New study: What are the benefits of peer-learning groups for clergy and the congregations they serve?
On a long shelf in my study here at the Seminary, there sit some twenty-five or so photographs of a cohort group to which I have belonged for as many years—one year per picture. We meet for a week at the beginning of each January, and work with an invited scholar-facilitator on the substance and craft of preaching. More importantly, though, we have become a sort of school of the Spirit—coaxing one another not just on skills, but finally on character and personhood and faith and ministry and vocational obedience. The group has grown a bit over the years—shedding some members and adding others—and gradually it has become quite simply the most important group in my life. Year after year, people in this group have held one another accountable, have encouraged one another’s strengths and challenged one another’s areas of needed growth; and, in the furnace of formation, have become stuck to one another in ways, finally, that are holy and redemptive. If I am remotely useful and effective as a preacher, as a pastor, even as a Seminary president, it is in greatest measure because of the teaching power of this group—“the Moveable Feast.”

Some time ago now, the Lilly Endowment became interested in what is possible in such peer support groups, and began to take seriously the pedagogical role they play in informing and sustaining pastors and thus churches. What follows in this issue of Windows is an analysis of Lilly’s Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) program—an initiative which funded scores of cohort learning groups across the warp and woof of American Christianity. Our own Janet Maykus, principal of the College of Pastoral Leaders, co-authored this study; and its findings are both fascinating and encouraging. Also in this issue is a series of testimonials, really, representing the work and joy experienced by various cohorts funded by our College. If you find this reading inspiring, I challenge you to explore how your own continuing education might be enriched through such a group.

You will also note various other items of interest in the pages that follow. Do not miss the details of our 2010 MidWinters; and, if you have not yet made plans to be here for our annual lecture series and “homecoming,” pencil in February 1-3, 2010!

From cover to cover, this particular issue of Windows reminds me of a prayer I once heard. “O Lord, we ask you for many things; but what you give us, over and over again, is … each other.”

Faithfully yours,

Theodore J. Wardlaw
President
Peer-learning groups for clergy

Support systems

A comprehensive study looks at the value of clergy peer-group learning

BY JANET MAYKUS

Pilgrimage

BY MELINDA VEEATCH

From cohort to alliance

BY DANIEL DAVID

Stuff that matters

BY DREW TRAVIS

A spectrum of colors

BY JACK HABERER

A “living tradition”

BY KEN CARTER

Community news

Faculty news

Development news

Alumni/ae news

Theological Education Fund

The theological schools of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) no longer receive funding from the basic mission budget of the General Assembly. Churches are asked to contribute 1% of their operating budgets to the fund, which is then distributed to the seminaries.
Support

BY JANET MAYKUS

Over the past twenty years, numerous studies have warned that
Ministers became a high-risk group to insurance carriers, leaving some denominations scrambling to find coverage for their pastors. An unparalleled exodus of ordained clergy left denominations bereft of seasoned leaders and pulpits stood empty. These problems, compounded by rapid societal changes that affected the role of clergy, their status in the community, and the validity of their authority were similar across the denominational and theological gamut.

In 2003, the Lilly Endowment Inc. launched the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) Initiative, a vast program in which more than 15,000 ministry leaders in the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico continue to participate.

Each of the sixty-three institutions that received SPE grants—seminaries, denominational headquarters, retreat and counseling centers, and other educational bodies—used the funds to develop and administer programs that enliven, invigorate, and sustain pastors for life-long ministry. (Austin Seminary received $1.6 million in SPE funds, from which its College of Pastoral Leaders emerged.) Representing nearly every Christian tradition, SPE projects focused primarily on creating programs of peer learning. Many

Janet Maykus, principal of the College of Pastoral Leaders (CPL) and director of Christian Leadership Education at Austin Seminary, serves as the administrator of The Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) Initiative Survey of Participants in Groups for Ministers and Other Pastoral Leaders. She and Penny Long Marler, PhD, professor of sociology of religion at Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama, are co-principal investigators of the project. Robert Reber, PhD, President Pro Tempore of Bexley Hall, a Seminary of the Episcopal Church in Columbus, Ohio, and Bruce Roberts, PhD, leadership consultant and retired professor of Christian Education, Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, Indiana, serve as consultants for the survey project. For survey details, go to www.austinseminary.edu/SPE

The quotes that accompany this feature are taken from project director surveys and from CPL cohort evaluations; the photos are of various CPL cohort groups and this summer’s Pilgrimage to the Holy Land sponsored by the CF Foundation (see story on page 4).
In late September of this year, I received a call from a colleague, asking about the Pilgrimage to the Holy Land that Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary had hosted in early August with sponsorship from the CF Foundation in Atlanta. He had seen video clips and journal entries of the trip on the Austin Seminary website and was curious to know exactly what had been its focus for the twenty pastors from eight different Protestant denominations around the United States.

“Don't you think,” he asked, “it was a bit self-serving to go to a place of such deep struggle just to experience spiritual renewal? Would it not have been better as leaders of your congregations to go there with an objective to educate yourselves about the conflict so you could help raise awareness when you returned?”

It was a tough question, and one we asked ourselves and the pilgrimage sponsor before we left. Our answer came as together we engaged each day of pilgrimage.

The purpose of pilgrimage is to attend anew to the faith in which we live. Pilgrimage requires us to step out of the familiar orientation of our own experience, our own schedule, our own preferences, our own politics, our own people, our own homes, our own comfort zones—in other words, our own self-controlled environments—and open ourselves to the leading of the Spirit in a new place and in a different way.

The purpose of pilgrimage is also to be in community, to be looking and listening with others, to learn how differently we each engage and experience all that we see, even as we are on pilgrimage together. It calls us to make space daily in prayer, reflection, and worship together to hear how the Holy Spirit is talking to us through one another—even when what we hear challenges what we have always believed.

