

August 23, 2023 | Waynesboro, Virginia | *a newsletter supplement*

As churches shrink and pastors retire, creative workarounds are redefining ministry

Religion News Service. If you are on a search committee in a mainline Protestant church looking for a new pastor, or a denominational administrator trying to find Sunday pulpit-supply clergy, you probably already know this: The clergy job market is a train wreck.

A wave of older clergy will retire in the coming years, with fewer seminary students in the pipeline to replace them. Those students are likely to find few churches that can afford a full-time pastor of any kind. Add that the religious landscape is changing and facing serious challenges — where young Americans are increasingly losing interest in organized religion and the majority of believers of all ages, if they go to church at all, are drawn to large congregations; the fallout from polarized politics and a world-wide pandemic — and these are complicated times for aspiring clergy and the people who train them.



“I don’t think any of us understands what’s going on,” said Sarah Drummond, a United Church of Christ minister and founding dean of Andover Newton Seminary at Yale Divinity School. “So, it’s a stressful time. But I honestly think one of the reasons it feels so stressful is that we’re really starting to wake up. We’ve been asleep.”

Sarah Drummond. Photo © Mara Lavitt

To meet the needs of churches, often ones that cannot afford to pay full-time clergy, mainline denominations are adjusting their strategies for recruiting and training leaders. They include providing lay leaders with more training and authority, encouraging more clergy to have day jobs that support themselves — a trend known as bi-vocational ministry — or revisiting the way they view ministry itself.

Among those helping train new leaders is Nandra Perry, director of the Iona Collaborative, a mostly online training program based out of the Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest. The Iona Collaborative relies chiefly on virtual instruction and videos to give clergy and lay leaders the skills they need to lead and staff local congregations. That can take place in a diocesan school or through courses geared specifically to support bi-vocational clergy and the parishes themselves.

Perry herself represents a new breed of leader. A former English professor at Texas A&M University, she left academia to direct the Collaborative and become the vicar of St. Philip’s Episcopal Church in Hearne, Texas, a parish with an average Sunday attendance of 18. She said Iona’s program can help leaders at small churches in small communities get the training they need to have an effective ministry. *continued*



Nandra Perry. courtesy photo

Redefining ministry, cont.

Programs like the Iona Collaborative have sprung up in part because traditional residential programs built around a three-year credential aren't drawing the candidates they once did. Data collected by the Association of Theological Schools shows that the number of students enrolled in Master of Divinity degrees — required for ordination in many mainline denominations — is down 9% since 2018.

Over the past few decades, he said, mainline schools have experienced an almost 50% enrollment decline, according to Chris Meinzer, ATS senior director and COO. Meinzer said there may be an incongruity between what some seminaries are preparing students for and the reality of pastoring a small rural church, or two or three churches, rather than one large one.

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Erwin.

Former Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Bishop R. Guy Erwin, now a seminary head, sees part of his current job as helping future clergy adjust to an environment in which there aren't as many self-sustaining parishes as there once were.

"The problem is not that we have a shortage of pastors," said Erwin, who currently serves as president of United Lutheran Seminary, a dual-campus school in Philadelphia and Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. "We have a shortage of congregations that can pay a full-time pastor the way they used to."

Part of the problem facing many denominations, said Darryl Stephens, director of the Pennsylvania Academy of Ministry at Lancaster Theological Seminary and author of *Bivocational and Beyond: Educating for Thriving Multivocational Ministry*, is that there is effectively a "two-tiered system" of ministry. Most American congregants attend large churches (approximately 7 in 10), in which the minister has extensive educational experience, while the many much smaller churches (also 7 in 10) that have an equal need for clergy likely can't afford to pay them full-time, said Stephens.

In the Methodist Church, alternative methods of training parish leaders that don't rely on the Master of Divinity credential are already a reality on the ground. Elaine Heath, former dean of Duke Divinity School, is co-founder of Neighborhood Seminary — a program that offers educational opportunities for lay people.

