

Modeling the Way Vocational Development at the Grantham Church



CULTURES OF CALL
Volume 1 Number 1

BY GRAHAM RESIDE

INTRODUCTION

Faith communities around the country are struggling with a crisis of leadership. Fewer and fewer young people are considering ministry as a viable career option. The current generation of religious leaders is moving toward retirement. Is there a new generation of young people poised to take the reins? Within a few years, the church could be running short—or out—of viable leaders.

The reasons for this leadership crisis are many. Some have to do with the changing labor market and career path, the increased costs of advanced education and the financial crises faced by denominations. Other reasons are cultural: religious leaders have lost their public status or public voices as religion has become privatized. Still other reasons have to do with failures of congregational imagination: some communities of faith have stopped thinking creatively about how to attract youth. They've forgotten how to transmit religious values and a sense of vocation to a new generation.

In the midst of these challenges, however, some congregations are moving forward. They are striving to cultivate religious leaders for the contemporary world. And they are succeeding. The Grantham Brethren in Christ Church in Grantham, Pennsylvania, is one such community of faith.

The Grantham Church is a successful vocational developer for a number of reasons. The congregation's proximity to its denominational college means a steady supply of young people. Its rural location, ethnic heritage and theological history give it a powerful social cohesion. But the main reason why Grantham succeeds in vocational development is simply this: Grantham *intentionally* inducts young people into an ongoing practice of discernment.

In a world where our career decisions, much like our romantic decisions, are taken for granted as entirely up to the individual, the Grantham Church is strikingly counter-cultural. It believes the church still has something to say about the life choices of its members. This belief makes Grantham an excellent place for vocational development.

Grantham Church

GRANTHAM'S UNIQUE HISTORY, together with its social and geographical locations, help shape its understanding of calling. Located in central Pennsylvania, just southwest of Harrisburg (the state capital), Grantham is the flagship congregation of the Brethren in Christ denomination. It sits adjacent to Messiah College, founded in 1909 as a Bible college and mission training post for the Brethren in Christ (Messiah is now a Christian liberal arts college). The denomination is headquartered right beside the church. In effect, Grantham is "ground zero" for the Brethren in Christ.

The Brethren in Christ describes itself as an "embracing evangelical denomination" drawing on three Protestant traditions: Anabaptist, Pietist and Wesleyan Holiness. The Brethren movement began in the late eighteenth century when a group of Mennonites from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, joined with local Pietists to form what was then called the River Brethren (due to their proximity to the Susquehanna River). The Pennsylvania Dutch (of Swiss and German descent) comprised the original members of the group. When the Wesleyan Holiness movement swept through the region in the early nineteenth century, the River Brethren appropriated elements of Holiness spirituality. Today the denomination looks back on all three traditions—Anabaptist/Mennonite, Pietist and Wesleyan—in its ongoing effort to engage the world as a vibrant, contemporary, evangelical movement committed to peace, piety and the inner transformation of the soul.

In 2003, Grantham's membership was 447. Attendance at its two worship services exceeds this number with 500–600 participants. Messiah College, with a student body of 2,800, offers a ready source of participants. Around 100 Messiah students attend regularly each year. Grantham also draws an abundance of retired ministers, missionaries and professors to its ranks, thanks both to the college's proximity and to the centrality of Grantham to the Brethren in Christ headquar-

ters. And while the church is committed to diversity, its members reflect the demography of the region: congregants are overwhelmingly homogeneous in ethnic make-up, and although there is some socio-economic diversity, most members are middle and upper-middle class.

The Grantham Church is ethnically homogeneous, but its age range is remarkably diverse. One hundred twenty members are 65 years and older. The children’s ministry serves 63 children (newborns through age 12) active in the church. There are 35 youth active in youth ministries, and over 100 young adults and college students participating regularly in church life. The congregation is family oriented and has many young families. The median age is 37.

