

Transforming Vocations

Journeys in the New Pastoral Economy:

*Conversations with clergy moving from
traditional parish ministry toward 'what's next.'*

A Professional Project Submitted to
The Faculty of Perkins School of Theology

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree

Of

Doctor of Ministry

By

Kendrick G. Crawford

B.G.S., Texas Tech University, 1992

M.Div., Brite Divinity School, 1996

Dallas, Texas

May 2015

ABSTRACT: Doctor of Ministry Thesis ~ May 2015

Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University

Rev. Kendrick G. Crawford

M.Div. Brite Divinity School, 1996

B.G.S. Texas Tech University, 1992

*“Transforming Vocations - Journeys in the New Pastoral Economy:
Conversations with clergy moving from traditional parish ministry toward ‘what’s next.’”*

Jesus offers to us his own experience of crucifixion and resurrection as a metaphor for transformation in our lives. This theme is translated into a secular framework by *Theory U*. The common understanding in these and other narratives is that “the new cannot emerge until the old begins to fall away.” The prospect of this, however hopeful, is also frightening and lonely for those who experience it. Such is the lived vocational journey of clergy who are being called out of fulltime parish ministry into new forms and expressions. In some cases the new work is new only to them, while in others the ministry is being created as if for the first time. Particularly when this is the case, no one knows how to encourage or support these pastors. Often their work is not even acknowledged as pastoral, with the commonly heard concern, “Oh, so you’re leaving the ministry?” Added to this is the clergyperson’s own internal wrestling with what it means to honor their call and ordination in these new ways. Their own question is, “Am I still a pastor?”

The purpose of this practicum/project is to capture and represent the stories of this journey into the New Pastoral Economy – the emerging landscape of multivocality in ministry and often multiple streams of income. Additional goals are to identify key themes and experiences that can be waymarkers for clergy on the journey; to provide resources for the journey; and to propose future work that would continue this effort. My hope is that the project contributes to and advances the conversation and the practice of multivocal Christian ministry that will continue to emerge in the coming decades.

The practicum was conducted over a four month period of time. A group of six ordained clergy were interviewed using a modified ethnographic approach. They have experienced a variety of vocational transformations over the last decade. They represent a dozen current and former denominational affiliations. Each of them served in full time pastoral ministry in local congregations prior to discerning the call (being driven by the Spirit?) into the liminal space of emerging vocational manifestations. They are all still discovering and creating their own way, finding multivocal expressions of their original call. This is also my story, so the project tells portions of my own journey of discovery.

The practicum/project demonstrates the wide array of life stories that bring people to the discernment to step away from fulltime congregational ministry but NOT turn away from their sense of call and vocation. These are not people who are giving up on God, the church, or their own ordination. Rather, they are recognizing that faithfulness to these gifts from God requires that they leave the supposed security of parish life and a staff salary in order to follow the leading of the Spirit and become cocreators with God and colaborers for the incoming reign. Each participant expressed how grateful they were and how much the process of telling their own story was itself instrumental in their growing understanding. The project illustrates the critical need for more opportunities of storytelling and sharing, of community building among these clergy, and resourcing for them and the work God is calling them to fulfill.

Table of Contents

Preface	ii
Introduction	1
1. Personal Awareness	9
Personal Narrative – The Full Story	12
2. Cultural Wisdom – biblical, theological and leadership reflections	33
3. Companion Stories	70
Summary and reflection on six clergy who are on their own bivocational journey	
4. New Reflections – assessment and proposals for future work	109
• Emerging Alternative Vocations.....	112
• Proposals for future work.....	114
• Final Thoughts	120
<u>APPENDICES</u>	
A. Workbook and Journal	125
B. Personal Journal	141
C. Resources and Tools	157
Notes	187
Bibliography	190

PREFACE

Thanks go first of all to my wife Laura for her unflagging confidence and support of me in all things. Even when she does not agree with me, she is gracious and supportive of who I am and what matters to me. Along with her I want to thank our children, Camille and Russell. The humor and hope with which they face the world every day inspires me to be more fully who God made me to be. I wish that when I had been their age I had as much confidence in myself and grace toward the world. My two amazing children have sacrificed time with Dad, and in their own ways have contributed to my reflections on this journey.

