

Bright Spots in Theological Education

Hopeful Stories in a Time of Crisis and Change

Christian Scharen and Sharon Miller

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Executive Summary

In a globalizing, interconnected world, major challenges impinge on every corner of American society. In the midst of this tumult, will leaders of faith and moral courage be prepared to lead in facing the most challenging social issues of the 21st century?

The 21st century is, perhaps more than any before it, a time of crisis. These crises are the result of complex global challenges, many of these dramatically outlined by the United Nations at its Millennium Summit in September 2000.¹ Their eight “Millennium Development Goals,” each directed at major global challenges such as poverty, education, women’s empowerment, maternal and child health, and the environment, offer one interpretation of what the inhabitants of this “pale blue dot” face together.² Similarly, in recent years, Pope Francis has issued a call to responsibility in the face of such challenges, both human and environmental. In his 2014 Encyclical, *Laudato Si’*, Francis addresses all people of goodwill with his poignant call for lives marked by mercy and justice for all creation.³

Many readers of this report would use the word “crisis” to describe the reality of seminaries and theological schools in North America as well. The trials and tribulations in some corners of theological education are widely known. Grim reports of institutional contraction and closure seem to be the main media stories about theological schools.⁴

The reasons seminaries and schools of theology are facing such challenges are not reducible to the faults of individual institutions and their leadership. Surely leadership does matter (see Auburn’s recent study, *Governance That Works*, for a convincing argument of the case⁵), yet underlying social forces in the society as

a whole perhaps matter more. The captain and crew of a vessel have only limited options when a storm blows up to them at sea, and for many in theological education, recent years have felt much like a storm at sea, buffeted this way and that by wind and waves.

To others, however, the changing nature of faith and leadership formation looks less like a storm and more like refreshing rain. Without wanting to minimize the grief and loss that inevitably come with institutional crises and closures, this report does not dwell there. Instead, we focus on “bright spots,” where—despite dealing with the same broader social forces—both old and new organizations are innovating, finding new pathways in theological education. Through a diverse range of case studies, this report asks how these vibrant organizations are preparing leaders for the challenges of a 21st-century world. Our major findings are as follows.

A pedagogical finding

Schools are shifting the educational model from content transfer to adaptive learning. We found that in innovative seminaries, theological schools and other institutions forming faith leaders, there is a sea-change away from a “core content transfer” model, which assumes schools are clear about what future leaders need to know for effective faith leadership today, to an “adaptive learning” model, which assumes students need to become agile learners in relation to real-world challenges.⁶ This does not mean abandoning core content or “fundamentals” for....

A programmatic finding

Schools are developing new programs to fit a widened sense of vocation to faith leadership. The shifting landscape of prospective student career goals means fewer students are preparing for traditional clergy leadership roles for local faith communities while increasing numbers desire formation for faith-rooted leadership in the face of the big challenges in the world—from climate change and sustainability to interfaith relations, poverty and racial justice.

Two exemplary cases (described in greater detail later in this report) show this shift in emphasis in simple catchphrases core to their identities, mission and vision. City Seminary in New York City, a new seminary not yet 15 years old, understands all its educational programs to “seek the peace of the city.” Fuller Theological Seminary, a long-standing flagship Evangelical Protestant seminary, recently shifted its focus from “educating leaders for the church” to “forming the church for the world.”



Katherine Butler, pictured here, grew up Pentecostal. While in an MA/PhD program in medical microbiology at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, she expressed doubts about the relation between faith and science. At her advisor’s encouragement, she took time off to explore the questions, doing an MA in science and theology at Fuller Theological Seminary. She now works on HIV/AIDS at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, with a special focus on women in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Institutional findings

These two cases, as well as others in our study, found support for launching and developing their pedagogical and programmatic innovation by three key institutional factors, each taking distinctive shape in their respective cases and discussed more fully in the “Recommendations” section:

- Administration willing to risk.
- A senior faculty champion, and broad faculty buy-in.
- An experimental second space to launch innovation.

Analyzing how they—and 10 peer theological schools—embody these factors of innovation is the task of the report to follow.

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Waves of Change

Two of the most powerful shifts impacting theological education today are the so-called “browning” of the population and the “fragilization” of faith. These dynamics must be named and their consequences explored, for they are like tectonic plates that, when they shift, can fundamentally remake the landscape.

Minority Majority

According to scholar Justo L. González, the entrance of racial/ethnic minorities into theological education is one of the most significant shifts of the past 50 years.⁸ As the United States moves toward a majority-minority population in 2040,⁹ it is not surprising that the percentage of racial/ethnic minority students enrolled in ATS-accredited schools has grown from 16 percent to nearly 30 percent in the past 20 years, and racial/ethnic faculty have doubled in that same period of time.¹⁰

In González’s view, the fate of churches—and their related seminaries—can be divided according to formal patterns of required ministerial education. Denominations that traditionally required seminary education for ordination have declining membership (and their seminaries are largely seeing declining enrollment as well), while traditions that conventionally do not require seminary education—mostly Pentecostal—are growing. Decline, González argues, has to do with demographics (mostly birthrates) and the unwillingness of the mainstream traditions to undergo necessary changes to reach new populations (or merely the failure to do so).¹¹ This failure or unwillingness goes for churches as much as for theological schools.

González points out that thousands of ministers are being licensed or ordained for ministry without formal theological education, and when they do seek out such formal education, it is as likely to be in the form of non-degree programs from alternative institutions as a master’s degree from a traditional theological school. González indicates a looming issue of injustice: the “anomaly” regarding resources available to white students versus minority students, with the vast majority of available resources “in terms of faculty, libraries, buildings, endowments, and so forth available mostly to a declining student population.”¹²

In summary, González sees the future of theological education as “either dim or bright.”¹³ It is dim if we only look at how traditional schools are now organized, committed to the Master of Divinity as the gold standard for leadership preparation in declining mainstream churches. But it is bright if we consider the diverse credentials and settings in which religious leaders are trained (what González calls the “continuum” of theological education).¹⁴ At least for the traditional ATS-accredited schools, circumstances require, González argues, the “total reorientation and redefinition of theological studies and ministerial training.”¹⁵

Fragilization of Faith

There is another reason why González’s call for the “reorientation of theological studies and ministerial training” rings true. Charles Taylor, a Canadian philosopher, makes sense of deeper dynamics impacting religious experience today in terms of the dynamics of secularization, which lead to what he calls the fragilization of belief.¹⁶

Influenced by centuries of reform and bolstered by Enlightenment critiques, Taylor’s use of the phrase “fragilization of belief” names the interconnected set of changes we are experiencing in this secular age.¹⁷ The forces behind this fragilization of belief take the shape of new cross-pressures impacting our lives, and in negotiating them, multiplication of forms of belief result. One axis of cross-pressure we must negotiate is between transcendence and immanence. The other axis we must negotiate is between enchantment and disenchantment. One extreme option, in the quadrant of immanence and disenchantment, is atheism. On the opposite side of the axis, in the quadrant of transcendence and enchantment, is orthodoxy. But between these, where many moderns find themselves, Taylor describes a “nova effect” of spiritual options, literally multiplying over generations. Importantly, it is not just knowledge of pluralism as the fact of others who believe differently, but proximity to others who are so like oneself that one can imagine their life as a possible alternative to one’s own.¹⁸

Today, our proximity and similarity to others makes their difference simply another potential path my own life could or might take. This, then, creates mutual fragilization. Even when I hold my beliefs very strongly, I know I could possibly hold very different beliefs with equal fervor. In fact, more and more people are switching their beliefs and faith practices over the course of their lifetime, especially younger people, negotiating a looser, more heterodox connection to personal beliefs and organizational belonging.

Mary Oliver, while surely a gifted poet, owes part of her broad acclaim to the fact that her work so deeply embodies a fragilized faith in just the ways Taylor describes.¹⁹ Her poem, “A Summer’s Day,” is an apt example. She begins describing a summer’s day and the grasshopper in her hand, with its particular shape and motions. Then, as if reflecting on the significance of her contemplation, she declares that she doesn’t know what prayer is, but she does know how to pay attention, to kneel in, to simply being blessed by the day. She asks whether she should have done something different, turning to the reader to ask what they will do with their one “wild and precious life.”²⁰

Oliver questions traditional faith practice, translating prayer, which she is not sure she understands, into wonder at nature’s beauty, which she does understand as a kind of this-worldly, individual contemplation. Hers is what Taylor calls a “third way” between acceptance of orthodoxy or atheism at the two poles of the spectrum of religious conviction. It is exactly these “third ways” that are multiplying exponentially, accounting for a significant part of the upheaval in religion today.²¹

Impacts of Change

An obvious impact of Taylor's understanding of secularism is the simultaneous growth of spiritual seeking in the culture and decline of many traditional churches and other faith organizations.²² First, the decline. Decline is most precipitous among the more traditional European-origin faiths. The Episcopal Church in the United States of America (ECUSA) is a good example. With roots in the Church of England's Reformation-era split from the Roman Catholic Church and the United States' subsequent split with England, the Episcopal Church is part of the worldwide Anglican Communion. Spread mostly through the colonial expansion of the British Empire, its communion now includes more than 30 provinces or national churches and is the third largest Christian communion after the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church. Yet in the United States, the ECUSA is the canary in the coal mine for mainstream Christian faith. Over the past 50 years, it has lost a full 50 percent of its membership, and in the last decade, nearly 20 percent, signaling an accelerating pace of decline.²³ While this is obviously dramatic, it is not atypical for the so-called mainline Protestant churches. Catholic and evangelical traditions have also experienced declines among their Euro-American membership. Complicating the situation for these churches, those who are still members tend to have a looser connection; only 3 percent of ECUSA members claim a high level of commitment and participation.²⁴

Yet alongside the decline, growth is also happening. Of course, some congregations in the mainstream church traditions are growing, too. Even among ECUSA congregations, at least 20 percent are growing. While these gains do not offset the losses elsewhere, they are important sources of wisdom about navigating ministry in a fast-changing religious context. Still more important to note is the burgeoning growth among non-mainstream traditions. Take the Assemblies of God (AG) for example, a fast-growing Pentecostal movement born in Hot Springs, Ark., in the early decades of the 20th century. Over the same 50-year

period in which the ECUSA declined from around 3.6 million to 1.8 million members, the AG in the United States grew from 572,123 to just over 3 million. Their global growth has been equally remarkable, with churches all around the world and a worldwide membership of nearly 68 million, making them the fourth largest Christian communion globally (just below the Anglicans at 85 million) and the largest Pentecostal church by far. Latin@s are fueling the AG growth in the United States, with current estimates claiming as many as 600,000 Latin@s joining the AG each year (many from nominal Catholic membership).²⁵ Obviously, immigration plays a significant role in this, as nearly half of the roughly 55 million Latin@s in the United States were not born here, yet with the global growth of Pentecostalism, many who do come to the United States are already part of that tradition.²⁶