As a Brethren in Christ church, Grantham follows a congregational polity. Currently it has a staff of eight, including a senior pastor, an associate pastor and six others. The governing council is composed of all members. A church board with 16 members functions as the representative body of the congregation. Seven commissions oversee programs and report to the church board. The commissions include worship; family ministries; youth ministries; stewardship; small groups; properties and facilities; and missions, peace and service. The church also has a board of deacons (30–35 members) responsible for the pastoral care and oversight of the members.

Many elements of Grantham’s environment contribute to its successful vocational development. Among the most important is, first, the church’s theological emphasis on the priesthood of all believers. In keeping with its low-church tradition, Grantham insists that *everyone* is called to minister. On the church’s welcome pamphlet, under “Our Ministers,” the text reads, “All members of the Grantham Church.” Grantham is theologically committed to vocational discernment as part of this priesthood of all believers, and words like vocation and calling are part of the common language of the community.

A second environmental factor supporting Grantham’s vocational efforts is the relative socio-cultural homogeneity of its membership. The Grantham Church (and the Brethren in Christ denomination more broadly) is no longer sectarian in its approach to the wider culture. But Grantham members still tend to share the same ethnic heritage. They also share relatively high levels of educational achievement, economic and familial

stability and a generally evangelical outlook on the world. This means that the “traditional family” and the “traditional life-course” are the norms at Grantham. Having such common values and experiences makes vocational development more straightforward or streamlined than in other, more culturally diverse contexts.

Grantham is also successful because of its historical commitments to intergenerational ministry. The congregation has robust representation across the lifecycle—from infancy to old age—and all age categories participate widely in ministry and leadership opportunities. And finally, Grantham’s historic ties to (and proximity with) Messiah College have profoundly stamped the church’s identity as a vocational nurturer. Messiah provides both a supply and demand for effective vocational discernment. And Grantham has taken on this role wholeheartedly.

A culture of vocation

Over the years, the Grantham Church has successfully produced many candidates for lay and ordained ministry. Today, the congregation is even more intentional about developing practices that support youth vocational development. I have noted those environmental factors that contribute to Grantham’s success. If we set aside those factors for a moment—after all, not every church has a college with ministry-minded young adults next door—we can pinpoint specific practices that shape a culture of vocation at Grantham.

As we turn to these practices, keep in mind that Grantham remains deeply rooted in a particular theological worldview. Its Anabaptist background encourages thoughtful criticism of the general culture. This gives Grantham’s youth a clear place to stand in relationship to the world. And it teaches them from an early age the difference between Christian vocation and a more general “career development.” In addition, Grantham’s Pietist and Wesleyan backgrounds treat sanctification and holiness as on-going processes of transformation, not one-time events. This long-term approach to individual growth helps situate vocation within a developmental model of the life-course.

“Who should I be, how should I then live and what should I do with my gifts, talents and time?” are focal questions in all religious traditions, but they are especially important for traditions

concerned with the soul's *ongoing* transformation. For Grantham, the question of vocation is thus intimately connected to spiritual formation, Christian education and stewardship. The senior pastor expects the emerging task force on spiritual formation to work in concert with the existing task force on vocation. He further assumes that both will inform and interact with other ministries in the church. At Grantham, in short, vocation is woven into the very fabric of community life.

An intergenerational approach

At least three practices contribute to Grantham's development of this culture of vocation. First, Grantham cultivates an intergenerational approach to ministry. This does not mean simply that the church offers programs for all ages. It also—or primarily—means that all ages are invited to play an integral role in the life of the church. At Grantham, leadership is intergenerationally dispersed.

This leadership approach generates creativity and energy. Members of each age group—especially young people—receive opportunities to lead. Visitors to Grantham cannot help but notice the vigorous and active involvement of young people and children in the liturgy. Recently an eight-year-old helped deliver the sermon. Other children have read the scriptures and performed music. Over and over again, young people note the high level of trust shown to them by the leadership of the church. The senior pastor models this willingness to share leadership, and others follow suit.

