

# **ABSTRACT: Doctor of Ministry Thesis ~ May 2015**

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## ***“Transforming Vocations - Journeys in the New Pastoral Economy: Conversations with clergy moving from traditional parish ministry toward ‘what’s next.’”***

Jesus offers to us his own experience of crucifixion and resurrection as a metaphor for transformation in our lives. This theme is translated into a secular framework by *Theory U*. The common understanding in these and other narratives is that “the new cannot emerge until the old begins to fall away.” The prospect of this, however hopeful, is also frightening and lonely for those who experience it. Such is the lived vocational journey of clergy who are being called out of fulltime parish ministry into new forms and expressions. In some cases the new work is new only to them, while in others the ministry is being created as if for the first time. Particularly when this is the case, no one knows how to encourage or support these pastors. Often their work is not even acknowledged as pastoral, with the commonly heard concern, “Oh, so you’re leaving the ministry?” Added to this is the clergyperson’s own internal wrestling with what it means to honor their call and ordination in these new ways. Their own question is, “Am I still a pastor?”

The purpose of this practicum/project is to capture and represent the stories of this journey into the New Pastoral Economy – the emerging landscape of multivocality in ministry and often multiple streams of income. Additional goals are to identify key themes and experiences that can be waymarkers for clergy on the journey; to provide resources for the journey; and to propose future work that would continue this effort. My hope is that the project contributes to and advances the conversation and the practice of multivocal Christian ministry that will continue to emerge in the coming decades.

The practicum was conducted over a four month period of time. A group of six ordained clergy were interviewed using a modified ethnographic approach. They have experienced a variety of vocational transformations over the last decade. They represent a dozen current and former denominational affiliations. Each of them served in full time pastoral ministry in local congregations prior to discerning the call (being driven by the Spirit?) into the liminal space of emerging vocational manifestations. They are all still discovering and creating their own way, finding multivocal expressions of their original call. This is also my story, so the project tells portions of my own journey of discovery.

The practicum/project demonstrates the wide array of life stories that bring people to the discernment to step away from fulltime congregational ministry but NOT turn away from their sense of call and vocation. These are not people who are giving up on God, the church, or their own ordination. Rather, they are recognizing that faithfulness to these gifts from God requires that they leave the supposed security of parish life and a staff salary in order to follow the leading of the Spirit and become cocreators with God and collaborators for the incoming reign. Each participant expressed how grateful they were and how much the process of telling their own story was itself instrumental in their growing understanding. The project illustrates the critical need for more opportunities of storytelling and sharing, of community building among these clergy, and resourcing for them and the work God is calling them to fulfill.