

Entrepreneurial Ministry: Research from Three Unique Ministries

By: **Andy Henry, Matt Hisrich, and Julie Rudd**
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Introduction

This research project seeks to gain insight into non-traditional ministries that are not rooted in a particular place but instead connect primarily through social media and travel. To do this, the project focused on three unique examples that while by no means exhaustive of the trend nonetheless provides a good range of experience and approaches.

The goal was to find examples where the project in question is for the individual that person's vocational call, not simply a hobby or one aspect of a larger ministry effort. Questions focused on the discernment of call, the nature of the individuals involved both directly and indirectly in the ministry, the logistics of building a network of interest such that it is – or may become – financially sustainable, and what the future may hold for each them, their projects, and ministry more broadly.

The research team consists of three members: Matt Hisrich, Director of Recruitment and Admissions for ESR; Andy Henry, a current MDiv student at ESR; and Julie Rudd, ESR graduate and pastor of Wilmington Friends Meeting in Wilmington, Ohio. Interviews were conducted through video conferencing in July of 2016.

Interviewee Profiles

- I. **Elizabeth Myer Boulton** is the Creative Director and President of The Salt Project (<http://www.saltproject.org/>), “an Emmy Award winning, not for profit production company dedicated to the craft of visual storytelling.” Her website biography states: “Ordained in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), her many years of preaching and pastoring have refined her ability to engage an audience with compelling content. She holds degrees from Trent University and the University of Chicago Divinity School -



but, her biggest claim to fame is that she's the mama of two incredible kids: Jonah and Margaret!"

II. **Peter Rollins**

(<https://peterrollins.net/>) "is a provocative writer, philosopher, storyteller and public speaker who has gained an international reputation for overturning traditional notions of religion and forming 'churches' that preach the Good News that we can't be satisfied, that life is difficult, and that we don't know the secret.



"Peter gained his higher education from Queens University, Belfast and has earned degrees (with distinction) in Scholastic Philosophy (BA Hons), Political Theory (MA) and Post-Structural thought (PhD). He is the author of numerous books, including *Insurrection*, *The Idolatry of God*, and *The Divine Magician*. He was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, currently lives in Los Angeles and will die somewhere as yet not known."

III. **Peterson Toscano**

(<https://petersontoscano.com/>) "has delighted audiences throughout North America, Europe, and Africa through his one-person comedies and lively lectures as he takes on social justice concerns. His plays and talks humorously explore the serious topics of LGBTQ issues, sexism, racism, privilege, gender, and climate change. A Quaker and obsessive gardener, Peterson lives in Sunbury, PA with his husband, the writer, Glen Retief. He is the host of Citizens' Climate Radio. "



Major Themes

While each of the participants comes from different background and is engaged in different work, several themes nonetheless emerged from the conversations that tied them together. In this section we will explore these themes and connections.

I. Origin Stories

None of our interviewees sees their current work as simply the inevitable outcome of the trajectory of their lives. Rather, their projects developed through a series of unexpected twists and turns, and in one case, an explicit divine invitation.

Peterson: In 2002 I was in my apartment thinking and praying about stepping out to tell my story about how I went through gay conversion therapy, and I had this very odd wonderful epiphany of sorts where I just understood that there are people who are in the world who for a time are on a public stage. And they're the people who appear on TV shows, they're written about in magazines, and they bring either wisdom or foolishness or a variety of things to a topic, but there are always people out there doing that. It was almost as if I didn't hear a voice or anything quite like that. But it was almost as if it was put out before me. "If you want to be, you could be one of those people. You can do that." It was so open-handed. It was so delicate in a way. It was like, "You don't have to. There's no pressure, but if you want you can do this."

And sitting in my apartment, I just sat with it in silence, and I then inwardly just said, "Yeah, I'm willing."

I had two different clearness committees. One was at the very beginning when I decided to write the play about my experience. And the next one was about a year later when I decided to go full-time.

I was working full-time as a teacher in Connecticut and then flying to Seattle for the weekend to perform and then flying back in. That's just too much. It was not fair to anybody.

I thought, "Well, if nothing else in one year, I could accrue enough debt to get me through the year, and if it doesn't work, my job will have me back. It was not a big deal." That was the attempt to

see where could I build up more work. At the end of that year it was definitely clear that I could make enough money.

