

We are pleased to continue this feature that invites readers to share ideas and stories with other readers. To receive the questions, alumni should sign up at <http://www2.ptsem.edu/alumni/change.htm>. Thanks to those who answered this issue's question. We received many responses, both serious and lighthearted, and will include more of them in the next issue.

## If you could make one addition to the course catalog at PTS, what course would you offer, and why?

A course on basic business and accounting principles. Though I hate it when people glibly talk about the church as a business, I think many pastors would benefit from knowing what it takes to run a business. What is a chart of accounts? What is a balance sheet and how do you read it? What are good accounting procedures? How do you make sense of professional audit reports? And for those who are fortunate enough (or unfortunate enough, as the case may be) to serve churches with endowments, how do you understand investment reports?

*Richard J. Moore (M.Div., 1970)*  
*Neenah, Wisconsin*



I have been active in training interim pastors, and participants in our training events say that basic information on family systems theory and its application to the church is one of the most helpful things in our curriculum. Most wish they had learned about it earlier.

*Tom Sebben (M.Div., 1970)*  
*Sharon, Pennsylvania*



There ought to be a course called "What They Don't Teach You in Seminary." It would include: what to do on a Sunday when the air conditioning isn't working, the substitute organist can't find the organ key, and the P.A. system breaks down. How to handle people who think that being caring entitles them to know intimate details of others' lives and health. What to say when a kid interrupts your children's sermon and says, "Why should we love Jesus? He died."

*Allen Brindisi (M.Div., 1971)*  
*Davidson, North Carolina*



With my tongue firmly in cheek, I'd offer a course in verbal self-defense against malicious parishioners. (Physical self-defense is best accomplished by throwing the *Book of Confessions* and the ever-expanding *Book of Order* at them.) The parish is rife with well-intentioned dragons, antagonists, and just plain crazy folks. I'd also revise the speech curriculum so that courses would include Shakespear-ian insults, and maledictions and curses in Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew (one way to use those languages!).

*Joseph Cejka, (M.Div., 1982)*  
*Bakersfield, California*



Wheat and Tares 101: Preparing for the political agendas established by ruling elders in the church parking lot after each session meeting.  
Wheat and Tares 201: Maintaining a personal faith after everything you learned about ministry is contradicted by the actions of parishioners in the church parking lot after services.

Wheat and Tares 301: The Sensual Pastor: Preparing for the consequences of eye contact and good listening skills with members who are lonely and want to offer something of themselves after hours in the backseat of their SUV located, where else, in the church parking lot.

Doctoral Seminar: Wheat and Tares 501: The church parking lot as the root of all evil. Training in demolitions. Training in the expansion of outreach ministries, which will require new construction in the area now occupied by the church parking lot.

*Kenneth Shales Williams, (M.Div., 1982)*  
*Portland, Oregon*



"Being a Lover and a Historian: Practical Matters for Professional Clergy in Their First Church and Beyond"

*Frederick J. Mendez, (M.Div., 1986)*  
*Parsippany, New Jersey*



I suggest a course that examines the history of mysticism or examines the forms that spiritual experiences take and how they are understood in modern Western culture. I'm a psychiatrist and am becoming quite interested in how spiritual phenomena need to be understood in their own right rather than pathologized or reduced to psychiatric symptomology.

*Jeffrey Rediger, (M.Div., 1989)*  
*Sandwich, Massachusetts*



I'd have a course on the basics of managing volunteers and running a session meeting. As a leader of leaders, the pastor should understand organizational dynamics in order to make best use of human resources. Nothing's more dispiriting than a session meeting that rambles along from one person's enthusiasm to another's beef to another's personal problem to another's financial concern, ending only at the point of mutual exhaustion.

*V.W. (Trip) Torbert, (M.Div., 1987)*  
*Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*



I would have loved a course called "Everything You Need to Know about Being an Associate Pastor."

I know that many graduates are becoming associate pastors without knowing what the "associate" part of that means (i.e., staff/team dynamics, working with senior pastors, etc.). Few graduates think about themselves as ministers in the context of a multistaffed church.

*Billy Song, (M.Div., 1994)*  
*Torrance, California*



I would like to see a course on the history of Princeton Seminary, from its first professor Archibald Alexander, to its signature theologian Charles Hodge, to its embroilment in the modernist controversy in 1929, to the present. The so-called "Princeton theology" had an enormous influence on American religious history, and its strengths and challenges should not be forgotten.

*Galen Johnson, (M.Div., 1995)*  
*Siloam Springs, Arkansas*



Only sort of facetiously, I'd offer "Things You Can Do with Your Education and M.Div. If You Suddenly Decide to Leave the Church As Soon As You Graduate."

*Amy Watson, (M.Div., 1997)*  
*Columbus, Ohio*