

The New York School of Ministry (NYSOM) exists to prepare and continually form leaders for the church of today and tomorrow. Through courses, workshops, and trainings, NYSOM helps participants – lay and clergy – to gain knowledge and skills that they can use in their various ministries in the church and in the world. I am so grateful for the generosity of the churches of the New York Conference, who choose, year after year, to make our educational offerings and our alternative path of preparation for ordained ministry a reality. You are invigorating congregations across New York and the Northeast by resourcing lay leaders and ministers and helping to prepare people who could not become authorized ministers in any other way. I am also deeply appreciative of the support of two foundations: the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, which, for 18 years, has continually supplemented what the churches of the NY Conference can contribute in order to allow me to run this program for 12 hours a week, and the Jeannine Heller Foundation, which, for 5 years, has generously offered scholarship and program support. The grants from these foundations allow NYSOM to lower the financial hurdles for anyone seeking to take a course, workshop, or training and to provide education and formation for ordained ministry at a fraction of the price of seminary.

Courses

This past year, we were able to offer four core ministry courses, “Family Systems and Pastoral Leadership,” taught by Rev. Wayne Gustafson, D.Min., LMHC; “Old Testament II: Psalms, Wisdom Literature, and Prophets,” co-sponsored with the Maine School of Ministry and taught by Rev. David Cleaver-Bartholomew, Ph.D.; “Liturgy & Worship,” taught by Rev. Michael Sloan, D.Min.; and “Introduction to Theology,” taught by Rev. David A. Kaden, Ph.D.. We had 42 participants who took these courses. Old Testament II allowed students in NY and Maine to learn together, and the variety of participants in our courses -- lay people, Members in Discernment preparing for ordination, and ministers taking continuing education -- enriched the experience for all.

We also offered a Ministry Practicum each semester for students on our educational path who have taken the core ministry courses: they’re small seminars, grounded in participatory, intentional learning that offer a deeper dive into aspects of the practice of ministry through engagement with new perspectives and discussion of participants’ presentations. We offered Ethics in the fall, led by Rev. David Kaden, Ph.D., and Practical Issues in the spring, led by Rev. Marsha Williams, Ed.D., Rev. Wayne Gustafson, D.Min., LMHC, and me.

Workshops

We started our series of financial education workshops on January 10, with “Money and Mission,” led by James Elrod Jr., who lectures at Yale Divinity School and has written *Creating Financially Sustainable Congregations*. Through the generosity of the Jeannine Heller Foundation, we were able to invite NY MIDs and ministers as well as MIDs from Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine to come together to focus on financial literacy. We were able to subsidize much of the cost of the book, *Creating Financially Sustainable Congregations*, for each participant to read before the workshop. We had 17 participants, mostly from New York, with a few from Vermont and New Hampshire. It was an informative and engaging session.

The next session in our financial education series will take place on the morning of June 6, when Rev. David Cleaver-Bartholomew, Ph.D., EA, will offer a workshop called “Church & Clergy Taxes 101.” We’ll welcome MIDs and Ministers at 9 am to learn about common mistakes ministers make regarding taxes; and Church Treasurers will be invited to join the group at 11 am for a discussion of common mistakes

that churches make when paying ministers. I am exploring other sessions of this series for the fall. Also in the works is a June 20th workshop on the uses and misuses of Artificial Intelligence, led by Rev. Kevin McLemore, ACM of the Keystone Conference, and our own Rev. Ryan Henderson.

We are able to offer all of our workshops free of charge to the participants, through the generosity of the Jeannine Heller Foundation.

Trainings

Ministers in the NY Conference are required to take Boundary Awareness Training(BAT) every three years and one module of Culturally Responsive Ministry Training(CRMT) every two years. NYSOM administers these trainings.

