

What is a 'D.Min.' and Where Did It Come From?

The Contributors

The Doctor of Ministry degree first appeared in United States theological education around the 1970s after several years of intense deliberation within the Association of Theological Schools (the main accrediting organization for seminaries in the United States and Canada).

The idea of a professional doctorate for practising ministers had been under discussion among theological educators since the 1930s. The way became clear to develop a wholly new approach to advanced professional study beyond the Master of Divinity degree, emphasizing the integration of theological reflection and ministerial practice. The Doctor of Ministry degree was born.

The Princeton Doctor of Ministry program succeeds in relating theological reflection to the practice of ministry by doing something that at first might seem a little risky. It seeks to encourage candidates to reflect deeply on the social, psychological and cultural aspects of ministry in the particular context where ministry takes place. The course therefore leans heavily upon the Social Sciences in order to enable candidates to understand their context as fully as possible. It does this un-apologetically in the belief that ministry is not just the undertaking of specific tasks but must be informed by theological reflection that takes into account context, human dynamics, social and cultural circumstances and a host of other factors.

Princeton Seminary remains proud of its leadership role in the earliest development of the Doctor of Ministry program. Princeton was in the first group of programs to be developed and was one of the first four Doctor of Ministry programs to be fully accredited by the ATS in 1975. Princeton continues to participate actively with sister seminaries in researching, planning, and further developing the Doctor of Ministry approach to advanced theological learning.



How are Doctor of Ministry Programs Different?

While according to accreditation standards all Doctor of Ministry programs share a commitment to the integration of theory and practice in ministry, the ways they go about that educational task differ markedly. Some make use of “courses” in the traditional manner, while others (like Princeton) rely on special seminars or “workshops” limited to Doctor of Ministry candidates. Some focus on certain ministerial functions or skills (preaching, counselling, etc.) while others work at a more general level of ministry process and dynamics. Some require extended on-campus residence, while others (probably most) are designed to be done by ministers who live far away. Some programs conduct all or part of their work in remote locations away from the main campus, while others do not. All Doctor of Ministry programs require the completion of a substantial written doctoral dissertation or project, but the specific shapes and requirements differ widely among programs.



The Princeton Doctor of Ministry Process

It was after a substantial application process involving essays and theological reflections upon our ministries that the successful candidates assembled at St Mary’s College, St Andrews in 1996. The introduction to what became known as the “*D. Min habit of mind*” was a challenging but refreshing one. We were encouraged to examine experiences of our ministry, such as a conversation with a parishioner, or an event in the congregation’s life and critically reflect on the theological and human dynamic at work. These reflections produced “*Ministry Experience Reports*” that became the focus of our study. We were encouraged to look at these experiences (indeed any experience of ministry) through four different lenses known as “*Dimensions of Ministry*”. These lenses or *perspectives* were the foundation of any given Ministry Experience Report. In fact any given report could be viewed from each of the four dimensions. These four Dimensions of Ministry were: -



Interpreting Sources of Christian Faith: this dimension of ministry focuses on the interpretation and communication of the biblical witness and the Church's faith through its various formulations as they have to do with human existence and the Church's mission in the world.

Empowering People for Transformation: focuses on the personal and interpersonal struggle and hope for renewal, transformation and fulfillment that are viewed both theologically and through the human sciences.

Organizing Communal Life: is concerned with envisioning, arranging and enabling forms of communal life that embody the Christian faith.

Rethinking Faith on God: focuses on the continuing task of theological formation and restatement in light of the experience of ministry, even if that experience is itself under examination in light of Scripture and the Church's faith.

These dimensions of Ministry enabled a scholarly investigation, whether of ministry experiences or academic subjects from a number of different analytical perspectives. We were being encouraged to "take seriously the human experience which provided its data and that psychological respect and listen to the values and interpretations of theological thinking and religious tradition".

Getting Started

Through a series of workshops both at St Andrews and Princeton hours of Ministry Experience Reports were gone through enabling us to catch that "*D.Min. habit of mind*". We were reminded that it is all too easy in theological education to become so engrossed in theological reflection, operational strategy and the ministerial role itself that we forget the bedrock question: "*Why are we doing what we are doing?*" The program encouraged us to become more sensitive and more knowledgeable in responding to the deep needs of people who come to us, both in and out of the Church.

The workshop is the pedagogical core of the program with several aims. The workshops sought to enable us to learn an analytical methodology; to build a framework of peer support; to enable us to evaluate strengths and weaknesses; to integrate the practice of ministry with theology and behavioural practice; to become competent as critics, resource persons and consultants in the work of ministry and to grow in skill and understanding of our own ministry. It was the group dynamic which grew and blossomed during the periods of intense learning and sharing of experiences that was an unexpected bonus for each in the group. For this blew away our inhibitions of sharing theological ideas and exploring those unusual, if not unorthodox, situations in our ministry. It has created a strong peer support that has lasted well beyond the program.

The Final Project

The Doctor of Ministry program is aimed toward the production of a final ministry project in the individual's chosen area of interest. The Final Project represents the integrative method of the Doctor of Ministry study at work in an actual context relating to the candidate's own ministry. It is intended as a demonstration of a candidate's ability to relate the practice of ministry to fundamental theological theory and to relevant material from secular sources. Therefore it does not need to be breaking new ground in research but will examine very closely the practice of ministry in a given situation.

The following essays are six such reflections of six Church of Scotland Ministers who were the first Scottish group to complete the Doctor of Ministry program at Princeton. They reflect a diversity of content in their areas of concern and yet reveal that they are but chapters in one larger story of ministry in Scotland today.