In an increasingly globalized world, seminaries are often asking how to adapt their traditional curriculum and teaching strategies to respond to changing ministry needs and expectations. Additionally, research shows that burnout rates for clergy people is high and that health of clergy people is low.\(^1\) Eastern Mennonite Seminary has placed the formation of the ministering person at the center of its curriculum for all students, but especially for Master of Divinity degree students. We see how this formation program addresses both of these concerns. This program aims to help students hear and respond to a vocational call and to do so as people who know themselves and God in a deep way, and are trained to listen to others just as deeply. Through observing our students develop during their seminary studies and their functioning as ministering persons after graduation, we are confident that the formation program here has much wisdom to offer to others who are concerned with the religious education and formation of people in and through theological education.

This poster will present the curricular formation of students at Eastern Mennonite Seminary, which shows our attention to the knowing, being, and doing of the Christian faith in conversation with the vocational exploration needed in seminary Christian education.\(^2\)

Three year-long formation courses are required of all Master of Divinity students, and some combination of these courses is required of everyone receiving a degree from Eastern Mennonite Seminary. In many seminaries, courses that teach students how to do Christian education/formation at their ministry sites is available. At Eastern Mennonite Seminary, these courses are also available, and in addition, every student is required to focus intentionally on their own formation. Through the practice and success of our formation program, we suggest that the following pieces of Christian education are essential to the health and well-being of ministering persons in this globalized world and changing time for ministry in and outside the church:

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• Ability to narrate one’s life story as part of God’s own story as narrated biblically and active into the present.
• Ability to listen to deeply, receive respectfully, and respond helpfully to the stories of others, no matter how different or similar to one’s own story.
• Practice spiritual disciplines and develop a rhythm and rule of life.
• Understand one’s own functioning in systems, beginning with one’s family and including one’s ministry contexts.
• Reflection on one’s sexual spiritual journey, including messages one receives about one’s sex, gender, body, and how one’s experience of sex and physical intimacy have and continue to shape a person and how they relate to others
• Discern how one thinks about leadership and authority, and identify him or herself as a leader.
• Ability to connect to peers and be an active and intentional member of a community.
• Practice vocational discernment on one’s own and in conversation and prayer with others, including reflection on formation both before and during seminary.
• “Put the pieces together” into a concrete way to take one’s learning from seminary into one’s vocation beyond the seminary walls.

Partial Bibliography:


