaries and churches adopting a bivocational mindset will encounter racialized and gendered constructs, generational dif-

ferences, and tradition-bound practices even as they seek to create something “new.” Bivocational ministry and contextually-originated training are hardly new approaches, given the two-thousand-year history of the church and its ministry and the proliferation of Bible institutes and non-degree certifications available in many non-White ministry contexts. It is graduate theological education that must be renewed and reenvisioned for the current day and age.

## *Reimagining Theological Education with Justo González*

The task of reimagining theological education is helpfully informed by a consideration of the historical trajectory that brought us to this point. In his book, *The History of Theological Education* (2015), Justo González provided an overview of two millennia of Christian efforts to disciple and equip persons for ministerial leadership. Contrasting several models, González offered directives for reconstituting theological education for “the new times we are facing” (127), suggesting specific ways ATS-member schools can respond to these new challenges in light of the broader history of the church and its educational efforts. Reading González’s insights through the lens of intentional bivocational ministry yields constructive ways of reimagining theological education.

Equipping leaders for a thriving bivocational ministry may require a new model of theological education. Learning from the rich history of theological education over many centuries, González (2015, 121–27) provided an assessment of two existing models of theological education and one suggested model (see also Wayman 2021). Existing models fail to address the challenges of bivocational ministry. The residential or “semimonastic” model of theological education cloisters students in a learning community for formation over several years. However, this model does not fit students with multiple responsibilities and demands on their time (González 2015, 122–23)—clearly not a good fit for the realities of bivocational ministry. A second model offers flexible scheduling arrangements: for example, weekend and evening classes, extension programs, and online instruction. This model allows students to remain in their community contexts as they learn. However, it carries the risk that “ministerial training

tends to become a matter of instruction and not of formation” (123). While flexibility is important for bivocational students, this model does nothing to alleviate the parallel risk that bivocational ministry may become a matter of financial expediency or necessity and not of missional intentionality on the part of the minister or congregation. In contrast to these two models, González suggested building on innovations in technology (such as the internet) and contextual education (“supervised ministry”) for “a radical revision in the curriculum” (127). In this new model, theological education consists of a continual spiral of praxis-theory-reflection-praxis, altering current methods of teaching, scholarship, and evaluation (126–27). These innovations would empower bivocational students by centering the practice of ministry in the learning environment and valuing the variety of life-skills they bring as an integral part of theological education.

Implementing this new model requires reconstituting theological education in specific ways. González enumerated seven directives for this new vision of theological education (2015, 127–29), each of which is potentially responsive to the realities of bivocational ministry. Viewed with a bivocational mindset, each directive addresses challenges of bivocational ministry. First, González suggested returning theological education to the church by locating learning in the community of faith (see also Wayman 2021). This directive enhances intentional bivocational ministry, which is most effective when it becomes the congregation’s curriculum and laity are included in the educational process (Stephens, chapter 1 in this volume). Second, he suggested teaching and evaluating student achievement based on application within communities of faith. This directive enhances bivocational ministry formation by valuing the student’s ministry context as a primary place where a student teaches, learns, and ministers. Third, González emphasized theological education as a life-long process; seminary is no longer considered an exceptional time of formation, after which one enters the real work of ministry. This directive resonates with formation in bivocational ministry, which often begins prior to formal theological studies, may or may not include seminary studies, and continues long after basic educational requirements are met. Fourth, he encouraged academic theological educators to partner with churches to address new and evolving challenges and circumstances. Intentional bivocational ministry is but one example of the kind of challenge implied by this directive. Fifth, González recognized that theological studies and the practice

of ministry go in both directions and that they are not confined to pastoral ministry. Theological education can benefit those in vocations outside of pastoral ministry as well as those already in the practice of ministry. As a case in point, bivocational ministry is often a blending of these two directions in one person. Sixth, he suggested training mentors to lead theological reflection on not only pastoral ministry “but even more the pastoral practice of the entire community of faith” (129). This directive pertains directly to enabling the congregation to take on bivocational ministry as its curriculum. Seventh, González encouraged redefining the way faculty publications are evaluated, based on their relevance and usefulness to ministry. This directive would elevate the status of scholarship on practices of ministry; currently, there exists very little scholarly and peer-reviewed literature on bivocational ministry.

