



**Kristina Lizardy-Hajbi and Matthew Floding, eds. *Explore: Vocational Discovery in Ministry*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2022. 229 pages.**

*Explore: Vocational Discovery in Ministry* is a resource I wish I had available to me thirty years ago when I graduated from high school and began discerning a career in ministry (my “call”). I had few examples of contexts for ministry beyond the walls of the parish, an experience still not uncommon. The latest volume in the Explorations in Theological Field Education series, *Explore* offers readers a greatly expanded horizon. It is an important read for me as an Association of Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE) certified CPE educator and as an ordained Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) minister serving as the chair of my regional church’s Commission on Ministry. Most relevant for those pondering a life of service within the Christian context and pursuing a Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degree, I also highly recommend this book to those who, like me, seek to educate, mentor, and support individuals at various stages of life as they respond to their perceived “call” to a ministry of some kind.

When I headed off to do my undergraduate work in the fall of 1992, I could not envision that which has become my current reality: ministering outside the parish and ministering in multiple contexts (i.e., a hospital and a regional church leadership role). At that time, I not only lacked theological imagination about where ministry could happen, but I lacked role models doing ministry in non-parish contexts. In their introduction, the editors write that *Explore* “aims to encourage and equip you in your vocational discernment by informing and enlarging your imagination. We hope to ignite your passion for service by providing plausible pathways by way of inspiring examples.” The book achieves its aim.

*Explore’s* authors, representing diverse perspectives within Christianity relative to ethnicity, race, gender, and sexual orientation, describe eleven common vocational pathways for those who pursue an M.Div. degree. As they do so, it is timely that many of them share from their current experiences during COVID-19. With one professional foot in the church and one foot in healthcare ministry, I have closely observed the physical, emotional, and spiritual toll the enduring global pandemic has taken on caregivers of all kinds, including many who have experienced high levels of burnout. Burnout is sometimes exasperated by feeling stuck in one place professionally. I often encourage both those exploring a ministry vocation and those feeling some level of

burnout to imagine that they may be able to utilize their experience and skills successfully in more than one setting. When assisting others in more boldly imagining vocational possibilities or helping promote professional resiliency, *Explore* is a welcome companion. *Explore* also introduces readers to innovative ministers and ministries of which they may not have previously been aware. When I feel weary in my work and experience the weight of the world on my shoulders, it helps to hear about creative people doing creative

things. Indeed, my human spirit was buoyed by learning about the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (89), Unleashing Potential (96), New Communion of the Triad (115), Friendship House in Fayetteville, North Carolina (188), and Jarena's Daughters (191), among other innovative ministries.

One viable vocational path for those pursuing an M.Div. (or others) was not mentioned in the book—that of the cloistered and communal life of a monk or nun. Greg Little's essay (119) comes closest. Though currently not a common vocational path, I wonder if it might be more so in the future and thus be worth including in any subsequent editions. It is certainly a "call" that is not quite done with me.

In addition to containing essays of theological reflection that inspire a broader imagination for paths of vocational ministry, another strength of the book comes as the authors share important wisdom about the vocational journey itself. Of particular note, Ruth Naomi Segres writes, "Knowing where you are *not* called is equally important as knowing where you *are* called" (44). David Emmanuel Goatley and Traci Blackmon discuss the importance of asking questions and being curious while discerning one's vocational path. Blackmon's invitation to consider "What is God up to in this place?" (108) provides a potent prompt for me, particularly as someone who works daily in a Level 1 trauma center and who can become discouraged and disheartened by constantly streaming news headlines. As the former director of Black Church Studies at Duke Divinity School, Goatley's caution to those who mentor others is particularly apropos: "We must not assume that the mentor's path and opportunities exist for everyone" (48). Miguel A. De La Torre emphasizes the importance of openness to being changed by one's vocational path (63), and Mary Schaller Blaufuss speaks to the importance of trying out and experiencing different ministry opportunities (96).

One glaring deficiency with *Explore* is the premium placed on saying "yes" during one's vocational discernment. This sentiment is expressed emphatically in Karen Aliveto's "To Say Yes, Again and Again and Again." After reading the essays in this collection, I yearned for at least one essay on the importance of saying "no" or "not yet." Providing a clear "no" or "not yet" is a lost art in some ministry circles where leaders sometimes struggle to set solid personal and professional boundaries. In my work with those pursuing denominational ordination or endorsement, and in my work with those pursuing a CPE residency or board certification as a healthcare chaplain, I have observed

many church leaders—ordained and lay—as well as many certification committee members struggle to say “no” or “not yet” when such care and caution is warranted.

The strengths of this work clearly outweigh the weaknesses as it draws readers into a lively and inspiring exploration of the many paths open to them and the unique ways each person may walk their path. For those discerning their vocation or “call” and for those in need of creative inspiration in their current work, I most certainly recommend *Explore: Vocational Discovery in Ministry*.

Timothy Shipe  
Spiritual Care Manager, Harborview Medical Center  
Seattle, Washington