Thanks to my Father and Mother, Jim & Ruth Crawford, who more than anyone else shaped and formed me for this time. It was ultimately Dad's prodding and support that got me to apply to doctoral programs again – I'd pretty much given up on that dream. My best friend, Otis Thornton, deserves the blame or credit for setting me on this path – he is the one who first suggested I volunteer at Habitat for Humanity in Lubbock while I was studying Architecture. That could be considered the beginning of all of this reflection on the interplay of faith, vocation, career and calling. Jim Jackson was the first to believe in me enough to pay me to do ministry.

I want to thank those who have been my students, mentees, spiritual directees and coachees along the way. You have permitted me to “practice on you” as I learned and developed my skills. You have pushed back at times. You have always been gracious and encouraging. I hope that my ministry with you has been a blessing. Most especially to Shirley Johannsen – you've walked with me the furthest through the process, and you matched my stubborn commitment to growth at each step. Thanks!

While a doctoral degree is not group work, it would not be possible without a team of folks teaching, nudging, questioning and guiding. Thanks to the faculty, staff and students at Perkins who have provided a theological and spiritual community over the last three years. Thanks to Gary McDonald, Carol Somers-Clark, and Karen Baker-Fletcher for pushing

beyond my comfort level and standing quietly in the presence of my anxiety. My DMin Core cohort was a wonderful mix of folks from different backgrounds, some of whom pushed my buttons in wonderfully helpful ways, while others shined light and offered hope. Thanks to Barry Hughes, Craig Gillam, and Wes McGruder for being conversation partners in discovery. Thanks to Fred Schmidt for unknowingly shaping the context in which God would finally lead me into the wilderness. Thanks to my therapists at the SMU Counseling Center who gave me a safe place to wrestle, and who more often than not assured me that I wasn't crazy, giving me the courage to continue on in spite of my doubts.

I was fortunate enough to also attend and complete the Certificate in Spiritual Direction at Perkins. I'm so indebted to my instructors and peers in Cohort #9: Vicki James, Liz Moulin, Joe McHugh, Fred Schmidt, Joseph Stabile, Joe Tetlow, Geneva Hoffman, Mike Wright-Chapman, Mark Bushor, Brenda Wideman, Doug Harrison, Stephanie Zajchowski, Laura Murray, Kathryn Beilke, Beka Falk-Jones, David Hulon-Hood, Barbara McArthur, Lee Allen Jarrell and Sarah Jones. You helped me reconnect with my call, you trusted me and taught me to trust myself. You were truly my peer group during this journey, and I can't imagine it without you.

Thanks to my committee, Elaine Heath, Bill Bryan and Ken Janke. You pushed and encouraged at just the right times. You asked questions I was too close to ask, and offered encouragement when my confidence waned. I hope that this work honors your contribution. Thanks of course to my six interview subjects whose courage as participants is eclipsed by your immense courage to undertake the Transforming Vocations journey. I have been so honored and blessed that you were willing to share the journey with me and let me share your story with others.

Most of all, I give thanks to God for the generations of faith that brought me home, and for the abiding gifts of Word and Table which nourish and sustain me. So many times I've doubted myself and my call, but never once have you been out of reach or far away. Thank you for believing in me and calling me beloved.

Ken G. Crawford, April, 2015

Vocation: *noun* \vō-'kā-shən\ⁱ

- 1 *a* : a summons or strong inclination to a particular state or course of action;
especially : a divine call to the religious life
b : an entry into the priesthood or a religious order
- 2 *a* : the work in which a person is employed : occupation
b : the persons engaged in a particular occupation
- 3 : the special function of an individual or group

Examples of **VOCATION**

1. This isn't just a job for me; it's a *vocation*.
2. People who follow a religious *vocation*
3. He never felt a real **sense of vocation**.
4. I'm a carpenter **by vocation**, but my hobby is painting.

Middle English *vocacioun*, from Anglo-French *vocaciun*, from Latin *vocation-*,
vocatio summons, from *vocare* to call, from *vox* voice — see also voice

First Known Use: 15th century

Transform: *verb* \tran(t)s-'fōrm\ⁱⁱ

- 1 *a* : to change in composition or structure
b : to change the outward form or appearance of
c : to change in character or condition : convert

Examples of **TRANSFORM**

1. A little creativity can *transform* an ordinary meal into a special event.
2. The old factory has been *transformed* into an art gallery.

