

Malcolm L. Warford, *The Spirit's Tether: Eight Lives in Ministry* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2011), 227 pp.

In the 1970s, Malcolm Warford interviewed students as they entered Union Seminary in New York and again at several points during their seminary careers. With only occasional contact with the students after they graduated, Warford brought together eight of these students in 2008 to discuss how their lives and ministry had taken shape in the intervening years. Each one read the transcripts of their earlier interviews and wrote an essay that explored who they had become in relation to the people they had been. We learn about each of the eight as the book's chapters progress from formative events of childhood, to particular issues each one faced at Union Seminary, to a summary of their years in ministry, and finally to what lies in their respective futures.

The Spirit's Tether presents compelling stories about the joys, challenges, and disappointments of the seminary experience. Many present-day students will resonate with the challenge of fitting in, just as Marvin and Anna found difficulty in situating their African-American identities and church traditions into the larger context of Union's history and commitments. Other students will identify with ambiguities around the call to ministry, the turning points in the vocational journey, and the surprise at finding that higher critical approaches in theological education can often trump monastic impulses. Union's uncertain future at the time these eight matriculated should provide a frame of reference for today's students attending seminaries facing precarious situations of their own.

The book also paints honest pictures about the realities of church and ministry. Ruth describes the relentless challenge of working with limited budgets, exhausted lay leadership, deteriorating buildings, and ineffective congregational practices. David, a Hispanic pastor, laments his meager salary and pension after thirty-six years in ministry. Yet, amid the winding journeys, demanding seasons, and profound weariness, most of the eight would take up this path again. They have found that pastoral ministry has provided the fullest way imaginable for them to express their life commitments.

The Spirit's Tether allows ministry students to see the pastoral life in the long view and provides numerous clarifying reference points for their own journeys. It gives concrete examples of the critical role reflection and lifelong learning play in the practice of ministry. The issues raised here continue to be significant and urgent. I highly recommend this book.

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