Pilgrimage to Israel is risky business, because it knocks away the crutches of comfortable assumptions we may be carrying about the biblical story and how Jesus lived it. It invites us into daily life and prayer with people we have not known before who don’t see faith as we do. But those things are also among its many blessings—the opportunity to experience the biblical story “out of the box” deepens its meaning and sharpens its call to us as disciples and as leaders of congregations. Sitting at a much broader Christian table, listening to and praying and worshiping with those who engage prayer and worship differently was a deep drink of the Spirit that I had not anticipated—and one that opened all of us to the gifts in the different ways we can worship together.

Being on this pilgrimage also made it possible for us to visit just as people with Christians, Jews, and Muslims living in the region whose lives are so overwhelmed by the political solutions that seem to bring only more violence and misunderstanding, not resolution. Because we did not come to those conversations with a curriculum or an agenda, but simply with a desire to hear, there was room to talk honestly about life in Israel, in Palestine, and in the United States and about the blessings and challenges of living our long-held faith in the reality of the present days.

As pastors called to pilgrimage, we walked along a road long-traveled, but certainly less traveled in these modern days. For all of us, to quote Robert Frost, “it has made all the difference” in how we engage ministry and faith today.

Melinda Veatch (MDiv’96) is executive director of Tarrant Area Community of Churches, an inter-denominational community ministry in Fort Worth, Texas. This summer she led Austin Seminary’s Pilgrimage to the Holy Land, sponsored by the CF Foundation of Atlanta, Georgia. She is a member of the Abiding Presence cohort.
groups convened for biblical study, theological reflection, spiritual renewal, and the development of accountability and friendship groups. Between 2003 and 2008, SPE projects created at least 1,390 pastor groups, making it one of the largest pastoral enrichment experiments in the history of the church in America. Most of the original sixty-three projects and their peer groups are still operating.

Although all denominations report similar concerns regarding pastoral burn-out, spiritual dryness, and loneliness, they differ in their requirements regarding formal educational and life-long vocational education. A “one size fits all” approach never would have met the needs of so varied a constituency. The Lilly Endowment granted awards across the denominational and geographical spectrum to meet the multiplicity of needs. As a result, some institutions support self-formed groups while some assign participants to groups. Some programs provide curricula and some ask members to create their own learning covenants or plans. Some programs provide facilitators while some do not.

All wondered if any of this work makes any difference in the lives of the participants, their places of ministries, their families, and their colleagues. If changes are realized, what influence do the various approaches have on those changes?

In 2007, Austin Seminary received a grant to create and administer surveys to participants in groups to find answers to these and many other questions. Directors of and participants in thirty-two SPE programs that have extended peer-group components participated in the survey. Over 4,500 pastoral leaders were surveyed and 50% responded.

So what do we know today? We can infer from the beefy response rate that participation in their peer groups is something ministry leaders find important. (Completing the survey required forty-five minutes to an hour of one’s uninterrupted time.)

Respondents indicate a high degree of satisfaction with their groups and a commitment to participation. The median number of participants per group was eight. Almost none of the groups reported members dropping out, and they met for a significant amount of time—a median of two years, nine times a year, for three hours a meeting. The vast majority of respondents indicated they had met with another small group of ministers or pastoral leaders for support and continuing education in the past ten years, but in terms of positive ministry impact, spiritual growth, creativity, intellectual challenge, personal guidance and support, and group leadership, 100% of this subset said their SPE group provided a better experience than any previous group.

Group members decide what they will explore in 90% of the SPE programs. Sixty-five percent of the programs allow participants to choose their own membership and most (76%) do not include spouses or families. Group-based peer-
A core group of Hispanic ministers, one female and seven males, received a grant from the College of Pastoral Leaders to meet and get to know each other better through interpersonal dynamics under the model of clinical pastoral education. In the process, the walls came up at first and some us were on our guard. However, as time went by we learned to trust each other and to engage in a genuine and sincere fellowship in the spirit of what Jürgen Moltmann calls “convivence.” We were not only coexisting but we started sharing our lives as colleagues with mutual interest in knowing and upholding each other as ministerial colleagues.

Our group organized itself into an alliance and in the process adopted the name of the Alianza Latina Ministerial de Austin (Austin Latin Ministerial Alliance). Thus the acronym is ALMA. It is significant because it also means “soul” in Spanish. We have formed into a group of around forty ministers representing congregations from different denominations: Apostolic Faith in Jesus Christ, Assembly of God, Baptist, Disciples of Christ, Free Evangelical, nondenominational, and United Methodist. We are still in the process of incorporating into a non-profit organization, but for the time being we gather as a covenant community of Latin leaders in parish and non-parish ministries. Together we have adopted and written our values and we have also stated a mission and vision for ALMA.

**Values:**

*Unity:* We value unity in the sisterhood and brotherhood in Christ Jesus.

*Diversity:* We recognize the diversity in the unity of the church as a body of Christ.

*Individuality:* We value the abilities and talents of each person.

*Respect:* We believe in treating people with love, dignity, and respect.

*Development:* We promote personal and ministerial growth.

*Friendship:* In ALMA the relationships as friends are more important than any other type of relationships.

*Commitment:* In our covenant with ALMA we commit ourselves to attend the established meetings.

*Service:* We believe that as leaders we must first think of ourselves as servants of God for the welfare of God’s people.

*Integrity:* We believe that as ministerial leaders we must maintain our integrity in all matters.

**Vision:** Our vision is to see Hispanic ministries united in growth with the purpose of reaching our city to establish the Kingdom of God.

