

report 2

Flourishing in Service

**RESILIENT
LEADERS
PROJECT**

The
Seattle
School
OF THEOLOGY
& PSYCHOLOGY

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
What is Ministry?	4
What we Asked	6
Themes	7
Profiles	8
What We Learned	23
Finding Meaning	24
What We Hope For	25
Gratitude	26
Contributors	27

Executive Summary

Culture in North America is rapidly changing. And because ministry is always rooted in time and place — rooted in culture — ministry is always changing to meet the needs and opportunities of its context.

Our predominant culture is increasingly post-Christendom. While that does require additional work of deep listening to the world around us and innovating responsive forms of ministry, post-Christendom may be the very context that allows Christianity to flourish.

At The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology, we believe that developing resilient Christian leaders will better equip them and their communities for ministry — however it may look — in a changing world. We talked with some of those leaders who understand their careers are expressions of their Christian identity, in order to learn about what service to God and neighbor entails in post-Christendom contexts. Ultimately, we're asking: What is ministry today? And, because we care deeply about the wellbeing ministry leaders, we're asking: What does it take to flourish in service?

To get to the root of the answer, we asked alumni of The Seattle School about how they serve, the challenges to their wellbeing in that service, and the ways they find to flourish while serving in complex contexts. All these leaders see their careers as expressions of their Christian identity, and from their stories arose themes that teach us about what service to God and neighbor entails in post-Christendom contexts. In their responses, themes naturally emerged as central to ministry today:



COMMUNITY



CONNECTION TO GOD



IDENTITY



SELF-COMPASSION



BOUNDARIES



BODY

We hope that this collection on Flourishing in Service encourages ministers of all sorts, and helps them to feel less lonely as they live into their ministry of service to God and neighbor.

We hope it inspires communities towards innovation for the next iteration of the Church that is still in formation, and offers the wider culture a way to understand Christianity separate from Christendom. Finally, we hope it inspires the organizations and individuals who, in their support, shape the future of Christian community and Christian leaders.

Thank you for reading. We look forward to continuing the conversation with you,

Kate Rae Davis

Andrea Sialaff

J. Derek McNeil



What is Ministry?

From looking back through history, we know that ministry always happens in a context, in specific times, places, and cultures that shape the meaning and expression of the message.

North America's predominant culture is changing rapidly, including spiritual practices that were once considered alternative becoming mainstream, and cultural norms moving the center of shared social life from established institutions into third places and new communities.

Ministry is shifting to meet the needs and opportunities of this context, and our image of what ministry is must change with it.



We don't believe people are losing their faith, but that they are finding different expressions of that faith. They aren't shunning the divine; they're pursuing additional ways to engage God. People commonly speak of their leisure activities — nature, arts, meditation, relationships, volunteering, introspection, movement — as pursuits of communion with the divine and humanity. Or, we might say, as loving God and neighbor.

In short: the context is increasingly post-Christendom, though not post-Christian. In these post-Christendom places, Christianity is no longer assumed as the normal or expected religion. Neither are the behaviors associated with Christendom, such as congregational attendance on Sunday mornings. Imposing (by legislation or custom) a strict moral code on all of society is distasteful to those with post-Christendom worldviews, which value freedom, choice, and influence. In all of this, what is rejected is the form of Christendom, not the content of Christianity. Even with the move away from structures and customs of previous generations of Christians, the life of Jesus and the wisdom of scripture still compel.

Seen in this light, post-Christendom is a valuable place for innovation of the Church that is still in formation, of inviting Spirit into the co-creation of community, of embodying Christ in the particularities of this context. When we let go of preserving church structures and cultural dominance, the focus returns to embodying Christ, to joining God's activity in the world, and to faithful witness.

Ministry in a post-Christendom context offers additional opportunities and challenge, both for the flourishing of

Christianity and of leaders. To flourish is to find meaning in the midst of struggle, to adapt and grow in response to challenge. A flourishing Christianity requires a more flexible understanding of what ministry is and an inspired imagination for what it could be. Such responsive ministry may not look like what we expect; the job titles of these leaders may surprise us. What is a yoga pastor? How is a children's trauma counselor a minister?

Given an increasingly post-Christendom context, we had some questions:

- **What does service in post-Christendom entail?**
- **How do we serve God and neighbor, especially outside of the 20th-century church structures?**
- **Who are the people gathering faith communities, if the metaphors of minister and pastor have too many limitations?**
- **What theologies, understandings, and frameworks help people to serve in post-Christendom contexts?**

We thought the best way to understand what this looks like is to listen to those who are in the world, serving God and neighbor, on a daily basis. How do they understand themselves, their work, and the relationship of their work to God? And as we look at the challenges of these diverse expressions of ministry, what does it take for these leaders to flourish in their lives, as they seek the flourishing of life of Christ?



What We Asked

Our ultimate question is “What is ministry in our time?”

The post-Christendom era requires us to ask that question in fresh language. Instead of using the word ministry, which evokes particular forms of service, we asked about service and leadership broadly.

We asked:

1. What does flourishing in service to God and neighbor look like in your life? How do you embody Christ in the particularity of your work?
2. What are the challenges to your flourishing – and how do you address them?
3. Who are the people that support your flourishing? What practices do you engage that help you flourish? How do you understand your purpose in life and work, holistically?