Today, increasing numbers of people grow up with little or no connection to faith. When they encounter faith, it is often, as it was for one Episcopal convert and best-selling author Sara Miles, through encountering a practice.²⁷ In Miles's case, the practice was the Eucharist, which drew her slowly into belonging to a community, and then in fits and starts, she negotiated her own way into believing the basic tenets of Christianity. In earlier eras, it was more typical for belief to lead belonging and the attendant practice of faith; today, much more commonly, it is connection that comes, as with Miles, through practice first, leading to some form of belonging and finally belief (although likely more individual and heterodox).²⁸ One might expect similar dynamics in conversions to Pentecostalism, starting with attending a prayer meeting or Bible study, then being drawn into belonging to a community of practice and learning (and negotiating one's commitment to) the beliefs of that community. As different as the Eucharist is from Pentecostal praise, the variety of emerging or growing communities of faith share a common thread one might call "flipping the Enlightenment." They all seem to emphasize the experiential and embodied, the

relational and communal, and the transcendent, with various forms of re-enchantment of the world at the heart of faith and practice.²⁹

It is important to note how this impacts faith leaders and, consequently, the preparation of faith leaders in theological education. As readers of this report would expect—and likely have personal knowledge of—traditional mainstream seminaries are struggling along with their constituent denominations. Over the past decade, for example, the 10 ECUSA seminaries have declined in overall enrollment by almost 30 percent. However, on a case-by-case basis, some are markedly worse than others, with the General Theological Seminary in New York, the oldest of the 10, experiencing a 66-percent decline, forced to sell off portions of its historic Lower Manhattan campus, and teetering on the brink of closing in 2014.³⁰ Overall, across all 250+ schools accredited by the Association of Theological Schools, the marquee degree of these mainstream seminaries, the Master of Divinity, is in steady decline (7 percent in only the last five years).³¹

However, other degrees and certificates offered by seminaries are on the rise. In these same schools, academic and professional master's degrees have grown 5 percent and 7 percent respectively over the past five years. This rise signals a widening (one might say a fragilization) of callings, with many fewer students coming to seminary with clear plans to serve as ordained clergy in congregational settings, more of them embracing a wide variety of vocational goals beyond the traditional focus of seminary education. The rising enrollment in master's programs fits this pattern. Schools attracting these seeker students (sometimes referred to as the "spiritual, but not religious," or SBNR, demographic) have seen their average student age drop significantly to the mid-20s, as young people ask big questions in their exploration of meaning, purpose and calling.

Beyond the professional master's degrees, there is also a whole world of theological education outside the ATS member schools, especially serving immigrants from the Global South, including, for example, the oldest Latin@ Pentecostal school for ministry, the Latin American Bible Institute, and its sister organization, the Latin American Theological Seminary, both of which are located in La Puente, Calif. Typical for the larger and more established organizations of this sort, they offer a range of certificate and degree programs on campus and through a broad web of extension sites in the United States and Mexico, as well as online. Many, if not most of their students are bivocational and already in ministry, either lay or ordained, when they seek out theological education. 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, saved till after graduation and denominational certification for ministry.³²

Bright Spots

Given that all theological schools face the same challenging dynamics of a fast-changing culture, what if we ask the question: Where are the bright spots, where innovation wins out over hand-wringing and battened-down hatches? A few caveats: The following cases are neither representative nor exhaustive; rather, they are exemplary and should serve to provoke fresh consideration of the circumstances at one's own institution. The bright spots methodology does not, therefore, draw upon the extractive logic of "best practices" approaches. Instead, contextual innovations are developed based on local resources. They can work by analogical reflection, inspiring an imagination about what can be done in each particular place (a brief suggestion for how to do this may be found in the "Recommendations" section). The case studies below do not catalog any and every innovation, focusing on the programmatic and pedagogical innovation forming leaders for the big challenges of the 21st century. While senior administrators, faculties, boards of trustees, and networks of alumni and friends should attend to the challenges facing any institution, if we are only archeologists of our failings, we may miss the signs of strategic innovation existing right under our noses. Bright spots invite us to be evangelists for innovations that work.³³

What are Bright Spots?

In 1965, nearly two-thirds of children in Vietnam were malnourished. Jerry and Monique Sternin were sent by Save the Children to try to impact the situation. With modest resources and a short timeline, they decided to look carefully at the circumstances of a particular region. They measured all the children to get a baseline and then visited families to observe their food preparation and mealtime practices. All families faced

the same difficult conditions, but they found a few cases where the children were healthy. The fact of a couple of standout cases in a field of similarly impacted cases is the source of the term "positive deviance."³⁴

After closer examination, they found these families had introduced a couple of innovations that went against the grain of standard practice. They collected little shrimp from the rice fields and added these, along with some greens not typically eaten, and fed these to their children. In addition to this simple nutritional supplement, they also fed the children smaller meals four to five times a day, in individual bowls, rather than sharing from the common bowl at the typical two-per-day meals the adults had. Simple, local innovation had a huge impact. It might be obvious, but as the Sternins argue, this approach is “unnecessary when a technical solution is known.” Rather, it is a methodology for adaptive change where problems are “enmeshed in a complex social system, require social and behavioral change, and entail solutions that are rife with unforeseeable or unintended consequences.”

As a next step, they then invited the parents to become teachers of their innovation, showing other parents what they did, and the Sternins carefully tracked the impact on children so the parents could see the success in their own children. The innovation spread, and literally thousands of children were impacted. Success, in this case, was physical and measurable: Healthier children weighed more, grew taller and were generally more active.

A key question for the use of this methodology in the study of theological education regards what we might look for as evidence of “health” or “success.” The temptation might be to use enrollment and financial numbers, the so-called “butts and bucks” metric. The changes we found are in process and so far do not uniformly show success in this way. Where relevant, we comment on these metrics, but on the whole, we focus on a more qualitative measure of vitality, that of vitality in mission. We look for signs of such vitality both on the curricular and pedagogical side, as well as on the leadership and institutional commitment side. We will have much more to say about this in the exemplary cases below and, in fact, use these indicators of success as key threads to pull through our analysis of all the cases. What seems important to say here is that while there are family resemblances in terms of what success looks like, we cannot simply say in a decontextualized way: “Here are the three characteristics of success!” The

very fact of the indigenous solutions making a bright spot be bright means one has to have a qualitative and contextual lens to determine what success looks like.

Where are Bright Spots?

For many, doing theological education in the same ways they have for the last 50 years is not working. The challenges of the 21st century require innovative faith leaders who are faithful, wise, courageous and willing to risk as they find ways to join in God’s work of loving the world.³⁵ We believe the Spirit’s movement among us is doing a new thing (Isaiah 43), convincing us to look carefully for how local innovation is taking hold of the challenges before us in effective and imaginative ways. This research project is centered on the claim that religious leadership is essential to faith communities and congregations, bringing a moral and ethical perspective to the public, pressing issues of our day. When we began, anecdotally we knew there were places where transformative learning occurs in theological education, but little existing research focused squarely on this needed topic.

To find these schools, programs or initiatives, we used a “snowball,” or chain-referral, method of gathering our sample. We talked to men and women in seminaries and organizations that support theological education; we canvassed our friends and colleagues for suggestions; we spent numerous hours on web searches and then followed up with phone calls; and we visited campuses, churches and religious institutions where interesting things are happening and conducted interviews with the principal players. The case studies and stories that follow are in no way representative of theological education as a whole, nor are they in any way exhaustive. Yet they do share a common story among them. We found a red thread running between these innovative programs for 21st-century leadership formation: Each, in their own particular ways, are forming agile public leaders.³⁶ In the next section, we turn to some exemplary cases of these innovative sites.³⁷

Bright Spots: The Twin Cities

The bright spots methodology can be used on a national level, as this study has done. However, it was pioneered as a regional strategy, and it is useful to highlight local innovation within a distinct geographic region. As an example of this, we focused on the metropolitan region of Minneapolis and St. Paul (the Twin Cities), home to more than a dozen institutions that form faith leaders in undergraduate or graduate educational contexts.

The largest and most prominent among the dozen or so institutions are all members of the Minnesota Consortium of Theological Schools, including three Protestant schools (Luther Seminary, Bethel Seminary and United Theological Seminary) and two Catholic schools (St. Paul Seminary and School of Divinity and St. John's School of Theology and Seminary). The consortium is, unfortunately, largely moribund, with limited shared activities and rarely used cross-registration policies.³⁸ The three Protestant schools have seen major declines in both faculty and student enrollment, while expenditures have stayed even or even increased. Luther's effort in responding to these challenges includes a significant effort at curricular innovation³⁹, yet the most prominent efforts largely entailed moves to stave off the crisis by renting, developing or selling off underutilized property.⁴⁰ The Catholic schools are smaller, on the whole, and have maintained their size or even grown, partly on the strength of immigrant priests (St. Paul Seminary) and new programs for lay ecclesial ministers (both St. Paul Seminary and St. John's Seminary and School of Theology).

A number of other small Protestant seminaries are present in the Twin Cities, including Bethlehem Seminary, a ministry of Bethlehem Baptist Church, as well as University of Northwestern, Central Baptist Seminary, and the Master's Institute. In addition, a number of colleges offer undergraduate faith leadership programs, including Northwestern University and Concordia Colleges. These programs show some signs of innovation in mode of delivery (e.g., multiple sites for classes, as well as evening and weekend offerings, and/or online courses and programs) but engage in rather traditional modes of preparation for church leadership, an education rooted in the classical fourfold curriculum (Bible, theology, history and practical theology).⁴¹

However, at least three bright spots stood out in the Twin Cities, according to our criteria, and saying a brief word about each highlights cases of local innovation where programmatic and pedagogical practice aims to form leaders for the big challenges of the 21st century. Two are new "side experiments" of older, existing institutions, while the other is a remarkable transformation of a long-standing school in the community. This foreshadows key themes regarding the geography of innovation—it almost always takes advantage of local, indigenous resources and often takes flight on the "side" of what business scholars call the "bread and butter operation."⁴²

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, a historically progressive Protestant seminary struggling with massive enrollment decline and staffing cuts, has nonetheless struck out in two innovative directions, seeking to find a new vitality. While keeping their seminary's variety of residential and online master's programs intact, including a Master of Divinity program serving the United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Church denominations, United provides the umbrella coverage for two projects designed for a new era and student.