Elizabeth: I think we started maybe seven years ago, officially. We got our not-for-profit status and incorporated it. We started with officer's grant from the Lilly Endowment. Way back when we were still in Boston, I was a pastor at Old South Church in Boston. Before that, I did a new church start for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ in Jamaica Plain and Roslindale, two neighborhoods in Boston. It was Hope Church. It's still up and running, which is great. I pastored there for six years, then I moved to Old South Church in Boston, where I was an Associate Pastor for three years. While I was at Old South, we started The SALT Project, which was an online project to create community around highlighting and preserving the best and most beautiful parts of Christianity.

It has changed and organically morphed since it began. When we moved to Indianapolis, I stopped traditional pastoral ministry to work on SALT as my primary job. I wouldn't say that I work a traditional "full-time job" because I set aside a bulk of time for my family and kids, but it is my primary work.

Peter: When I was doing my PhD and when I finished my PhD work, I was unemployed for...I've been unemployed for eight years in my life all through my 20s on to 30s. But that's a lot easier in the UK than it is in America.

I wrote my first book, I started up Ikon. But I was, for a while, living in a squat. We were living pretty simply in Ireland, but then, I kind of won the lottery. A patron, a very wealthy individual, liked my work and said, "I would like you to come to America. I'm going to give you three years, so you don't have to worry about your finances. So just do what you love, and after three years, you're on your own." That's why I came to America. I got the patronage from a private foundation about the end of the three years ago. Now, I'm doing freelance work in my area.

I do two things primarily or three things. One is writing books, two is public speaking, and then three is community development, setting up communities.

Of those three, where I make a living is the second one, public speaking, either in churches, in universities, with families, or mostly in doing online courses and using the technology that we're using today actually.

II. Entrepreneurial Ministry is Still Ministry

While not standing behind a pulpit every Sunday, each of our interviewees clearly sees their work as an important form of ministry. Language of hybridity and partnership with congregational ministry also emerges. Another consistent theme is that of being true to an inner leading – even is that leads one away from more easily recognizable patterns.

Elizabeth: I still feel called to ministry. We did a new church start in Boston, which was amazing, and hard, and difficult. Old South Church was a great position. I enjoyed being an Associate Pastor. I think it's more my speed than being a new church pastor or even a solo or senior pastor. After those two positions, I was ready for a break from traditional pastoral ministry. But I still wanted to serve the church.

Peterson: I think of myself as a theatrical performance activist. I don't call myself a minister, but I do acknowledge that what I do is ministry.

That's a very important distinction for me because I think someone with the title minister does get certain perks and privileges within certain institutions. But often, somebody who's considered a minister among Quakers in particular, is expected to do unpaid work, particularly among un-programmed friends.

What I do is a hybrid. It is my work. It's also my leading. It's also something I do in really secular spaces. I recognize the ministry happens regardless of the venue. It could be a secular university, it could be a high school, it could be a Quaker Meeting, and at any moment, it could become this very sacred called meeting, the centered space you least expected.

But also for me, I prefer not to call myself a minister. Not to take that name for myself, both because it seems presumptuous - I think we're all ministers, so I shouldn't distinguish one person over another. But also because people immediately think, oh, we don't have to pay this person because some institution is paying him. Or he's doing it for God, so God surely will bless the person. I look at them and say, "Maybe you're God."

Peter: One thing you can do with technology is, you record everything. You try to have engaging content, so you do -- for example -- you learn from public speakers. You really emphasize homiletics. You learn how to communicate well.

You're not just communicating to your congregation, but that's also going out to people all over the world. You build a mailing list. You build an international platform that has a local base, and this allows two revenue streams. One is, if you've got a small congregation that will bring some money in. But also, if your work is having an impact on people outside of your local community, you can get invites to other churches, and/or you can run online courses.

For example, there's lots of Christians out there who would love the course, 20th-century Theology. They have to be named something much sexier than that. But who would love to delve into some of the stuff that you've learned in seminary.

Elizabeth: I think film has the ability to reach out in a way that an established church doesn't always have the ability to, especially in terms of reach and shareability. That is to say, I feel very committed that, instead of weekly preaching, my filmmaking is a version of that, a sort of like trying to put flesh on the Gospel in film that's shareable and makes an impact.

At this point, SALT is still growing and I'm not taking a salary. Last year, I think I made about \$12,000. But, the work is so creative and so life-giving that even if I was losing money I think I'd still want to do it. What can I say, I'm a fool for Christ!

