
Libraries Serving Students Preparing for Multivocational Ministry

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ABSTRACT Libraries and librarians need to help and support students who are currently dealing with busy multivocational lives and to prepare them for their multivocational ministry. This session looks at multivocational ministry and suggest ways in which libraries and librarians can be involved in serving students living in and preparing for their multivocational lives.

At one time the typical seminary student was called to full-time, univocational ministry. Many of our students are still being prepared to do that. In Jo Ann Deasy's article "Shifting Vocational Identity in Theological Education," (Deasy 2018, 69) she mentions that "Data from the GSQ indicates that almost one-third of 2017 graduates are planning on bi-vocational ministry." She later asks, "What are the unique skills needed to prepare someone for bi-vocational ministry?" As librarians we need to ask, "What are the skills we need to teach to prepare them for multivocational ministry?" Libraries and librarians need to help and support students who are currently dealing with their overly busy multivocational lives and to prepare them for their multivocational ministry. This session will look at multivocational ministry and suggest ways in which libraries and librarians can be involved in serving students living in and preparing for their multivocational lives.

I became interested in this topic when I was asked to contribute a chapter in the book *Bivocational and Beyond: Educating for Thriving Multivocational Ministry*, edited by Darryl W. Stephens. The book is published by Atla Open Press and is available from the Atla website (<https://doi.org/10.31046/atlaopenpress.82>). If you are interested in the topic of multivocational ministry, you need to read this book. Many of the things I will talk about come from this book and from

what I learned from being a part of the creation of the book. In this session, I would like to bring up several strands of thought that deal with the topic of multivocational ministry, then talk about ways that these strands are affecting theological education in general and theological librarianship in particular.

The first strand is *multivocational ministry*. Multivocational ministry is full-time ministry with part-time compensation from the ministry. It is not part-time ministry. It just means that the pastor or deacon or religious leader is receiving only part-time compensation and may be receiving compensation from other segments of their life (Stephens 2022, 1-3). I remember the term “tentmaking” being used a generation ago, and Paul the Apostle is described as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3-4). It is the idea of having another vocation or job other than as pastor of a church. As you will note in reading *Bivocational and Beyond*, more and more students who are graduating from seminary and pastoral training institutions are entering bivocational or multivocational ministry. JoAnn Deasy’s article in *Theological Education* (2018, 69) and her chapter in *Bivocational and Beyond* say that “two-thirds of all students entering master’s programs in graduate theological schools considered bivocational ministry a possible outcome of their degree (2022, 256).” What does this mean for theological education and for library services if that many students are thinking about this?

The next strand is the *priesthood of all believers*. The priesthood of all believers is understood by some Christian denominations that all Christians should be involved in ministry. The passage in 1 Peter 2 is combined with Paul’s body of Christ imagery from 1 Corinthians to understand the call for all Christians, ordained and lay, to be involved in the ministry of the church. Multivocational ministry means that the ministry in a church must be a collaboration of all those involved in a particular congregation so that it becomes shared ministry. The pastor does not do everything but encourages the members to use their gifts for the building up of the entire body (Ephesians 4:11). Learning collaboration tools may become an important part of theological education. An interesting side note to this is how other rosters such as deacons are included into the mix of pastors and laity in multivocational ministry.

A third strand is *formational theological education*. Daniel Aleshire talks about formational theological education in his book *Beyond Profession* (Aleshire 2021, 82). He says (emphasis his):

The goal of theological education should be the development of *a wisdom of God and the ways of God, fashioned from intellectual, affective, and behavioral understanding and evidenced by spiritual and moral maturity, relational integrity, knowledge of the Scripture and tradition, and the capacity to exercise religious leadership.*

This understanding is that theological education is not about learning the tools of being a pastor or deacon or ministry leader but of being formed. He later says, “the aim of theological education is directly linked to the qualities that are important for persons who serve as Christian leaders.” Who we are is as important as what we know.

A fourth strand is a *model of learning* from Hubert Dreyfus (Dreyfus 2009, 27). In my chapter in *Bivocational and Beyond*, I go into more detail than I do here (Ebertz 2022, 314-7). Dreyfus names six stages of learning: Novice, Advanced Beginner, Competence, Proficiency, Expertise, and Mastery. Christian Scharen talks about theological education in terms of these stages in his chapter “Learning Ministry over Time” in *For Life Abundant* (Scharen 2008, 26-88). He mentions that students in seminary rarely go beyond the competent stage. The other stages occur after they are in a congregation. The learner progresses through these stages with the help of mentors.

A fifth strand is *competency-based education (CBE)*. Some theological institutions have been experimenting with competency-based education. The institution provides students with a formal structure which students go through as they become competent in various curriculum topics. CBE often includes practical and formational learning as well as learning content. Mentors as well as the instructor may be involved in each “course.” Students progress at their own pace. The Association of Theological Schools has created Guidelines for Competency-Based Theological Education which may be found at [https://www.ats.edu/files/galleries/guidelines-for-cbte-programs_\(15_April_2020\).pdf](https://www.ats.edu/files/galleries/guidelines-for-cbte-programs_(15_April_2020).pdf).

A sixth strand is *church-based ministerial training*. Many denominations have for years used church-based training for their ministers. It is beginning to trend in mainline denominations. I know of an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America congregation which has an apprenticeship program in which they provide biblical and theological content as well as practical experience and mentors.

Another strand involves issues of *justice*. Theological education can be seen as elitist, and the whole academic enterprise could be seen as colonial attempts to press a certain type of ministerial train-

ing into a particular academic mode. Understanding different cultures within our particular location and context may change the way we do things.

My final strand is *students are involved in multivocational ministry*. Our understanding of seminary students as preparing for full-time, univocational ministry needs to change. Many students are not only taking classes full-time but are also working full-time, involved heavily in a church, have a family, and have other commitments. These many vocations take a toll in terms of time and energy. They feel pulled in many directions and need ways in which to study that understand their reality. Learning how to set boundaries and flow between commitments are all skills needed for multivocational ministry.

I can understand our students who are working in a church full-time while being a student full-time. I started library school after I had begun my role as the director for the library. I probably understood how my classes fit in with the profession better than those who were not working in a library. I was able to make connections between the theory and the practice and could integrate what I was learning with my job. I noticed in my library classes that there were a significant number of fellow students who were also taking classes while working.

Multivocational ministry and preparation for multivocational ministry begins to *weave some of these strands together*. What kind of theological education does this entail? And the corollary is: what kind of library skills do we teach these students? How do we blend biblical and theological studies with practical ministry so that whole students are formed to begin the road to growing in their vocation? As conversations about this take place, theological librarians need to think about what kinds of library skills students need to learn in order to weave their multivocational reality. As I thought about how to teach our students the library skills they need, I came up with several possibilities. I also cover this in more detail in my chapter “Seeking Information Mastery in Multivocational Ministry” in *Bivocational and Beyond* (Ebertz 2022, 313-326).

On-demand services are needed so that services are available when our students are available. Some of our students study after the kids are in bed. This means that library resources and help should be available. This does not mean that a live person needs to

be available. Creative ways of answering or helping late at night may be needed instead.

Students need to be taught how to find reliable information that is not based on databases to which they may not have access once they graduate. Learning search skills, evaluating hits from browser searches, and general information literacy skills become important. Collaboration with others through text studies or ministerial groups may be helpful, or learning about algorithm bias in searching. Basically, learning how to learn becomes important.

Multivocational ministry and multivocational students are trends theological librarians cannot ignore. As we find ways to teach in this new environment, we may want to keep in mind Dreyfus's stages of learning and think about where we are.

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