Heath, a veteran of the older educational model, says she is a fan of Path One, the United Methodist Church's church planting program, where bi-vocational pastors and other nontraditional leaders often have opportunities to minister. "There is a lot of effort and emphasis on equipping people to do alternative forms of new faith communities that are localized, often led by laypeople," she said.

Leaders like Perry are hopeful about the future. "We've got some scrappy little churches that are out there being salt and light in some very inspiring ways," she said. "I think bishops are in touch with that, and increasingly, with the importance of elevating the ministry of all the baptized, and strong, well-trained, locally formed leaders. It's an enormous opportunity."



Presbytery's Big Event

Shenandoah Presbytery's Big Event this year will be on Saturday, September 9th, 2023 at Massanetta Springs Conference Center. Our conference theme is "Faithful Decisions in Difficult Times" as we consider Christians are called to join God's work in making all things new amidst 21st Century challenges.

This year we are excited to welcome speakers Rev. Dr. Teri McDowell Ott, Editor/Publisher of the Presbyterian Outlook and author of the book **Necessary Risks: Challenges Privileged People Need to Face**, and Rev. Dr. Mark Douglas, Professor of Christian Ethics at Columbia Theological Seminary and author of **Modernity, The Environment, and the Christian Just War Tradition**. They will lead us through worship, a keynote address, and afternoon breakout session; as always, informal conversation between sessions and during lunch should be a highlight of the day.

Registration opens at 8:30 am in Stewart Hall, with Welcome and Worship beginning at 9:30. Cost for the day is \$20 and includes lunch in the Massanetta Dining Room. After lunch, we will meet again in Stewart for 2 workshop/discussion times. There will also be an intentional space in the adjacent Calvin Room for quiet reflection/prayer during the day. Click on the links below:



[Information](#)



[Registration](#)



[Child Care](#)

OUR WORSHIP CHANNELS

CLICK ON THE LOGOS



AND THEN GOD SAID, (AND I HOPE I'M GETTING THE ACCENT RIGHT)...

WORSHIP THIS WEEK:

PSALM 17: 1-7, 15

GENESIS 32: 22-31

SERMON: RASSLIN.'



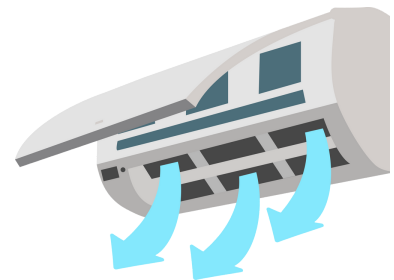
WALK. GIVE. CHANGE THE WORLD.

Waynesboro/East Augusta
CROP HUNGER WALK

SEPTEMBER 24, 2023

WAYNESBORO, VIRGINIA

Until further notice,
we will gather for worship
in the Barksdale Room,
where we will **TRY** to make it cooler.



This Week in History.



Approximately **20 African Americans** are landed at Old Point Comfort, VA, where they are sold or traded into servitude - the first African slaves in English North America.

August 20, 1619



President Dwight D. Eisenhower signs the proclamation admitting **Hawaii** to the Union as the 50th state.

August 21, 1959



French composer **Claude Debussy** is born in St. Germain-en-Laye, France. His unusual chords, based on the whole-tone scale, laid the groundwork for a new style of music called *Impressionism*.

August 22, 1862



Italian immigrants and Anarchists **Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti** are executed for payroll robbery in which a paymaster and a guard had been killed - despite the lack of hard evidence and a later admission by a known criminal that he had participated in the robbery with an organized criminal gang.

August 23, 1927



Thousands of French Reformed (Presbyterian) Protestants, called **Huguenots** are massacred by Catholics in Paris and throughout France in what would become known as the *St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre*.

August 24, 1572



Leonard Bernstein is born in Lawrence, MA. A pianist, music educator, author, composer and humanitarian, he would be one of the most important conductors of his time, and the first American conductor to receive international acclaim. His works include *West Side Story*, *On the Town*, and the opera *Candide*.

August 25, 1918