TwinSoT



President Barbara Holmes (left) and attendees at a Kaleo Center event on mass

United's first "side experiment," called Twin Cities School of Theology (TwinSoT), has its own mission, branding, website and physical location, even though it operates with institutional accreditation and faculty support from United. Rather than United's suburban location, TwinSoT is in the trendy "Warehouse District" of downtown Minneapolis, and the seminary literally is housed in a warehouse, just across the hall from a coffee shop. "Theology belongs in real life," director and faculty member Thorsten Moritz enthuses, "so we're putting it there. In the heart of the city, where people live and work and play." They offer a 36-hour, 12-course Master of Theological Studies (MTS) in Integrative Theology, a degree intended to be integrative and transformative "for the sake of the world." It seeks on the one hand to be accessible to students with a much wider sense of vocational goals and with a focus on engagement with real world challenges. Such courses as "Public Theology for Social Transformation" or "Culture and Justice" are at the heart of the program. The program is available both residentially and via distance learning platforms.

United's second "side experiment," based out of the Kaleo Center for Faith, Justice and Social Transformation located on United's Campus, is another initiative with its own mission, branding, website and physical location, and like TwinSoT, operates under United's institutional umbrella. Rooted in the conviction that "spiritual communities provide significant leadership for movements of social transformation," they seek to provide a continuum of offerings to train new leadership for these movements for

justice. In one-off events, a certificate program, concentrations available in the basic Master of Divinity. and master's programs, and a new master's degree in Leadership for Social Transformation, the center director, Steve Newcom, articulates the desire to move beyond "education *about* issues and instead offer *training in the skills and capacities* for leadership of movements for justice." The M.A. L.S.T. requires students be situated in a community or congregational context for the entirety of the program, using the site as their leadership case study throughout the program. This work culminates in a capstone project integrating and exemplifying their new skills and capacities.

UNDERGROUND SEMINARY is located within the ministry of Church of All Nations (CAN), a suburban Presbyterian church just a mile from United. CAN hosted seminary students for congregational internships for many years. The congregation had deepened their theology of radical Christianity, including developing a post-colonial biblical critique of the United States as a modern imperial power and experiments in community housing, sustainability, urban gardening and participation in local movements for racial and economic justice. The senior pastor, Jin S. Kim, said typical seminarians were not prepared to join into the life of the congregation, and required significant



The Underground Seminary at a #BlackLivesMatter march in late 2015

reorientation to be ready both to understand and then to help lead ministry at CAN. After some discernment, they laid plans for their own “side experiment”: to begin a seminary. Modeled on the underground seminary Dietrich Bonhoeffer set up in Finkenwalde after public suppression of the confessing church leaders in Nazi Germany, the model is built on living, working, and studying in community.⁴³ A three-step curriculum focuses on

- 1) unveiling the workings of empire,
- 2) reimagining the bible as a counter-imperial witness, and
- 3) birthing sustainable community life.

Now recruiting its second cohort of students, they aim to prepare leaders free from debt and ready for the complex challenge of faith leadership today.

AUGSBURG COLLEGE, one of a network of Lutheran Church-affiliated colleges across the nation, is located in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood just southeast of downtown Minneapolis. With historic roots in the immigrant Norwegian residents of the neighborhood, the college has continued to change as it welcomes new immigrants, committed to its inner city location as it grounds its mission of “education for service.” Starting in the 1990s in response to the civil war in Somalia, Minnesota became an important site for resettling refugees looking for a stable life and new opportunities. Thousands settled in the Riverside Plaza towers and surrounding neighborhood, leading some to describe the neighborhood as “Little Mogadishu.”⁴⁴ Disciplined partnerships, led by President Paul Pribbenow since 2006, have fostered many relationships with the Somali community. These relationships dramatically changed in the campus that more than tripled the percentage of minorities in the undergraduate body (from 11 percent in 2006 to 33 percent today). Remarkably, their 2016 graduating class had more than 42 percent students of color.⁴⁵

Typical of such church-related colleges, there is a chapel program as well as a vibrant religion department with, among other things, an innovative undergraduate youth ministry program preparing students for “public church leadership.” In response to their more recent emphasis under President Pribbenow, who has framed their mission as “Called to serve the neighbor,” they launched an Interfaith Scholars Program. By application only, this partnership between the Christensen Center for Vocation, the Religion Department, and Campus Ministry selects a cohort of 10 Interfaith Scholars. They lead interfaith initiatives on campus, learn about both local and global interfaith issues, and participate in a weekly Thursday evening seminar. Participants receive upper-level course credit as well as a scholarship.



Augsburg Interfaith Scholars

While impacting the students, equipping them as faith-rooted leaders for a wide variety of careers, the program influences the campus and wider Minneapolis community, as well. According to one observer, “In this collaboration, young people are learning to work across difference, and faculty and staff are leveraging their academic assets to

advance a social commitment—both bringing a more just and equitable future within closer reach.”

These are three programs showing the particular kind of success we sought to find, but it does not mean in every case they are sustainable in a basic organizational and especially fiscal sense. This remains to be seen, as in each case the initiatives are rather new. This is the case throughout our study, as we noted above, but our prior research shows that there is a remarkable correlation between a vital mission and a sustainable institution for forming faith leaders.⁴⁶ Notably, each of these cases exhibit the characteristics of our overall findings:

- Forming adaptive, learning leaders who are already engaged in responding to real-world challenges.
- Responsive to a widening sense of vocation, beyond preparing leaders for churches and other faith communities.

While it varies depending on the case, secondary findings also appear here:

- Administrators willing to risk.
- Faculty ready to champion new initiatives.
- Experimental spaces for trying out new patterns and programs.

What this microcosm shows, among other things, is that the sorts of changes underway in theological education are responding to the broad social forces outlined above, and so while indigenous elements of innovation will be particular to each place, some of the responsive aims for the innovations will show up as family resemblances, with shared characteristics in how the innovations were effectively launched and nurtured.

Total Reorientation

Earlier, we highlighted Justo González’s call for a “total reorientation” among the full range of mainstream theological schools, which for shorthand he identifies as schools with ATS accreditation. Among the most striking examples of this reorientation, we report on a notable shift away from a “content transfer” model, which assumes schools are clear about what future leaders need to know for effective faith leadership today, to an “adaptive learning” model, which assumes students need to become agile learners in relation to real world challenges. Today’s pressing challenges impact both church and society and require leaders who have on-the-ground experience in leadership, flexible skills and knowledge to equip them for leading communities deeper in faith and broader in mission in order to join God in creating the world God desires for us.

Some of the most interesting examples of innovation in leadership education of this sort are happening, we found, as experimental “side projects.” This should not be surprising. After studying hundreds of business cases, innovation experts Vijay Govindarajan and Chris Trimble argue that “organizations are not designed for innovation.”⁴⁷ Rather, they are designed for ongoing operations, and according to Govindarajan and Trimble, innovation experiments have the best chance at success when they are distinct from ongoing organizations. Similarly, in a respected study of organizational innovation, sociologists Michael Hannan and John Freeman found it is more often the case that new types of organizations arise to meet new circumstances rather than existing organizations altering their structures.⁴⁸

Take, for example, Kodak, an iconic 20th-century print film company that went bankrupt in 2012 just as digital photo sharing company Instagram was taking off, reaching 30 million users in just two years. As the

example of Kodak and Instagram suggest, it should not be surprising to see innovation and a reorientation of theological education more often in schools recently founded. Yet there are schools, such as United, which have created “experiments on the side” and schools that have literally tried to reinvent their basic programs, rebuilding the organization’s main engines while they are running, so to speak. We will explore all three types of change: new starts, experiments on the side, and rebuilding of basic programs as we traverse our case studies to follow. However, to launch our exploration of this dynamic, we will briefly discuss a paradigm case of a “new start” from a parallel profession—engineering. Doing so will highlight some of the key features of the same sort of pedagogical shift we found in theological schools. We believe looking at a peer profession can clarify our vision as we then turn to similar cases of innovation in theological education, some developed as “side experiments” for innovation, and some efforts to reorient the main programs in dramatic ways.

Olin College of Engineering

What's cool: After half a century of funding new facilities for engineering and the sciences at existing colleges, and experiencing frustration at the difficulty of change when inheriting existing cultures of schools and departments, the F. W. Olin Foundation made a radical decision to close and use its substantial remaining funds to found a new school.⁴⁹ They essentially flipped traditional engineering education. President Richard K. Miller describes the shift in a nutshell: “Students start out with an audacious project, which would in many institutions be heretical, except we do that deliberately. Because, after all, when you get hired in a corporation, that’s the first thing that happens to you: they give you a challenge for which you’ve not had the prerequisites. It’s all about learning how to learn. So we do that here from day one.”⁵⁰

Teasing it Apart

Pedagogical

Olin’s curriculum is innovative, built from the ground up to prepare leaders ready for the most pressing challenges facing the world today. For example, rather than making the integrative learning of lab classes a secondary component in support of traditional classroom lectures, Olin created an extensive design core so that a quarter of all classes are based upon collaborative, hands-on design and build work, which integrates student learning.

Programmatic

Rather than leaving design projects which approximate professional practice and real-world challenges until late in the educational program, Olin engages this from the first semester as part of an integrative design stream offering the chance to engage collaboratively with users and develop designs in the context of social and economic considerations. Students are also required to launch an entrepreneurial business project as part of the curriculum, which culminates in a year-long senior project in which teams of students take on a real-world engineering challenge for a sponsoring company.