Middle English, from Middle French *transformer*, from Latin *transformare*, from
trans- + *formare* to form, from *forma* form

First Known Use: 14th century

INTRODUCTION

Vocation is the manifestation of our voice, our self, in the world. It is the way we are most fully present and contributing our uniqueness that creates and enhances the lived experience for ourselves and others. At its deepest level, vocation is the expression of the unique image, gift and call of God on each individual. Transformation is the process by which a subject undergoes a dramatic change. The caterpillar which turns into a butterfly is perhaps the most widely recognized example found in nature. The essence of the being remains the same. It is still the same individual, but its form and structure and character have been altered so as to be almost unrecognizable. This project, “Transforming Vocations,” is a study of clergy whose unfolding call to ministry includes similar dramatic shifts, through many and various stages through and beyond fulltime parish and pastoral ministry.

The caterpillar experiences changes that are often hidden, and at times sudden, though not without predictive signs. The caterpillar does not choose to be transformed. The process and outcome are guided by life forces greater than the caterpillar. So too for the pastors whose stories are offered here. At times they are acting, while at other times they are being acted upon. The vocation of the butterfly is no nobler than its predecessor states, though perhaps more appreciated by onlookers. Nor can one simply manifest as a butterfly *ex nihilo*. The latter states are only achieved by traveling through the former. There is no other way to become fully who and what God is creating and calling us to be. Perhaps the same can be said of the fresh expressions of ministry now emerging. Is it possible that they can only come to fruition, thus advancing the church and the reign of God in those particular contexts, if these vocational transformations take place and move on toward completion? If unfavorable environmental circumstance cause the metamorphosis to be aborted, then the beauty waiting to be revealed, by which the world is blessed, will never appear.

Vocation may be, but need not be, connected to income and career. Some people prefer to integrate their occupation and vocation, while others desire to have them separate. This latter group may work in some employment where they earn an income, and then they donate

significant time and energy to an important non-profit endeavor or hobby. Still others would like to integrate their career and vocation but find it incredibly difficult – think writer, actor, dancer, painter, sculptor, musician or singer. These individuals find it difficult to generate sufficient income from their art, and find themselves working in other pursuits to pay the bills. This kind of tension often leaves them feeling stretched and frustrated. They know what their voice in the world can be, yet they are limited to x number of hours per week or month because their “real job” requires so much of them. The “starving artist” is a common cliché – the actor in New York or LA who waits tables to pay rent. In smaller cities and towns, community theatres are filled with people who work other kinds of jobs and carve out ten to thirty additional hours per week during a show. The weekend craft fair circuit is another place you will find artists and artisans selling the creations that they make in the evenings.

Community agencies and congregations could not survive without the scores of volunteers who give freely of their time over and above their work hours. We strive to promote volunteerism in young people through our schools and community youth programs because we believe these activities help create more community-minded, selfless adults, and because the needs in these organizations are so great. Most of these programs for youth are also largely run by volunteers with a minimally paid administrative staff. Small staffs at community centers and congregations have typically provided administration in these settings while much of the effort in planning, leadership and delivery of services is provided by volunteers. The employees in such settings are often overworked and underpaid.

The close of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries ushered the mainline congregational pastor into a new the world, what I will call the New Pastoral Economy.ⁱⁱⁱ Many who entered seminary prior to the year 2000 anticipated that they would be able to choose from among multiple pastoral staff positions upon graduation, and that during the span of their pastoral career, opportunities would always be available for growth. The anticipated career path would run as follows:

- 1) Commit to 3-5 years of fulltime graduate school study funded by a combination of loans, grants, scholarships, part time jobs and support from family and friends;
- 2) Read, attend lectures, write papers and pass exams;

- 3) Complete one or several ministry practicums, internships and residencies
- 4) Prayerfully discern, along with colleagues and mentors, individual gifts, graces, and callings for ministry.
- 5) Navigate an arduous theological, psychological and spiritual path to ordination.
- 6) Find ways to maintain and develop personal relationships throughout this journey.

At the end of all this, one could reasonably expect that congregations who would pay a living wage would be seeking you as their next pastor or associate.

