

M.Divs. without collars

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

May 21, 2013

I enjoyed [Michelle Boorstein's piece of reporting](#) on M.Div. students who aren't headed for parish ministry. She details how some seminarians seek to be ministers of a sort as part of their calling to other vocations; she also touches on the challenges of post-Christendom pastoring and the need for more flexible and affordable paths through seminary.

[CCblogger](#) Crystal St. Marie Lewis [posits another thing that might keep some theologically progressive seminarians from going into ministry](#):

Professors spend countless hours training students to think outside the theological box, only for their ordination committees to demand that they put God (and their capacity for exploration) back inside the box. . . I have come to think of this as the **Explore Now/Pay Later** model.

David Williams, another [CCblogger](#), [adds this](#):

[Boorstein's interview subjects'] stated intent was to have seminary be the place that strengthened their faith, so that they could better apply it in their day-to-day lives. . . Isn't that what the church is for?

A few additional questions I'm curious about:

- How many of these students go somewhere besides the parish *involuntarily*, whether for reasons such as Lewis describes or due to a lack of available pulpits?
- Boorstein notes a considerable decline in the percentage of M.Div. grads going into *full-time* parish ministry. Presumably this means the numbers she's using include bivocational folks in the "not a pastor" column?
- Are more and more students taking the M.Div. as a pragmatic alternative to an M.A./M.T.S.? Because it might be easier to get into,

or there's more funding available, or they want to be better-rounded teachers of future M.Div. students, or they see ministry as a fallback plan now that a tenure-track job in the humanities seems like such a long shot?