We asked these questions of people trained at The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology because we are curious about how they live out the school’s mission to train people “to serve God and neighbor through transforming relationships.” We know that oftentimes our alumni use their degrees in unexpected ways, such as people with Counseling Psychology degrees who become ordained pastors, or alumni of the Divinity program who instruct yoga. So we asked across all training programs, in order to represent the diversity of the real application of these trainings in pursuit of service. Each Flourishing in Service profile includes the training programs completed by the individual, and you can notice the creative application of those trainings in their responses.

Themes



COMMUNITY

Valuing and cultivating connection, belonging, and collaboration.



CONNECTION TO GOD

Connecting to and depending on the divine.



IDENTITY

Knowing and living into one's God-given self.



SELF-COMPASSION

Tending to the self through vulnerability, especially around needs, shame, and pain.



BOUNDARIES

Maintaining limits on availability and commitments.



BODY

Practicing care for the body through movement and tending to pain.

Alex Zarecki

- **Worship Music Director,
Japanese Baptist Church of Seattle**
- **Master of Arts in Theology & Culture 2017**



“Flourishing for me includes collaborative energy.”

I serve with a sense of lower case “p” pastoral; it enables more collaboration with the folks who have been at this church all their lives and with the newer folks who just walked in or found us from google. This collaboration is especially important in my context of working in a historically Japanese-American church. I am not Japanese-American, I’m European-American, so it’s a little unusual for someone like me to be in such a space.

The fact that I have a team in my work space makes a tremendous difference. It’s not just me trying to figure things out on my own; I can ask questions and be a student of the context.

I’ve learned about the history of the organization, individual people’s histories, what sort of dynamics have existed, why things are the way they are. It’s a

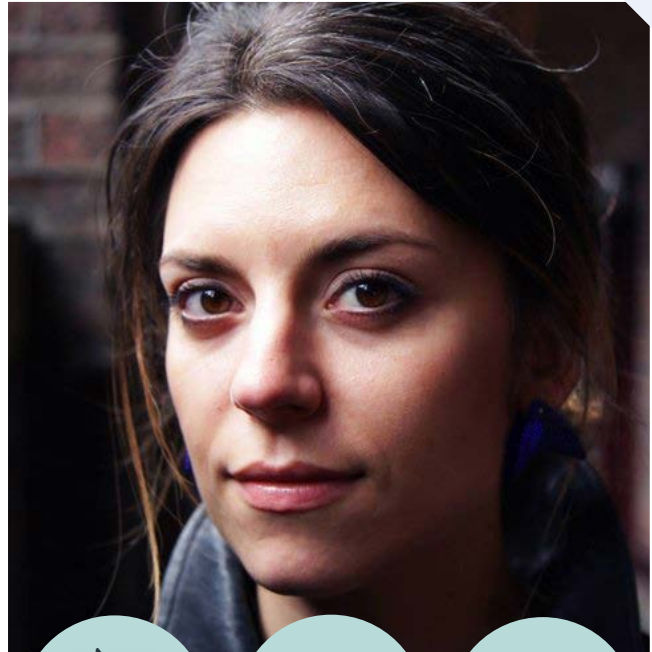
practice of collaboration that creates community with my coworkers and lay people, and I think that sense of community is imperative to doing anything worthwhile.

Music can be a great way to invite everybody into a space. As a church, we’re becoming more multiethnic and confidently intergenerational. We’ve seen that there can be a holding together in the midst of theological diversity because of a greater sense of community. Music and art can help us navigate spaces that are otherwise impasses.

As someone who sees the role of the artist as close to the prophetic tradition, I have found that some social media has been helpful for hearing the voices of other Christians. These other voices reorient me as I am creatively thinking about problem solving and attending to the resistance in my work.

Jenny Wade

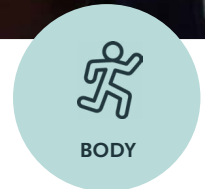
- Psychotherapist and Yoga Instructor
- Master of Arts in Counseling Psychology 2013



CONNECTION
TO GOD



IDENTITY



BODY

“I have learned how to use movement as prayer.”

As a therapist, I began to notice that after a full day of seeing clients I experienced tenderness and pain through my sternum, and taking deep breaths felt difficult. I realized that my body was mirroring my clients' tension. As much as I worked during my sessions to metabolize the physical intensity of whatever emotion my client brought into the room, I was always leaving feeling physically and energetically depleted. I decided to practice a form of bodywork, SOMA, that acknowledges the ways that tension in the body reflects tension in the mind.