I just love what I'm doing. I feel like it's good for the world.

Peter: I've always felt that one of the things I like about theology, as they say, is that there is the practical fused with the theoretical. I've always felt that the key to my work and the work of anybody who calls himself a pastor is working with real people in some sort of way. In so many ways, my theology, if it's really doing work, has to have some sort of positive impact in the lives of other people.

There's a sense in which, yes, theology is always having to say, "What is this like incarnated in my life, in the life of other people?"

What is this doing? Is this a symbolic language that is helping people enter into something rather than a literalistic language that just is something you read and don't necessarily participate in?"

There is a sense in which we have to be true to the path that you're wanting to explore. But I think if you're a pastor or a theologian, you always have to have an eye on the subjective experience of others, and you live between those two worlds.

If you want to be a public theologian, a public intellectual, often, you need to have a question and a quest that defines who you are. Not your own necessarily, it can be part of the wider tradition, but very much saying, "I work within this. I'm critical of it. I try to deepen it."

For me, it's radical theology.

III. Control your own destiny

Entrepreneurial ministry means not only serving others, but claiming a voice of one's own in order to serve most effectively.

Peterson: If you're going to do this kind of work, you really need to thoughtfully, carefully, respectfully, use the contacts you have, because people trust people they know.

I can go to any venue and say, "Hey, I do this amazing work and here's all these newspaper articles about me. Here you can see this YouTube video." But until somebody they know recommends me, they just may not listen.

Whenever I'm looking to go somewhere, I ask myself immediately, "Who do I already know there?" Or, "Who do I know who might know somebody there?" Because that's the most time efficient way of doing it.

If I say, for instance, I had to go to Portland, Oregon, and I did cold calling, out of ten cold calls, I think maybe I'd be lucky if two people even responded. They most often don't even respond. And you could be as thoughtful and personal as you want. That's just the reality.

But if I am going through somebody I know, there's a 50/50 chance that I'll get a performance out of it. Those are good odds. And not just the performance, but one where people are prepared for me -- where they know what I do.

Elizabeth: I grew up in the church. My father was a pastor. I love the church, the bible, Christianity...I just seem to have a hard time constitutionally fitting into traditional pastoral ministry. Personally speaking, I'm very sensitive to conflict, and, in two out of the three churches that I have "officially" pastored, conflict, dysfunction, destructive forms of communication, abuse of power, and plain old anger have been very present. I don't have a stomach for it. I don't have the constitution for it, but I still believe in Christianity right down to my toenails. I believe in the Good News of the Gospel. I believe so wholeheartedly in it that I can't not do it. But, at this point in my life, I can't see myself working in a congregation and navigating anger and conflict.

How can I support congregation? In their ministries, that's what I'm trying to do.

Peter: I used to rely on invites. I would get maybe, two or three invites a month to churches and seminaries. That's how I made my living. But I made a decision about two years ago to take control and try to do more of my own events because technology changed. With things like Eventbrite, I can sell my own tickets to an event. So instead of waiting for somebody else who has the infrastructure to put on an event, I can now on my computer, I have the infrastructure that can allow me to put on an event.

I followed Rob Bell's model, started doing more of my own things. And actually, I'm glad I did because if I hadn't done that, I'd been in trouble because my speaking engagements have declined.

I currently think it's important for people in my line of work to get as much control over doing their own events as possible.

Peterson: At first, I thought I needed a professional agent. I pursued that for a while when I started to really begin to get some traction, and I realized I couldn't keep track of all these bookings.

There is a professional route for public speakers. You can go if you speak at universities and all. But I learned very quickly it cost you a great deal of money to get part of that system because you have to

pay the various organizations that advertise you and let you showcase your work. Your agent gets 20%. You have to pay for all kinds of stuff, stationery, all sorts of things. And I thought, “Well, huh! That’s just too expensive, and it just seems unfair. Most people can’t afford that. I can’t afford that.” I did waste a good year and a half and a lot of money pursuing that before I realized that’s not the way.

So the next model I tried was to just find someone who never did this work before as an agent, who wanted to do it as a hobby or part time, and they could do the work and get 20%. That worked really well for the most part. But still at the end of the day, I communicate what I do better than anybody else, and I need to be involved in the planning. I can’t just show up at a gig. All sorts of stuff needs to happen before I arrive. Even deciding what presentation to give, my agent couldn’t always figure that out.