Embracing the above directives would require significant changes by ATS-member schools. González (2015, 138–39) suggested that “traditionally accredited theological education” must respond to current challenges by learning from the history of the church. He prescribed eight responses, each of which has implications for bivocational ministry. First, learn to view theological education as a continuum from catechesis to lay education to pastoral training to research and reflection. This prescription implies that, to equip persons for bivocational ministry, seminaries should allow multiple entry points to theological education. Offering only a standard, three-year master’s degree is not a sufficient response to this need. Second, disrupt the idea that theory precedes practice. This prescription implies that the practices of bivocational ministry must inform our theology of mission and ministry and the way we teach in graduate theological education. Third, set aside institutional elitism. This prescription implies that, to equip persons for bivocational ministry, seminaries need to lower the bar to entry and participation. For example, is a bachelor’s degree a necessary requirement for admission into theological studies? Fourth, realize that theological education and ordination are not necessarily coincident. This prescription implies that persons seek formal theological education for a variety of reasons. Educating for bivocational ministry will include laity, persons preparing for ordination, and those not preparing for ordination. Fifth, establish closer ties with immediate communities and their needs. This prescription implies that communities and congregations are essential partners in theological education. Bivocational education requires getting involved in the faith communities in proximity to

the seminary. Sixth, accredited programs must encourage and acknowledge non-accredited programs of theological education. This prescription implies that non-degree programs are a necessary option for many people and should be valued as such. Bivocational ministry often relies on pastors educated through non-traditional, non-accredited programs of study. Seventh, seminaries must widen their ecclesiastical and denominational horizons. The need for and desirability of bivocational ministry transcends confessional and denominational differences. Eighth, González asserted that theological schools must “acknowledge the cultural captivity of much of our institutional and ecclesial life” (139). When the wisdom and experience of bivocational ministry emerges from the margins, the entire church and academy will benefit from those not previously centered in the fully-funded model of professional parish ministry.

### *Reimagining Theological Education with Daniel Aleshire*

The task of reimagining theological education is also helpfully informed in conversation with those in charge of accrediting graduate degree programs. Daniel Aleshire served as executive director of ATS for nearly twenty years, 1998–2017. According to Aleshire, the goal of theological education is:

the development of a wisdom of God and the ways of God, fashioned from intellectual, affective, and behavioral understanding and evidenced by spiritual and moral maturity, relational integrity, knowledge of the Scripture and tradition, and the capacity to exercise religious leadership. (Aleshire 2021, 82)

One key aspect of relational integrity, beyond how one relates to others, is how one relates to one’s own complexity. Intentional multivocational ministry demands a kind of relational integrity within oneself, evidenced, practiced, and lived out across all of one’s life activities. Equipping for a thriving bivocational ministry cannot be accomplished without attention to this aspect of relational integrity. Aleshire’s assessment of theological education can inform the education and preparation of bivocational ministers—if it is read with a bivocational or multivocational mindset.

From the vantage point of his experience, Aleshire (2021, 140) recognized that theological education must be “right for its time.” To meet today’s challenges, he recognized that “formational theological education” will need to change, requiring both a “fundamental reorientation to higher education” as well as technical adaptations (136). He named three institutional changes needing closer examination: “the evaluation of students, the organization of student learning, and the partners that theological schools engage” (131). Each of these changes has implications for how ATS-member schools can better educate for a thriving multivocational ministry.

First, Aleshire (2021, 132) pointed out the need for schools to develop more qualitative forms of evaluating students. He asserted the need to find appropriate ways to evaluate a student’s spiritual or moral maturity, if that “becomes a legitimate goal for theological education.” In other words, if formation is a goal, how do we assess a student’s adequate progress toward this goal? In a similar vein, theological educators might consider evaluation criteria for vocational clarity, integration, and balance. Successful bivocational ministry relies heavily on the ability of the individual to understand their own gifts and calling, to find ways to integrate their ministry into the wide range of activities comprising one’s day-to-day life, and to achieve some sense of sustainable proportion among the various aspects of their life. Multivocational education is one way of intentionally tending to one’s multiplicity as a minister and a human being—how will theological schools teach and assess the skills necessary to success in this form of ministry?