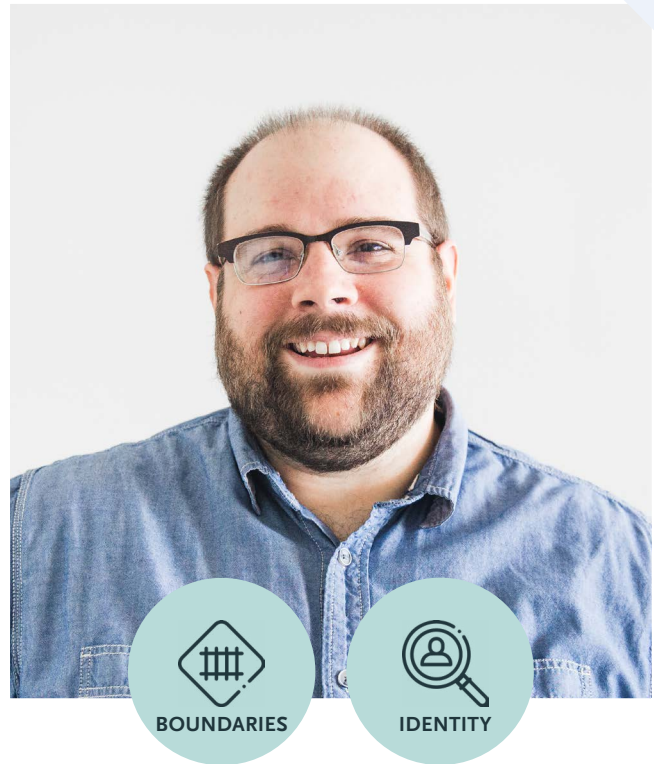
Now, when I experience discomfort in my physical body, I recognize these sensations as my body trying to alert me to some kind of emotional or spiritual disruption in my life. When I sense this tension I can nurture my body with massage, myofascial release,

yoga, dance, or breath work - in these ways I'm able to discharge the accumulated tension that is a natural result of meditating on other's trauma multiple times a day. I have learned how to use movement as prayer, and I see how being with my body is a worshipful experience.

Movement is my medicine, but there is a heavy, oppressive force that I have to push against internally in order to choose movement for myself. It's a very real form of spiritual warfare that I have to engage on behalf of my own personal healing. *The Desire Map* by Danielle LaPorte taught me to ask the question, 'How do I want to feel today/this week/this year?' and then to consider what I need to do in order to feel that way. Framing my choices from a place of desire versus a 'should' helps me to choose movement that feels authentic!

David Rice

- Lead Pastor, Markey Church
- Master of Divinity, 2010



“Resilience is a necessary attribute of a faithful pastor,”

Knowing that I can only take people as far as I’ve been willing to go in my own journey has been the framework I’ve used over and over as I lead. I don’t know how pastors lead churches faithfully without knowing themselves, their story, how they relate to and impact others – without being fluent in the dark places of their lives. It’s a huge reason why so many younger pastors burn out. They know “how” to be a pastor, but they were never invited to consider how to “be” a pastor.

I’ve learned from Brenè Brown that it’s good to hear from and learn from folks who are critical of you, but it’s not helpful for you to give everyone’s words and ideas equal weight. If the critic isn’t in the arena with you, working to birth the thing you’re working to birth, their words don’t count as much. They may feel strongly, but if they’re not committed to the same

future as you and your partners are committed to, then be kind, but pay little attention. Ask, “What is there in this for me to learn?” and then continue doing your work.

Resilience is a necessary attribute of a faithful pastor, and putting my ideas about faith into practice has been key to strengthening the muscles of resilience. Ideas are neat, but practices are sustaining. For instance, consider the difference between just reading the text that says, “rejoice in the Lord always” versus reading the text and then taking the time to write out 100 things that you are thankful for. That’s the difference between knowing we should “rejoice” and practicing the rejoicing. The practice itself can revolutionize how you see the world. Gratitude as a practice is a fear and cynicism killer.

Suzanne Aultman

- Structural Engineer
- Master of Arts in Counseling Psychology 2016



COMMUNITY



SELF
COMPASSION

“My hope is to see each person and to know them beyond the role they fulfill at our company.”

As a structural engineer who supervises several others, I am constantly juggling the demands on my time from others across all departments. My hope is to see each person and to know them beyond the role they fulfill at our company. If I can remember something specific about them to ask about or to acknowledge, maybe they will feel seen. It is in the small moments of seeing the other that we tend to have the most impact and sometimes not even realize it.

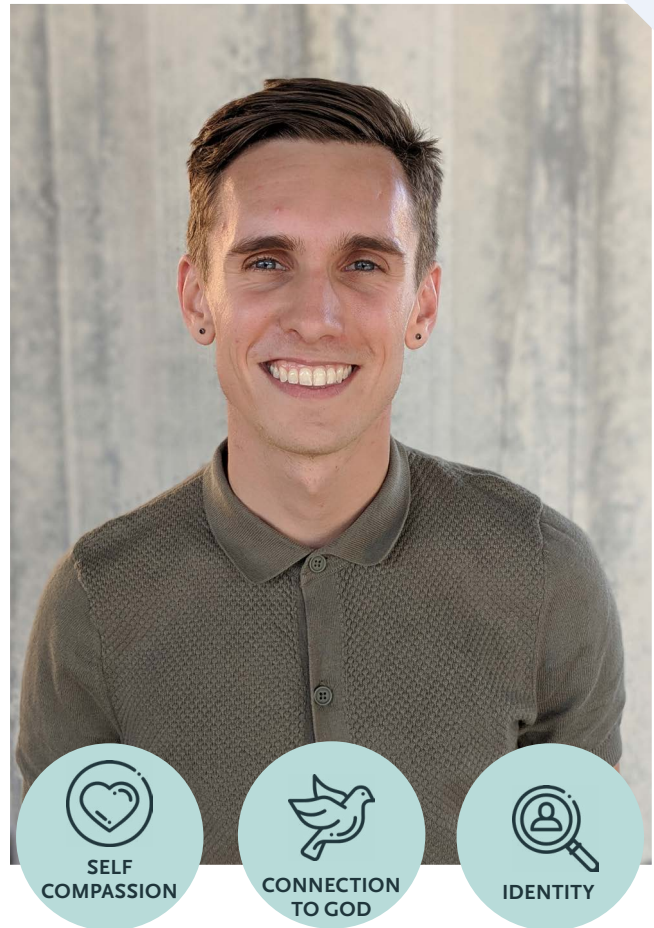
Something my time at The Seattle School helped me refine was my ability to read a situation – to recognize when there is something deeper happening in an interaction. When I notice that something else happening, I begin asking myself questions to determine how much I should engage it in the moment.