Institutional

- **ADMINISTRATION:** The Olin Foundation literally “bet the farm” on this experiment, closing its doors to fund the college; further, they risked building a whole new curriculum not based on the past, but what’s needed for the future. Thanks to the large endowment from the Olin foundation and the small class size (about 80 admitted per year), the school offers half tuition merit scholarships to all students.
- **FACULTY:** Olin does not have traditional academic departments, nor does it offer its faculty tenure. Further, the focus on integrative, collaborative, project-based learning also forces the faculty to bring specialized knowledge to bear in multidisciplinary approaches to solving problems. Lynn Andrea Stein, a faculty member, describes her experience: “You need to have a different notion of yourself and your role here. Being ‘sage on the stage’ is problematic when you are trying to encourage intrinsic motivation and encourage students to have ownership of their learning.”⁵¹
- **SPACE:** Olin is, as a new start school, serving as an experimental “second space” for innovation on behalf of the whole field of engineering. As one member of MIT’s curricular revision committee put it, “I look at Olin and I say, ‘Gee, those guys are doing exactly what I wish we could do!’”⁵²



Olin College of Engineering students

City Seminary of New York

What's cool: City Seminary began out of recognition that the global church had come to New York City. When founder Mark Gornik moved to Harlem to help plant a new church, he noticed many new immigrant churches from Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Africa. Many ministry leaders in these churches had no formal theological education, and for a variety of reasons, including their bivocational reality (working a day job and ministering nights and weekends), traditional seminary was not an option. Gornik began to envision founding a new school.⁵³ After a few years of incubation, a two-fold plan emerged. First, the seminary would launch via partnership with Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. This part-time Urban Ministry master's program graduated almost 40 students over a seven-year partnership from 2003–2010. At the same time, a plan slowly emerged for an indigenous learning community with its own programs and, eventually, master's degree. The plan developed from a commitment to see God's presence and work in the midst of two intertwined global realities: the shift of a majority of the world population from rural to urban areas, and the shift of the center of world Christianity from Europe and North America to the Global South. Thus, their mission statement, drawing on the Hebrew Prophet Jeremiah (29:7), is “to seek the peace of the city through theological education.”

Teasing it Apart

Pedagogical

Early on, they developed the idea of cohort-based, deeply contextual, continuum of learning. City Seminary's dean, Maria Liu Wong, has largely led this process. Rather than view the seminary as a discrete process of two or three years, Liu Wong and Gornik are building “a lifelong community of learning and practice with multiple entry points and modes of engagement.”⁵⁴ Here, practice comes before and dynamically interacts continuously with theory, in part because nearly all students are active in ministry when they come to seminary. Also because programs are cohort-based from the start and intentionally make each student's culture and ecclesial background part of the learning process, tacking back and forth between life histories, ministry experiences, critical group reflection, and collaborative inquiry.

Programmatic

The continuum of learning covers multiple programs for students and alumni:

- 1) Occasional seminars, exhibitions and workshops open to the public;
- 2) A regular neighborhood field trip practice called “pray and break bread. NEW YORK CITY”;
- 3) A semester-long certificate program called Ministry Fellows;
- 4) A pending master’s in Ministry in the Global City
- 5) Ongoing research projects like The Next Generation Project; and
- 6) Engaging alumni and faculty with current students in the Alumni Praxis Groups. Key to all these are cutting-edge adult learning practices such as collaborative inquiry-fostering time and space for transformative learning that emerge from the heart of the shared faculty-student work.



Pray and break bread. New York City

Institutional

- **ADMINISTRATION:** Unlike Olin, City Seminary began on faith, constant prayer and a few generous donors rather than big dreams and hundreds of millions in foundation funding to bring it into being. City Seminary started in a Harlem storefront, not in a beautiful newly designed and built campus in suburban Boston. “Hatching” its own programs while under the administrative cover of Westminster Seminary allowed Gornik the time he needed to nurture donors and develop a reputation in the new immigrant community and beyond, driving increased enrollment.
- **FACULTY:** Like Olin, City Seminary has no faculty departments, no tenure, and, the ongoing growth of academic programs and curriculum are integral to shared faculty work. There are no traditional ‘decontextualized” courses, and cohorts of students engage their ministry experiences directly in integrative courses around four emphases: understanding the city, seeing the church in the city, living ministry practices in the city, and spiritual formation for leadership. Academic disciplines and their specialized knowledge are marshaled in support of these integrated, practice-based learning trajectories.
- **SPACE:** Again, like Olin, City Seminary serves as a space of innovation for the field of theological education, and interest in their experiment is spiking. Because they had no existing facility, faculty or curriculum, they were able to let their mission define their work. Thus, the city is a constant “lab” assumed by every part of the curriculum, including “pray and break bread. NEW YORK CITY,” where faculty, students, and alumni study, walk through, and pray for particular neighborhoods in the city, usually with a presentation by a student or friend of the seminary who lives and does ministry in that neighborhood.

Fuller Theological Seminary

What's cool: After a meteoric rise from upstart Evangelical seminary in the 1940s to the world's largest seminary in the 2000s, Fuller Theological Seminary is well on its way to a near total reorientation of its educational enterprise.⁵⁵ Rebuilding the engines while driving full speed is no mean feat, but for most existing seminaries, it is the option before them if they wish to survive and even thrive. Broader challenges impacted Fuller's move: With nearly a one-third drop in student enrollment over the last decade and rising student debt, the seminary found itself facing an increasingly unsustainable financial model. In addition, an in-depth alumni study found significant disconnect between the more traditional academic curricula and the challenging and diverse ministry contexts in which graduates found themselves working. After a failed curricular revision process in the mid-2000s, a new leadership team was formed in 2012 to again seek change. Rather than merely reducing credits to make the programs more affordable, key leaders saw an opportunity to redesign core programs around leadership formation rather than academic, discipline-based learning.⁵⁶

Teasing it Apart

Programmatic

A focus on practices—vocational and leadership—helped focus the rebuilding. Formation practices include vocation, worship and prayer, community, and mission. Leadership practices, cleverly encompassing traditional academic areas, include interpreting, theologizing, ministering and contextualizing. Traditional courses in Bible, history, theology, ministry and mission were recast and became less about mastering a body of knowledge and more about using classic disciplines for the sake of leadership in a changing global context for ministry. While reducing the overall credits dramatically, Fuller added a new backbone of four integrative vocational formation courses starting with a first semester “touchstone” course, and three subsequent courses with the goal of forming agile leaders for a changing church and world.

Pedagogical

The first-year touchstone course, shared by all master's students, flips theory and practice by taking seriously the changing nature of students. They come with a looser sense of vocation, unsure about direction, and in need of immersion in vocational discernment, spiritual practices, and self-assessment in conversation with peers and practitioner-mentors. This course embodies—and launches—a whole curricular shift to focus on practices of vocation and leadership. Three subsequent vocational courses—focus on worship (relation to God), community (relationship to church) and mission (relationship to the world) include “vocation and formation” groups with the same practitioner-mentor throughout. Each course asks students to repeatedly reflect on the fundamental question: “At this point of your Christian journey, how do you envision your call to God’s mission in the world?”

Institutional

- **ADMINISTRATION:** In order to launch conversation about change, Academic Dean Scott Cormode got the whole faculty to view the lecture by Clayton Christensen on the internet as a disruptive innovation in higher education. In light of the major changes in the world and in education, they shifted the whole goal of the school to focus on “forming global leaders for Kingdom vocations.” Key to real-world engagement, President Labberton appointed a new Vice President, Tod Bolsinger, to tend the four key integration courses and to guide integrative course planning in partnership with faculty, ministry practitioners, and their diverse contexts of ministry. These partnerships allow for an ongoing grounding in real-world challenges. For example, a Latina immigrant student working in a new-immigrant Korean Methodist church applied for funding to support a social justice internship project which mobilizes and trains mentors to provide college preparation for girls, helping them overcome significant obstacles.
- **FACULTY:** An “Educational Models Team” led planning for the changes. Drawing membership from every division, including respected leaders from bible and theology. Two particular leaders

were crucial, both from the Bible area. Joel Green, a well-regarded senior faculty member, became a champion for the changes, a crucial move for gaining wide faculty buy-in. Second, Love Sechrest, a junior faculty member with extensive executive experience in the corporate world, led the new models work. Dramatic challenges face the faculty in living into these newly redesigned curricula. Like most faculty of theological schools, they remain organized by academic disciplines (theology, Bible, history and missions) though these silos no longer organize their shared work within the curricula. However, as Sechrest put it, the “misalignment between the curricular arrangement and the organizational structure creates organizational inefficiencies, producing stress.” It remains to be seen if, like Olin and City Seminary, they will do away with traditional faculty divisions or departments. In fact, they currently have parallel structures—the long-standing departments divided by academic disciplines, and new interdisciplinary teams who design and lead the four integrative courses that focus on vocation.

- **SPACE:** In a bold move, these changes were enacted throughout Fuller’s modes of delivery—its main campus in Pasadena, its regional campuses, and in online and hybrid courses, as well as in both M.Div. and M.A. programs.



Fuller Theological Seminary campus

Modes of Innovation

10 CASE STUDIES

We have chosen to highlight ten bright spot schools and a church whose work is forming faith leaders. They are, of course, not the only bright spots in the field of education for faith leadership, and in that sense are meant more as conversation starters rather than as the end of the story. In fact, the story of the transformation of theological education is very much in process, and as a marker of this, in some cases we note similar organizations that exhibit family resemblances. We invite you to use these cases, and those above as well, as provocation for thinking in creative ways about the indigenous possibilities for innovation in your organization. This report's website will have space for you to add your stories of other bright spots, thus contributing to the emerging and very generative conversation about the many innovative and interesting experiments and initiatives being tried in theological schools, and in institutions of theological education more broadly understood.

Methodist Theological School in Ohio

What's cool: Methodist Theological School has long been committed to civil rights and racial justice. It had taken on only the typical environmental commitments—building energy audits, recycling, and elective courses or concentrations in ecology and theology. In 2014, Methodist took a leap of faith. In partnership with an organic farmer, they turned over the soil of their 80-acre campus in rural Ohio to found Seminary Hill Farm. Much of the fresh produce needed for the seminary dining room is now grown on the organic farm and food-shares may be purchased by anyone in the community. Some energy on campus is produced via a solar array, with considerations underway to add more capacity, as well as wind and geothermal. “Students have asked for us to align campus life better with the what we’re teaching in classes on ethics and the environment, theology and ecology,” according to seminary president, Jay Rundell.⁵⁷ Because of student interest in deeper, more integrated commitments to justice and ecology, and training in practical ministry leadership at these intersections, campus life now orbits around major commitments to the integration of racial and ecological justice. For instance, partnerships with alumni serving inner-city congregations in Columbus allow for vital rural-urban partnerships, make healthy fresh food available in some of the “food deserts” in the city, and bring urban youth to campus for farming intensives.