It is true, of course, that an intergenerational approach might come easier for Grantham than for other churches. Grantham's theological roots and traditional family focus encourage lay involvement, especially youth involvement. But Grantham also sets an example for others to follow. Any church that commits to involving young people in the life and ministry of the church plants a vocational seed in its congregants. And this seed can flower into a fuller sense of calling in the future.

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Role models

A related feature of Grantham's intergenerational focus is its attention to role models. At Grantham, young people interact with a range of role models active in ministry. If you were a teenager at Grantham, for example, you'd get to see not only the church's senior pastor—a 48-year-old male with a Ph.D.—but also a whole host of ministerial models: older people, younger people, female ministers, leaders with little formal education, leaders with diverse spiritual gifts and others. Even the staff includes people of all ages, from college to retirement. It is clear that the entire pastoral team remains committed to inter-generationally dispersed leadership. And this commitment has produced a range of opportunities for congregants to exercise their gifts.

Mentoring

A third feature of vocational culture at Grantham is mentoring. Across the board, congregants agree that older and more experienced members take an active role in guiding and mentoring younger people at Grantham.

Let's take just one example. Merle and Lila Brubaker are senior members of the congregation who actively mentor a young man in the church. For more than thirty years, the couple served in a variety of ministerial positions. Now in retirement, they have taken a keen interest in developing a new generation of leaders. Merle explains that when he was a youth, senior members took him under their wing. He and his wife want to do the same for others.

Grantham's mentoring structure includes three key leaders: a volunteer discipleship pastor who coordinates a network of small groups specifically designed to train young adults, an associate pastor who oversees the equipping of all small group leaders in the church, and a youth pastor who works with lay advisors and leaders. As mentors for young people, they stand in an interesting—and productive—position: they are neither parents nor “official” ministers, but work instead as supportive mediators of congregational culture and values. Parents of Grantham youth are acutely aware of just how important these mediating mentors have become. At Grantham, the good

mentor is one who partners with parents to nurture Christian identity and vocation in the congregation's children.

Even though Grantham is closing in on 500 members—and struggling with increased transience among its members—the church has retained important elements of its original character: it tries to be familial and intimate, and it promotes a culture of care and communal sensibility. Grantham succeeds at vocational development, in short, because it values—and shapes—excellent mentors.

Grantham's formal programs

Grantham's "culture of call" includes a commitment to intergenerational leadership, role modeling and mentoring. Under this commitment, the church has developed programs specifically targeting vocational discernment: the pastor-in-residence program, the youth internship program and vocational development for 13- to 17-year-olds.

Pastor-in-Residence Program

Grantham established a pastor-in-residence program three years ago. The program built on the church's long tradition of providing aspiring young ministers an opportunity to serve. Members of the congregation had begun discussing the unique ministry opportunity the Grantham Church has in being able to identify young people at the college and in our own church who seem to have a heart for ministry. This discussion, coupled with the recognition that the senior pastor and his staff had passion and gifts for nurturing young people, helped jumpstart the pastor-in-residence program. The denomination already had started a financial campaign to support "shaping leaders for tomorrow," and it had successfully completed an informal student internship with a young man who felt called to ministry. Grantham had all the ingredients necessary to institutionalize its pastor-in-residence program.

The stated purpose of the new program was 1) to identify young adults with leadership potential who have a heart for ministry; 2) to offer young adults a formal mentoring program; and 3) to encourage young adults to pursue seminary or additional Christian education, and subsequently to enter active ministry in the Brethren in Christ denomination.

The residency position is thus designed for young candidates who sense a call to ministry. The resident works 35–40 hours per week as a full member of the pastoral staff. He or she is assigned an area of focus (determined by matching congregational needs with the candidate's gifts and interests). The resident must submit a quarterly report to the board (and include it in the congregational letter) that updates the congregation on the candidate's project and development. The resident participates in all staff meetings. He or she also meets with a designated staff mentor (currently the associate pastor) every other week. The senior pastor also mentors the resident in weekly sessions, and the resident receives still more counsel from a senior couple in the congregation. At present, a retired minister and his wife are fulfilling this counseling role.