Kindness is both acknowledging what you see in a person while also knowing when it is not the most appropriate time to name it, especially in a corporate environment. It is always a judgment call – sometimes I’m right and sometimes I’m wrong. I do not sit in shame for failing; instead it pushes me to pay better attention to those around me and to respond when I notice a need. For the moments I happen to notice and engage, there is a reward in the connection with the other that encourages me to keep going.

Also, being community, this is not a one-way interaction. I must be willing to be able to speak my needs so that others can respond to me and offer to me where I am lacking. It is in the giving and receiving that we can all grow and flourish together.

Elliot Huemann

- Associate Faculty Counselor, Edmonds Community College
- Private Practice Therapist
- Master of Arts in Counseling Psychology 2019



“At the core of the Christ message is the persistent belief that there is a cycle of life, death, and resurrection”

Working primarily with LGBTQ+ individuals, many of whom have been profoundly harmed by religious institutions, has required me to tease apart what it practically means to serve God and neighbor in my context. At the core of the Christ message for me is the persistent belief that there is a cycle of life, death, and resurrection always trying to unfold. Whether we explicitly name it as Christian or not, I find that all of my clients are wanting to live more fully into this cycle, daily desiring a more full experience of life and identity. In offering a kind witness, I hope to help my clients find the freedom inherent in the Christ cycle.

The biggest challenge to my flourishing has been finding a way to integrate my own evolving spirituality in my work in a way that feels authentic while honoring

my doubt and my client’s own spiritual and emotional journeys.

There have been a number of moments when I have realized that the Christian “answers” either fail to capture the fullness of the moment with a client or have actually been used to harm one or both of us. At times I’m tempted to throw it all out and reject Spirit in the process. However, in those moments my clients return to something beyond us in the work, and I am reminded that we are both discovering a way forward together.

More than anyone else, my partner provides me with the care I need to stay engaged in this work. He consistently engages my process and talks with me about the many questions I have regarding what it means to be a healing presence in the world.

Hillary B. Kimsey

- Hospital Chaplain, Candidate for Episcopal Priesthood
- Master of Divinity 2017



“To flourish in this ministry, I must tend to my own grief in safe and supportive communities.”

When I was a resident chaplain at Harborview, I became deeply involved in a tragic case involving a child that dragged on for months. The grief of this child, these parents, and the many caregivers involved poured into me along with my own grief and crushing sense of helplessness. I finally said to my peers and my educator, "I don't know if I can do this anymore." I wept in front of them, letting loose all of my sadness, my anger, my doubts – both in God and myself. And when I had finished weeping, I wondered – have I shown them now that I can't do it by this show of emotion? But no, what I found was the group weeping with me and joining me in the struggle.

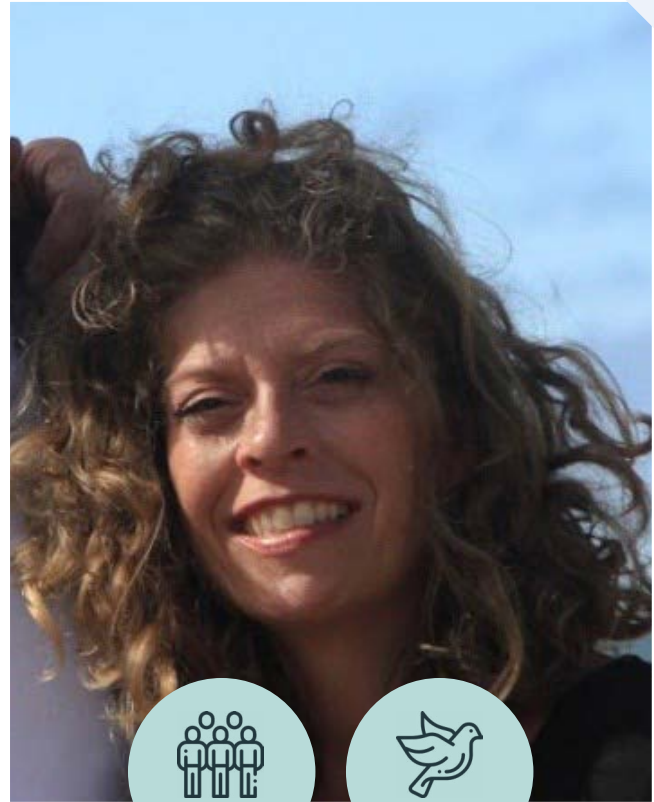
At the same time, I was in discernment for my call to the Episcopal priesthood. In sharing with my

discernment group what I was going through, I broke down into tears and admitted to doubts and anger and despair of God even while I clung to my love for God and belief that God's presence somehow remained with me and the family I'd come to care for so much. When my tears were spent, I wondered – have I shown them I'm unfit for the priesthood by this show of emotion? But no – they cried with me and said, "We are more sure now than ever that you are called."