The last agent I had, she got very sick in the fall of 2015, and she couldn’t work for me anymore . So I said let me try it on my own. I bought a really good CRM, customer relations software that keeps track of all of your contacts, and you can log in all of the communications you’ve had. I’ve been doing it on my own for now, and I make more money as a result. But also, the quality of the gigs have been better.

IV. Making the Finances Work

The interviewees discuss the excitement and challenge of their entrepreneurial lifestyles. On the one hand, Peter sees living singly as an advantage – allowing him to live simply and with few obligations. Elizabeth and Peterson, on the other hand, share about the importance for them of spousal support in making their work possible.

Peter: Obviously, to be a half decent public speaker, to write half decent books, to have time to put out lots of free content...You don't get paid for any of that -- anything I do during the day, I'm practicing the talks. Any regular talks, you don't get paid for. That's all free. So you have to have an income stream that is enough, that allows you to do weeks of work for nothing.

So basically you do three days speaking somewhere, and that pays for two weeks, or a month, where you can then give out free

content. This is a new model that I think is going to grow and grow.

Elizabeth: I certainly couldn't do SALT, in this present incarnation, as a single person. I don't have benefits or health care. I made \$12,000 last year, so it's not a get rich quick scheme.

I think there's something to be said for a life, a life that has one hand in the Bible and one hand in creativity. I didn't feel very creative as a pastor. Today, I feel like I'm doing what I was called to do. I feel fully human in my work. But, right now, it's not financially viable... at least the way I'm doing it. It's not financially sustainable yet, but I'm optimistic about the future.

Peterson: I lived quite simply [starting out]. Part of my testimony is to live as simply as possible. So my expenses were very low, but it was quite possible to do.

I was also single and only one income. Now I am married and we share expenses. In addition to my performance work I now produce a monthly podcast and get paid per episode. While it is not a lot, it is regular income that I can count on compared to the fluctuation of the presentation fees that change seasonally.

When I first began my support committee was very helpful during the lean times because they would give me cash advances when I needed because the work is seasonal. For example, in December and January, there's virtually no work for me; Schools are shut down, churches and Quaker meetings are caught up with other stuff. So there have been cash flow problems at times. Having a support committee that was willing to give me loans at times, did help out, particularly in the beginning and during some lean times.

Peter: You know, I couldn't be anything else... really to be honest. I always think, here's the problem, I always think the bottom's going to fall out. Like it doesn't worry me, actually, because I can just go back to work in a record store, whatever. But there's a sense which you cannot stand back and go, "Oh right, just because I made money last year, I'm going to make money this year."

There's risk to this type of life, but it's also a lot of fun.

My truth is, I'm single. I don't have kids. This is a lifestyle that is much more difficult if you've got kids.

I have a housemate. I house share. I live well. I don't have wants for anything. I've got a car, and whatever, but I do rent the house. I don't own a house. I did say I have a housemate. I kind of live like a student still in many ways. That kind of suits my personality.

I understand that it's much more difficult when you're more settled, or when you have a lot of debt, or when you have say, three kids. This lifestyle is much more complicated. I feel a wee bit out of my depth talking about how to do it then. If I had three kids, I don't have the finances for that. I don't think I have the finances for all of the costs that are involved in having one child.

Peterson: One of the first questions people ask is, "What do you charge?" I struggle with this as a Quaker because Quakers were known for setting fixed price back in the day when before fixed prices. Part of me would like to say, "This is what the price is and it's fixed." But that's not realistic because every venue is different. What they want is different, and they're funded differently. A university always has money put aside somewhere for speakers; most Quaker meetings and many high schools do not.

Determining a fair fee is an art, it takes some discernment. It is something worth talking to a clearness committee about and having your list of costs for yourself upfront, so that you decide in advance, "In this scenario, we do such and such. In that scenario, we do this." From a marketing perspective, it's always helpful to tell people what you're going to give them before you tell quote them a price. I typically say, "Well, if I come, I can do this. I can do this. I'll also do this, and I'd be very happy to do this. And to do all of this, I determine that the fee should be about \$X.XX" I quote a fee that doesn't yet include expenses. That gets added.

That's important -- plus expenses -- so that they cover your travel or at least a portion of your travel. They put you up; they feed you, and that doesn't come out of your fee. If it comes out of your fee, then suddenly, that's a whole other thing, which you have to then work that into your fee.