Second, Aleshire (2021, 134) recognized the need for an integration of academic disciplines in student learning. He observed that the structure of academic disciplines and subdisciplines does not match the way ministry is practiced. Ministry requires integration of knowledge and practice across disciplinary divisions. Aleshire asserted that the “tasks of integration . . . need to become the responsibility of theological schools,” not just the individual student. Integration is not just a curricular issue; it is also an issue for multiple vocations. Multivocational ministry takes the task of integration one step further: not only must theological education equip the student to integrate knowledge through the practices of ministry, but theological education must also be integrated through the entire spectrum of one’s life activities. How can theological education contribute to an integration of knowledge, practice, and individual multiplicity? An apprenticeship approach, such as promoted by the Carnegie volume

*Educating Clergy* (Foster et al. 2006), holds promise—if this approach were cognizant of and attentive to multivocational realities in the lives of students and ministers (see Fain, chapter 12 in this volume).

Third, Aleshire (2021, 134–35) observed the need for increased engagement with new partners to promote and nurture experiential learning. The kinds of “behavioral and affective learning” to which Aleshire alluded occur not only in formal ministry settings but also in the multiple locations in which one lives out one’s call as a disciple and leader of other disciples. The wide, collaborative engagement suggested by Aleshire lends itself to multivocational preparation. Field education is one under-utilized way to do this, providing a natural site for exploration and learning about bivocational ministry. Other avenues of learning and partnership occur through informal interaction among one’s peers in ministry and the congregations served. Multivocational ministry is most successful with the support of intentional partners who participate in one’s ongoing, life-long formation and learning as a faith leader. How can theological educators partner with the student body to cultivate meaningful avenues for peer evaluation and support? And how can theological educators partner with congregations? Aleshire’s observations about needed institutional changes lend themselves to a consideration of bivocational ministry, though he did not do so himself.

## *Present Obstacles*

A multivocational mindset is a helpful—perhaps necessary—way to reimagine graduate theological education as “right for its time” today. Reimagining theological education in conversation with Justo González and Daniel Aleshire showed the resonance of their ideas with the demands of bivocational ministry as well as the necessity of bringing to their discussion a multivocational mindset in order to draw out implications for equipping persons for a thriving multivocational ministry. This mindset also reveals specific obstacles presented by current forms of theological education.

I offer the following observations and questions about theological education today, based on the above discussion and my own experience and research about educating bivocational pastors. First, many ATS seminaries mirror the design, purpose, prejudices, perceptions, and anxieties of the White, mainline churches they primar-

ily serve. This observation is both consistent with and illustrative of the distorted formation resulting from “white self-sufficient masculinity” as described by Jennings (2020, 5–9). Instead, can seminaries lead as change agents for the church, moving from existing models of residential and flexible scheduling arrangements to a truly contextual mode of praxis-based learning? Second, fully-funded, professionalized ministry is the norm around which most academic theological education programs are currently designed and implemented. What would it look like for seminaries to restructure their education programs with bivocational ministry as the norm, truly partnering with congregations? Third, current curricula are designed with full-time students as the norm, paralleling the challenges confronting part-time pastors. How can seminaries recenter their curricula around part-time, multivocational students as the norm? Fourth, current curricula are centered around degree programs to support credentialing in ministry. What would it look like for seminaries to partner with churches more seamlessly to provide theological education spanning the spectrum from catechesis to discipleship to credentialing to life-long learning—a drip hose rather than a pipeline (González 2020)? Fifth, the tenure model, including funding for academic research through sabbaticals and subsidized scholarship, does not directly support the vision of the future of theological education envisioned by González (2015) and others. When seminary faculty are hired on the basis of scholarly research, when faculty are not credentialed in ministry, and when faculty have little experience in or connection to churches, how does this impact the school’s ability to prepare persons for bivocational ministry? Sixth, contingent faculty in theological education are treated in ways that implicitly devalue bivocational modes of employment, including bivocational ministry. When contingent faculty are marginalized in theological education, what does that imply about the relative value placed on bivocational pastors in church structures?

