

Original Research Article

Ministerial Engagement and Curriculum Applicability: Tracing the Graduates of Bachelor of Arts in Theology

ABSTRACT: *Theology, often hailed as the "queen of all sciences" in the Middle Ages, has seen a decline in status since the modern era. Despite this, many Christian institutions continue to offer theology programs, primarily to prepare individuals for ministry roles within the church. However, as Van den Brink points out, the field of theology faces challenges today, including a shrinking job market and a diminished intellectual reputation. This has led to a situation where not all theology graduates pursue traditional ministry roles; instead, some use their degrees as a stepping stone to other careers. In the Philippines, the path to becoming a pastor varies by denomination, with some churches requiring formal theological education while others do not. For example, one institution in Northern Luzon offers a Bachelor of Arts in Theology, primarily aimed at training ministers for a young Presbyterian denomination. This program is recognized by the Philippine government, allowing graduates to pursue various careers, not just in ministry. Given the importance of understanding the effectiveness of such programs, this study was conducted to trace the career paths of graduates from 2014 to 2020, examining their involvement in ministry and the applicability of their theological training to their current roles.*

Keywords: graduates, theology program/institution, ministry, curriculum

1. INTRODUCTION

"Theology is the queen of all science," says a popular cliché in the Middle Ages. However, theology has declined in popularity since the modern period. Van den Brink noted,

The academic discipline called theology has had a remarkable career: once hailed as the 'queen of the sciences', its status has been questioned ever since—and after the secularization of the European university, it has been written off and discontinued in many places (Van den Brink 2019, 442).

Despite declining popularity, many Christian institutions still offer theology programs and courses. These usually prepare aspirants for ministry work in the local church or wider Christian communities. Otokola says,

Theological education is the training of men and women to know and serve God. It is distinguished from Christian Education in that it is usually done in preparation for special service or leadership in the Christian church or mission. Christian Education is generally seen as for all and takes place generally in the church. Theological education is not for all, usually results in special service and leadership, and usually takes place in a college or in a Theological Education program centered beyond the church (Otokola 2017, 94).

However, many theology graduates have a huge dilemma to face outside the four corners of seminaries or theological institutions. Van den Brink noted the external dimension of crises in theology regarding a shrinking job market, audience, and intellectual reputation (Gijsbert 2019, 442-443). With this, some theology students do not necessarily aim to become religious workers after graduation but to pursue other professions as they are also qualified for such. Abner writes, "For those who are interested in theology but do not plan on going into a ministry-based career, it is common to use a theology degree as a bridge to other careers (Abner 2023)."

Most churches expect their ministers to be ministerial and theologically equipped. Becoming a minister in Protestant or evangelical churches in the Philippines varies from denomination to denomination. Some groups allow someone to become a pastor with little or informal theological schooling. However, it is becoming standard for other churches in the country to have ministers with at least a bachelor's degree in theology (or any related degree) or a Master of Divinity. The most common way to get a theological diploma is by studying in the Bible or in theological schools.

In 2010, one school in the Northern part of the Philippines added a Bachelor of Arts in Theology (BA Theology) to its teacher education, accountancy, business, information technology, and criminology programs. This theology program primarily aims for the training of ministers of a relatively young Presbyterian¹ denomination in the region. Nonetheless, students from other denominations are welcome to enroll. The Philippine government recognized the program through its Commission on Higher Education (CHED). Hence, graduates of this theology program can take the civil service examination or pursue licensure examination for teachers and be qualified to work in private or public employment; they can also pursue university or graduate studies if they wish to. Nevertheless, the foremost mission of the program, as stated in the school's document, is "To produce well-equipped church leaders with the tools ready to meet the challenges of the mission of the church("KCP Student Handbook" 2020, 6)."

It is encouraged by CHED that higher educational institutions will not only produce employable graduates but also that they know the whereabouts and status of their former students to determine if their programs are right on track. One way of doing this is through the conduct of a graduate tracer study. It is said, "Tracer study is unquestionably one of the most important elements to determine the success of the programs or courses the school offers. It documents

¹ This denomination is evangelical and relatively conservative in its leaning compared to other more progressive Presbyterian groups.

the status, characteristics of employment, struggles, and extent of applicability of skills in the current employment of the graduates (De Castro 2017, 41)." Moreover, tracer studies are essential in the accreditation process of HEI programs from different accrediting agencies in the country.

This study was conducted for the abovementioned reasons. It covers the first batch of graduates in 2014 to graduates in 2020. There were 89 of them in all. This study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the percentage of BA Theology graduates are involved in Christian ministries?
2. What is the status of involvement of BA Theology graduates in Christian ministries, in terms of:
 - a) Ministry Position
 - b) Ministry Time Allotment
 - c) Ministry Financial Remuneration
3. How applicable is the school's BA Theology curriculum to graduates' ministry or work involvement?

2. METHODOLOGY

This study is an Explanatory Sequential design, utilizing a descriptive survey and semi-structured written interviews. The questionnaire is patterned from the CHED tracer template but was modified to fit the purpose and respondents of the study. The questionnaire is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the profile of the respondents, their ministry involvement or non-involvement, and the ministry status of those who are involved. The second part is on the level of applicability of the program curriculum to the respondents' ministry or work setting.

Data collection involved distributing questionnaires in person and through email, Google Forms, and various social media platforms to reach the intended respondents. Among the initial pool of 89 graduates, two passed away due to severe illnesses, resulting in a final sample of 87 participants. Respondents were geographically dispersed, with a concentration mainly in the Northern Luzon area. While the data collection process experienced a temporary interruption, it was successfully resumed and conducted between January 2022 and February 2023.

The data gathered for the first part were described and analyzed. Further personal, phone, or online interviews were done with the concerned respondents when some answers needed clarification. The data were tabulated and ranked according to applicability for the second part.

List 1 : The following scales were used:

Statistical Limit	Numerical Value	Verbal Interpretation
3.26-4.00	4	Very High Applicability
2.51-3.25	3	High Applicability
1.76-2.50	2	Moderate Applicability
1.00-1.75	1	Low Applicability

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Graduates' Involvement in Ministry

Table 1 presents the involvement or non-involvement of BA Theology graduates of 2014-2020 in ministry:

Graduates Involvement	No. of Respondent	Percentage
Involved in Ministry	52	76.47
Not Involved in Ministry	16	23.53

Table 1: Ministry Involvement or Non-Involvement

There were 87 intended respondents in this study, but only 68 turned in the interview and survey questionnaires. Fifty-two (52) answered affirmatively to the question, "Are you currently involved in a Christian ministry?" This is equivalent to 76.47 percent. On the other hand, 16 respondents, or 23.53 percent, answered negatively. This means that the theology program is doing fairly in its reason for establishment. Moreover, it shows that the majority of those enrolling in the program have in their mind to use their theological education in the work of the ministry.²

However, it is also to be noted that though theological training does not necessarily require a graduate to have a ministry as its primary vocation or profession, it is expected that graduates of theological schools should not fail to engage in whatever form of Christian ministry, particularly in the church setting. Thus, the 23.53 percent who admitted that they are not involved in any ministry or even connected to any church sparked interest in further investigation. Nine (9) respondents reported that they could not commit to a ministry because of their secular work or other engagements to supply their financial needs.

In the Philippine context, many Protestant and evangelical churches are not big congregations or are financially well-off. In many cases, churches are composed of ordinary believers, and financial collections cannot suffice to support a church worker, much more to a family. Thus, one respondent reported, "I am currently busy with my work and raising my kids. I also help my partner in her online business." Even in wealthier countries, many pastors are underpaid. In a 2015 survey of more than 4,000 pastors in the US, Robinson writes, "More than three in four knew someone who left the ministry due to financial stress," and "many millennial pastors, a few years into the ministry, had significant doubts about continuing due to inadequate pay (Robinson 2018)." Few respondents of this tracer reported that it is due to health concerns, being busy reviewing for the teacher licensure examination, and further studies why they cannot commit to any ministry.

3.2. Graduates' Status of Involvement in Ministry

Ministry Position	Number of Respondents	Percentage
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² Cf. Abner, "What are the Best Theology Careers?" (2023).

1. Senior/Head Pastor	14	20.59
2. Assistant/Junior Pastor	13	19.12
3. Youth Pastor	4	5.89
4. Worship/Music Director	6	8.82
5. Children's Director	4	5.89
6. Other Ministry Head or Ministry Team Members (Women, S.S)	11	16.18
7. No ministry position/involvement	16	23.53

Table 2: Ministry Positions

Table 2 shows the different ministry positions BA Theology graduates have. Fourteen (14) respondents, or 20.59%, are senior/head pastors. This means that these respondents serve as chief leaders of their congregations and supervise the overall affairs of the church. For the position of junior or assistant pastors, thirteen (13) respondents, or 19.12%, serve their churches in this capacity. Four (4), or 5.89%, also said they are engaged in church ministry as youth pastors, supervising various ministries for young people. The assistant and junior pastors usually work under the supervision or authority of a senior pastor.