Both times, my vulnerability was welcomed and cared for, even seen as a strength! I learned that to flourish in this ministry, I must tend to my own grief in safe and supportive communities.

Lisa Henton

- Pastor, Coast Vineyard Church
- Certificate in Resilient Service 2019



“Prayer is how we sink our roots in deep to get the nourishment for our being and the outflow of our doing.”

I believe there are three components to flourishing: belonging, being and doing. I get a picture of an amazing healthy fruit tree: deep roots and a solid trunk with far-reaching branches that are filled with good fruit. In this analogy, the belonging would be the root system, the being would be the trunk and the doing would be the branching out bearing much fruit.

As a leader, I have to ask myself what am I flourishing unto: the world or God’s Kingdom? The secular world tells us that flourishing is about our doing and that’s where we get belonging or our being. We have to retrain ourselves and the people in our community about what flourishing in the Kingdom really is.

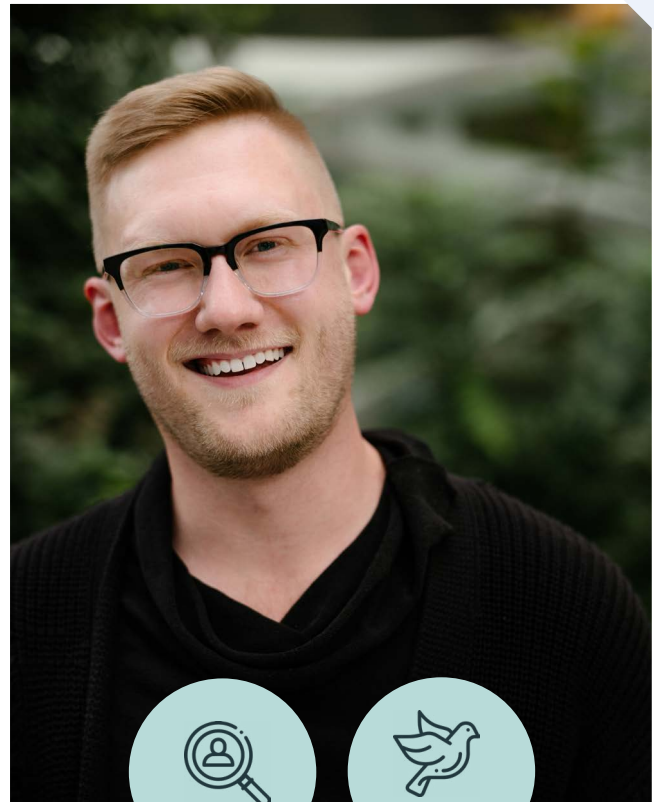
As a leader, I try not to underestimate the power of prayer. I think we fall into this trap because it’s easier

to put our best effort into it and see some results, even if they’re not a fraction of what we’re hoping for. Prayer is about our connection with God; it’s how we sink our roots in deep to get the nourishment for our being and the outflow of our doing. We need to be deeply grounded in the heavenly father’s love for us. The ancient future community in Acts joined together and prayed constantly; that’s how they were able to flourish under all kinds of conditions.

Obedience is also important, especially when I’ve had to face betrayal in my ministry. Like the community in Acts who obeyed the Spirit by replacing Judas, we also must carry on with what we have been commissioned to do even in the face of betrayal.

Matthias Roberts

- Therapist, Podcaster, Author
- Master of Arts in Theology & Culture 2017
- Master of Arts in Counseling Psychology 2018



“How do we talk about theology in ways that are fresh and different so that they don’t bring up pain and triggers?”

I help LGBTQ+ people and allies to live confidently. Much of my work is inviting LGBTQ+ people into flourishing. For so many of us queer folk who grew up in religious contexts, we’ve been told flourishing is not for us or that it looks very different from the way we know we are internally wired. My work is to share the vision that we can be faithful Christ followers who fully live out who we were created to be.

This vision requires a lot of translation work. How do we talk about theology in ways that are fresh and different so that they don’t bring up pain and triggers? And among faith communities, how do we hold the tension of deep division around sexuality and this vision of the eschaton, of what flourishing would look like?

At The Seattle School I was able to unpack what kept me back from my flourishing, through seeing that God is so much bigger than I imagined and through doing story work at the Allender Center. Something Dr. Stearns talked about is that we have to be full first and then work from our overflow. The Holy Spirit fills us up, and then we work out of that instead of us being completely empty. I learned that if we are working at being healthier people, we can bring others along on that journey.

My book, *Beyond Shame: Creating a Healthy Sex Life on Your Own Terms*, is for folks who grew up within purity culture. How do we work with the sexual shame we’ve been given? How do we create more expansive sexual ethics, without abandoning our values? My hope is that people will find more freedom to explore this world of sex and sexuality.