The resident position is motivated, in large part, by Senior Pastor Terry Brensinger's experience as a professor of young ministers "being eaten alive in their first position." He hopes the pastor-in-residence position will give up-and-coming young ministers ample support, mentoring and accountability. "We provide a safer place to make mistakes and a supportive environment [in which] to learn and discern," says Pastor Brensinger.

This year's resident describes just such a supportive environment. He applauds the congregation's strong show of support and is grateful for the mentoring he is receiving.

Pastor Brensinger's particular passion for nurturing the vocation of young people cannot be overstated. For while the congregation has had a long history of supporting youth vocational development, it is also true that the pastor-in-residence program did not exist until Pastor Brensinger arrived. Thus, his own interest in developing young people as ministers provides essential inspiration and sustenance for the pastor-in-residence program.

Pastor Brensinger may be the founding visionary, but the pastor-in-residence program still requires a significant commitment on the part of the congregation. Currently, the pastor-in-residence receives a salary of \$15,000–\$30,000, depending upon the hours involved. The church is seeking ways to fund this position through an endowment instead of the general fund. Before the position can become fully stabilized, a secure line of funding must be obtained.

In practice, the residency position is not simply a rotating staff position. It is primarily a development opportunity for the resident. As such, the long-term vocational interests and requirements of the candidate take precedence over immediate congregational and staffing needs. Grantham's administrators hope their new program will accomplish several things: the resident will gain ministerial experience to aid in on-going vocational discernment; the resident's gifts will continue to develop and he or she will learn to overcome challenges; intentional mentoring will strengthen the resident's ongoing spiritual and moral formation; and finally, the resident will enter full-time ministry, ideally (but not necessarily) in the Brethren in Christ denomination.

It is not hard to see that the pastor-in-residence program requires a major commitment, not only from the leadership staff, but also from the congregation, which provides financial and spiritual support. The ongoing funding of the position represents the most immediate challenge. But the congregation remains invested. Grantham's members recognize and value the pastor-in-residence as an incubator for denominational leadership. They also remain strongly committed to youth development and to spiritual formation in general. Grantham is eager to support creative programs for the spiritual formation of its young people.

Youth Internship Program

The Grantham Church also offers an internship program for college students and young adults. The church has a 25-year history of internship collaboration with Messiah College (students serving the church as part of their curricular requirements at Messiah). Under Pastor Brensinger's tenure, however, this internship program has become more organized and formalized.

According to the program description, Grantham's Ministry Internship Program aims to provide "an opportunity for college students and other individuals to gain firsthand ministry experience in a caring and supportive, and directive setting." Eligible candidates include "college students and other individuals who want to explore a possible calling into the ministry."

The internships typically span one academic year. The church has a summer internship program as well, funded through a grant to the college. The summer internships share the same mission as the year-long internships: to help young people gain ministerial experience up close and firsthand.

Grantham's internship program strengthens the church's culture of vocation. "Just having interns helps stimulate [our church's] conversation about vocation," Pastor Brensinger says.

What do ministry residents do during their internships? First and foremost, they work on a particular project (as part of their academic

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requirements), usually a research project. In conversation with the interns, the pastoral team develops projects that support both the intern's particular interests and the mission of the church. One intern recently worked on an outreach strategy for an underserved local neighborhood (a nearby trailer park).

Thanks to his efforts, the church now has a budding ministry with a new constituency. This year another intern is working with Grantham's Minister of Worship and Music to integrate the formal church calendar into the liturgy at Grantham—quite an innovation for a low-church congregation. Her creativity has already influenced how the church thinks about its liturgy.

In addition to their projects, interns also "serve in the church an average of 10 hours per week, and...meet regularly with mentors/pastors for developing their weekly schedules, input for ministry plans, debriefing and evaluation of ministry experiences." One staff person serves as mentor for each intern. These mentors assume a range of responsibilities: they support and encourage the intern; they hold him or her accountable; and they help develop the intern's gifts and abilities. As Pastor Brensinger puts it, staff mentors are also role models. "They also provide good models of people who are themselves at different stages of vocational development."