Work out your terms in advance. Just because we're all nice people and everything, if it's not clear, it just creates bad will. People get uncomfortable talking about money and all, but make it really clear. Make sure you have a contract, even a very simple one-page

contract, just so it's spelled out. This is what we talked about. This is what you'll do. You have goodwill all around so that you don't walk away feeling bad over some misunderstanding about the money.

V. The Psychology of Ministry

The interpersonal struggles of ministry – whether congregational or in other settings, emerged as a consistent theme in the conversations. In some cases, interviewees were asked what they would have told their younger selves to prepare them for what was to come.

Elizabeth: I would have told myself it's not personal. That church conflict is not about you. It has more to do with humanity, the fall, sin, and that age old saying: hurt people, hurt people.

My biggest insight after 10 years of pastoral ministry is this: people who grow up in conflict create conflict because that's what they know, that's how they feel safe, that's how they shine. If I could go back and tell my younger self something, I would have told myself that.

And I would have told myself that -- I've found this over and over - - when you listen to people's stories about how hurt they are by an authority or figure, you will almost inevitably become that same person. I didn't know that before. As a pastor, it's like you become the source of a hurt they already have.

I would have told myself that – that's just human nature, and that it's not personal. It's part of leadership, part of pastoral leadership. It's not necessarily you. It's just humanity, the fall, sin...

So I would have told myself that. Or if I could have learned that in seminary I just would've had a lot less sleepless nights fighting ghosts and age-old criticisms...

Peter: People will troll you. People will be nasty. People will say horrible things, and people will say wonderful things. People will give you too much love that you don't deserve, and too much hate that you don't deserve.

In some respects, if you're not psychologically able to handle that, if you haven't have good therapy, if you get too much investment from people's love and hatred, you're going to find this world incredibly difficult, and you're going to need a strong support network.

It's like some people don't need much of it. Like for example Rob Bell, that stuff doesn't bother him at all. He's kind of very content in his life and so people attacking him or loving him online, doesn't even affect him. But for somebody else, that may be able to hurt them, or they might get too much pleasure from that, and that kind of thing. Then maybe, you need a strong support network.

It's difficult to say. It's like some people require seeing a therapist here three times a week and having a mentor. Some people, they just need to read a few good books, and they need some good friends around them.

But it's an important question, because if you're going into working with people and pastors are, and if you're going to be working with potentially hundreds or even thousands of people, the more people you work with, the more things are going to happen. Yes, you do need to be prepared for that.

Elizabeth: What I found out is people are so nice outside of church. I needed so much support as a young pastor when I just felt like...this image will be potent because I'm a vegetarian now... I felt like I was in a meat grinder. It's like someone was stuffing me into a meat grinder all the time. People's needs were so great. The only time I didn't feel that way was when I was on a pastoral staff at Old South.

Even as I was doing SALT, living this beautiful creative life making resources for churches, I felt the call to go back into pastoral ministry. I lasted six months. The pastor before me had been abusive and embezzled hundreds of thousands of dollars and I tried so hard, in those short six months, to put some safeguards into place, some professional procedures, and everyone became so angry with me... And, I was literally only asking for folks to turn in receipts before being reimbursed. But, the pain left by the past leader was so strong, it lashed out at me.

I had a very strong support network when I was in ministry because it called for that. But outside of ministry, I work with people I want to work with. I don't have to work with mean people who are having anonymous meetings behind my back, and I'm smiling at them on Sunday.

It's like everyone I work with is lovely and kind. It's almost when we get together for a shoot. It's like camp in the sense like it's just so fun, and creative, and affirming. It's like this little love fest, and then we break up, scatter, and then come back together for another project. I don't feel a sort of deep ache for emotional support outside of the congregation.

Accountability-wise, I'm still ordained, and I have ordination with our region. So I still do the boundary stuff and the anti-racism stuff, and I belong to a congregation. I have those external support systems that hold me accountable...

I have those formal external supports. But, in terms of emotional support, I don't really need it now that I'm working outside of the church. There's just so much less anger and antagonism to deal with.

Peterson: I definitely have connected with people who are sort of a casual or unofficial support committee that I turn to for clearness. And they're all over the world. I either connect with them on the phone, through social media, or when I happen to be in their area.