Lang Charters

- Yoga Pastor
- Master of Divinity 2014



“To pastor is to care for souls, which means journeying with people toward a beautiful and holistic existence.”

I started seminary after a hiking injury ended my successful military career. At The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology, I learned the importance of pastors being in and with the community they live in and serve. Teaching yoga became that point of community connection for me while I continued to primarily pursue and dream about being a more traditional pastor.

As this journey was beginning to unfold, I went through a divorce and was passed over by the church I wanted to work for. I had poured my “self” into both relationships, only to be left alone as an unrequited lover. The beautiful plot twist, though, is the failures and the undoing of my “self” were my salvation! While “husband” and “pastor” were things I did, or wanted to do, neither of them were who I was in my essence.

Jesus emphasized how important it is to “lose your life to find it” because it’s precisely by losing our small selves (jobs, titles, relationships, possessions, accolades, etc.) that we find our true selves in Christ.

So, after “failing” at pastoring in a church, today my pastoring is teaching a person, or three, or ten in a yoga class ... and I wouldn’t trade it for the world. As a yoga pastor I think of myself as a conduit for love and endeavor to help people tangibly experience the bliss of being in Christ. As we breathe mindfully we take in Spirit, as we move purposefully we integrate body, mind, and spirit, and as we unclutter our minds, we shift our experience from small selves to True Self. In a very real sense I’m never not pastoring: to pastor is to care for souls, which means journeying with people toward a beautiful and holistic existence.

Martha Wood

- Interim Released Minister, West Hills Friends Church
- Master of Divinity 2015



“My task was to listen through and beyond all those voices for the voice of the Spirit, for the greater truth that we all needed to hear.”

Being a minister in a Quaker setting is a unique playground. I get to contribute and participate as one part of the whole body rather than get saddled with the weight and pressure of making the church “successful” or delivering “powerful” sermons. I do get to be up front more often, hosting meetings for worship and offering messages, but my task is to make space for each person to encounter the Divine, to offer prompts and opportunities to hear the Spirit as clearly as possible, to identify and connect folks’ swaths of gifts and contributions in the life of the community. Leading in this context is the ground of my flourishing.

My previous call brought my personal story, strengths and weaknesses into sharp relief: I will always hope for harmony within a community, and the community’s fractures will reflexively attempt to rend me. My job (on paper) was to hold this community together while trying to reconcile its warring parties. I experienced disrupted sleep, chest pains, headaches, difficulty concentrating, weeping on my daily commute: I was play-doh-pressed by the demands. Many voices

clamored for my attention, but I came to see that my task was to listen through and beyond all those voices for the voice of the Spirit, for the greater truth that we all needed to hear. Some people expected me to save their church, but I knew that the Spirit would be the one moving in people’s hearts; it wasn’t my job to change or save anyone. I had never before felt such dependence on and sustenance from God.

There was a rollercoaster year between my first and second call, during which I grappled deeply and encountered the thing that has reoriented my life: pilgrimage. I walked the French route of the Camino de Santiago, and six months later returned to Spain to walk the Camino Primitivo and to volunteer in a pilgrim shelter. These three experiences renovated the way I understand and experience God, faith, community, faith-community, fellowship, ministry, time, resources, provision, and myself in the world. Walking 800 km was a foil for encounter: encountering God, myself, others, creation. I could not comprehend the word “flourishing” apart from the experience of pilgrimage.

Michele Ward

- Associate Pastor and Community Organizer
- Master of Divinity 2015



COMMUNITY



BOUNDARIES

“My constant question is: how can I be a better neighbor?”

I enjoy ministry and find it life giving. With any work, though, the underside emerges when love of work becomes an addiction. I learned to be a workaholic through church and academia, receiving praise for unhealthy behaviors such as staying up late to finish projects, being constantly available to lead at church, and overscheduling myself. This all came to a head when I started my first ordained call in Philadelphia. The work culture there was entrenched in start-up mode concepts of work-life balance, which is typically more common in places like Silicon Valley and Seattle.

I was not expecting start-up culture to follow me to the City of Brotherly Love and Sisterly Affection. We were serving a high needs population, with thousands of guests walking through the doors each week. My

impulse was to reactively meet that need without thinking about the impact it might have on me. My colleagues and I had to work very hard to maintain and celebrate our boundaries so we could continue to serve.

To sum up my purpose in life and work, I come back to an ordination question that I said “yes” to: “Will you pray for and seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?” It is these four categories that I think about when I consider my flourishing and the flourishing of the community. In my work, I try to embody Christ through acts of compassion, play, hospitality, and neighborliness. My constant question is, “how can I be a better neighbor?”

Phil Doud

- Life Coach at Heroically
- Master of Divinity 2013



“I want people to actually live heroically, taking on world-saving problems in challenging work.”

As a life coach, I am driven by the questions of who people are and how they change, develop, and flourish. My work is focused on caring for those in the helping professions: educators, health care and medical professionals, mental health and social service workers, ministers and clergy. The name Heroically is word play. I want people to actually live heroically, taking on world-saving problems in challenging work. And I want to both be a heroic ally, helping the helpers to flourish along the way. Helpers have high rates of stress, compassion fatigue, disillusionment and burnout. To thrive, they need supportive community, safe spaces to grow, struggle, and yes, play. That's why I've launched Heroic Ally Game Groups, inviting people to build community, reflect, and explore identity through a custom tabletop roleplaying game.