**Mission:** Our mission is to promote ministerial fellowship and to assist each represented church of ALMA in the fulfillment of carrying out the Great Commission and to establish the Kingdom of God in the city of Austin.

ALMA meets on the third Wednesday of every month. In these meetings we have a didactic from a member of

Continued on page 13
learning models are excellent vehicles for adult learners. The adult learner is self motivated, looks for information that has practical applications, and is up for a challenge; therefore, it is not surprising that these ministers were satisfied with their groups. After all, they participated in the design of their learning goals, they are surrounded by people they know will learn with them, and they are not distracted by the demands of family care-giving. (Check out A Lifelong Call to Learn: Continuing Education for Religious Leaders, edited by Robert Reber and D. Bruce Roberts, and The Adult Learner, 6th ed. by Malcom Knowles, Elwood Holton III, and Richard A. Swanson for further reading about the adult learner).

This is not to imply that there are no conflicts or issues regarding leadership within the groups. Every group that has been interviewed revealed that almost all members hesitated before committing to the group. Some said they wanted to make certain that they were not going to be a part of another minister group that was “working against issues.” They said they wondered if participants would actually live into their covenants with one another, and many felt guilt about leaving their congregations and families. All of the groups reported that the conflicts were handled well, and, more importantly, that the processes of positively resolving conflicts were, in retrospect, valuable experiences. These ministers now have tools for effectively negotiating the troubling waters of conflict. They say the lessons learned contribute to a reduction in their experiences of stress when difficult topics arise in their congregations.

The ministers in these groups say they seldom question their calls and they almost never think about leaving their vocations for secular work. They join and stay in their groups because they are always looking for ways to improve in ministry, they enjoy intellectual challenges, they find the subject matter studied personally important, they are energized by being with others, they need to “charge their spiritual batteries,” and they need a group that holds them accountable.

Clergy report they are weary of groups where a few large egos dominate the discussion. They have no more time for groups where “the best” in ministry is judged by the size of the congregation or its budget. Clergy have had their fill of gatherings filled with competition, gossip, and tedious focus on a few divisive issues. They sympathize with laity who leave the church; some wonder how they will ever be able to spread Good News when even denominational leadership meetings are marred by theological and political territory fights. By contrast, the SPE groups were models of community, they were safe places where people believed everyone was heard, they re-energized members’ commitments to ministry, they were fun, and people felt they could say anything without fear of rejection.
Our group had its genesis in a web of cell phone conversations late one night meandering through West Texas, dodging cows and coyotes along the way. We lost connection somewhere around Paducah but the signal was strong on the caprock and my battery lasted until the formula was complete and the players were chosen.

We gave the group a name—The STM Group—an acronymic expression for “Stuff That Matters.” Twelve hand-picked participants agreed to meet. (It’s an interesting number biblically, but assuredly with this group the comparisons stop there.) We gathered in the mountains of southern New Mexico for four days of theology, politics, and music. We came to let our hair down and to talk about, well, stuff that matters. It mattered enough for us to make it an annual affair.

Several of us have moved since banding together; we now come from Oregon and Alabama, Arkansas and New Mexico, and, of course, Texas. We run the gamut of pastoral experience: one young ‘un in his 30s, a couple of retired guys, and several mid-career pastors wondering what we were thinking in the first place and questioning whether we’ll ever make it to retirement. We look to the wisdom of those younger and older in our group.

We jumped at the opportunity to form a cohort group through the College of Pastoral Leaders for two reasons: the application process gave us the incentive to be intentional in clarifying our reason for existing as a group, and it provided funds to support us in our venture.

With financial support, we continued our exploration of faith at the intersection of the arts and spirituality. We have penned poetry and composed music, formed fountains of copper and ducks of wood, created art tying knots and dry flies. It is fair to say that we have learned much together and from each other. Without a doubt, this has been a venture in continuing education.

The more I dabble in the scriptures and experience the workings of the church, the more impressed I am with the relational nature of this faith we share.

The scriptures tell tales of folk like you and me, folk who live life in relationship with one another. For all the remarkably astute theological thought that has been summoned by the scriptures, the scriptures remain, in the end, stories of our relationships with God and with others. The genius of scripture lies in its ability to communicate truth through its words—words about relationships.

I value greatly the relationships that have been formed in this STM group. All our theological conversation and our pondering about what we are called to do and be as followers of the Christ has been strengthened by the bonds that have formed between us. Our reflection on the arts and the creative juncture where art and spirituality commingle has been enhanced by the ties that bind us. Our meals and our drink, our prayers and our worship, our music and our words have all come to mean more because of the bonds we have formed in the hospitality of friendship. We have become a community.

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Groups that have the highest levels of diversity (e.g. gender, race, denomination, etc.) are those most likely to have curricula and trained facilitators. The facilitator is an important factor in these groups as this person reminds the group of its covenant and models respectful listening when the expected and unexpected differences between members come to the fore. Members without facilitators indicate that commitment to their groups and/or their group’s covenants focused them through conflict and even allowed them to establish creative ways to negotiate troubles.

“Diversity” took on new definitions in most groups: decidedly diverse groups were pleasantly surprised by the similarities represented in their groups; the converse was true in those groups that appeared homogeneous. Clergy say that concentrated intentional reflection, study, prayer, conversation, and fellowship have revealed how those they once thought “the same” are quite diverse. Some consider themselves better listeners because they no longer assume that one who seems “similar” is. Those in groups designed to be “diverse” have learned to set aside their preconceived notions and are more aware of their personal prejudices and assumptions about those considered “different.” Both groups report that the experiences of being together with and being heard by other clergy leaders who have common goals make them better ministers, friends, and family members.

