Ms. Heather Zdancewicz, M.B.A., Vice President for Administration and Finance at Virginia Theological Seminary, recommends the following books as part of the Bishop Payne Library's monthly series highlighting a faculty member’s “picks”:


If you believe that the annual stewardship campaign lies in the hands of the stewardship chair, if you believe knowing parishioners giving habits will taint your pastoral relationship with them, if meaningful growth in your church budget seems out of reach, if stewardship is an annual chore rather than an ongoing ministry then Christopher’s book will offer insight to these outdated church ideas about giving.

Stewardship should be about gratefully giving back to God what is God’s but what Christopher shows is that the church needs to do more than preach the message of proportional giving or tithing. He clearly illustrates that churches are competing with over 1 million charitable organizations for funds. Nearly all those organizations that are not churches are far more effective in motivating new donors and attracting the giving of large philanthropic donors. Churches need to provide information showing how increased giving directly affects great programs and outreach while clergy and other church leaders need to learn to have two-way conversations with parishioners about giving. Clear messages and expectations are more effective than gimmicky stewardship campaigns. You may bristle at what Christopher has to say, but you won’t walk away without any new insights on effectively creating relationships that benefit your ministry.


The Rev. Becca Stevens is the chaplain at St. Augustine’s at Vanderbilt University. Motivated to show radical hospitality, she founded Magdalene, a residential program to help women who have survived prostitution, addiction, prison, and living on the streets. Magdalene went further to help women by starting Thistle Farms as an enterprise to help these same women with job skills. In *Snake Oil*, Stevens weaves together her own life experiences, testimonies of the women she has come to know, and how healing comes from love. She explains that the term “snake oil salesman” has become synonymous with the quacks that peddled their wares by over exaggerating the power their products had. The oils were not bad, just the claims that were being made that didn’t fit the actual benefits of these oils. There are known benefits to essential oils. Combining oils with prayer, love, touch, and relationship is at the heart of her ministry and now the ministry of the women that have come through the program.

The vignettes are beautiful, heart wrenching, current, full of wounding and full of healing. Stevens has taken practical theology into the streets and dark corners of Nashville, Tennessee and not only helped the women of Thistle Farms but those men and women who have also ministered to the mission. Intermixed with the stories and her own faith journey are recipes for oils and salves that the reader can use. At the heart of it all is the story of healing – her own healing, the healing of the women, the healing that we all need at times in our lives.

**Flunking Sainthood: A Year of Breaking the Sabbath, Forgetting to Pray, and Still Loving My Neighbor** by Jana Riess (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2011)

I read *Flunking Sainthood* as part of my Lenten discipline this year, along with fellow parishioners. Riess takes on 12 spiritual disciplines, one a month for an entire year, and writes of her experience. She had planned to be writing a spiritual self-help book but quickly found that spiritual practices are hard and not always a fit for her, and I might add nor a fit for me. Fasting, refraining from spending money, observing Orthodox Sabbath, following Brother Lawrence’s *The Practice of the Presence of God*, reciting the Jesus prayer, lectio divinatio, centering prayer, giving thanks (all the time), well you get the idea.

There is plenty of humor throughout, as on the first day of the month of Orthodox Sabbath, when she broke the rules in the first five minutes after rising. She reflects on learning about her own spirituality and what feels right and what is contrived. In the end, failing at the practice does not equate to failing at spirituality.