The tenure system and the marginal status of contingent faculty are deeply embedded in ATS-member schools. Tenure is a mainstay of research institutions, including university-embedded seminaries. The tenure model is unlikely to change anytime soon, though it is unsustainable in the long term. Can stand-alone seminaries continue to fund scholarly research in the same way as research institutions, even when this research is directly tied to programmatic improvements in student learning for ministerial leadership? Furthermore, fully-funded faculty are currently prioritized and honored in ways

that implicitly endorse and reinforce fully-funded ministry as the norm. Does this dynamic not imply that full-time pastoring is to be more highly valued and prioritized than bivocational ministry in the church? Can ATS-member schools elevate bivocational ministry without also addressing their bias toward full-funded faculty? I think not.

For theological schools to promote intentional multivocational ministry as a legitimate and equal calling, they will need to address their own inequities regarding adjunct faculty. The unfair treatment of contingent faculty has been recognized as a deficiency of “a culture of ethics” (Keenan 2015), an inconsistency with church teachings (Keenan and Gaudet 2019), an “ethical deficit” (Thistlethwaite 2018), an “ethical debt” (Anonymous 2019), and a “scandal” (Keenan 2018). In a vocational retrospective, Kathleen Henderson Staudt (2015, 38) provided a detailed assessment of her experience as an adjunct, including the injustices she faced and what could be done to ameliorate the worst of them, drawing an explicit parallel to bivocational ministry. For ATS-member schools to equip students for careers of intentional, partially-funded ministry—and to do this well and with integrity—they must address the inequities of the partially funded faculty who occupy the same classrooms.

Self-standing seminaries may have an advantage over university-embedded schools of theology in addressing these issues. Independent seminaries have the potential to be more agile, responsive, and innovative when it comes to changing inherited models: for example, tenure, funding, and faculty status. However, the treatment of contingent faculty is an issue for every institution of higher learning, and self-standing seminaries are no less susceptible to classism than other institutions.

## *Implications for Theological Education*

A multivocational mindset can assist ATS-member schools in reimagining graduate theological education in the midst of current challenges. There is great need for renewal. “If theological education was ever in peril, it is now,” observed Benjamin Wayman (2021), referring to a rash of seminary and church-related school closures within the most recent five years. To assist in the task of “Imagining the Future of Theological Education,” the title of his article for the *Chris-*

*tian Century*, Wayman interviewed Emilie Townes, Justo González, Rowan Williams, and Sam Wells. The future of theological education, he concluded, requires “shifting the center from the university to the church,” providing a variety of offerings “that attend to the vocation of each person,” and “challeng[ing] the *isms* that have long poisoned theological education” (Wayman 2021). In conversation with Aleshire, González, Wayman, and others, what if North American seminaries were to risk reinventing themselves by adopting a multivocational mindset?

A multivocational mindset can equip the seminary to respond to each of the ideas Wayman put forth. A focus on intentional multivocational ministry can shift theological education back to the church. As the church’s curriculum, bivocational ministry is praxis-focused, vocationally motivated, and community-centered. A bivocational mindset can address the directives and prescriptions offered by González as well as the needs for curricular integration and wider collaboration raised by Aleshire. A focus on intentional bivocational ministry can also provide a practical structure and theological framework for increasing the modes and types of educational offerings required to “prioritiz[e] vocational learning over degree completion,” as Wayman (2021) expressed it. Attention to less-than-fully funded ministry can also open doors to new initiatives and partnerships.

Some theological schools have already made significant strides to adapt degree programs to meet the emerging leadership needs of bivocational congregations. Positive features and changes include:

- creation of modular or flexible-schedule course offerings designed for students concurrently pastoring or holding other forms of employment;
- renovation of degree programs to accommodate remote learning opportunities;
- development of hybrid models of instruction, online teaching, and other uses of technology;
- emphasis on contextual education as a site of learning;
- student debt reduction programs;
- commitments to antiracism, social justice, and diversity;

- prioritizing cross-cultural learning as integral to theological formation;
- placing seminary education within a continuum of life-long theological education—for example, by developing and supporting non-degree learning programs both prior to and beyond seminary;
- exploring bivocational ministry as an emerging leadership need in churches and a potential paradigm for theological education;
- involvement of full-time faculty in church-related programs and activities beyond the seminary's degree programs.

