

Seminary 2050: Part monastery, part seminar, part mission agency

by [Brian D. McLaren](#) in the [February 21, 2006](#) issue

Seminary programs should be one part monastery, one part seminar and one part mission agency. As monastery, such a program would require emerging leaders to spend extended periods living in community and devoted to spiritual practices like contemplative prayer or *lectio divina*.

Those who have served as pastors know that without spiritual disciplines we can't be sustained in our calling. Practice in the spiritual life—which is so often taken for granted—needs to be a central thread of training Christian leaders.

Communal experience would not only offer the chance for the practice of spiritual disciplines, but would also expose candidates' latent antisocial tendencies. The current systems reward people who can get As in book-learning, test-taking and essay-writing, even if they get Fs in neighborliness, courtesy, forgiveness and sociability. If passing "Christian community" required being affirmed as a functioning Christian sister or brother by one's roommates and housemates, the church would be sending out different kinds of pastors.

As seminar, the program would not exclude lectures, but it would focus on students doing research and presenting their findings to their peers and the instructor. In this way, students would be practicing the kinds of skills they will use every day in ministry—research, study, reflection, preparation, organization, presentation/communication and evaluation.

Much seminar work could be placed within a simulated scenario. For example, instead of writing a paper on biblical interpretation, students could be given a scenario like this one: they are leading a church that is in danger of being torn apart over the issue of homosexuality; they must make a presentation to a board of the church on how to interpret key texts so as to help their members move forward. Class members might take turns being the pastor and being members of the board.

As mission agency, the program would send students for extended periods (at least three or four weeks) to live and serve among the poor in the U.S. and abroad. It is hard to imagine that we have been training ministers in the way of Christ without ensuring that future leaders have lived among the poor and seen life from that perspective. Not only would this equip them to understand and care about people who, according to Jesus, are vitally important in the kingdom of God, but it would change the way they read Barth, Moltmann, Aquinas and Augustine (or Matthew, Amos and James).