However, something has changed. Church futurists were forecasting these changes, but denominations, church associations, congregations and their leaders were caught unprepared. In many cases, they are still struggling even to see the present reality, much less respond to it in creative, life-giving, and sustainable ways. Why were the warnings of this dramatic shift in the ministry-as-career landscape going unheeded by those most responsible for calling and equipping clergy and sending them into pastoral ministry? These are important issues, but I will not attempt to explore them here.

My primary focus in this project is toward those who have served in local congregational ministry for some number of years (typically not less than five) only to find themselves needing to rethink the relationship between occupation and vocation, between job and calling, between congregation and other contexts, between serving God as a career and earning a living. Congregations are shrinking in size and their members are aging, both of which place a downward pressure on congregational income; the number of congregations able to pay a fulltime pastor a reasonable salary is also shrinking; the average pastoral salary is not keeping pace with inflation or the cost of supporting a family. The number of people is rapidly increasing who will never look to a religious community to be part of their lives.^{iv}

Pastoral ministry was among professions, like education and medicine and perhaps law, where individuals believed they could both fulfill a true calling and make a living with the same activities. These and others are careers where identity is often most wrapped up in job – I'm a healer, I'm an educator, I fight for justice, I am a pastor. Rare is the story of a doctor who cannot find a patient. People need these services and are willing to pay for them. There

may be attorneys who struggle to find a position, but this is more likely the result of an excess of graduates rather than a decline in the number of compensating positions. Teachers fall into a slightly different gap category, because their jobs are by-in-large publically funded. Educators experience pressure on wages and work hours, with salaries limited by state and local taxes while uncompensated worktime beyond the classroom increases due to testing and other administrative tasks. Some believe that technology can partly if not completely replace the local classroom teacher, which might create additional downward pressure on the job market for educators. ^v

I need to duly acknowledge here that what I am describing as “the New Pastoral Economy” is primarily a problem of middle class Anglo congregations – mainline and evangelical. My observation has been that congregations from racial and ethnic minorities^{vi} are often served by bi-vocational clergy who work full time jobs and serve their congregations in the evenings and on weekends. Similar arrangements are found among congregations situated in areas of extreme poverty, or serving primarily the working poor. As such congregations increasingly served middle class cultures or communities, their clergy were more likely to draw a fulltime salary from pastoral work. The result now is that when I am in conversation with clergy representing racial and ethnic minority groups and mention the New Pastoral Economy with its pressure toward bivocational ministry, the typical response is, “Welcome to the club.” An opportunity for future learning is hinted at here - those of us coming late to the bivocational ministry party have much to learn from our sisters and brothers of color and those serving communities on the economic margins of society if we will be humble enough to ask and listen and observe. Several of those interviewed for this project have chosen to serve such populations as a part of their emerging call.

All of this is, of course, contextual. I live in a suburb of the Dallas / Forth Worth Metroplex – an area I refer to as “the rhinestone in the buckle of the Bible belt.” If there remains any place in the United States where the life and ministry of Christian Congregations are still privileged, it is here. Prayer is still found at public events. Municipalities and school districts often interact favorably with faith communities. This is rapidly changing, but for the moment, it is still here. Other regions of the country fall across the Secular – Spiritual – Religious spectrum. The northwest and northeast of the United States are both less religious

and more spiritual / secular. Southern California is an interesting mix of evangelicalism, spirituality and secularity, as is Colorado.^{vii}

Diana Butler Bass and others have ably catalogued the trends away from congregational participation and religious affiliation.^{viii} Even the New York Times has described the impact on congregations of rising costs and declining income.^{ix} Tom Rainer points out the changing definition of “active member” from attendance every Sunday in worship plus a midweek activity, to two or three activities per month, worship included.^x All of these things impact the ability of a congregation to pay clergy a full time living wage commensurate with their education and experience.^{xi}

Few clergy ever expect to earn what doctors or lawyers or psychologists do, but when their salaries fall at or below that of a public school educator, they begin looking at things differently. My hope and expectation was that as a congregational pastor I could be the primary bread winner in my household. My wife is a public school teacher. Together we hoped to provide a modest but comfortable middle class living for ourselves and our children. (The appropriateness of this hope will be addressed in my own Personal Narrative.) We live in a safe and quiet neighborhood and our home is below the average market value in our community. We drive base model older cars. We would like to pay for our children’s college education, spend a week at the beach each year, and still save for retirement. The number of pastoral staff positions that would fund this lifestyle is rapidly declining.^{xii}