Teasing it Apart

Pedagogical

Dean Lisa Withrow was central in moving from having a farm to a goal to make the life of the seminary as a whole a lab for experimenting in God's dream of a just and sustainable life for people and the earth. As outlined in their "Sustainability and Land Initiative", they view sustainability not just as a subject of study but also as an integrative programmatic theme for the school. "In such a role sustainability can facilitate dialogue between disciplines, denominations, religions, and demographic groups."

Programmatic

Ecology and Social Justice is offered as a stand-alone specialization for a master's degree in Practical Theology, or may be taken as a specific focus for Master of Divinity students. The current faculty is offering increasing numbers of courses on ecology issues, and a new faculty position in "Theology, Ecology and Race" will begin in 2017. The farm serves as a potential internship site for students, and many classes take part in the fieldwork.



Methodist Theological School in Ohio

Institutional

- **ADMINISTRATION:** In Methodist's case, the key was President Rundell's imagination and willingness to risk. For years, faculty and students in an ecology course had been walking the seminary lands, asking how to live more sustainably on the land. So in the fall of 2013, when the president met a farmer looking for land to farm, the partnership idea popped. Two weeks later a proposal was before the board. "Blank looks quickly turned to excitement," Rundell said. By January, the farm had begun, and by the February 2014 board meeting, meals were partly grown in newly built green houses.
- **FACULTY:** Moral passion on the part of a few faculty and their students led to a growing commitment to practice justice and ecological sustainability. Key here was faculty empowerment of students' passions and leadership. One faculty leader, Timothy Van Meter, said, "Students are not waiting on the church to do this; they are not interested in saving the church, but rather drawing the church into God's work of loving the world, and working for its healing and renewal."
- **SPACE:** A major element of the bright spots approach is to recognize indigenous resources which, when seen in a new light, become a source of new vitality. This was the case here. The renewal of the seminary is emerging from this new imagination regarding use of their land in relation to their core mission, and in turn, their core mission is sharpening in its focus and vitality, as well.

Family Resemblances:

- Wake Forest University and School of Divinity and its Food, Faith, and Religious Leadership Initiative.
- Drew University Theological School and the Green Seminaries Initiative which it hosts and helps to lead.⁵⁸
- Princeton Seminary's Farnary

(See also: the important "Report on Faith and Ecology Courses in North American Seminaries" by The Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development⁵⁹)

Western Theological Seminary

What's cool: In light of the slow loosening of public connections to and understanding of faith communities, Western Theological Seminary realized its vital future was connected to lively, public engagement in their own community of Holland, Michigan. Over the last decade, the school has embraced its community through multiple innovative initiatives including a Community Kitchen that offers free lunches, hosting a Hispanic Bible Institute, and providing housing for adults with cognitive disabilities. The free lunches occur every weekday, with Western hosting from 75 to 200 people for a lunch prepared by community volunteers, assisted by seminary students, faculty, and staff.⁶⁰ As the elderly, homeless, or others in need mingle over a meal with staff, students and faculty, unlikely friendships develop. Instituto Biblico Ebenezer (IBE) now shares space on Monday evenings, training 20+ Hispanic ministry leaders. At Friendship House, six special-needs adults live in six apartments on campus and welcome 18 seminary students to share their apartments each year.⁶¹

Teasing it Apart

Pedagogical

Rather than any one thing, it is the integration of public-minded, faith-rooted, shared life and learning which allows Western to prepare leaders for the challenges of ministry today. A strong formation focus, under the title “learning by doing,” connects classroom and real-world ministry leadership.

Programmatic

A new Graduate Certificate in Disability and Ministry, the first such certificate offered by any Association of Theological Schools’ accredited school, grew out of this experience. Students at Ebenezer Bible Institute migrate into courses at Western as part of their deepening learning journey. This track, Advanced Latino/a Theological Education Courses, covers the range of traditional curricular areas in seminary: Bible, history, theology, ministry and culture.



Western Theological Seminary

Institutional

- **ADMINISTRATION:** The president, Timothy Brown, has been willing to risk supporting new initiatives building on their first effort, the Community Kitchen. Brown's predecessor at Western, Dennis Voskuil, had the original vision for the Friendship House. was discussing with someone at church the need to build more student housing. The church member shared with him the frustration his family experienced trying to find adequate housing for his adult son with Down's Syndrome. The question, "Why not do both?" led to the founding of Friendship House. IBE was similarly started out of a conversation when Brown invited a dozen Hispanic pastors to lunch a couple years ago and asked them, "Western Theological Seminary would be a better place if you were a part of it. Would you be willing to hold your classes here?" What they needed was classroom space for IBE, their Spanish-language bible and ministry leadership school. Now, Brown or one of the faculty hosts up to twenty pastors on Monday evenings, offering them meeting space, use of the library, storage space for their books and classroom materials, and of course, coffee.

- **FACULTY:** A faculty champion of these initiatives, Professor Thomas Boogaart reflected on the beginnings, "I helped start the Community Kitchen and there was some push-back from faculty, staff and the board. It nearly got me fired. But it was a game changer. It changed our relationship with the community of Holland and was one of the reasons we were able to start the Fellowship House." Professor Kyle Small has been a champion of formation, leading the "learning by doing" piece of the curriculum and championing the integration of world, ministry contexts, classrooms and campus life.
- **SPACE:** Crucial to Western's story is listening to the needs of the community on the one hand, and to the needs of their students, on the other, and building innovations to serve the formation of leaders ready for the challenges of a troubled world. This has, in cases like IBE or The Community Kitchen, meant creative repurposing of existing space, and the case of Friendship House, creating a new space for an initiative to be planted and grow.

Family Resemblances

- Duke University Divinity School and its Friendship House for co-housing for students and persons with intellectual/developmental disabilities.⁶²

Candler School of Theology, Emory University

What's cool: Candler was among the earliest schools to recognize the power of cohort-based immersion in community organizations—prisons, low-income housing, refugee communities, homeless shelters—in the formation of faith leaders. They have made contextual education the heart of the curriculum, intentionally integrating theological education with opportunities for formation in ministry and leadership in diverse settings. All first-year Candler M.Div. students must choose, prior to arriving on campus, the community or social ministry they would like to be engaged in and where they would like to work during their first year of seminary. The options include pastoral care for women in a state prison, ministry to low-income seniors, providing transitional help for refugees, working with the homeless, serving as chaplains at a hospital, providing mentoring and guidance for youth in the juvenile justice system, offering comfort to terminally and critically ill men in prison or working with women in a work-release program. Each site offers a group of 10 to 12 Candler students with a minimum of four hours of work per week. In addition, students spend an hour and a half each week in a reflection group with the on-site supervisor in the fall, and two hours in a weekly seminar co-taught by the site supervisor and a faculty member in the spring.

One of the more dramatic examples of this program's impact has emerged from Professor Elizabeth Bounds' decades of leadership at the Lee Arrendale State Prison, Georgia's largest women's prison. Among other activities at Arrendale, Candler students help lead a certificate program in theological studies for incarcerated women. One of the program's graduates, Kelly Gissendaner, was on death row. As her execution neared, students, staff, faculty and alumni participated in a movement to have her death sentence commuted to life in prison and to end the death penalty in Georgia.⁶³ Sadly, the execution was carried out, and Georgia remains not only one of 31 states with the death penalty, but one of the few actively performing executions.



Candler School of Theology

Teasing it Apart

Pedagogical

In the spring of the first year, an Integrative Seminar is collaboratively designed and co-taught by the supervisor and a faculty member from Candler. Key to the success of this integrative work, every professor at Candler, regardless of whether if they teach Hebrew Bible or church history or ministry leadership, is tasked with integrating their academic discipline with students' on-the-ground ministry experiences. Second year M.Div. students complete a year-long placement in an ecclesial setting; this work is paired with reflection groups and arts of ministry courses. In addition, they take an elective course designed to help them integrate classroom learning and contextual experiences. These Contextual Education Electives, offered by faculty in all areas of the curriculum, require students to use material from the course in their site work and make site experiences foundational to class assignments.

Programmatic

The deep investment in a broad array of learning contexts beyond the church, expands the imagination about what forms ministry might take and opens Candler's programs to the widening sense of vocation students come with. As an example, after completing her yearlong Contextual Education placement at the Lee Arrendale women's prison, Bethany Kotlar, a Candler MDiv-MPH student with a focus on theology

and public health, helped to launch a project called "Motherhood Beyond Bars." This program now offers nine-week childbirth education and prenatal yoga at the Helms Facility (which houses all of the pregnant inmates in the Georgia prison system), as well as a six-month health class for new mothers at Arrendale. The class covers postpartum holistic health and parenting from prison.

Institutional

- **ADMINISTRATION:** A series of deans committed to the life of the church, including current dean Jan Love, have upheld the centrality of curricular integration and formative leadership experiences. Candler's motto—"Preparing real people to make a real difference in the real world"—is indeed more than just talk; it is lived. This commitment extends to the seminary's newer degree offerings, as well. The Masters of Religious Leadership (MRL) requires two semesters of contextual experience related to student's vocational aims.
- **FACULTY:** Initially, New Testament scholar Luke Timothy Johnson was a champion for moving contextual education to the center of the curriculum, and for full faculty participation. More recently, church historian Jonathan Strom championed the agreement that all faculty offer one course with a contextual emphasis, and rotate through planning and teaching in partnership with a site supervisor or ministry leader.
- **SPACE:** The powerful shift Candler embraced is shaped by a profound regard for the diverse contexts of ministry leadership, treating them as central rather than marginal in the work of forming faith leaders. Rather than creating an "experimental second space" for innovation, the innovation in effect happens "between" context and classroom, in the dynamism of reflective engagement around learning about real world leadership in the midst of real world situations.

Family Resemblances

- Meadville Lombard Theological School's "contextual learning model of theological education."⁶⁴

Northwest Baptist Seminary

What's cool: In response to reports from supporting churches that graduates were not ready for the challenges of church and world, Northwest Baptist Seminary created the Immerse program which completely flips traditional theological education. Rather than an academic education based in classrooms with experiential learning in ministry settings as a secondary (in every meaning of the term) aspect of the program, Immerse asks ministry leaders to stay in context, immersed in their work in church and society, and the academic coursework is delivered secondarily (not devalued, but repositioned so as to serve the learning leaders busy out in the world.⁶⁵ Furthermore, academic work is positioned in relationship to students gaining mastery of a set of ministry leadership competencies which, when demonstrated, signal completion of the degree program.⁶⁶

Teasing it Apart

Pedagogical

The Immerse program focuses on

- 1) mentoring (each student is assigned three mentors: a pastor, denominational representative, and an academic mentor),
- 2) mastery of twenty-seven Ministry Leadership Outcomes and
- 3) the integration of learning and practice.

The twenty-seven Ministry Leadership Outcomes are organized around Mission, Manner (the way leaders help churches achieve their mission) and Mode (which are personal, relational and structural). Students earn

credit solely by proving their mastery of the program outcomes and move through the program at their own pace. Immerse can be completed in four years, and upon completion, the student is awarded the M.Div. degree.

Programmatic

Students who are attracted to Immerse are frequently already working in a congregation and often have outside jobs as well. They are not interested in sitting in a classroom for three years and want to avoid taking on student debt in order to get their degree. Immerse provides a way for them to continue working while gaining skills and knowledge they can immediately bring to bear in church and society.



Northwest Baptist Seminary

Institutional

- **ADMINISTRATION:** The decision to go in this direction was difficult. President Kent Anderson said the churches they serve gave them hard feedback. “Well, it was mostly the church telling us how we’d failed. That’s real, and the truth is, we knew we were failing in many ways. It’s not that we were doing bad things in the classic approach or that we weren’t trying hard or that we didn’t care or anything like that. But we’ve been doing things pretty much the same way for a very long time, and the world has changed.”
- **FACULTY:** The transition to the new model was difficult for the faculty. The shift from a “content transfer” mode in a decontextualized classroom to an “adaptive learning” mode primarily situated in real-world ministry contexts felt to some like a rejection of what they had been faithfully doing for many years. According to Anderson, what it came down to is the seminary saying to the churches, “Yes, we agree with that assessment [that what we’re doing isn’t working any longer]. You guys bring something that we can’t bring, and we value what you bring, and want to respect it and build it into the system by which we train our leaders. But at the same time, you have to understand that we bring some things that you can’t bring very well.”

- **SPACE:** While continuing with their traditional M.Div. on campus, launching Immerse used congregations and other ministry contexts as an “experimental space” for building a new and innovative M.Div. and allowing it to grow and gain strength as a distinct and separate entity. In fact, the trial innovation on the side has now replaced the traditional M.Div. and Immerse has become the basic program structure for delivering the M.Div. degree.

Family Resemblances

- Lexington Theological Seminary competency and context-based M.Div.⁶²

Asociación para La Educación Teológica Hispana (AETH)

What's cool: AETH and the Hispanic Bible Institutes it represents and serves center their educational initiatives in context-based ministry leadership formation. Their prominence is rising as major demographic transitions are remaking the church in the United States. According to the Pew Research Center, the Hispanic population in the United States grew to over 55 million in 2014. While a majority of the Hispanic population is Catholic, almost a quarter (22 percent or about 12 million) now identify as Protestant and most of these describe themselves as evangelical, Pentecostal or charismatic Protestants.⁶⁸ These numbers translate into tens of thousands of churches across the US where Latin@s worship each weekend, churches that need trained leadership. Fernando Cascante, Executive Director of Asociación para la Educación Teológica Hispana (AETH) told us: “Part of the appeal of Bible institutes is that they are flexible, affordable, and students can start right away. Mission-oriented churches that are rapidly expanding can’t wait three or four years to train a pastor.” Many Latin@ church leaders also lack the baccalaureate-level diploma required of graduate-level seminaries. Time, money, access, language, and qualifications prevent most Hispanic pastors from enrolling in traditional theological schools. Responding to this need, the AETH was founded in 1991 to “Prepare Leaders to Radically Transform the Latino Church and Community.”⁶⁹

Teasing it Apart

Pedagogical

The focus is leadership education, including basic communication skills (writing, speaking), ministry leadership, and deeper engagement with the bible. The assumption is that students will be working in ministry, and that the courses are adjunct to and supportive of that ongoing ministry leadership.

Programmatic

The Association seeks to promote and enhance Hispanic Bible institutes, Bible colleges and seminaries by supporting educational programs, providing theological resources in Spanish and English, channeling opportunities for cooperation and communication between schools, fostering spiritual, professional, and institutional development among its members, and by working towards greater enrollment of Hispanics in these institutions. AETH understands theological education as a continuum between the local congregation, the Bible institute, and the seminary.



Group of graduates of the 2016 class at the Hispanic Center of Theological Studies, in Compton-CA. CHET (for its name in Spanish) is one of the institutions already certified by AETH.

Institutional

- **ADMINISTRATION:** AETH has worked with The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) in the creation of a Certification Process for eligible Bible institutes that the ATS recognizes as being in compliance with the requirements for baccalaureate degree equivalency. This would enable graduates of these certificate programs to enroll in master's programs at ATS schools. There are four such programs already certified in different parts of the country, and ten others in various stages of the process of certification.
- **FACULTY:** The vast majority of Latin@ pastors are preparing for ministry in small Hispanic Bible institutes or schools, not in graduate-level seminaries or divinity schools. The faculty is less likely than their traditional seminary colleagues to have Ph.D. level training or to be full-time faculty. Most are actively working in ministry, have graduated from Bible Institutes themselves, and have gone on to gain a Bachelor's and, often, Master's degrees in ministry. AETH's plan in the next few years includes a project seeking the professional development of instructors at Bible institutes across the country.
- **SPACE:** This is a nimble and low-overhead institutional space. Its entrepreneurial spirit is shown by the literally hundreds of these schools across the country, usually based in a congregation and begun by a pastor. Many are small and enroll less than 50 students. Others are well established with boards, buildings, full-time faculty, and enrollment in the hundreds.²⁰

Family Resemblances

- Esperanza College of Eastern University.²¹
- McCormick Seminary and its Certificate in Latin@ Theology and Ministry in partnership with Asamblea Apostolica de la fe en Cristo Jesus, a fast-growing Pentecostal denomination.²²

Judson Memorial Church, NYC

What's cool: Recognizing that the church is an important place for student formation in ministry, most seminaries and denominations require some form of internship for their Master's degree students, and thousands of churches across the United States and Canada step forward each year to act as teaching sites for training and mentoring pastors. It is usually only a small part of the overall degree requirements that are heavily focused on coursework in the classroom. Recognizing critical development of leadership formation can only take place in context, Judson Memorial Church in New York City has piloted a more intensive program of congregational mentoring and leadership formation based on a Clinical Pastoral Education model of experiential learning and group reflection.⁷³

What they do is varied and no two Community Ministers are alike. Some of the seminary students, when they interview with Dr. Donna Schaper, senior pastor, know exactly what they want to do. They may be passionate for theatre and know Judson's reputation as an avant-garde venue for the arts. They may want to learn more about community organizing or want to focus their ministry with homeless youth, or the LGBTQ community. One young man had been involved in the Restaurant Workers' Union prior to coming to seminary. "You'll be the chaplain to the Restaurant Worker's Union," announced Schaper and by the next week the church had printed business cards for David and he indeed became chaplain for the Union. The modus operandi is to trust the Community Ministers to learn on the fly, and they do. "We got tough pastoral care

assignments when we were at Judson," one alumna recalled, "and it was good for us. Donna would just assign us someone and let us go and we had to figure it out ourselves."

Teasing it Apart

Pedagogical

In most internships, seminarians spend a few hours a week in a congregation helping with worship, education, and youth, and learning from their supervising minister how to 'do' ministry. The model at Judson, rather, is to discover what public ministry the seminarian is passionate about and encourage him or her to pursue that interest and to involve members of the church community in that mission. The

commitment is 15 hours a week, including worship and a three-hour Friday afternoon seminar led by Schaper together with the Community Ministers themselves, a couple of lay leaders, and topical guest experts. The seminar allows for student presentations, discussion of church issues, and guest speakers on a variety of topics related to congregational life and broader public concerns.



Judson Memorial Church

Programmatic

Judson welcomes seminarians who have little idea what they will be doing with their seminary degree once they graduate since ‘normal’ church positions their classmates are eager to accept typically hold little allure for them. One CM alumnus who is now pastoring a church remarked, “I knew I was called to ministry, but I had no idea what I would be doing...I thought there was no way I would end up at a church. I thought I’d be involved in some justice ministry work, maybe related to a church, but not a church.” In fact, he ended up loving his position as a pastor of a vital, justice-minded congregation.

Institutional

- **ADMINISTRATION:** Key to this program is trust and support from the lay leadership of the congregation in becoming a ‘teaching church,’ and hosting the Community Ministers’ Program. Initial funding came from a Foundation, but increasingly costs are born by the congregation or must be raised each year from other donors.
- **FACULTY:** Donna Schaper began the program a decade ago, convinced seminaries did not combine deep formation and the integration of congregational life and public ministry leadership. A second faculty influence is seminary Field Education directors. They often place students at Judson who are difficult to place elsewhere. A director of Field Education commented, “It (the CM program) works best with misfits and self-starters, not people who are traditional or wanting a traditional church experience.... It serves those on the fringes of the established church...many of the students I refer to Judson have few religious ties and once they get to Judson, for the most part, they are smitten, by what they find and what they can do.”
- **SPACE:** Because Judson conceives of itself as an experimental space on the edge of the church, its Community Ministry program functions as a vocational incubator for students unsure of their vocational goals, showing them how they can remain in the church and lead it in new directions.

Family Resemblances

- Transition into Ministry programs, for example at Concord Baptist, Brooklyn, NY or Wilshire Baptist, Dallas, TX.⁷⁴
- Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary’s Fellowships in Pastoral Leadership for Public Life.⁷⁵

Center for Inter-Religious and Communal Leadership Education (CIRCLE)

What's cool: Even in innovative institutions, the forces of religious change can be dramatic and there are no guarantees of survival. CIRCLE, a partnership of Hebrew College and Andover Newton, is a pioneering program in interfaith leadership formation, yet its exciting future was put in jeopardy as a result of Andover Newton's struggle with decreasing enrollment and the financial challenges of an aging campus. We conclude with a comment on these challenges and future directions for this remarkable program.