The three levels of pastoral ministry positions discussed above are pastors' most common roles in local congregations. Ministers in these categories are considered members of the clergy, professional ministers, or popularly referred to as pastors in evangelical or Protestant denominations. A church music leader, or head of children's ministry, etc., are not popularly referred to as pastors, though some groups do. Many evangelical theological schools aim to produce pastors or ministers in higher levels of ministry than positions for other ministry fields or departments. BA Theology respondents serving as pastors totaled 31 or 45.59 percent. This trend, even in the United States, is that 41% of theology graduates pursue pastoral ministry, while others are in different fields (Boorstein 2013). This provides a picture that the program is achieving results at the same level as with other theological schools in other parts of the globe.

Furthermore, other graduates serve as music or worship directors (8.82%), in children's ministry (5.89%), or in other ministry areas, e.g., women's groups, adult Sunday School, etc., (16.18). This is still good as the program acknowledges the gifting and calling of individuals. So, it is expected that other graduates will not be in the pastoral role but could be in other functions necessary for the church's well-being. Romans 12:4-6 says, "For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each [church] member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us" (NIV).

3.3. Ministry Time Allotment

This research looks not only at the ministry involvement of the graduates but also at the time they are rendered ministers or workers of the church. The table below shows the time spent by the respondents to the ministry.

Time Allotment	Part-Time Ministry	Percentage
Full-time	19	27.94%
Part-Time	30	44.12%
No ministry	16	23.53%
Not Indicated	3	

Table 3: Ministry Time Allotment

Looking at the table above, most respondents are engaged in ministry part-time (44.12%), or 30 respondents out of the 68. The respondents claim they have this set up because they are involved in other livelihoods and simultaneously committed to the ministry. The assumption discussed earlier in this paper and below is that the church's financial remuneration is insufficient to sustain the pastor's needs and family. This can be attributed to the small size of Protestant congregations (Gray 2016). Even in Western churches, Trueman states, "Bivocational pastoring will be the new normal for churches with 200 members or less. The cost of salaries, benefits and pensions makes it hard for churches to cover. Added to this is the routine expenses that churches incur (Trueman 2015)." As this happens in churches in wealthier regions, it is a starker reality in third-world countries such as the Philippines.

Regarding full-time ministry involvement, 19, or a percentage of 27.94 of the respondents claimed to have this status. Moreover, of the 19 full-time, 9 are senior/administrative pastors, while five (5) senior pastors are part-time. This means 64.29% of the senior pastors are in full-time ministry, in contrast to the standard expectations that most, if not all, churches should have full-time ministers. For example, 82% of the members of Presbyterian Church USA agree that it is essential that every congregation have a full-time, installed pastor ("Presbyterians Expect Fewer Full-Time Pastors" 2011)." However, based on further conversation with some respondents who are ministering full-time, few are contemplating turning to part-time due to limited financial remuneration from the church. Thus, regardless of the common notion that most, if not all, pastors should be full-time, the trend of part-time pastoring is rising due to said financial considerations.

3.4. Ministry Salary or Financial Remuneration

Financial Remuneration	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Church Salaried	2	2.94
With Allowance Only	21	30.88
Volunteer	29	42.65
Volunteer without regular work	(14)	20.59
Volunteer but salaried in a Christian School/Organization	(6)	8.82
Volunteer but with Secular Work Salary	(7)	10.29
Volunteer but with Business/self-employed	(2)	2.94
No Ministry but with secular work	16	23.53

Table 4: Financial Remuneration

As shown in the table above, only two respondents say they receive regular salaries from the church. They are one senior pastor and one assistant pastor, respectively. The former receives P20,000.00 (USD 352) monthly, while the other receives P15,000.00 (USD 264). Despite this, in a messenger communication with the latter, he said that with his meager salary, he is contemplating finding other work or even going overseas employment, just like many other Filipinos. This shows that having a senior or administrative pastor position does not guarantee ministers financial security, even if they serve full-time. Such a scenario could discourage others from pursuing senior pastoral roles and full-time service.

Furthermore, 20.88% of those engaged in ministry are given allowances or honorariums only. Though these church workers receive regular amounts from the church, they do not consider it salary because it is below the minimum wage, as stated in the Philippine labor law. For example, next in rank of the two salaried pastors, is a respondent that receives eight thousand pesos (P8,000.00 or around USD 141) a month from the church. During the interview, it was revealed that the pastor occasionally engages in daily-wage work, such as building construction jobs, to augment his income and support a family of four.