Peter: I think there's no sort of support network that I use except obviously all these with the writers that I respect, and that speak into my life. A lot of my mentors are dead, like a lot of my mentors are 300 years old, and I encounter them through a book. Sometimes, that's where I get my sustenance. Sometimes from going out and having a drink with friends, and sometimes talking to my peers who are in the same line of work.

I guess my advice to someone who's going into this freelance world is definitely to hang around with people who are in the same line of work. Try to hang around with people who are doing better than you and let them speak into what you're doing, give you advice, point you in the right direction, Definitely who you surround yourself by will dictate a lot of how well you do.

Peterson: The problem with activism and ministry is, sometimes you don't know when to stop, and you can feel guilty when you feel it's time to transition.

When I first started, I had a sense to do the work around conversion therapy for five year, when that five-year period came up, it was much easier to let that work go, I was then able to move onto something new. Because I thought, "I've done my time in this. I've made my contribution. There are other people doing this, and I don't have to feel guilty that I'm leaving this specific area. I'm rather going to take what I've learned and put it somewhere else; I bring my whole self. I could never forget the previous work or completely abandon it. I can continue to be supportive particularly if I can tie the old work and networks into the new work."

VI. The 80/20 Model

Peter was the first to explicitly name the 80/20 concept, but all three resonated with the need to charge for only a fraction of what they produce, and see that as both a workable financial model and a form of ministry.

Peter: Basically, it used to be that a tour was the fun bit for a band. They made their money through selling their albums, and then they ripped away, and they party, and throw TVs out of hotel rooms, and wasteful expenses and fun.

But the whole dynamic and the economics have changed dramatically. Now bands tour, primarily because that's how they make their living. Their music is a way of keeping them in people's consciousness. You're giving something.

Like a lot of bands work with an 80/20 model. 80% free, 20% pay. That's what I do. That's what Rob Bell does as well -- like 80% of your content you give away for free. You put out there, in podcasts, in Facebook Live, in articles, in blogs, and various forms, and then you make your living through 20%, which people pay for.

I like this model because I feel it's ethical as well. But if anybody wants any of my material, they can get it for free. There's no secret material that they can't get unless they pay for it.

I've got all these talks online, videos. I've got books worth of material online that you can have for free. But if you want to go and have a drink with me and talk about the stuff directly, then that's kind of a tour equivalent.

Peterson: I'm not getting paid for a lot of the work that I'm doing. Because it's really important to communicate to the world who you are and to have a presence, a platform. That happens with or without money coming in. Though unpaid, building this platform can be part of the work.

It also could be a total waste of your time when you should really be focusing on other things. Sitting on Facebook for hours, I could pretend and say, "All this is part of my work; I'm connecting with people." Perhaps, but there are products I can create that will carry on the conversation without my active participation. Once I produce a video for YouTube or Facebook, I put it out there, and it remains. It becomes an extension of my work because I get to share some of these thoughts that I typically share in live presentations. I get to show people what I do. I can showcase what I say and HOW I say it. I also get to weigh in as a public speaker on an important issue. Those videos then stay out there, and they form this body of work that's available to people so that if they're interested in having me come to their venue, they can say, wow, so this is what he does. I love how he does that. Or if they can't have me come but they really need to hear somebody talk about conversion therapy, or theology, or climate change, they don't have to have me come. I can still have an impact.

It's a resource that's out there for people, and some of it has to be given freely. I think you get something back in return at times, but also it's just part of what it is. I think to me that's the distinction of my work being a job or being a job and a ministry. There are gigs that I don't care if I get paid to do because they're valuable to me to be able to talk to folks.

As a business model, yeah, I'm making due, I'm paying bills and all. You can see a certain measure of success through the finances, but I'm not in it to make a lot of money. I just need to have it be sustainable enough so that I can keep doing it.

Elizabeth: I work a lot. Last year we put on a lot of content. But, I'm committed to running SALT like a co-op. I like to pat everyone

who invests in the project a similar “salary.” So, I made 12k, my business partner made 12k, my main shooter and editor made 12k, and SALT Project made 6k. Again, it’s not sustainable yet, but I really believe that it’s good for the church and for the world!

VII. Media as Platform and Pitfall

Peterson and Peter highlighted the pros and cons of being a public figure.

Peterson: We live in a culture that values the media, and celebrity even. Suddenly, if you appear in something public—like national TV or public radio, people are more interested in you. This can become a silly trap where you’re just chasing after being seen in the media, but it also can be an incredibly important tool in two ways.