Many peer groups travel. In fact, cultural immersion is an essential component of some programs. Time away from day-to-day routines, from the burdens of administration and family life, can be refreshing and invigorating and can provide open space for new ideas and rejuvenated hope. Yet “the appeal of travel opportunities” was one of the last items listed as a reason to join or a reason to stay in a peer group. The need for “a break from my day-to-day routine” was more commonly rated as a reason to join and to stay in a group. Breaks from normal routines and immersion in meaningful activities with people who know and understand each other’s callings is revitalizing. The new activity stimulates the mind, invigorates...
A spectrum of colors makes a bright light

BY JACK HABERER

Brent Eelman’s proposition wasn’t very attractive, but I was too proud to turn him down.

To join him and a half-dozen other colleagues around the presbytery in forming what he called a “clergy cohort group” had a basic attraction. I already was participating in a national pastors’ covenant group that meets for three days each spring—and loving the collegial accountability that that annual gathering was forging. To meet for a full day once a month every month was appealing, except for one thing. Brent was, at least by reputation, so far off the other end of the theological spectrum from me that I couldn’t imagine the group becoming anything more than either a scream session or a conversation about bland trivialities.

But he had extended the invitation, and I was not about to get tarred as too high and mighty to give it a try.

So, with caution, I drove to the home of Mac Turnage—whom Brent had recruited to be convener and host. I was pleasantly surprised. The ten guys there (yes, it was specifically a men’s group) shared their personal history of faith and calling, as well as a how-goes-it report on their present church. Each one’s faith was genuine. Each one’s openness in sharing struggles was disarming. After lunch Mac led us in a discussion to lay the groundwork for a long-term plan—morning check-in to be followed by an afternoon topical discussion, with each of us to take a turn presenting an original paper or circulating an interesting article or the like.

Given that I was researching my book, GodViews, I realized that this could provide a great way to test my hypotheses regarding the theological spectrum with these folks that represented most every part across the range. In fact, I was quick to volunteer my papers, and they were quick to give insightful feedback with suggested edits. The resulting book reflects their wisdom and counsel.

Fourteen years have passed since our original meeting. Some folks moved away—Brent’s call to Abingdon, Pennsylvania, marked one of the first departures. Mac eventually moved to Atlanta and several years later joined the church triumphant. Others joined the group but five of the originals remain to this day.

Along the way we joined Austin Seminary’s College of Pastoral Leaders. We even welcomed its director, Janet Maykus, to break the mold of the boys-only club to become our newest convener-guide-teaching fellow. A twelve-day trip with spouses to France in the summer of 2006, under sponsorship of the CPL, climaxed our time together.

Now Rick lives 300 miles north and I live a thousand miles east. But for us the friendships forged through those years brought us into the deepest kind of fellowship, collegiality, mutual accountability, and pastoral partnership—the kind that we will treasure into retirement and to which we will return often to share our joys and our sorrows, our hopes and struggles. And in that circle we know we are loved—even though we live up to the name we eventually dubbed ourselves, “Spectrum.”

Jack Haberer is editor of The Presbyterian Outlook. Other current members of his cohort, Spectrum, include: Mike Cole, Charles Hendricks, Jerry Hurst, Ken Jack, and Rick Young.
creative energies, and helps the minister see her calling and gifts in new lights.

Those participating in groups report a rise in attendance at their churches. Although church attendance is not the only indicator of congregational health and vitality, it is one important indicator. Many participants report they joined groups thinking this would be a support group to help them leave ministry. Their calls to ministry were not questioned; their senses of weariness and lack of emotional and spiritual resources, though, were devastating. Focused time in prayer, reflection, study, and fellowship renewed their vigor. Colleagues, those to whom they minister, spouses, intimate friends, and children all benefited from the participants’ time with groups. Some ministers reported that it seemed inevitable that “the dog died” or “the pipes burst” or “the hurricane struck” while they were out of town for a cohort meeting. Planning for emergency contingencies added a level of stress to some persons’ lives, but the benefit of the time with the group far outweighed the stress.

It appears that the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence initiative struck a vital chord with minister leaders across the nation. Changes in societal norms, fluctuating immigration patterns, new uses of technology, and the widening gaps in the economy bring challenges to the leaders of our churches that seminaries and divinity schools cannot adequately address and remain committed to the courses necessary for robust theological educations. The challenges of modern church leadership demand commitment to life-long learning, flexibility, and curiosity from those in positions of authority. The SPE models allow for nimble and creative approaches to learning. I have never agreed with the phrase “one size fits all.” Finding the right size, the right fit, always results in a longer and more comfortable wear.
Early on our cohort settled on the name “Living Tradition.” We represent three denominations (Presbyterian, United Methodist, and Congregational) and the five of us have enjoyed associations within and across denominational lines. What unites us is the practice of ministry, especially preaching, teaching, and giving shape to worship, and, in addition, some experience in seeking to define these acts against shifting cultural expectations. So we are returning to the sources of the living tradition, drawing strength from each other and from varied readings.

Most recently we met with Jason Byassee, formerly an editor with The Christian Century and now associated with Duke. Jason is the author of Praise Seeking Understanding: Reading the Psalms with Augustine (Eerdmans). In preparation we had read Augustine’s Confessions alongside Praise Seeking Understanding; our morning focus was on the Confessions, and our afternoon attention was given to the Psalms.

I had not read the Confessions (I confess!) since seminary. Augustine casts such a large shadow over our interpretation of scripture (and in particular sin and grace), and yet he does not come up in everyday conversation. I became aware, in our morning of discussion, of how different Augustine is from our usual stereotype of him; for example, we explored the prominent feminine images in the Confessions. In the afternoon, our questions centered around creative and allegorical interpretations of texts; Byassee insisted at one point that “orthodoxy is more creative than heresy.” We acknowledged that often, due to demands of parish life or our lack of imagination, we are prone to “flattened” interpretations of familiar biblical texts.