As with the pastor-in-residence program, the staff makes a concerted effort to integrate interns into the ministry team. Interns are listed in church publications as part of the staff. They participate in staff meetings every other week. "We put them

in significant ministry positions. They don't just stock shelves," says Pastor Brensinger.

For their part, interns express surprise and delight at the amount of responsibility they are handed. It seems clear that in both intention and execution, the internship program provides these young people tangible opportunities for vocational development.

The internship program draws most deeply on the resources of the pastoral staff, which takes first responsibility for overseeing and nurturing the interns. But the congregation supports the program as well. Members take pride in having a role to play in the ongoing development of Messiah students. And while the internships are unremunerated positions, every year at the end of the internship program, the congregation shows its support through a special offering distributed to the interns as a blessing and thank-you.

Grantham's Youth Program (13–17 years old)

The Grantham Church's youth programs represent the earliest intentional efforts in vocational development for the church's young people.

While vocation is not the *primary* focus of any youth programs—that is reserved for the broader agenda of spiritual formation and Christian identity—it nonetheless holds a place at the table. Indeed, the new youth pastor has been invited to work with the task force on vocation and to take Christian vocation into account as he plans future programming.

What this means, quite simply, is that vocation—here defined broadly as a calling to a life in Christ—forms a significant part of the youth programs at Grantham. In conversations with the youth pastor, lay youth leaders, parents and the senior pastor, I learned that these programs center on inculcating a Christian identity. Parents and leaders alike talk about the importance of biblical literacy. They want to provide their youth with a counter-cultural identity. And they understand that cultivating a distinctly Christian self-awareness in their children is a first step toward a more developed sense of vocation in the future. Grantham does this cultivating work in a variety of ways, from Christian education programs to Bible studies, from peer-to-peer groups to mission trips and service engagements.

Within its broader understanding of vocation as "a life in Christ," the youth program also introduces young people to more specific vocational

opportunities. Programs in support of this aim include role models and mentoring, annual mission trips, small discipleship groups, and Youth Sundays.

Parents and staff agree that a youth leader's first charge is to serve as a role model and mentor. Youth leaders at Grantham provide a crucial "layer" of adult leadership that sits between parents and youth and that, according to parents, is an invaluable asset in their children's Christian formation. These young adult leaders provide the church's youth with non-parental models of adults putting their faith into action.

Parents strongly insist that the relationships between youth and their leaders are more important than programming or curriculum. This insistence matches well with the youth pastor's own philosophy: youth ministry at Grantham is "relationship driven, not program driven."

Vocational development also receives explicit attention on annual mission trips. The youth group runs on a three-year mission trip cycle: one year the youth go on an overseas mission, the next year they go on a mission in the United States, and in the third year they undertake a mission project closer to home. These experiences expose the youth to cultural and socio-economic realities very different from their own. They also serve as exercises in hands-on ministry and service.

Just as important, the mission trips introduce participants to a focused work environment—one where everyone pulls together toward a common goal that is also explicitly Christian. Participants put their shared Christian values and concerns to work in an intensive communal setting. In consequence, these trips can prompt important spiritual experiences for young people. These experiences sometimes lead the youth to consider from a new angle their dreams, hopes and life directions. Such reflections aid in the work of vocational discernment.

The youth are also responsible for one "Youth Sunday" each year. Again, while this has been a long-standing practice at Grantham, Pastor Brensinger's leadership has given it greater prominence. Since his arrival, Youth Sunday has changed from an evening service to a morning service, signaling a stronger investment. The youth pastor and Minister of Worship and Music, for example, also use Youth Sunday as a teaching opportunity: they instruct the youth about the various elements

of the liturgy. Even with their involvement, however, the responsibility for the service sits squarely on the young people's shoulders. They spend months preparing for it. The children of the congregation also prepare a similar "Children's Sunday."