Many members of Philippine evangelical churches are simple folks, especially those outside the urban centers. This means that the "income" of churches through offerings or donations is not big enough to support their ministers and other church expenditures. This prompts many ministers to accept whatever their churches can afford to give or even render their services for free to avoid burdening the congregation. It could be gleaned from the table that 29 respondents, or 42.65%, are engaged in church ministries but do not receive any compensation. This can be associated with the story of Apostle Paul, who worked for his sustenance so that the church would not be burdened while he was ministering to them.³

This lack of financial remuneration is one of the causes why many young people are turning away from getting a theology education or being in a full-time pastorate. This resulted in a decrease in enrollment in theological schools, both in the Philippines and abroad. So, "many theological schools have responded by expanding their programs beyond aspiring clergy to appeal to working professionals, offering ecumenical and interfaith education and embracing online learning. Seminary leaders hope such innovations will extend the longevity of their schools (Post 2022)." Leaders of theological schools in the Philippines are also shifting their schools to government-recognized programs, aiming to produce ministers who can work in the secular field for additional income.

Twelve (12) respondents acknowledged their involvement in secular employment alongside their ministry roles. They claim that secondary employment does not hinder their ministry responsibilities. The extent of ministry commitments often depends on the scale of the church, where activities might be limited, such as evening midweek services, Saturday visitations and worship preparations, and the Sunday worship service.

³ Cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:9 and 2 Thessalonians 3:8.

Nevertheless, despite the modest size of congregations, having full-time pastors remains advantageous. This arrangement permits pastors to dedicate more time to sermon preparation, establish developmental initiatives that can be conducted throughout the week, offer flexible support to congregants, reinforce evangelism efforts, and enhance Bible study activities, among other benefits. However, the challenge, particularly for smaller churches, is providing adequate compensation for full-time pastors.

3.5. Training Applicability (Curriculum Applicability)

The Bachelor of Arts in Theology program aims to produce ministers. Its curriculum equips graduates with the necessary skills and qualities to become effective ministers. The table below shows how graduates perceive the applicability of the program curriculum in their conduct of ministry or even in their secular jobs:

Areas of Ministry	4	3	2	1	Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
A. Administration and Leadership	30	17	17	2	3.14	High Applicability	5
B. Preaching	32	16	13	5	3.17	High Applicability	4
C. Teaching (Sunday School, Bible Study, etc.)	37	15	10	4	3.29	Very High Applicability	1
D. Evangelism, Discipleship, and Mission	31	14	15	6	3.06	High Applicability	6
E. Pastoral Counseling	25	21	15	5	3.00	High Applicability	7
F. Children/Youth Ministry	32	16	15	3	3.17	High Applicability	4
G. Personal and Family Development	33	20	11	2	3.27	Very High Applicability	2
H. Community Relation	31	19	14	2	3.20	High Applicability	3

Table 5: Curriculum Applicability

As shown in the table, in the different areas of ministry, the respondents perceived that their training in the BA Theology program is highly applicable, with a total mean of 3.16. This is

encouraging to the school administrators and faculty that the curriculum - all the training provided, academic, practical, and spiritual – is helpful to the graduates.

Noticeably, the highest rank is in teaching, with a weighted mean of 3.29 and with verbal interpretation of very high applicability. Though preaching is a pastor's most commonly perceived primary responsibility, teaching is also vital. For example, the Bible says an elder or pastor must be "able to teach" (1 Timothy 3:2; 2 Timothy 2:24). On the meaning of Ephesians 4:11, whether "pastors and teachers" are taken as separate or as one unit (pastor-teacher), exegetes differ, yet most agree that "all pastors are teachers however, not all teachers are pastors (Wright 2020, 6)." This shows that teaching is an integral component of pastoral ministry.

Second in rank is the curriculum's applicability to personal and family development, with a weighted mean of 3.27 and a verbal interpretation of very high applicability. This means that the training program helps the respondents develop their character inwardly and outwardly and how they conduct themselves toward their family members. This is expected because theology students learn in the program things about God, the Bible, etc., and the result should be a person's inner and outward transformation.⁴ Further, Chiroma Nathan, noting the work of Susan Lochrie Graham, says "that the overall aim of theological education should be the development of theological learning; practical preparation for ministry; spiritual and ministerial formation; and growth in personal maturity (Chiroma 2017, 53)."