In some traditions, it has long been the practice for a pastor to serve multiple congregations simultaneously. In Methodism, this is known as a two or three point charge. The expectation is that together the income from these congregations combines to support a reasonable standard of living. Often these are located in rural areas where employment options are more limited for other members of the pastor’s family. They assume the clergyperson has both a calling and desire to serve in such communities. I predict that this model will grow in suburban and urban settings if current church financial and membership trends continue. A potential result of this is that one person serves two or three congregations, when previously each of those congregations employed one or more clergy

full time, with the result that the congregations will receive a different amount or style of pastoral attention, or both.

My working assumption is that these shifts provide new opportunities for clergy and congregations to reimagine and renew the pastoral ministry landscape and the relationship between clergy and congregations. The changes are certainly stressful, and I will identify and explore some of those stresses. Change may also bring relief, as in, “Thank God that is over.” I will eagerly look for and listen for these blessings. Whether or not we can or should reverse this trend is a conversation for another time. It may even be found that this trend is returning us toward a more faithful and biblical living of the pastoral vocations, and that the last several hundred years have been the aberration. Perhaps this present shift will in time be revealed as little more than a necessary course correction.

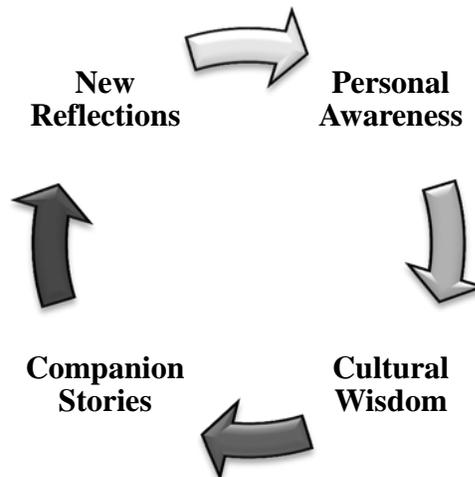
How do we who love the place from which we came, and those who raised us (the modern, traditional, mainline or evangelical churches that are struggling so today), and at the same time remain faithful to the God who continually calls us forward in faith with the words, “Behold! I do a new thing in you”? How do we do both? How do we love and serve the former while giving birth to the latter? My desire here is to understand, articulate, and support the journeys of those clergy who are entering into the liminal^{xiii} space of a *transforming vocation*. These pastoral servants have answered a call, they are here, and their numbers will likely increase in coming decades even if the trend is eventually reversed. This has also been my own personal journey, so my work on this project has to do with my own vocation, too. I want to gain insight into what is happening in and through me. I want to know how to live this new calling faithfully, with integrity and generosity of spirit. I also recognize that part of my calling has long been to support clergy and laity as they respond to the various ways that God calls people into vocations of ministry as followers of Jesus Christ. I hope that this doctoral thesis and the broader scope of my work provide resources for the church as we continue to exercise our voices to proclaim the Good News.

The phrase “*Transforming Vocations*” will prove to be multifaceted. From one angle we can see that vocations, and the very idea of vocation, are being transformed. Stand elsewhere and it becomes clear that the vocation itself may power transformation of the individual, a

family, a congregation or community. As we learn to speak with new and different voices (vocations) we discover things about ourselves. We live into new or long-dormant truths, while laying aside others that no longer, or perhaps never, fit.

Project Structure

This written project unfolds in four stages that mirror the journey of vocational transformation itself: 1) Personal Awareness, 2) Cultural Wisdom, 3) Companion Stories, and 4) New Reflections. Something within or around us stirs and awakens our imagination. Our mind and heart reach for what is “known” by our contemporaries and forbearers about the matter. We seek the wisdom and company of others who are also on the journey. Our heart and mind process all of this and develop working hypotheses and construct a narrative to understand and function within our new reality. Ideally, we continually repeat this cycle of experience and reflection until we experience that final transformation into the fullness of all God created us to be.