In the last year, we offered 10 sessions of BAT in which 75 ministers and MIDs participated. Most participants were from New York, but we also had some from the Vermont Conference, the Rocky Mountain Conference, Southern New England Conference, and one American Baptist. We provide three types of Boundary Awareness Training. Basic BAT is an overview of pastoral ethics for those who have never taken BAT before, and this year our Committees on Ministry approved an expansion of that training (from 4 to 5 hours, with the extra hour focused on the Ministerial Code). Rev. Lynn Sullivan taught two sessions of Basic as well as a short session to bring those MIDs who had taken the 4 hour version up to date. Refresher BAT is for active ministers, and we offered four sessions this year, with Rev. Reginald Brantley, Peter Wright, Rev. Lynn Sullivan, and Rev. Noel Vanek as our trainers. We offered 3 sessions of Retirement BAT, specially created to address the issues our retirees face, with Rev. Reginald Brantley, Rev. Gary Gossel, Joycelyn Howell, Rev. Lynn Sullivan, and Rev. Noel Vanek as our trainers.

I offer hearty thanks to Rev. Gary Gossel, who ended his time as our BAT Curriculum Creator and Trainer of the Trainers in the fall. He has given much time and energy over the last few years to develop curriculum for Refresher BAT that is fresh and relevant. This past winter, Rev. Lynn Sullivan and Rev. Noel Vanek developed and piloted our new Retirement BAT curriculum; they will be working on a new curriculum for Refresher BAT, which will be rolled out in January 2027.

Since last year's annual meeting, we have offered 5 zoom sessions of CRMT: Module 2 (Culture & Sexuality/Gender) for 68 participants. Module 2 will have its last session in June, and then we'll offer Module 3 (Culture & Disabilities). I'm thankful for those who led the trainings this year: Rev. Joya Colon-Berezin, Rev. Gary Brinn, Susan Belair, Rev. David Gregory, and Rev. Dr. Kelly Sprinkle. I'm thankful as well to Rev. Barb Van Olpen and her CRMT curriculum development team (hard at work right now to get the next module ready).

Educational Path

We currently have 12 MIDs from 7 Associations on our educational and formational path.

GVA: Patty Carlson; Eric Kelly
HMA: Michelle Ledesma Baer; Jonathan Riedel
Metro: Vanessa Pugh-Reefer
North Country: Kathleen Hyde; Vicky Kellner-Landers
Oneida: Andy Hinman; Craig Zeller
Susquehanna: Russell Bouseman
Western: Rosann Lowder; Jen Mazur

8 of our students have Lay Ministerial Standing and are currently pastoring congregations in the NY conference. I want to lift up these MIDs, who balance study and ministry with commitments to loved ones and jobs. Our educational path is not a short or easy one; it is not about how quickly one can jump a series of hurdles, and formation – the cultivation of character and process of spiritual growth that shapes one for the practice of ministry – takes time. So, I applaud our MIDs for their patient work and perseverance, for their continued response to their call amidst the distractions of life, and for taking seriously this transformative journey. After all these years, it continues to gladden my heart that NYSOM can be resource for our Committees on Ministry and for gifted people called to ministry for whom seminary is not a viable option.

I do want to lift up a joy. Last summer, Tina Bacon, from the Western Association, was the first MID to complete our revised educational and formational path (we revised the path is 2024). Tina is now a Pastoral Minister with Catholic Health, working at Mercy Nursing Facility at OLV and preparing to become a board-certified chaplain.

Among the various regional theological educational programs across the denomination, the niche we claim is one in which small learning communities engage in discussion in real time with instructors who have expertise in the subject matter and experience in ministry. Participants build relationships with one another and provide support and feedback for each other. NYSOM is small enough for me to know each student. And so, it is a great sorrow whenever we lose a participant or a graduate. This year, we lost three: Jeff Stone, a graduate of our Supply Preacher Certificate Program; Eunice Shippee, a graduate of our Christian Leadership Program; and Val Gray, a current student in our core ministry courses. Each one of them showed their love of the church through their ministry in their congregations; each one is greatly missed.

Finally, I give thanks to all who make this program so special: our wonderful faculty, our mentors, and our supervisors, who give so much of themselves to the work of education and formation. I am grateful to Lisa Delgado and Tracy Lovejoy-Kitzweiger, for providing essential administrative help, and to my colleagues on the Conference Ministry Team. And, first and last, I am grateful to the churches of the New York Conference who care about ministry – not only their own ministers – and look beyond their walls and their current needs to make Christ's church strong, vibrant, and responsive in the years to come.