Recognizing multivocational ministry as an existing and emerging need of the church and fully embracing multivocational ministry as a strategic priority in their educational programming, seminaries would need to explore and identify various changes and initiatives required to reform their curriculum, extracurricular offerings, programs, structure, and ethos around this priority. Example initiatives and programmatic ideas include:

- curriculum and co-curriculum assessment in light of bivocational needs;
- seamless integration of degree and non-degree offerings, reducing barriers to entry and participation, and moving from the pipeline to drip hose metaphor;
- creating crossover learning opportunities for master's, doctoral, and non-degree students;
- support for innovative approaches by faculty (full-time and part-time) to model and support bivocational ministry;
- providing parity among fully-funded and contingent faculty with regard to remuneration for courses taught, support for research and writing, professional development, job security, and institutional standing;
- degree and non-degree class offerings coordinated with and within church contexts;

- student career and vocational advising, including bivocational models of ministry;
- job search support for students, including electronic portfolios, identification of skills and credentials, and interview skills;
- support and training for bivocational mentors to accompany students at all stages of ministerial leadership formation.

New programs, such as those above, could begin as grant-funded initiatives and then, as appropriate, become fully integrated into the permanent operations of the school. The specific initiatives and programmatic ideas appropriate for a seminary will depend on the strategic priorities of the school, as discerned by its administration and trustees, based on their vision for theological education and their understanding the emerging needs of God’s world, including the church. Whether multivocational ministry is situated at the center or the periphery of this vision is a matter for their discernment—and ours.

### *A Necessary and Insufficient Mindset*

In this chapter, I have invited readers to reimagine graduate theological education by adopting a multivocational mindset. I have argued that the challenges of bivocationality are one key to understanding the changes required within seminaries and schools of theology for the present time. For example, I have drawn attention to shifting contexts and needs within predominantly White Protestant mainline churches and named bivocationality as a class issue complicated by racial biases. In particular, I have drawn attention to inequities among faculty employment in schools of theology and the growth of “alternative” pathways for education and credentialing, particularly among non-White communities. Can theological educators address the challenge of material inequalities in church and academy sufficiently to provide a credible and faithful witness to a future in which the multivocational minister is lifted up as an honored member in the Body of Christ? The future of graduate theological education may require it.

Yet a multivocational mindset is not enough by itself. It must be combined with antiracist and other justice-oriented commitments in order to reimagine life-giving change. For example, conversations about bivocational ministry often transcend common ideological divisions between evangelicals and mainline, conservatives and progressives. However, many conservative traditions on the cutting edge of bivocational ministry do not ordain women. Conversations are also complicated by the way in which many White, male church planters perform “white self-sufficient masculinity” (Jennings 2020, 6) in a distinctly heteronormative way. Furthermore, White liberals as well as conservatives operate within inherited structures and patterns of racism, sharing a common malformation that continues to insinuate itself into theological education and our churches. These complicated interactions are filled with potential. Will these conversations “form us in the art of cultivating belonging” (10)? Or will they merely replicate “the facilitating obsession of whiteness” in which its participants have already been formed (139)? A multivocational mindset is a necessary but insufficient view to the future that Wayman, González, Aleshire, and others invite us to imagine.

As I tie up the loose ends (Conde-Frazier 2021) of this essay, I realize that I have offered only fragments (Jennings 2020) of a larger tapestry in which ministry and theological education escape the control of churches and graduate schools. There are many other fragments to collect. There is the resonance between the boundary-breaking work of multivocational ministry and that of the diaconate, bridging church and world through a wide range of professions. There are understandings of multivocational ministry and theological education that no longer center on pastoral ministry within a congregation in a particular neighborhood: ministry beyond the pastorate, congregations beyond the walls of a building, and digital spaces as sites of ministry. Each of these fragments, and more, reminds me that the future of theological education is ours to weave.

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## *Notes*

- 1 The language of “multiple pathways” is in use in at least one US mainline denomination. The General Synod of the United Church of Christ affirmed “multiple paths for preparation and formation toward ministerial authorization” in 2005 (United Church of Christ 2018, 78).