Roleplaying games are really storytelling games in which participants assume a contextual identity within

a hypothetical setting. The games I lead are meant to be epic, with big stakes and powerful obstacles, giving people practice in taking on overwhelming challenges, handling setbacks, developing agency and tolerating the distress of not knowing. You take a risk, roll the die, and play with what happens, good or bad.

The collaborative nature of the game helps people learn to depend on community. Groups include reflection time to process things that happened in the game and to discover how a particular character or situation connects to their real lives. Sometimes a werewolf in the game is just a werewolf in the game. But sometimes it's a metaphor for that wild and ferocious hunger inside. It's exciting when interpersonal and intrapersonal discoveries found in game play catalyze personal transformation. I have found that I am most alive helping people navigate into where they are most alive.

Ruth Wiley

- Counselor
- Master of Arts in Counseling Psychology 2016



“Coming to love myself is and will be my leadership crucible.”

Two challenges to my flourishing are shame and overcommitment. Shame inhibits flourishing by not allowing psychic space for creativity to thrive, thus limiting how I share my gifts with the world. Overcommitment, which can be subtly fueled by shame, reduces the quality of my presence and work. The irony of both of these self-protective postures is that we try to hide the parts of ourselves that we deem unlovable and so we do not allow the gaze of compassionate others to reframe who we are in a fuller more nuanced way. I feel shame, so I do not want you to see me more fully for fear that you will deem me unworthy too. But when I can love the aspects of me that are “ugly,” the roots that support flourishing for self and others can authentically grow deeper into love.

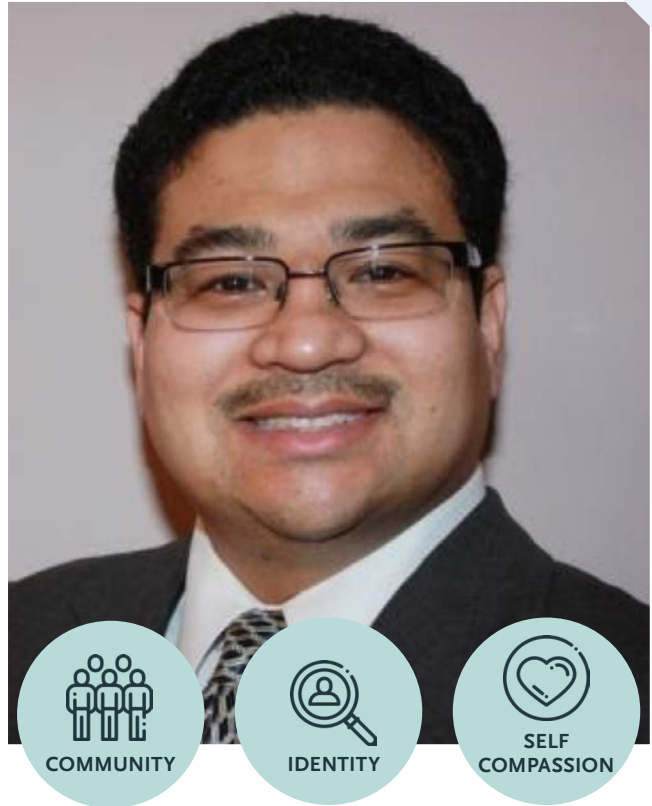
I address these challenges through growing self-compassion. I believe that Jesus was the most self-

compassionate person to live. It was because of his deep care and compassion for himself that he was able to love others so disruptively well. When I first began meditative centering prayer, I could not imagine being able to honestly say to myself Brene Brown’s now famous sentence: “I am worthy of love and belonging.”

As I avidly continued my contemplative practice, my own therapy, my academic pursuits and my engagement with my community, something changed where my chest cavity meets my thoughts and words are formed. One morning while lying on my floor in our attic apartment in Seattle, I, like C. S. Lewis, was surprised by joy: “Oh my God I am worthy of love and belonging.” Coming to love myself is and will be my leadership crucible. Love is what God is and is doing.

Wakaki Thompson

- Reverend and Computer Systems Architect
- Certificate in Narrative Focused Trauma Care 2019



“I see flourishing as a mutual – but not transactional – relationship with peaks and valleys.”

I hope to flourish in the tension of love, disappointment, hurt and joy. I see flourishing as a mutual, but not transactional, relationship with peaks and valleys. It's asking my neighbor more thoughtful and deeper questions to sufficiently attune to them; it's seeking their story to better understand their development and the critical people in their lives. I would hope to see myself in their brokenness and rehearsed behaviors, so this mutual identification could help provide a shared grace and mercy for bonded neighborly connection. If we can relate with others as mysteriously and supernaturally as described, to intimately and spiritually connect with others in a series of moments, I believe that to be Christlike.

To engage myself deeply and intimately is a challenge. I have developed a superhero persona and often

suppress my feelings. I was taught to power through situations and to leverage logic over emotions. I was taught to look out for myself and to be the center of my decision tree. I was taught relationships should have a checklist and meet certain criteria.

