

2005 National Conference on Tentmaking/Bi-vocational Ministry

**Friday — Sunday, November 4-6, 2005
Saint Mary of the Lake Conference Center, Mundelein, IL**

Edited by Davis Fisher

Saturday, November 5, 2005

Panel Presentation

The Rev. Dr. Deborah F. Mullen, Dean of Masters Level Programs at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago

First, I would like to thank the conference planning committee and especially Rev. Ross Blount (Blunt) for including McCormick Seminary in this panel discussion. My colleague David Esterline, Dean of the Faculty and Vice President for Academic Affairs sends his greetings, and regrets that he was unable to be here today. In fact, were it not for a prior commitment with our accrediting agency, the Association of Theological Schools of North America and Canada, David would be here. In fact, when we last spoke on yesterday afternoon, 10 minutes before his meetings in Pittsburgh were to begin, David was trying to convince me to trade places with him. He'd much rather be here with the Tentmakers, talking about issues of mutual concern for the seminary and for the church, than spending the day in meetings at an airport hotel in Pittsburgh. So, thank you for inviting McCormick to be a part of this conversation on the future of ministry for church and society.

McCormick Seminary was founded one hundred seventy six years ago here in the Midwest to prepare men for ministry in this region, which at the time was considered to be the frontier. Our founders believed the men who would minister in this part of the church should be educated in the ways of the region; that they should be men whose sensibilities were shaped by the realities of Midwestern life on the farms and fields of the small towns and villages rural Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin. Our founders believed rightly or wrongly that the seminaries in the East were ill-equipped to educate ministers for ministry on the frontier with its hardships and struggles, and so in 1829, Presbyterian Theological Seminary of the West opened its doors but not in Chicago. It would take another 30 years before Cyrus H. McCormick would successfully woo the Seminary to Chicago in 1859 from its birthing place in Hanover and New Harmony. Hardly the world class city it now boasts to be, nevertheless Chicago was up and coming, a cross roads at which rural and an emerging urban America came together in the heart of the nation's bread basket.

Today that idea of preparing men and women for ministries on the "frontier" remains for us at McCormick a driving force. And while the location and definition of frontier has changed in many ways, the idea of meeting the needs of ministry on the frontier of theological education is still very real for us. When McCormick was founded many of its students were indeed bi-vocational or tentmakers. That is still the case. Nearly one half of our students attend seminary mostly at night while working full time jobs during the day. And yet it is still not possible for a student to fully complete the MDIV without having to take some classes during the day. Happily I can announce that plans are underway that will make it possible starting with the next academic year for a person to attain the MDIV in 5 years going to school at night and on weekends. This is something that graduate programs in executive leadership and business schools have been doing for years. We believe the Evening Division Program will enhance our ability to equip

women and men for leadership in ministries that are faithful, inclusive, and liberating in today's church and world.

When seeking to describe theological education at McCormick, three words characterize the values and goals that inform and shape the ethos of the Seminary from its curriculum, to its worship and institutional/community life, they are REFORMED, ECUMENICAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL. Our mission statement says it clearly in this way, "We are a community of learning and teaching; challenged by the Holy Spirit and grounded in God's transforming love for the world in Jesus Christ." A spirit of openness characterizes the mission and corporate life of McCormick. It is in this connection that I see the Seminary's mission and that of Tentmaking Ministry being quite compatible in three basic ways.

1. With nearly one-half of all congregations in the Presbyterian Church USA being small membership churches that cannot afford to hire full-time pastors, seminaries must be in the business of training bi-vocational ministers, working with persons who understand themselves as "pastors with day jobs." We know quite a lot about that reality at McCormick where, as I previously mentioned, nearly one-half of our students are folks with day jobs, most of whom will never have full time pastoral positions in the church. Our curriculum needs to be sensitive and responsive to issues bi-vocational ministers will encounter including how to equip and empower the laity for full and active engagement in the ministry of the congregation.
2. The Seminary's mission from its beginning up to this day is deeply committed shape leadership for the church in the world. The church's public ministry needs to be omnivocational; that is to say, capable of responding to a wide range of issues and realities in which God's people presently find themselves. We need to be in the business of promoting a theological understanding of ministry that begins with an understanding of baptism as that which sets persons apart for life to serve God and the Church whatever their particular work, whether or not "ordained," whether or not the exercise of their ministry is in the church or beyond, in so a called secular job.
3. Related to the first point, the Seminary is committed to quality education for clergy leadership whether for bi-vocational or for service within the church according to traditional patterns of full-time parish ministry. The Seminary needs to be more attentive and intentional in its inner life (curriculum, worship, community and institutional life) to how it can support and promote tentmaker ministry education. Honestly, I think, this is a growing edge for us, and although I think we are doing some of this now, I don't think we are doing it as self-consciously as we could, and will given what I will take back from this conference.

I think there is much more we can do to look more deeply at the kind of questions posed on Justin Bader's Open-Source handbook website:

- What does it mean to be a bivocational minister?
- What are some of the theological reasons for vocational ministry?
- What are some practical reasons for vocational ministry?
- What biblical basis do we have for bivocational ministry?

Finally, I believe the Seminary ought to be a place that validates bi-vocational ministry as a valued and creative response to the reality that without tentmaking ministries and ministers, far too many of God's deserving people will go without the benefits of regular, high quality, pastoral leadership.

Thanks for asking us to join you today.