Stage One, **Personal Awareness**, presents my own narrative of vocational transformation, beginning with my journey to seminary, skipping forward to my most recent discernment to step away from fulltime parish ministry, and then starting back at the origins of my call to ministry and walking forward to the present. Stage Two, **Cultural Wisdom**, encompasses stories of discernment, call, vocation and journey from the Hebrew Scriptures

and Christian New Testament. Added to these are descriptions of the journey from Richard Rohr, Parker Palmer and the team led by Otto Scharmer and Peter Senge who developed Theory U. Stage Three, **Companion Stories**, brings forward the journeys of six clergy colleagues who are at various stages in their own Transforming Vocations. A modified ethnographic interview process^{xiv} was used to capture these stories. “Modified Ethnographic Interview” refers to a process based upon the work of James Spradley in *The Ethnographic Interview*. It is “modified” because I did not travel and spend time onsite with the interview subjects. I relied upon their descriptions of their settings, captioned photos, and what I could glean from their social media pages. Stage four, **New Reflections**, begins to propose additional steps forward that will support the clergy on this journey and resource the communities who train them and the ones they serve. These steps include work that I will undertake as an extension of this project, new initiatives I will launch, and suggestions for how others – particularly churches and seminaries – might adjust their approaches.

Wherever your road leads, you don’t have to travel alone. In fact, God does not call us into the world or into ministry in isolation. Our own egos, fears and organizational systems impose that isolation upon us, to our detriment. The **Appendices** offer a collection of resources for further study, reflection and conversation. They are designed to be used by individuals, groups or organizations. Most of them originate in my own ministry experiences, having been adapted for this project. A few stand as a witness to my own thoughts at several key points in my journey of vocational transformation. These personal pieces are not meant to be examples for others to follow, but may provide some context for the work and even offer some familiarity and comfort to those on a similar path.

My sincere hope with all of this is that the reader might gain valuable insight into her or his own journey, experience mercy and grace for the past, and receive encouragement and hope for the road ahead. I hope too that we may have increased sympathy for those called to this Transforming Vocations Journey. Finally, I hope that we might more faithfully support one another into whatever future kingdom endeavors God might call us.

Endnotes

-
- i <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vocation> (accessed February 21, 2015).
- ii <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transform> (accessed February 21, 2015).
- iii “New Pastoral Economy” is a phrase that has been used previously to describe shifts in agricultural, most specifically with reference to Australia and New Zealand. (<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/international-economic-relations/page-3>) (accessed February 21, 2015). My novel usage here is meant to capture the broad sweep of dynamics and factors related to the shifting economic realities of pastoral ministry as a career and income source.
- iv <http://www.faithandleadership.com/features/articles/church-finances-face-long-term-challenges> and <http://pulpitandpew.org/sites/all/themes/pulpitandpew/files/salarystudy.pdf> (accessed April 7, 2015).
- v Michael B. Horn, *Louisiana’s Digital Future: How Online Learning Can Transform K-12 Education*, New Orleans, LA: Pelican Institute for Public Policy, (2012). <http://www.thepelicanpost.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/LouisianasDigitalFuture.pdf> (accessed February 21, 2015).
- vi “Minority” as a term to refer to people of color is already ironic, if not a complete misnomer. By 2050, if not before, people of Anglo-European descent will be the numeric minority in the United States. Already they represent a minority of Christians globally, and perhaps also in the U.S.
- vii <http://www.missioninsite.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/QuadrenniumWhitePaper.pdf> (accessed April 7, 2015).
- viii Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening*, (New York: HarperOne, 2013), p20.
- ix <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/25/us/25religion.html> (accessed February 21, 2015). See also reports from Alban Institute: <https://alban.org/archive/resilience-in-the-recession-economic-impact-study-highlights-congregational-strengths/> (accessed February 21, 2015).
- x <http://thomrainer.com/2013/08/19/the-number-one-reason-for-the-decline-in-church-attendance-and-five-ways-to-address-it/> (accessed February 21, 2015).
- xi <http://pulpitandpew.org/sites/all/themes/pulpitandpew/files/salarystudy.pdf> (accessed April 7, 2015).
- xii “Presbyterians expect fewer full-time pastors,” *Christian Century*, 128, no. 10 (May 17 2011): 14.
- xiii Liminal Space – Victor Turner, “Liminality and Communitas” in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Antistructure*, (Ithica, NY: Cornell Paperbacks, 1995): 94-130.
- xiv James P. Spradley, *The ethnographic interview*, (New York : Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979).