In 2002, Hebrew College moved to land adjacent to Andover Newton and thus began a new partnership in interfaith cooperation and learning between the seminary and the rabbinical school. Proximity and curiosity of students at the two schools led to increasing levels of cooperation. After the two presidents began weekly breakfasts and faculty began initial experiments in co-teaching, Hebrew College and ANTS together founded CIRCLE (the Center for Inter-Religious and Communal Leadership Education). The leap for the two schools was recognizing the need to move beyond the history of religions mode of teaching about other faiths, and instead engage in leadership formation for 21st-century challenges with multifaith classes learning together.²⁶

Teasing it Apart

Pedagogical

The two schools, along with CIRCLE, committed to the premise that the training of contemporary religious leaders should include regular and substantive encounters with individuals from other faith communities. The faculty is committed to the idea that effective interfaith education “requires the religious and civic leader in formation to articulate her or his religious commitments with clarity and conviction, while remaining open to learning from people with different beliefs and practices.” While various leadership courses are offered, they are in the context of a whole range of activities that engage faculty and students from both campuses as well as individuals from the wider community.

Programmatic

CIRCLE offers lectures, a yearlong cohort-based fellowship, and most recently an innovative joint Master of Arts degree in Global Interreligious Leadership. The purpose of this program is to teach graduates how to address root causes of interfaith tensions in the world, to provide them with a global perspective on faith and life, and to equip them to be leaders of interfaith organizations. CIRCLE Community Days are held each semester to bring the communities together and most recently, the schools have shared an appointment of an Islamic scholar-in-residence who teaches on both campuses.

Institutional

- **ADMINISTRATION:** The early commitment of the two presidents to weekly lunches, without an agenda but intending to build friendship, had a profound impact on the development of all the cooperation that has since emerged. Even as the leading players changed, including new presidents, their continued prioritization of CIRCLE assured its growth amidst pressures to cut back on both staff and programs.
- **FACULTY:** Broad buy-in from faculty at both institutions was crucial to the development of CIRCLE. Pairs of co-teachers from the two schools design and teach courses to Hebrew College and ANTS students together, focusing on themes and topics where there is mutual interest, for instance, pastoral care, preaching, social justice or scripture. These partnerships across faith traditions were inspired by pioneering students who began meeting together soon after Hebrew College co-located next to ANTS. Parity and partnership have become signature dimensions of all CIRCLE's programming. Interfaith student fellowships, for example, require students from two different faith traditions to apply together on topics of shared concern.
- **SPACE:** CIRCLE, with its home in a former president's house between the two campuses, provides a "experimental second space" which is neither Hebrew College or Andover Newton, a crucial element in allowing a new thing to grow over time, finding truly innovative directions beyond its sponsor schools.

In November 2015, President Martin Copenhaver sent a letter to the ANTS community announcing that the school must move in a bold new direction to ensure our work and mission continue to thrive. In part, this is necessitated by seismic changes that are taking place in the church and, by extension, in theological education." Copenhaver goes on to discuss many of the challenges facing ANTS, challenges outlined in the introduction to this report: decline in the applicant pool, rising student debt, changing needs of congregations and the broader culture. As of this writing, Andover plans a phased affiliation with Yale Divinity School, continuing in a much-reduced presence as Andover Newton at Yale.²⁷ The future of CIRCLE, albeit in somewhat different form, was secured by a major endowment gift from Dan Miller, a member of Hebrew College Board of Trustees in honor of his late wife, Betty Ann Greenbaum Miller. Miller was one of the early Hebrew College students who reached out to ANTS students and formed the first cohort of interreligious conversation partners—an important precursor to CIRCLE's work. Hebrew College will carry forward with CIRCLE, working closely with Andover Newton during an extended transition period.²⁸

Family Resemblances

- New York University's Global Spiritual Life Center, Minor in Multifaith and Spiritual Leadership, and its Global Spiritual Life Fellowship.



Celine Ibrahim-Lizzie, Jennifer Howe Peace, and Or Rose, Co-directors of CIRCLE

Zaytuna College

Zaytuna College, the first Muslim liberal arts college in the USA, is explicitly preparing women and men for a wide diversity of vocations in society.⁷⁹ Zaytuna College is rooted in The Zaytuna Institute, founded in 1996 with a focus on education and publication. The Institute launched a pilot seminary program in 2004, graduating five students in 2008. After an in-depth strategic planning process, Zaytuna College was launched in 2009 and welcomed its first undergraduate class in fall of 2010. Dramatically located on Berkeley's historic "Holy Hill," home to more than half a dozen seminaries, Zaytuna is housed in a former Disciples of Christ Church and The Franciscan School of Theology (which in the face of declining enrollment, moved to join the University of San Diego in 2014). Zaytuna has a long-standing working relationship with the Center for Islamic Studies at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. Part of the vitality at Zaytuna, felt as soon as one walks into the welcoming foyer of the main building, is the deep faith which pervades all they do. It is, as one commentator noted, "something of an academic hybrid." It includes a robust commitment to liberal arts, with a mission calling for grounding students in the Islamic scholarly tradition as well as in the cultural currents and critical ideas shaping modern society.⁸⁰

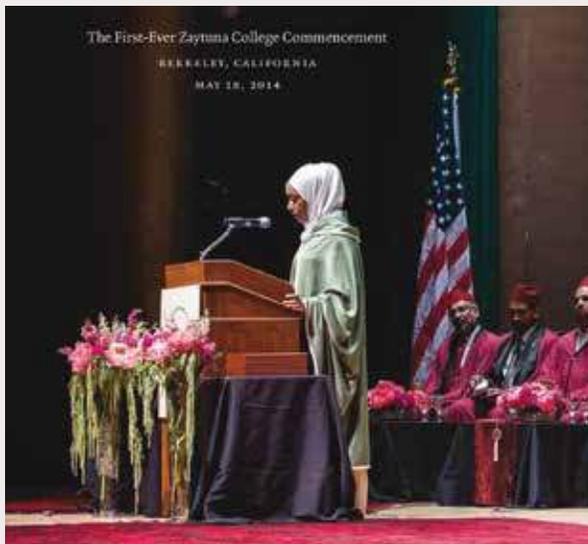
Teasing it Apart

Pedagogical

Zaytuna’s deeply integrated curriculum emerges from the Arabic term *adab*—a complex term related to fully formed humaneness. This is demonstrated by deep academic study, development of high moral character, a focus on the interrelatedness of all subjects of study, and community building through public service. Influenced by the Great Books tradition, all students begin in a cohort Arabic intensive the summer before matriculating, and take Arabic all four years. Thus, classical Islamic literature is read in the original.

Programmatic

Islamic literature is read in relation to its relevance to the present world, an emphasis most clearly embodied by faculty member Dawood Yasin, Coordinator of Learning Outside the Classroom. His aim is to prepare students for lives of service and leadership. Through required internships and experiential learning immersion trips like a recent trip to Ferguson MO to explore issues of racial injustice, students are challenged to grow in intellectual curiosity and to become caring, responsible human beings, committed to the stewardship of all creation, especially of the weak and vulnerable.



Zaytuna College Commencement

Institutional

- **ADMINISTRATION:** Strong vision, partnership, and major fundraising are behind Zaytuna’s rise. Co-founders Zaid Shakir and Hatem Bazian, currently members of the board of trustees, and Zaytuna President Hamza Yusuf, are among the most prominent Muslim leaders in the United States. In a post-9/11 anti-Muslim climate, President Yusuf and Dean Mahan Mirza have strongly advocated for a faithful and justice-minded civic role for Zaytuna and its graduates in American life.
- **FACULTY:** The faculty are committed to a curriculum which while committed to academic fundamentals, is simultaneously highly attentive to the development of the whole person, and inclusive of a range of activities including prayer, study, shared meals, field trips, and internships. While the academics are rigorous, including required Arabic and engagement with classic texts in their original language, these are turned towards questions of what sorts of persons students are becoming, and how this serves the needs of the world today.
- **SPACE:** Clearly, it was a distinctive and influential choice to locate in the midst of one of the most well-known centers of theological education in the world. It is no small part of the story, and speaks to their welcome, that Zaytuna was invited to purchase its buildings by the Christian institutions that owned them. Location on “Holy Hill” brings prestige and resources, not only from the GTU but also from near-by University of California, Berkeley.

Seattle University School of Theology and Ministry

What's cool: Located in what recent Pew surveys on religious affiliation reveal to be the least religious region of the country, Seattle University, a Jesuit Catholic institution, developed a dynamic master's program in Transformational Leadership.⁸¹ The program is at the vanguard of the of the school's effort to reach those "spiritual but not religious" professionals interested in combining leadership, spirituality, and social change. While continuing its traditional Master of Divinity program, which prepares students for professional leadership in the church, the new master's degree allowed Seattle University to reach those who have a wider and more varied sense of calling than the typical seminary student of past generations. In response to survey findings that the Millennial generation desires a more integrated, holistic life, the school created this program to move beyond "black and white" divides between personal and professional, spiritual and religious, secular and faith-based. Students in the transformational leadership program are invited to "bring their whole selves to work, whether they find themselves in corporations, nonprofits, churches and faith-based organizations, or other corners of the marketplace."⁸²

Teasing it Apart

Pedagogical

A recent (2013) graduate, Noah Baskett, who works on educational equity issues, describes the crucial pedagogical shift embodied in the program. “For me, the power of the Transformational Leadership degree resides in its method: pushing theological reflection to its most practical implications in our urban world. Demanding that leadership needed in our world today must have an eye toward justice on behalf of the ‘least of these,’ the program pressed us to consider what it means for leadership to take this charge seriously. A dynamic integration of in-context leadership practice (via an internship program) and classroom learning finds a home in a two-part course sequence at the heart of the program, Integration of Transformational Leadership for Justice I and II.



Dean Mark Markuly

Programmatic

Embodying directly our programmatic finding, the Transformational Leadership master’s degree casts a wider view of ministry leadership: from an HIV/AIDS Case Manager to a non-profit executive director to leadership in environmental activism. It is not surprising, then, to find it is one of the schools fastest growing programs.

Institutional

- **ADMINISTRATION:** In developing this new program soon after arriving at the school in 2008, Dean Mark Markuly took the risk of trying to reach a new and uncertain constituency. He described it as a “mission-driven decision.” Even more strongly, he argued if a school did not seek to engage area residents who are engaged in spirituality, who are deeply ethical in their living, then “you are not doing your job.”
- **FACULTY:** The program requires not only a range of new, broader courses in the skills of leadership, it also requires a shift in agility regarding students who come with both a more diverse range of spiritual convictions and practices as well as a wider sense of callings. In addition, many of the students are active professionals, seeking to immediately use learnings in their professional practice.
- **SPACE:** The experimental space for this program is deep attention to the world through a robust contextual education process that listens to and reflects on the real leadership challenges students face in their places of work.

