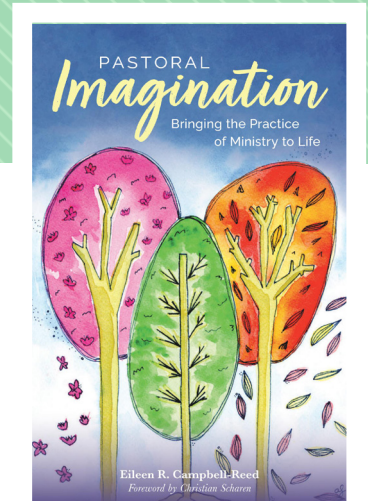




# CBF Book Discussion Guide

by Meg Lacy Vega



## *Pastoral Imagination: Bringing the Practice of Ministry to Life*

By Eileen R. Campbell-Reed

### **About the Author**

Rev. Dr. Eileen R. Campbell-Reed is an ordained minister, practical theologian and co-director of the Learning Pastoral Imagination Project, a national, ecumenical and longitudinal study of ministry. She is coordinator of coaching, mentoring and internships at Central Seminary (Nashville) and visiting associate professor of pastoral theology and care at Union Theological Seminary (New York City). She is the host of the Three Minute Ministry Mentor podcast and author of *State of Clergywomen in the US* (2018) and *Anatomy of a Schism: How Clergywomen's Narratives Reinterpret the Fracturing of the Southern Baptist Convention* (2016).

### **About the Book**

The 50 brief chapters of *Pastoral Imagination* are inspired by the stories and experiences of participants in the Learning Pastoral Imagination Project, a qualitative study exploring the life and work of pastors and ministers, chaplains and activist, youth workers and lay ministers. The LPI Project, which began in 2009, is the first longitudinal, national and ecumenical study of ministry in practice, following 50 pastoral leaders

from seminary onward, and 25 ministers with 15-30 years of experience in ministry. Participants are rich in diversity (race, ethnicity, gender, regions equal orientation and age) and denomination (Orthodox, Pentecostal, Evangelical, Baptist, Mainline Protestant, nondenominational and Roman Catholic).

### **A Word about How to Use this Guide**

*Pastoral Imagination* is a book chock full of stories, wisdom and insight. There is no way to capture it all in one conversation, or even a few. Consider your small group discussion a jumping off point for participants to begin reflecting on their practice of ministry. Use the seven broad themes outlined below to invite participants into the “action-reflection-action” model Campbell-Reed employs. You might consider sharing these seven themes with your group, and allowing the group to decide where to begin the conversation. Perhaps your group covers all seven topics in the course of the discussion, or maybe only one or two. You may choose to divide your group into smaller subgroups to promote more intimate storytelling and reflection, or invite participants to journal on certain topics before discussing them partner. Allow the conversation to move where there it wills, and trust that the Holy Spirit is a collaborator.

Rev. Meg Lacy Vega is a writer, speaker, yoga instructor and retreat leader who is passionate about creating spaces for rest and spiritual renewal. Meg lives outside of Chattanooga, Tennessee, with her husband and two pups, Ruth and Olive. You can find Meg on instagram at @meglacyvega.



# Book Discussion Questions

## Gathering Question

Discussing the topic of pastoral imagination with a group invites vulnerability, curiosity and storytelling from participants. As a part of introductions, you may wish to ask group members to share a word about their ministry context or the way pastoral imagination plays out in their ministry. You can create your own questions or use the questions below.

- (a) Share with the group a recent moment of ministry you found meaningful, challenging, significant or that has “stuck with you” for some reason.
- (b) Campbell-Reed defines pastoral imagination as “the capacity to see into a situation in all its embodied, spiritual and relational depths and then be able to make a fitting pastoral response.” What is pastoral imagination to you?

## Ministry Topics

### 1. Ministry as a Practice

“Ministry is a practice that is learned by trial and error,” - pg. 9

- Many of the chapters in *Pastoral Imagination* remind us that ministry is a “trial and error” practice, a lifelong endeavor in which learning and growth occur as an ongoing process over time. Think back to the beginning of your practice of ministry compared to your ministry now. What are some of the key lessons you have learned, or areas where you have grown? What has supported your process of growth over the years? If it is helpful, consider the stages of competency outlined by Brenner and Scharen: novice, advanced beginner, competency and proficiency, wise expert, as you discuss (pg. 25). Campbell-Reed shares these examples to help you get started: “I learned about reflecting theologically... leading people of all ages, recovering after letdowns, attending to grief, proclaiming good news and navigating conflict.” (p.25)

### 2. Collaboration

“The importance of supporting peers in ministry really can’t be overstated... friends know us and listen to us, and when we are struggling or reaching for a new kind of learning, they are sounding boards for our change.” - pg. 45

- What peers and friends support your ministry, and how do you stay connected to them? What are the things you most long to share with others in ministry? How do you utilize peers for feedback and accountability (see chapter 32)?
- Who do you consider a mentor in ministry - whether it be a church leader you know, an author you have read or even a podcast host you have learned from. Who is a wise expert that inspires your pastoral imagination? Consider Campbell-Reed’s suggestion to build mentoring relationship around skill-building, rather than relational needs (pg. 66).
- How does collaboration within your congregation strengthen your practice of ministry? What are the barriers or challenges to collaboration? How is the Holy a collaborator in your ministry (pg. 36)?