Our upcoming plans include conversations with an Orthodox scholar and a visit for a few days to a Benedictine monastery (where we will again reflect on the Psalms). We sense the renewing of friendship as a means of grace (and of course this is enhanced around meals!); we also share a common love for reading and study, and yet know that the accountability of our gatherings prompts us more deeply into this discipline. Since each of us serves a congregation that tends toward the traditional side in worship and liturgy, immersion in what has been and is important is helpful to us, as leaders, but also, we are convinced, to our people.

Although we are dispersed by geography, each of us lives in contexts where the tradition is either called into question, rejected, or rehearsed in static or nostalgic ways. The “living” tradition is about the recovery of the rich insights from friends who happened to live far from us in space and time and yet whose voices are nevertheless essential to us. We also believe, with Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass, that there is a “hunger [for] nourishment drawn from the deep wells of Christian history, belief, and experience.”

We are convinced that the tradition is neither static nor a given, and that it merits renewed engagement in our own lives and in the lives of our parishes. We are grateful, as a cohort, for time and space to return to these “deep wells” that lead to life.

Alliance
Continued from page 6

ALMA or from a guest speaker. We also take time to minister to each other. We separate into pairs or threes to hear each other, support and encourage each other, and to pray with each other. We have grown in number but our spirit of mutual interest in knowing and upholding each other as ministerial colleagues continues. That is our DNA that was born as a consequence of our coming together and meeting at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary under the grant from the College of Pastoral Leaders. We remember this beginning with gratitude to CPL and to God.

I am grateful to the College of Pastoral Leaders for helping us make this community happen. It seems important for pastors to experience community where our role is not that of shepherd or leader. There are times when it is simply good to be among friends, to be cared for and supported. This community has afforded us the opportunity to celebrate together the birth of a child and the wedding of a friend. It has given us the occasion to share compassion in the death of a loved one and a listening ear in time of family strife. Together, we have shared stories of ministerial challenge and leaned on one another as we discerned new calls. In the process, we have come to understand each other and ourselves. We’ve lived up to what we said we wanted this group to be—because this is the stuff that matters.

COMMUNITY NEWS

Young incoming class active in service

Austin Seminary welcomed thirty-six master’s-level students representing six denominations at the start of its 2009 academic year on September 8. The convocation address, “What Makes Care Pastoral?” was given by Allan Hugh Cole Jr., the Nancy Taylor Williamson Associate Professor of Pastoral Care. The past two student body presidents of Schreiner University are in the incoming class as well as four PC(USA) Young Adult Volunteers. This year’s entering class includes students who have served as volunteers in ministry settings in India, Nigeria, South Korea, and Malawi. The median age of the students is 25.
On February 1-3, 2010, alumni/ae and friends of Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary will gather to hear Thomas Currie, Barbara Wheeler, Rodger Nishioka, and Brian Blount during the 2010 MidWinters. The three-day event will also include a Welcome Dinner Under the Oaks, time for conversation with the lecturers, worship and social time with the Jim Cullum Jazz Band, and the annual Austin Seminary Association Banquet.

The Reverend Dr. Thomas W. Currie III (MDiv’73) will be giving the Currie Lectures (named for his grandfather) focusing on the nature of Christian ministry. The lectures, which he calls “Dancin’ with The One Who Brung Us: Jesus Christ and the Embarrassing Work of Ministry,” will give an account of ministry that is rooted in “an understanding of Jesus Christ and the church he has chosen to embody with his own presence and ministry.” Currie is professor of theology and dean of Union-PSCE at Charlotte. He has served as an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for twenty-five years. He has taught courses in theology and homiletics at Austin Seminary and in its extension programs in Houston and Midland, Texas. Currie is the author of four books, including The Joy of Ministry, Searching for Truth: Confessing Christ in an Uncertain World, Ambushed by Grace: The Virtues of a Useless Faith, and Prayers for the Road.

In her Westervelt lectures, Dr. Barbara Wheeler will address the effects of differences within mainline religious denominations over theological doctrines, social issues, and religious practices and their possible implications. Her lectures are titled “Made with Human Hands: Idols of the Left, the Right—and the Center” and “For This Reason: the Dignity of Denominational Differences.” Using the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as a principal example, her first lecture will explore the ways that differences threaten the future of denominations and the second will propose ways that these same differences can become the basis of virality and faithfulness in the years to come.

Wheeler is director of Auburn Seminary’s Center for the Study of Theological Education, which she founded in 1991. Wheeler served as Auburn’s president for thirty years. She writes and speaks on American religious life and theological education and consults widely with seminaries, denominations, foundations, and congregations concerned about the future of religious leadership and institutions. She has contributed to and edited a dozen volumes on the future of mainline Protestantism, congregational studies, and theological education and is co-author of the book, Being There: Culture and Formation in Two Theological Schools. Wheeler is currently serving on the Presbyterian Committee on Congregational Song, charged with producing a new hymnal for the denomination.

The Jones Lecturer, The Reverend Dr. Rodger Y. Nishioka, holds the Benton Family Chair in Christian Education at Columbia Theological Seminary. His two lectures, “Marked as the Imago Dei: Human beings and our capacity to imagine” and “But it’s just a rock! Nurturing the religious imagination in a cynical age,” will explore humans’ imaginative giftedness and the challenges to imagination of a cynical and skeptical age. His lectures will focus on the potential of the human gift of imagination inspired by the Holy Spirit.