One, you get to talk to a lot of people in a really thoughtful intelligent way. And two, you get this platform so that people are more likely to invite you to present at their venue.

Again, this is where humility and discernment really need to be in place because the media can be a game in itself. You can just get all caught up with, “How many hits do I have? How many interviews did I do this month?” That just becomes silly after a while, and a support committee can really ground you with that kind of stuff.

Peter: Twitter and Facebook, they can really expose us.

On Twitter, for example, if someone attacks me, if he doesn't know me at all, I am a symbolic figure for them. I am a screen upon which they’re projecting something within themselves that they either love or hate.

Sometimes, it’s more pure in social media precisely because people are more anonymous. But either way, you're dealing with real situations, real people who have real projections.

And as a minister, you're a symbolic figure. And by definition, the minister is someone who when they wear the stuff and when they're in liturgical space, they’re a symbolic representation of the absolute for people.

And so yes, this is where it's really important. Your question is like, if you're just taking on people's projection all the time and you don't have a place to work through that and to offload that, then you're going to end up crashing.

VIII. Shifts in Social Media

Being entrepreneurial means finding an audience. For our interviewees that means being effective communicators and a constant effort to stay on top of changes in a rapidly shifting media environment.

Elizabeth: We have a really, I would say healthy email list of pastors. It's probably about the 6,000 mark. We communicate with our network of pastors probably every other week. Our Facebook page is over 114,000, so we try and communicate regularly there and on Instagram.

We've gone viral on Facebook with over 29.5 million views for a DIY Easter Egg tutorial we created. The Internet is a fickle creature, so we're always trying to figure out how to maximize for the sake of SALT and for the sake of shouting the good news of the Gospel from the mountain tops.

One thing we're really excited about is our Customizable Short Films for congregations. We create short, sharable films that churches can use on all of their social media platforms and on their websites.

If you zip over to our website, you'll see them and they're so stinking cute and there is so much good theology being done in such a short amount of time. I think they're really great and people who use them love them. But it's hard getting the word out about them and convincing churches that video marketing on social media is important.

Peter: I'm either on the road speaking places, or more recently, I'm doing stuff using video conferencing. That's an important one by the way. I've recently been experimenting with this, but there's lots of people out there who want to engage directly with their favorite authors and thinkers. And through micro-payments, for example, \$40 for a six-week course, you don't get anything. You don't get a seminary paper, you don't get any grade or anything

like that, but you get to have six weeks with an author that you're being inspired by. And so, will cost you \$40. You can also download the audios. You can listen in your car; you can listen in the gym. You can supplement your education with these courses. So it's personally useful, potentially academically useful.

But for me, if I get 200 people signed up to a course I'm using technology that cost me virtually nothing. And I'm just in my own house, rather than having to get an airplane and travel eight hours to give a long talk and then travel eight hours back. So it works out really well for me, and also really well for people who can never get to the locations that I'm speaking at.

Peterson: I was very early on YouTube, so it's been over ten years that I've been producing content -- almost ten years I've been creating YouTube videos, which I really think is an important means of storytelling.

Facebook and Twitter are important to the work that I do, in promoting I do. I connect with people and get ideas from them. Sometimes. I'll say, "I'm working on this. What do you think? Have any suggestions or input?" These social media platforms also help to inform the public on who I am, what I am passionate about, my tone, and my presence. The fancy cold marketing term "promoting your brand." But really it is what we do everyday when we decide what we will wear and how we present ourselves. I communicate my values and style. Lately Instagram has become an effective way to do this, but it will change again, and likely soon.

I didn't like Facebook at first, so I was reluctant to get involved in Facebook. I really liked emailing people, but nobody likes emails anymore. I actually still send personal letters to perspective venues.

I find that with college students, it works much better to give them my number and say they can text me. I get a much faster response than if I send emails.

I've been doing podcasts the past few years with the climate work. It doesn't get as broad of an audience as the videos, but it's still a great medium to use in part because it is so personal. I also get to be more careful in my storytelling with a podcast.

Peter: Things are moving fast.

For example, blogging was really big and important, and I would have a few years ago recommended everybody who's trying to be a pastor, whatever, do a blog. But now, blogging is kind of disappearing and podcasts have been massive.