### 3. Defining Moments

“Defining moments are the ones that cause of to change, turn, go in a new direction.. such pivotal points in our lives and ministries can also become touchstones to which we return over and over.” - pg. 204

- Campbell-Reed shares a number of stories in which one moment had a large impact on the life and ministry of a young minister. For example, the story of Grace in chapter 5 as she learns more about her parishioners hospitalizations and realizes “even if I’m only there for 10 minutes, it matters!” (pg. 40), or the story of Pastor Malinda who received instructions to “hold the baby” (if a baby is present in the hospital room), a motto that became a guided metaphor for her embodied pastoral practice (pg. 47). What are the defining moments and epic experiences, large or small, that have changed the way you practice, define or articulate ministry? What “aha” moments from early in your ministry practice have you carried with you, that continue to shape your ministry or vocation?

### 4. Equity and Justice

- “To be a church leader in our time requires not only a clear calling but also courage. Is it your hope and desire that

your faith community be a part of change for justice and equality for people of all genders and social locations... You will need knowledge, commitment, and a willingness to risk something big for the sake of something better for all people.” - pg. 53

- When you assess your ministry setting for equity in roles responsibilities, pay and decision-making power, what do you notice (consider gender, sexual orientation, race and age). What would it look like for you to participate fully in working for equity in your context (pg. 54)?
- What is your social location? Have you taken time to own your experience of privileged and oppression? How do they impact your calling and practice of ministry (pg. 108)?
- Campbell-Reed identifies deep listening (pg. 64) and facilitating rituals (pg. 80) as unexpected forms of empowerment and activism. How do you see these practices taking shape in your ministry setting?

### 5. Spiritual Practices that Nurture Pastoral Imagination

“I teach prayer in my seminary classes because I think there is a profound connection between one’s spiritual practice and one’s energy and focus for ministry.” - pg. 73

- Campbell-Reed explores prayer in a number of ways throughout the book, including contemplative prayer (chapter 14), the Examen prayer (chapter 25) and preaching and prayer (chapter 27). She states, “Spiritual practice and ministry practice are intimately related. Prayer is a source and grounding for one’s identity and purpose of tending to faith communities, sacred rituals, and the work of justice; the stewardship of mercy, and the tremendous need for pastoral imagination.” ( pg. 73-4) What spiritual practices nourish your soul and nurture your pastoral imagination? What connection do you see between your prayer life and your ministry life?
- Another spiritual practice that Campbell-Reed highlights is the practice of Sabbath keeping. She states, “Sabbath is extremely counter cultural. It is a way to reclaim space and time for spiritual attentions. For ministers, it is a pathway to nourish vocation.” (Pg.110). When are you taking time to rest deeply? What kind of sabbath keeping practice might work for you in your current season of ministry?

### 6. Failing Creatively and Other Challenges

“Mastery is neither perfection nor success... mastery is like a curved line that keeps reaching for a kind of expertise, keeps striving, keeps learning, and never truly ‘arrives.’” -pg. 60.

- Campbell-Reed includes chapters on many of the challenges faced in ministry: Failing Creatively (10), Brick Walls (19), Harnessing Frustration (3), Overcoming Isolation (35), Two Vocations (41), Facing Fears (43),

Navigating Conflict (45) and Boundaries (49). Which of these chapters most resonated with you? What challenges you are facing in your current ministry setting? Do any of the stories in these chapters help you reflect creatively on addressing them?

- What have you recently identifies as a “failure” in your ministry practice? Who helped you along the path or trying and failing? How can you reframe your thinking around failure to include learning in the process of “mastering” ministry?
- In chapter 41, Pastor James talks about balancing ministry and family life. He says, “Ministry will put more on you than you can handle. You have to set boundaries. If you do not set boundaries, take it from me: We will put everything and everybody else first in the name of ministry.” How are you navigating the two vocations of family/community and ministry? What boundaries and practices feel most supportive as you seek balance?

### 7. Embracing Joy

“Don’t ask yourself what the world needs, ask yourself what makes you come alive. And then go and do that. Because what the world needs are people who are alive.” - Howard Thurman -pg. 228

- How do you practice ministry grounded in joy? What in your practice of ministry right now, “makes you come alive”? Share with the group a source of nourishment and joy in your ministry life.

### A Closing Blessing

It may be helpful to summarize your groups’ learning by taking the time to have participants name a “take-away” from the book and/or your conversation. Consider also closing with the blessing Campbell-Reed quotes from John O’Donohue.

#### For Presence, by John O’Donohue (from pg. 41)

Awaken to the mystery of being here and enter the quiet immensity of your own presence.  
Have joy and peace in the temple of your senses.  
Receive encouragement when new frontiers beckon.  
Respond to the call of your gift and the courage to follow its path.  
Let the flame of anger free you of all falsity.  
May warmth of heart keep your presence aflame.  
May anxiety never linger about you.  
May your outer dignity mirror an inner dignity of soul.  
Take time to celebrate the quiet miracles that seek no attention.  
Be consoled in the secret symmetry of your soul.  
May you experience each day as a sacred gift woven around the heart of wonder.



## Further Resources to Explore

- Learn more about Eileen Campbell-Reed, the LPI, and Three Minute Ministry Mentor at <https://eileencampbellreed.org/>
- Scharen and Campbell-Reed's "The Learning Pastoral Imagination Project: A Five Year Report on How New Ministers Learn in Practice" (Auburn Studies, Winter 2016)
- Christian Scharen's "Learning Ministry over Time: Embodying Practical Wisdom" in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry* (Eerdmans, 2008)
- Matt Bloom's *Flourishing in Ministry: How to Cultivate Clergy Wellbeing* (Roman & Littlefield, 2019) and the Wellbeing at Work project: <https://wellbeing.nd.edu/flourishing-in-ministry/>
- Craig Dykstra, "Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination" in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry* (Eerdmans, 2008)