The third in rank is community relations, with a mean of 3.20 and a verbal interpretation of high applicability. The respondents think their training has enabled them to cultivate good relationships in society or community. This aligns with the concept that a pastor should not be detached from the community but someone who mingles with people, both members and non-members of the church. Chiroma rightly states, "Ministerial development is to be holistic, including students' personal, spiritual, academic and social development (Chiroma 2017, 51)." This does not mean that all pastors should be extroverts. Still, regardless of personality, pastors should know how to build good relations with others. Second Timothy 3:7 speaks of pastors as having a "good reputation with outsiders" and that Jesus himself, the master of all preachers, "grew in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52 NIV).

Surprisingly, the fourth in rank is the applicability of their training in preaching and doing children and youth ministry, both of which have a weighted mean of 3.17. Preaching has been considered the foremost task of a pastor, especially among Protestants, since its beginning. It is considered the essential component of Protestant worship. As Bertolet says, "Preaching is a vital part of worship because only in preaching God's Word do we actually hear from God. Preaching is a means of grace in that God uses preaching His Word to nourish the believer, build the flock, and bring souls to repentance and saving faith. This is why the sermon serves as the capstone of the worship service in the evangelical church (Bertolet 2015)." Thus, every pastor should have a good way, if not a mastery, of delivering sermons, regardless of one's preferred sermon types and delivery styles. Surprisingly, this item did not come at the top, though being placed fourth and

⁴ Cf. Richard W. Stuebing, "Spiritual formation in theological education: A survey of the literature," *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, 18 no. 1 (1999): 47-70.

with a weighted mean near the top is still good. However, this can be examined further on how to improve the preaching training of BA Theology students.

The fifth in rank, Administration and Leadership, also falls under the verbal interpretation of high applicability, with a weighted mean of 3.14. This shows that the program is doing well in training the graduates in this area, as another significant task of a pastor is managing the church, its staff and volunteers, programs and activities, and finances. Though some larger churches have separate church administrators, most Philippine evangelical churches have their pastors as administrators.

Other vital tasks of pastors are evangelism and, discipleship, and pastoral counseling. The table shows that the respondents perceived that their training in these areas is highly applicable, with a weighted mean of 3.06 and 3.0, respectively. Protestant evangelical churches are expected to be vital in reaching out to the so-called "spiritually lost" (e.g., unchurched or unbelievers of the gospel), and often, this starts from the pastor to the individual members of a church. In one research, 94% of church leaders noted "that working to lead others to Christ is part of being a good evangelical (Pew Research Center 2018)." This is also true for pastoral counseling, especially nowadays when parishioners are beset with various challenges in their personal and family situations due to the modern pace of living, mobility, and technology. However, though there are counseling course/s for theology students or pastors, it is acknowledged that such are still insufficient to address the complex issues people encounter (Rainer 2015).

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The Bachelor of Arts in Theology of the aforementioned Philippine school is offered primarily to prepare men and women for the work of the ministry. This research found that most of the graduates are involved in Christian ministries. Thus, it is encouraging to the school that the program is fulfilling the reason it was established.

Further, it is found that nearly half of the graduates are involved in a higher level of ministerial engagement, i.e., as pastors or church leaders, while the rest are in other areas or ministry departments such as children's ministry, music ministry, and so on.

It is also found that many are doing ministry part-time as many of them are engaged in other enterprises for their financial needs. Most churches where the graduates serve do not give them salaries but only allowances (honorarium).

Regarding the applicability of the program curriculum to the graduates' ministry or work contexts, two items barely ranked with very high applicability, while the rest (six areas) had high applicability.

4.1. Recommendation

Considering the findings of this study, the following are the recommendations:

Firstly, for the theology faculty to inculcate to the students the importance of ministry engagement and participation in the life of the church during theological training;

Secondly, the theology faculty should be observant and informed of the current trends and development in the ministry contexts of graduates to prepare the latter for the realities of Christian ministries in the region or country and;

Lastly, the school administrators and faculty should constantly review and enhance the curriculum to better equip students in various ministry areas and engagements.

4.2 Call to action

Based on the findings of this study, it's clear that theological institutions and churches need to take a fresh look at how they approach theological education in today's rapidly changing world. It's not just about preparing people for traditional ministry roles anymore; it's about equipping them with the skills they need to succeed in a variety of careers. To do this, churches and educational institutions should join forces to develop curricula that are more flexible, relevant, and practical, addressing the wide range of needs their graduates will encounter. By working together, we can help future leaders serve both within and beyond the church, making a real difference in their communities.

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