Youth Sunday supports the vocational development of Grantham's youth in at least two ways. First, it signals the congregation's commitment to including young people in the theological life of the church. Second, it gives youth a formal opportunity to occupy ministerial roles. Young people take responsibility for everything from music to scripture lessons to sermon and benediction. By taking Youth Sunday seriously, the Grantham Church demonstrates its commitment to a culture of vocation. It gives its youth exciting—and challenging—opportunities to experience themselves as ministers and to begin thinking about professional ministry as a possible calling.

Analysis

Grantham's vocational development is effective, in part, because vocation is integrated into all dimensions of the congregation's life and practice. As Pastor Brensinger puts it, vocation is woven into the whole cloth of life in Grantham's community of faith. This integrative approach works. It makes theological sense, as well, given the church's conviction that all believers are called to be priests in God's service, and thus all are called to consider their vocation as an enterprise of faith.

Grantham's approach also works because it is developmental. Pastor Brensinger notes, "We're intentional about that." Taking a developmental approach means that how the issue of vocation is managed changes depending on the place in the life course under consideration.

Thus, the youth programming, while mindful of vocation as part of its mission, aims to help youth think about life in terms of playing a part in God's divine drama, and to deepen young people's sense of Christian identity. Vocational development, for these younger members, means helping solidify their place in the family of God. The youth leaders certainly provide opportunities for their young people to experience ministry firsthand—through mission trips, service projects and participation in worship—but the emphasis is not on professional ministerial tracking.

The vocational path is wide and the question of career—whether in terms of religious professional or secular—remains in the background.

In contrast, the church's efforts with college students and young adults attend more closely to career concerns. Formal explorations of ministry are integral to the internship program and distinguish it from the youth programs' broader approach.

Finally, Grantham's pastor-in-residence program serves the developmental needs of those young people who have advanced farther down the vocational path. While still providing a context in which to "test" one's calling to professional ministry, the residence program targets individuals with a more developed sense of call. Keep in mind that the program was motivated, in part, to remedy the problem of new pastor burnout. As such, the pastor-in-residence program offers a safe place for rising ministers to experiment and make mistakes without losing the initial excitement that led them to ministry in the first place. It offers a supportive environment in which to learn and discern a candidate's gifts. In short, each element of Grantham's formal vocational programs is progressive, directed to meet the particular needs of young people at different stages along the vocational track.

Grantham's developmental spirit in its culture of vocation might be summarized as follows. 1) Youth programming invites teenagers to consider themselves first as Christians, then as God's agents in the world. 2) The internships provide opportunities to try out formal ministry roles and serve under the mentoring guidance of religious professionals. 3) The pastor-in-residence program gives those who have developed a deeper sense of call to professional ministry a concrete role and setting in which to test this calling and to gain the experience necessary for success under safe and supportive conditions.

Translating success

Grantham's leaders would not recognize themselves as experts in vocational development. Indeed, Pastor Brensinger expressed surprise that FTE considered his church a model for others to follow. "We feel like we're just learning our way," he notes. In one sense, his surprise is understandable. Only recently has Grantham become intentional about vocational develop-

ment. Its committee on vocation has been in existence for less than a year. And Grantham certainly has advantages that other churches do not share. It serves as the denomination's headquarters. It sits adjacent to Messiah College, which provides a pool of young, motivated people. The church is flush with strong mentors, ministerial models and leaders. And while Grantham's cultural homogeneity provides its own challenges, the congregation's shared socio-cultural values make it easier to transmit vocational lessons across generations. Grantham is surely an exceptional church.

Yet there are lessons to be drawn from Grantham's experience that can be applied in different settings. These lessons can support—or ignite—a rich vocational culture across a spectrum of diverse churches.

First, Grantham is intentional about vocational development. The church engages in conversation about vocation regularly and has instituted a committee on vocation. This committee is charged with deepening and enriching the church's conversation and its practices of vocational development.