And so now the podcast is the thing we're going to...you should have a podcast, whatever. But actually, now the podcast thing is beginning to be overshadowed by these live low budget videos -- kind of video blogging. That's becoming huge. Facebook are putting those huge amounts of money into this, Twitter, and the engagement is huge. I notice this. I used to get 30 or 40 comments for a blog post, and now I get 0. But I do a video blog, and I get 2,000 views in a week.

There's this sense in which things are very much in flux. If I were to say to you, for example, the importance of podcasting, and you put that in a PhD, by the time someone reads the research work, they could be going like, "Podcasting?!? Oh, my goodness!"

There's a sense in which people like me and Rob have to adapt. We have to be watching. Where's the energy, where are people at? What are people engaging in? Is it video? Is it audio? Is it text? Of course, it's usually a mix of these three, and how can I use the technology to communicate well to as many people as I can.

IX. Implications for Graduate Theological Education

Elizabeth and Peter both had strong feelings about how what they are doing and seeing in the world needs to impact the education students receive at seminary.

Peter: If you have a seminary education that both emphasizes the intellectual and the practical, so you're working with real people, you're setting up your own ministry at the same time that you're reading great thinkers, they will inform and enrich each other. The theory will inform the practice, practice will enrich the theory.

That was my experience with Ikon. I was doing my PhD in French theory, and the French theory was influencing my community, and the community was actually influencing how I read and understood and interacted with the theory.

I think it works on a number of levels. And seminaries are uniquely positioned to do this because theology is a theory and a technology. It's a theory and a practice. Rather, whereas often in universities, the intellectual is the only thing you do. But theology and psychoanalysis, both have institutions where you are engaged in theory and technology simultaneously.

Elizabeth: I was just learning on the fly. I went to Divinity School. We didn't really have classes on leadership, church administration, etc. And, unless I missed something, we didn't get much practical advice from the Patristic Fathers...although I did love hanging out with them in the desert!

So, my schooling was not super practical. And, I don't have an innate business sensibility but I'm taking some online classes and I have a lot of drive, so I'm getting by.

My friend Molly Baskette... wrote a book called [Real Good Church](#), and it's getting at that entrepreneur tool box. I think every person coming out of Seminary of Divinity School should have that book. I feel like everyone should have that concrete entrepreneurial tool box.

Peter: Basically, it's a golden age for public speaking. So for anybody who wants to potentially do the kind of work that I do, like communicate with people, set up communities, and have an income from that, they want to find ways to build up their social media platform, build up their mailing list, gain an interest, and then put on online courses, put on conferences and events, and use that up as their income revenue.

That's what I think a seminary education is, or a University education is...it is giving someone a few years where technically, they don't have to work so they can read, they can write, they can reflect, they can hone their skills, even set up a community.

I set something up when I was doing my university work so that when you leave, you're not looking for a job; you already have a job. That changes how seminaries probably offer it. But that's where I think things have to go to for at least some people.

Elizabeth: I think all pastors need to be entrepreneurs and they're not. We're not trained that way. They don't have a tool box.

Peter: This is such an important area. It's so important for people who are coming out of seminary and can't get jobs, and can't just be in those jobs financially. I am actually doing work that sustains me.

I guess coming out of seminary, I get most people are part of a denomination and will be getting into their particular stream. But more and more that it seems to me there just aren't the jobs there. So more and more, some have got to come out of seminary and start their own community, whether it's completely separate from any denomination, or whether it's within a denomination.

More and more seminary students are going to come out and have to be entrepreneurs in many ways.

Conclusion

These interviews provide some initial basis for considering the role entrepreneurial ministry currently plays in American religious culture and may play in the future. Each of the interviewees come across as both cut loose from the traditional support system of congregational ministry, but also freed from the burdens that too often come with that structure. They offer insights for those considering similar paths, but also issue an urgent call for schools to develop the tools future ministers will need to impact the lives of others while developing sustainable ministries for themselves in a religious landscape that looks different with each passing day.

Nine key themes emerged from these discussions:

- I. Origin Stories
- II. Entrepreneurial Ministry is Still Ministry
- III. Control Your Own Destiny
- IV. Making the Finances Work
- V. The Psychology of Ministry
- VI. The 80/20 Model
- VII. Media as Platform and Pitfall
- VIII. Shifts in Social Media
- IX. Implications for Graduate Theological Education

It is our hope that current and future students, as well as seminary administration and faculty, can glean practical wisdom from these brief conversations with practitioners in the field. We would especially like to thank Elizabeth Myer Boulton, Peter Rollins, and

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