However, past midlife I am challenged to change who I am to be more like Christ. I'm challenged to reveal my pain, trauma and brokenness, to realize that this does not make me weaker but in reality, makes me stronger and more worthy of trust and connection with others. I should not have to shoulder all the load when we as a community can bear it together more honestly. Being a superhero is not healthy or realistic. Having the strength to point to God is sufficient and embodies a more sustaining joy.

Seth Thomas

- Pastor, St. James Presbyterian Church
- Certificate in Resilient Service 2019
- Master of Divinity 2016



COMMUNITY



SELF
COMPASSION



IDENTITY



BOUNDARIES

“Flourishing is an awakening of our image-bearing nature.”

For me, flourishing in service to God and neighbor means calling out people’s ability to bear the image of God in them to its fullest form. It’s identifying people’s gifts and the opportunities they have to engage those gifts in the practical places they are in everyday. It’s an awakening of their image-bearing nature.

On the flip side, the challenges to my flourishing have been the denial of my own gifts and fear of using my voice that the image of God has placed in me. It’s easy to deny the gifts that we have and stay locked up in our brokenness, to not seek the healing that can happen in the community of the church. My own healing and growth are really key to my success as a leader and

caretaker of others. I’m an enneagram 9; I am self-neglectful. So what I actually need to do is not go looking for ways to care for other people, I have to do the work of caring for myself, so that I can do the work of caring for other people. I need to tell people what I need, so an important practice for me is honesty about my needs. I need to attend to my whole being so I can attend to another’s whole being.

Flourishing requires slowing down. I have to do the prayerful and introspective work of asking “what’s going on that is so challenging, why is it so challenging, and what is it stirring in me?” Instead of running away from it, I have to take the time to engage with what the opportunity for growth is in that moment.



What We Learned

Participants shared their principles of ministry, worship, leadership, and the theological frameworks that encourage them in their work. Their responses indicate that...

MINISTRY IS

- Collaborative
- Inviting others into healing through connection with God, self, and others
- Equipping others to embody Christ in the world

WORSHIP IS

- A practice to unify across difference
- Prophetic
- Embodied

LEADERSHIP REQUIRES

- Honesty about one's own doubts and struggles
- Vulnerability

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS

Theological frameworks that support includes the beliefs that:

- Connection to others is tied to connection with God
- Loss leads to new life
- Self-compassion is a spiritual practice

These might traditionally be called incarnation, resurrection, and grace.



Finding Meaning

“The church, therefore, should not be confused with an organization, a denomination, a movement, or a leadership structure. The church is the people of God.”

FRANK VIOLA, Reimagining Church

There is a shift happening in what image is conveyed in the word ‘ministry.’ Ministry in post-Christendom takes many forms, from the easily-recognizable pastor in mainline denomination, to individual counseling of the afflicted and marginalized, to gatherings in yoga studios and virtual communities, to faithful presence in business settings.

These forms are all ways that Christians are leading people in engaging God and God’s abundantly offered reconciliation, redemption, and salvation. They are

ways that Christians are supporting the faith lives of their communities, by means that individuals in post-Christendom contexts are able and willing to access.

What holds across these varied forms of ministry is a focus on following Spirit and embodying Christ for self and others, to joining the activity that God is already doing in the world, and to faithful witness of one’s own struggles and hopes. Ministry today does what good ministry has always done: It reads culture, and offers a response. It meets people right where they are, and helps them discern what is next. Ministry, then, may be more about content — a way of living and relating the message of Christianity — than it is about any particular form.

Today’s ministers, no matter their title, are people who embody Christ in love and service to God and neighbor. To flourish in ministry, these leaders need relationships in which they can be vulnerable about their experiences and collaborative in service. They need boundaries and practices that help them to be kind to themselves, body and soul. And perhaps above all, they need a connection to God that grounds their identity and fosters self-compassion.



What We Hope For

- We hope that ministers with any job title find encouragement as they pursue the work God has given them to do, in the particularities of their identity and context.
- We hope this is an added resource in their resilience, encouraging them to pursue peer support across fields and to engage a sense of purpose, meaning-making, and creativity in their work.
- We hope that churches and communities find inspiration to continue to innovate and experiment with bold expressions of gathering and spiritual practices, and freedom to pursue connection in ways that are faithful, though perhaps not understood as “traditional.”
- We hope that established institutions can be generous in their understanding of who is a minister, and generous in their resourcing of innovative ministries.
- We hope that Christians can better understand post-Christendom as an exciting time for Christianity, full of hope and possibility; that this context is a valuable place for growth of the Church that is ever in formation; that it’s in these moments of cultural transition that we can join Spirit in the co-creation of our communities.
- For the future of faith in North America, we hope for an understanding of Christianity that is distinct from Christendom.
- We hope that a wider embrace of post-Christendom ministry helps the people and cities we serve to see new possibilities for connecting to God and neighbors.
- We hope for Christianity to become associated with collaborative communities who are honest about their struggles, who are attuned to their neighbors, and who embody in their lives and actions the message of Christ’s grace.



Gratitude

We are grateful...

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The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology trains people to be competent in the study of text, soul, and culture in order to serve God and neighbor through transforming relationships. We offer masters degrees in Divinity, Theology & Culture, and Counseling Psychology, as well as trainings through Resilient Leaders Project and The Allender Center.

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