Second, Grantham's senior pastor remains strongly committed to vocational development. He provides essential leadership in this area. There is no getting around the importance of the senior pastor for cultivating a culture of vocation. Pastor Brensinger provides the necessary leadership by keeping vocation in the forefront of the church's mission. It is true that lay leaders can—and should—take on responsibility in many areas of congregational growth and formation. But the issue of vocational development seems especially dependent on pastoral investment. Pastor Brensinger cares deeply about this issue, and his congregation senses this commitment. In effect, every time Pastor Brensinger steps into the pulpit, he is inviting young people to consider following his path.

Third, Grantham mentors its young people. More experienced members as well as staff take an active interest in the lives of young people. And while the church has a long history of informal mentoring, it has more recently taken a more formal—thus proactive—approach to the issue. The importance of mentoring is hard to

overemphasize. Mentoring is also a practice that can be easily appropriated in other congregational contexts. All of us recognize that in our fast-paced contemporary life, young people do not receive a lot of adult attention. Often both parents work outside the home, and educators are overburdened. Young people may be very busy with sports, music and social activities, but there are few contexts that lend themselves specifically to conversation between young people and adults about the meaning and direction of their lives as Christians.

The church possesses the tools and motivation to fill this gap. It stands as one of the few remaining social spaces where young people can be mentored by those further along the life course. Research with successful leaders across a spectrum of professional occupations attests to the importance of adult role models and mentors in the

discernment process. Yet many churches do not provide this kind of aid to their own constituents. The Grantham Church has stepped up to the plate in this respect. And the long-term payoffs of this commitment—for the congregation as well as individual youth—are considerable.

Finally, the Grantham Church provides programs that are sensitive to the developmental stages of its young people. The children's minister is concerned first and foremost to cultivate a love of Jesus in the hearts of her students. She has never initiated a discussion about vocation; however, she sees her work as fundamental groundwork for later discussions about vocation. Similarly, the youth group leader is less interested in conversations about occupational roles and ministerial vocation than in simply introducing a conversation about vocation broadly conceived. The internship programs for college students serve as experimental opportunities for young people to discover and cultivate more particular gifts: here they can test out ministry as one among many options on their horizon. And for those who are more advanced in the discernment process, and who have a more fully articulated sense of call, the pastor-in-residence program provides a more structured and formalized discernment opportunity for ministry in the church.

Thanks in large part to this progressive or

Vocational development seems especially dependent on pastoral investment.

incremental style of vocational development, none of the young people with whom I spoke felt like they were being strong-armed into ministry. As one 16-year-old explained, “No one has ever even asked me if I wanted to be a minister.” Yet the youth pastor points to this young man as “someone who is spiritually mature and probably has the gifts to be a good minister.” As this young man moves into college and beyond, Grantham will be a place where people know his gifts and communicate them back to him. At Grantham, he will have opportunities to explore ministry as a calling.

Of course, not every congregation will have the financial or human resources to offer internships or pastor-in-residence programs. At the same time, however, any church can be intentional about vocational development. All that is required, at least initially, is a commitment to talk about vocation. If this conversation sparks interest, the pastor can pick up the mantle and lead the discussion forward. Inculcating a culture of vocation also will entail finding ways to mentor young people and to invite them to hands-on engagement in ministry. Finally, any church can be mindful of the developmental stage in which its young people find themselves. This mindfulness, in turn, can help both lay and ordained leaders to pitch their conversation and programs to the appropriate level.

The most important step to successful cultivation of a culture of vocation in one’s church is to recognize its importance and begin with an intention to address it. As one of Grantham’s intrepid Committee on Vocation members explained to me: “We don’t always know what we’re doing, but we’re committed to helping young people discern God’s call for their life.” And that, it seems, is the foundational ingredient for success.

In the end, the lessons to be learned from Grantham’s vocational culture are simple: Grantham initiates a conversation about Christian *identity* with its children, opens a conversation about *discernment* with its youth and then progressively deepens this conversation to encourage meaningful *vocational choices* throughout the life course. This developmental approach offers a non-threatening and encouraging context within which young people can explore two theological questions that remain fundamental to all of us, regardless of age or

stage of life: Who am I as a child of God, and what would God have me do in the world?



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