

An In-Situation Review of *Flourishing in Ministry* by Third-Year Divinity Students

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We read Matt Bloom's book during the final semester of our theological training at Yale Divinity School, meeting monthly with Rev. Jennifer Davis to discuss *Flourishing in Ministry's* impact before we, ourselves, were launched into the work Bloom has researched. While we found the contents worrisome as we considered our (very near) future, all three of us found this to be a valuable tool to be moving forward with and an innovative way of viewing ministry.

What we found unique was Bloom's effort to quantify such an abstract and subjective field as ministry. Omar describes *Flourishing in Ministry* as "a type of ministerial 'walking with,' leading clergy and other professionals to a place of wellbeing." We appreciated Bloom's scientific approach that factors in some of the deep-seated situational realities that often attend a life of ministry. His focus on finding meaning, integrity, community, and purpose

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allows the reader to take the bird's-eye view rather than getting stuck in the weeds that make up the everyday lives of twenty-first century pastors, weeds like the sixty-four different competencies needed for the job, most of which are not being taught at seminaries. One aspect we really valued was Bloom's bringing up the value of social support in chapter 7 and the "backstage crew" described in chapter 8. From Daniel, "I believe social support is a topic that is often discussed but not implemented until it is too late."

One somewhat troubling concept Bloom brings up early in the book is that of alignment —between the pastor's competencies and duties, the pastor's needs, and what is supplied by the hiring community and the pastor's values and the church's values, the latter being the most important for wellbeing and effectiveness. For the three of us soon to be seeking employment, focusing on values alignment, while surely helpful, is fraught with uncertainty. For Omar, who came to divinity school with prior church leadership experience, the issues of alignment are why he has decided not to pursue the ministry but to work in the nonprofit realm instead. Paige found the concept to be challenging in what it means to answer a call in a country with so many communities that are politically divided. "Do some pastors have more privilege and therefore more access to jobs that align with their values? When is values alignment contributing to oppression, for example, by churches and pastors that are not LGBT affirming? Is it possible to be a person of integrity and truly flourish given the reality of systemic oppression? How many small steps can an individual take to create wellbeing until they find that they run into sociopolitical barriers?" Does this mean we should *only* serve churches that align with our values? Perhaps these questions are beyond the scope of his writing, but they inform our twenty-first century search for a call.

Bloom concedes that there is no existing universal manual for pastoral ministry, so it makes sense to us that the alignments described will vary greatly. Finding that perfect fit may be like finding a needle in a haystack for us. However, forewarned is fore-armed. The concluding "way forward" not only guides the minister who may be experiencing burnout and a lack of ministerial wellbeing to flourish in their ministry but also offers a framework for those seeking a ministerial call in this divided and hurting world.