While he teaches in the area of Christian education and practical theology, Nishioka specializes in ministry with youth and young adults and has completed a research project comparing the participation of young adults in mainline Protestant congregations and non-denominational independent Christian movements. Prior to his joining the faculty at Columbia, Nishioka served for twelve years in the area of youth and young adult ministry for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). He earned degrees from Seattle Pacific University, McCormick Theological Seminary, and Georgia State University. Nishioka has published several articles, chapters, and books...
largely focused on ministry with youth and young adults and the educational ministry of the church as spiritual formation.

The MidWinters Preacher, the Reverend Dr. Brian K. Blount, is president and professor of New Testament at Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education in Richmond, Virginia. He was called to this position in 2007 after serving for fifteen years as the Richard J. Dearborn Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Princeton Theological Seminary. He was the first African American to be tenured in the Department of Bible at Princeton Theological Seminary and is the author of five books including Cultural Interpretation: Reorienting New Testament Criticism and Can I Get A Witness? Reading Revelation Through an African American Lens.

On Tuesday, February 2, a special ceremony will take place to dedicate the Stanley R. Hall Liturgics Lab. Through a gift from the Class of 2009, a classroom in the McMillan building is being outfitted with a custom-built (by alum Derek Forbes) communion table, font, and pulpit. The room will be used primarily as a practice worship space, long a dream of the former professor who died in 2008.

A tent under the great live oaks between Shelton Chapel and Stitt Library will be the site of the opening dinner on Monday evening. Guests will enjoy a Cajun feast featuring “peel and eat” shrimp, gumbo, boudin balls, red beans and rice, and bread pudding with bourbon sauce. The Jim Cullum Jazz Band of the Riverwalk in San Antonio will play during worship on Tuesday evening and continue for an hour after for those who wish to linger on the lawn and enjoy dessert and coffee.

New this year, in addition to book signings by the lecturers and Austin Seminary faculty, books will also be offered and signed by alumni/ae who choose to participate.

The Austin Seminary Association (ASA) Annual Meeting and Banquet will close out the lectures on Wednesday at 12:30. Awards to distinguished alumni/ae will be given to Laura Mendenhall (DMin’97) and Clint Rabb (MDiv’74), President Ted Wardlaw will deliver the State of the Seminary address, and fellowships will be given to outstanding seniors. The Seminary has made a commitment to end the banquet by 2:00!

To register for the event and buy tickets for the opening and closing festivities, go to www.austinseminary.edu/midwinters2110 where you’ll find a complete schedule of events and a video of highlights from last year’s MidWinters.

Crawley and Olsen join board as new trustees

The Austin Seminary Board of Trustees elected two new members: James B. Crawley of Norman, Oklahoma, and The Honorable Lyndon L. Olson Jr. of Waco, Texas. Each is invited to serve an initial three-year term.

James B. Crawley is the founder and chairman of Crawley Petroleum Corporation, Crawley Ventures LLC, and the Crawley Family Foundation. Crawley earned a degree in mechanical engineering at Texas A&M before receiving an MBA from Harvard Business School. He and his wife, Molly, are members of First Presbyterian Church, Waco, where James is an elder and serves on the Foundation Board of Directors.

The Honorable Lyndon L. Olson Jr. is an active member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the Council of American Ambassadors. He served as the U.S. Ambassador to Sweden from 1998-2001 and before that as the president and CEO of Travelers Insurance Holdings. He is a former member of the Texas State House of Representatives, serving from 1973-1978. A graduate of Baylor University and Baylor Law School, Olson lives in Waco, Texas, where he and his wife, Kay, are members of Central Presbyterian Church; Lyndon is an elder.
**The Dean’s Bookshelf**

**Big feelings in small packages**

Ernest Hemingway said you don’t have to use big words to convey big feelings.

The same can be said of “big” genres. You don’t have to write a novel the size of *War and Peace* to communicate passion, grief, hope, unrequited love, or unfulfilled longing. Sometimes a short story is exactly what’s called for.

This year two collections entered the contemporary canon.

The first is the swan’s song of perhaps the greatest fiction writer in America: John Updike’s *My Father’s Tears and Other Stories* (Knopf, $25.95). The second is a first work by a promising young author: Lydia Peelle’s *Reasons for and Advantages of Breathing* (Harper Perennial, $13.99).

They are must reads, as I’ve been telling anyone who will listen since I read them this summer.

Updike reminds us that he is the rightful heir of Hawthorne and Melville, the most theological of American writers, because he is the most reverent and observant. In the story of a man returning home for his high school reunion (graduating class of 1950), Updike writes: “In theistic Pennsylvania, David realized, people developed philosophies. Where he lived now, an unresisted atheism left people to suffer with the mute, recessive stoicism of animals. The more intelligent they were, the less they had to say in extremis.”

Updike is in his element in the long short story, “Varieties of Religious Experience,” which tracks the horrific events of 9/11 through the smallest apertures of individual experiences yet against the largest landscape imaginable, the meaning of life and the character of God. But his wry turns of phrase in the title story, “My Father’s Tears,” signal that sometimes the most important things about us are not cosmic, they are and remain ordinary: “It is easy to love people in memory; the hard thing is to love them when they are there in front of you.” These stories are achingly beautiful.

Lydia Peelle is the best new writer I’ve read in years. A native of Boston, she writes about her adopted country of Tennessee as well as anyone since Peter Taylor. When I finished the first story in the collection, “Mule Killers,” I closed the book and said that nobody could write a better story. I was wrong. The second story, “Phantom Pain,” was even better. She has a gift for allowing a narrative to transmute itself into a metaphor that represents something so elemental, so essential, to our humanity that we cannot, after reading the story, imagine there was a time when we didn’t know this story. There’s nothing so true as good fiction. And sometimes the compression of feelings into the smallest literary packages is what’s needed for the truth to fly home.

—Michael Jinkins, Academic Dean

**FACULTY NOTES**

**Whit Bodman**, associate professor of comparative religion, gave a paper, “The Color of God,” at an Islam conference in Ottawa and published an article, “Reading the Qur’an as a Resident Alien” in *The Muslim World Journal*. He is directing a pilot course in “Free Church Polity” for Unitarians and United Church of Christ students.

**James S. Currie**, associate dean of the Houston Extension program, delivered the keynote address on John Calvin and preached at the meeting of Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery in September. He also gave two presentations on Calvin for New Covenant Presbytery.

Academic Dean **Michael Jinkins** delivered the inaugural Lupberger Lectures at St. Charles Avenue Presbyterian Church in New Orleans on October 24, “The Reformed Project: The Legacies and the Future of Reformed Faith.” He preached at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York on November 15.

In October **David Jones**, director of the Doctor of Ministry program, delivered the keynote address, “Prophetic Ministry: Taking a Stand While Staying Connected to Your People,” at The Christian Health Care Center’s “Clergy Day” in Wyckoff, New Jersey. In November he was the keynote speaker for the Taiwanese Christian Church Council of North America gathering at the Austin Taiwanese Presbyterian Church. He also led retreats for First Unitarian Universalist Church in Austin and Russell Memorial UMC in Wills Point, Texas.

**Timothy Lincoln**, associate dean for seminary assessment and library...
**Worthy Words**


**Board approves sabbatical leave requests**

At its November meeting, the Austin Seminary Board of Trustees took the following action with regard to faculty:

- reappointed **David W. Johnson** as director of the Ministerial Formation program;
- approved a six-month sabbatical leave for Academic Dean **Michael Jinkins** for the 2010 fall term;
- approved a six-month sabbatical leave for Associate Dean **Timothy Lincoln** for the 2010 fall term;
- approved a one-year sabbatical leave for Assistant Professor **Monya Stubbs** for the 2010-2011 academic year;
- approved a six-month sabbatical leave for Assistant Professor **John Ahn** for the 2011 spring term;
- approved a six-month sabbatical leave for Associate Professor **Whitney Bodman** for the 2011 spring term;
- approved a sabbatical leave for Professor **Lewis Donelson** for the 2011 fall term;
- approved a feasibility study for a new capital campaign.

The board also accepted the sabbatical reports of Professors Rigby and Jones and approved a feasibility study for a new capital campaign.

**Sign up now for a Lenten study event led by Homiletics Professor Kristin Saldine**

“From Ashes to Fire: Lectionary Lessons for Lent”

**January 8**

Register here: [www.austinseminary.edu/cle2010](http://www.austinseminary.edu/cle2010)
My wife, Ayana Teeter (MDiv’06), and I were thankful to receive the Wilcox Scholarship the summer of 2005. During that summer we were married and served in a co-internship at the Taiwanese Presbyterian Church in Austin. Now we are in Mattituck, New York—out on the east end of Long Island. We share an associate pastor position and the responsibilities of parenting our two daughters—Evangeline, 3, and Naomi, 1.

As students and newlyweds we were quite seriously poor! The Wilcox Scholarship gave us the opportunity to devote ourselves to practicing ministry and learning pastoral skills before receiving our first call. Through your giving, God provided for us. During this internship, Ayana and I had our first opportunity to work together. Through this we discerned God’s call for us to be in ministry together. This call has been confirmed as we have worked alongside one another for three years and counting. We hope and believe that our co-ministry will be fruitful to the Church of Jesus Christ.

—Aaron Teeter (MDiv’06)
I f you would like to make a gift to Austin Seminary but also need current income, a charitable gift annuity may be an answer. A charitable gift annuity is an irrevocable gift that provides you (or someone you name) a stable, set amount every year for life and could yield more than your current investments (see table below). At the end of your life, the remainder provides a special and enduring gift to strengthen the Seminary’s programs. For more information, please call Elizabeth Shumaker at 1-800-777-6127.

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Says Dr. Timothy Lincoln, director of Austin Seminary’s Stitt Library, “Austin Seminary’s graduates, like everyone these days, are bombarded by information. By providing our alums with ATLAS for ALUM at no charge, Austin Seminary is ensuring that our graduates will have access to high quality information to enrich their preaching, teaching, and decision-making.”

To utilize ATLASerials, alumni/ae need to contact the Stitt Library at circdesk@austinseminary.edu, or call 512-404-4879.

David will also publish his first book, *Vital Signs*, in print January 15, in conjunction with that month’s broadcasts.

Tammy Gregory Brown (MDiv’94), senior pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Charleston, was honored by Presbyterian College for her work directing the multi-congregational Hands of Christ ministry. She received the Honorary Doctor of Divinity degree on Saturday, May 9, during the school’s commencement exercises.

The New England Dream Center, directed by George Cladis (DMin’96), opened the Michael Chaulk Master Tradesmen Program in October. The Center is designed to teach carpentry, plumbing, and electrical skills to potential workers in the region. Cladis is working with officials from the City of Worcester to identify dilapidated or abandoned properties for these apprentice tradesmen to renovate. Profits from the sale of the homes are reinvested in the program.

Rebecca Fox Nuelle (MDiv’97) is interested in starting a Texas Clergywoman’s Project with initial steps being a website with blog and possible retreat in 2010. Anyone interested in collaborating on the project can email her at rebecca.foxnuelle@gmail.com.

2000s

M. Anghaarad Teague (MDiv’01) wed Daniel Zane Dees on August 8, 2009, at First Presbyterian Church in Tupelo, Mississippi. They live in Pensacola.