Family Resemblances

- Asbury Theological Seminary M.A. in Christian Leadership.
- Pacific School of Religion, M.A. in Social Transformation.
- Christian Theological Seminary and its OPEN Master of Divinity.

Central Baptist Theological Seminary

What's cool: Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Shawnee, Kansas is an example of an institution that was forced to change or die, and in the process of change was able to respond creatively to the need and challenges students and graduates face in their ministry. Central was faced with declining enrollment, financial problems and deferred maintenance costs on an old campus that topped \$25 million. Extraordinary times call for extraordinary leadership and Dr. Molly T. Marshall, then Professor of Theology and Spiritual Formation at Central, stepped up and took the helm of this sinking ship in 2004. “I believed we had a mission yet to go, and I believed that we could find creative ways to deliver it,” Marshall said. “I began to see that creativity is one of the most important leadership qualities for a seminary president - a willingness to try some things, not be risk-averse, and challenge a board to move nimbly.”⁸³ While in her 12 years of leadership many things have changed, the bright spot example for our study was Central Baptist’s unique leadership formation initiative for women—and especially women of color. Marshall, herself a pioneering woman in Baptist life and ministry, felt a specific call to help build women’s leadership in the church. Her answer was to build the Women’s Leadership Initiative (WLI), a special cohort-based Master of Divinity program based in Nashville, TN. The program was modeled on a highly successful experimental version of the Master of Divinity called the Create Program launched in 2009 to offer young (22- to 35-year-old) candidates for ministry a degree option grounded in immersion experiences, leadership education, and entrepreneurial skills for the rapid changes of 21st century ministry.

Teasing it Apart

Pedagogical

The goal is to develop a revised Master of Divinity focused on contextual and skill-based knowledge needed for women's leadership in the 21st century. The radically changed Master of Divinity curriculum focused on ministry (job) ready graduates, learner-centered education, an integrated curriculum and mastery of essential ministry competencies. Students progress sequentially through the curriculum in cohorts, working with mentors and coaches to build competencies to professional levels by graduation.

Programmatic

A key element to widening the scope of potential women applicants, especially from marginalized and underprivileged communities, is major donor support which allowed a tuition-free program for all accepted students. The cohort model and built-in mentors and coaches for students assure timely progress from an initial assessment of students' leadership capacities through to an integrative capstone project.



President Molly T. Marshall and students in the Women's Leadership Initiative

Institutional

- **ADMINISTRATION:** The creativity and willingness to risk on the part of President Marshall is crucial here. It is not, to her, merely pragmatic survival. She thinks of her leadership in both pedagogical and theological terms. She noted, "I am convinced that a school must model the kind of adaptive, flexible, creative leadership that it hopes to instill in those it is preparing for ministry." Reflecting on the dramatic and often very painful work of selling buildings and cutting positions, she recalls: "I began to talk about resurrection. Resurrection means it comes in a new form, and that was something I had to articulate to faculty, students and other stakeholders."
- **FACULTY:** The story in part is of loss. Of course, the obvious loss of colleagues was difficult. Marshall said, "Cutting so many faculty and staff was a horrible thing in a small, tight-knit community." There is also loss in traditional patterns of teaching and learning, typical classes, and programmatic emphases. Over time, however, Central equipped faculty who were eager to teach in the new format that seeks to better equip students for nimble ministry in the face of change.
- **SPACE:** While the dramatic story of selling the campus and relocating gets the lion's share of the attention, a more dramatic and perhaps as consequential impact comes from the "experimental space" offered by the "Create" program and then the "Women's Leadership Initiative" Master of Divinity programs. As labs for innovation, they allowed for trial and error, and now all Master of Divinity tracks, residential and distributed online, follow those same innovations.

Family Resemblances

- Eastern Mennonite Seminary's Women's Peacebuilding Leadership Program.
- Hartford Seminary's Women's Leadership Institute.

MAJOR FINDINGS

We offer this report as one contribution to a lively conversation about the changing and challenging nature of faith leadership today. Institutions helping to train faith leaders are, we believe, essential to the thriving of faith communities. Further, they have the potential to help our whole society face the crises of our time with prophetic vision and pastoral imagination.

The perspective of the bright spots methodology encourages local innovation, asking the critical question of what resources and practices might already be at hand which can contribute to health. Our study has brought to light many hopeful stories about innovation in theological education, and several key findings emerged from our analysis.

Our major findings are as follows:

A pedagogical finding

SCHOOLS ARE SHIFTING THE EDUCATIONAL MODEL FROM CONTENT TRANSFER TO ADAPTIVE LEARNING. We found that in innovative faith leadership schools, there is a sea-change away from a “core content transfer” model, which assumes schools are clear about what future leaders need to know for effective faith leadership today, to an “adaptive learning” model, which assumes students need to skills for being agile learners in relation to real-world challenges.

A programmatic finding

SCHOOLS ARE DEVELOPING NEW PROGRAMS TO FIT A WIDENED SENSE OF VOCATION TO FAITH LEADERSHIP. The shifting landscape of prospective student career goals means fewer students are preparing for traditional clergy leadership roles for local

faith communities while increasing numbers desire formation for faith-rooted leadership in the face of the big challenges in the world—from climate change and sustainability to multi-faith relations, poverty and racial justice.

Institutional findings

The cases detailed above found support for launching and developing their pedagogical and programmatic innovation in three key institutional factors, each taking distinctive shape in their respective cases.

ADMINISTRATION WILLING TO RISK. Regardless of the nature of the changes, these cases show how changes go hand in hand with senior leadership willing to risk. In many cases, the question driving the leap of faith related to how mission connects in a meaningful way the community. Deep listening to stakeholders—however one defines that—leads to experiments, some of which will entail very difficult decisions.

A SENIOR FACULTY CHAMPION, AND BROAD FACULTY BUY-IN. Rarely did experiments take hold without a senior faculty member who rallied to the cause. Often (as in the cases of Fuller and Candler) the influence comes from the surprising fact that they are not practical theology faculty, who might be expected to support such innovation, but from the so-called classical disciplines. To have these faculty

members commit to reimagine their role from a focus on their academic discipline to a focus on integrative and adaptive learning for ministry goes a long way towards bringing a whole faculty along. And without such broad faculty buy-in, many of the innovations described above would never have flown the nest.

AN EXPERIMENTAL SECOND SPACE TO LAUNCH INNOVATION. While in different ways, we found it was important for schools to have a “play space” for experimenting without committing their whole enterprise to the change. In some cases, a new and quite different structure was built while living in the old structure, but many of the changes we studied began as experiments “on the side” and only after being refined and proving themselves were they integrated more fully. It is impossible, we believe, to launch and successfully build innovative programs or schools without experimenting.

There are clearly many more sites of innovation, experiments worth noting, bold leaders worth learning from, and stories deserving attention. While we briefly note a few others along the way, we encourage you to check out the Auburn website where this report is hosted (auburnseminary.org/report/bright-spots/). There we include ample opportunity for you to add your voice to the conversation about where theological education is going. At a recent convening of the ATS sponsored Educational Models Project survey, they found over 2,500 distinct educational programs and practices being tried among their 273 member schools.⁸⁴ Sharing our stories—successes and failures—help to foster a revitalized network of institutions training leaders of faith and moral courage ready to join God’s work of mercy and justice for all creation.

A note on using this report.

The bright spots methodology, as we note above, pushes back against an extractive “best practices” approach. Rather, the claim is each “bright spot” has marshaled its particular location, tradition, mission, and resources in indigenous ways. Further, while we highlight some of their journey of innovation, they are the primary and best teachers about their efforts. Therefore, in using this report, we recommend:

- 1) *Using the report to provoke fresh thinking about one’s own institution, noticing potential resources or points of leverage for change.*
- 2) *Engaging in vibrant conversation about the challenges and opportunities of training faith leaders today at your institution.*
- 3) *Traveling to visit one or more of the “bright spots” institutions highlighted here to learn more about their experiments.*

Notes

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- 10 Smith-Brown, E. (2015). *Racial/ethnic students represent largest growth area for theological schools*. Pittsburgh, PA: The Association of Theological Schools. Retrieved December 26, 2015 from www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/documents/racial-ethnic-growth.pdf
- 11 Terminology is contested here, and we are consciously avoiding the nexus of terms around the label "mainline." Sometimes people qualify it, as in "formerly mainline" or change it to "oldline," which is confusing enough, but in common parlance it only refers to Protestant churches, not Catholics or Orthodox, and then only certain of Protestants (not Evangelicals, for example). The displacement we point to here is shared (albeit differently) by all these traditions that have held, at least since the mid-twentieth century, places of cultural dominance.
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- 15 González. *The History Of Theological Education*, p.127.
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- 17 Taylor. *A Secular Age*, pp. 303-304.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 Smith. *How (Not) to Be Secular*, p. 63.
- 20 Oliver, M. (1992). *New and Selected Poems, Volume One*. Boston: Beacon, p.94.
- 21 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p.302.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p.513.
- 23 Hadaway, K. (2014). *New Facts on Episcopal Church Growth and Decline*. The Episcopal Church. Retrieved December 26, 2015 from www.episcopalchurch.org/files/new_facts_on_growth_2014_final.pdf
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- 30 The complicated situation in 2014 was not merely enrollment decline, although it was certainly an exacerbating factor. See <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/02/nyregion/labor-dispute-leaves-professors-jobless.html> accessed December 26, 2015.
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- 32 Conde-Frazier, E. (2005). *Hispanic Bible Institutes: A Community of Theological Construction*. Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press.
- 33 Heath, C. and D. Heath. (2010). *Switch: How to change things when change is hard*. New York: Crown Business. They argue for the shift from archaeology of problems to evangelizing bright spots on page 48.
- 34 Pascale, B., J. Sternin and M. Sternin. (2010). *The Power of Positive Deviance: How unlikely innovators solve the world's toughest problems*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.
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- 36 The language of agile leaders comes from Scott Cormode. (2016). *Educating for Agility*. Retrieved on May 18, 2016 from http://cms.fuller.edu/TNN/Issues/Spring_2014/Educating_for_Agility. See also Dwight J. Zscheile. (2014). *The Agile Church: Spirit-Led innovation in an uncertain age*. New York: Morehouse Publishing.
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