Renee Mackey (DMin’03) was installed as pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church, Hagerstown, Maryland, on June 28, 2009.

Marta Peña (MDiv’06) was commissioned as an officer in the U.S. Army, Active Duty in the Chaplain Corps, on August 9, 2009.

Chizason Chunda (MATS’09) has been chosen to become the academic dean for Chasfu Theological College in Zambia.

Melissa R. Koerner Lopez (MDiv’08) and senior student Jose H. Lopez were married on June 6, 2009.

Above: Alice Hernandez (MDiv’08) at her ordination with James Lee (MDiv’00) and husband, Paul. Left: former ecumenical student Iza Hutzler (MATS’06) dropped by the Seminary in November for a visit with husband, Jeremy Schmidt, and daughter, Kamilla.

below: Alice Hernandez (MDiv’08) at her ordination with James Lee (MDiv’00) and husband, Paul. Left: former ecumenical student Iza Hutzler (MATS’06) dropped by the Seminary in November for a visit with husband, Jeremy Schmidt, and daughter, Kamilla.

NECROLOGY

Thomas K. Prentice (MDiv’53) Malden, Missouri, 2006
Florence M. Cole (MDiv’57), Davidson, North Carolina, August 28, 2009
Fred S. Morrison (MDiv’68), Green Valley, Arizona, April 20, 2009
Roger S. Watkins (MDiv’70), Greensville, South Carolina, August 2, 2009
Juan F. Trevino Jr. (MDiv’79), Brownsville, Texas, September 12, 2009
Elisha A. Paschal Jr. (DMin’92), Dallas, Texas, August 29, 2009
Roger M. Brown (MDiv’99), Osage Beach, Missouri, June 18, 2009
ORDINATION

Kathleen Brinegar (MDiv’08) to serve Community Presbyterian Church in Oakland, Oregon

Alice Hernandez (MDiv’08) to hospital chaplaincy at Trinity Mother Frances Hospital, Tyler, Texas

Jonathan Murray (MDiv’08) to serve St Paul’s Presbyterian Church, Needville, Texas

Emily R. Owen (MDiv’08) to serve Matthews Presbyterian Church in Matthews, North Carolina

Ryan M. Pappan (MDiv’08) to serve Douglass Boulevard Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky

Laura (MDiv’09) and Keith (MDiv’09) Hudson to serve as co-pastors of First Presbyterian Church, La Grande, Oregon

First female BD grad dies in North Carolina

Florence “Flosi” Mason Cole (MDiv’57) died on August 28 at her home in Davidson, North Carolina. She was the first woman to receive the Bachelor of Divinity (precursor to the MDiv) degree from Austin Seminary. Cole won the Faculty Fellowship Award in 1957.

While they were students, and before she married Richard Cole, Flosi and the only other female student, Eugenia “Genie” Hopper Zavaleta (MCE’57), lived in Wynn House, the former home of the president of the University of Texas. Before entering seminary, Flosi worked with migrant ministry for the National Council of Churches. She was active in Davidson College Presbyterian Church and was a recipient of the college’s Algernon Sydney Sullivan Award, given annually to a local citizen for service to the community.

Alumni Challenge

The results are in!

The 2009 Alumni/ae Challenge was a wonderful success featuring a kick-off event at the President’s Manse and callers in Austin and Dallas. A total of $56,666 in gifts and pledges was raised for the Annual Fund; alumni/ae participation this fiscal year is 20.35%. The stellar performers during the challenge was (drum roll please): graduates of the Class of 2008 for having both the largest number of donors and giving the highest dollar amount.

Connect with Austin Seminary alumni/ae over lunch, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Learn from a dynamic speaker and from one another. Lunch is only $10; the continuing ed is on us!

Register online at www.austinseminary.edu; click on “Alumni/ae Gatherings”

March 4, 2010, Grace Presbyterian Village, Dallas
“Elder Ministry” with The Reverend Sam Riccobene (MDiv’91)

April 22, 2010, First Presbyterian Church, McAllen
“Transformación: Leading Church Through Ethnical Change” with The Reverend Danny Cruz Longoria

May 5, 2010, First Presbyterian Church, Tulsa
“Art & Theology” with The Reverend Dr. C.D. Weaver

Alumni/ae news

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Dallas-area alumni/ae who participated in the phone calls for the Alum Challenge were: (standing) Traci Trul, Clay Brantley, Mally Baum, Walker Westerlage, Lewis Donelson (who led a Bible study before the calls began), and Anne Clifton; (seated) Matt Calvert, David Fletcher, John Evans, and Cynthia Logan.
**Envisioning the Future**

**of Christian Education & Formation:**

**Talking Across Disciplines**

April 5-7, 2010, at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary

This conference celebrates the 25-year partnership between Austin Seminary and The South Central Region of the Association of Presbyterian Church Educators (SCARPCE) and honors the long-standing commitment of First Presbyterian Church, Bryan, Texas, to the ministry of education. Christian educators, pastors, chaplains, and lay persons will explore the future of Christian formation and education in the 21st century as Austin Seminary professors address the emerging developments and methodologies of their disciplines.

**Theodore J. Wardlaw,** President and Professor of Homiletics  
**David White,** The C. Ellis and Nancy Gribble Nelson Professor of Christian Education | Convenor  
**Arun W. Jones,** The John W. and Helen Lancaster Associate Professor of Evangelism and Missions  
**David H. Jensen,** Professor of Constructive Theology  
**John Ahn,** Assistant Professor of Old Testament  
**Kristin Emery Saldine,** Assistant Professor of Homiletics

Come to discuss, collaborate, and learn!

For information or to register: www.austinseminary.edu 512-404-4857 cle@austinseminary.edu