

Remembrances of Rev. Dr. Matthew Duane Floding (February 1, 1955 - May 14, 2024)

Our beloved friend and colleague, Rev. Dr. Matthew Floding, Co-Editor of *Reflective Practice*, passed away on May 14th, 2024. Matt served as President of the Association for Theological Field Education (ATFE). In 2021, he retired from his position as Director of Ministerial Formation and Field Education at Duke Divinity School in Durham, NC. Before his tenure at Duke, Matt served as Dean of Students and Director of Formation for Ministry at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, MI.

Matt is remembered for his many scholarly contributions to theological field education and leadership in ATFE. More importantly, Matt was a singular mentor to field educators, particularly new field educators, whom Matt helped to orient to theological field education, introduce to the field education community, and contribute to the guild and *Reflective Practice*. In many ways, Matt was a connector who held the community of theological field educators in North America together. He is profoundly missed.

We invited Matt's colleagues to offer short remembrances of his life, work, and ministry

Bonnie Lemelle Abadie, D Min., Associate Professor of Pastoral Studies, Director of Theological Field Education, Oblate School of Theology, San Antonio, TX

My first ATFE conference was January 2018 in North Carolina. I was looking for my caucus, but since I was new to the organization, I didn't know anyone to even recognize. I asked the first person I saw wearing an ATFE nametag. He happened to be Matt Floding. He did not know where my caucus was meeting, but he cordially invited me to join his. This is my earliest memory of Matt. Kind, gentle, genuine, hospitable, helpful. I soon came to understand his importance in this Conference. Anytime he asked for the contribution of an article or participation in a study, I was happy to oblige. He was brilliant and had a way of calling forth peoples' talents, empowering members of the organization. I am grateful for having known him and for the opportunities to serve with him.

Dr. Barbara J. Blodgett, Former President
Association of Theological Field Education, Oberlin, OH

Every biennial meeting of ATFE begins with a ritual we call, simply, The Walk Across The Room. Everyone gets up and gathers to one side of the meeting room we are in. Groups are then invited to cross to the other side of the room according to their longevity serving in field education. Without fail, a full half of the biennial meeting attendees cross the room in the first round each time. Proceeding by five-year increments, the ritual leaves fewer and fewer people remaining.

When Matt Floding attended his first ATFE meeting and experienced The Walk Across the Room, he immediately grasped its point: few people make this work their lifelong vocation. But in that moment, Matt decided to be one of them. He had previously served other vocations in ministry, and he continued to pursue a variety of interests within and alongside field education, but he committed to our field and by doing so, made it so much richer.

I had the privilege of co-editing a book with Matt, and we fell into the habit of talking by phone most Friday afternoons. We would discuss our progress on the book and work out whatever decisions needed to be made, and then we would talk about our work, our lives, and whatever we were planning to do for the weekend. Matt always had a knack for embedding a project in relationship and in joy. Always the contextual educator, he expertly practiced the alchemy of place, food, fellowship, and learning. Our community is the better for it, and we miss him.

Dr. Sung Hee Chang, Associate Professor of Supervised Ministry. Union Presbyterian Seminary, Charlotte, NC

The best part of my memories about Matt is his mentoring. He was my mentor and a mentor for all!

I am still amazed by his attentiveness of noticing first timers and attentiveness to them at any theological field educators' gathering. He would come first to and gently welcome those who were unsure whether the ATFE was a right place for them and whether we ATFE members were the right persons for

them. It was Matt “the guide runner” who made me sure that I was in the right place. Matt made me feel “at home” at the ATFE. I can’t think of anyone who is more welcoming than Matt. Matt has encouraged me to participate in the meetings and projects that he was working on. And he continued to invite others to join new initiatives.

In particular, I am very grateful to Matt for his help as I was discerning my career path in theological field education. In 2017 I stood at a crossroads of my career. I didn’t know which was the right path and whom to turn to for counselling. It was Matt who convinced me that contextual education was already my passion and who made me stay where I am today.

I believe this is true not only to my stories but also to the stories of many of us. Matt’s mentoring took many forms and I especially treasure my conversations with Matt. Whatever we talked about in our conversations, Matt was always mentoring me. I remember our last phone call in March 2024. We were checking on each other. At the end of the call Matt gently mentioned something that I could pursue for my upcoming sabbatical project. At that time, I couldn’t even have any hint of his illness. With his typical encouraging voice, he said, ‘Sung Hee, I would imagine you could do this and it will be a huge contribution.’

I thank God for Matt as my mentor, colleague and dearest friend.

Kristina Lizardy-Hajbi, Associate Professor of Leadership and Formation Faculty
Director, Office of Professional Formation, Iliff School of Theology, Denver, CO

Embodying *Educare*: In Remembrance of Matthew Floding

This is our work, to discover what we can give. Isn’t this the purpose of education, to learn the nature of your own gifts and how to use them for good in the world?

—-Robin Wall Kimmerer¹

Matthew Floding knew who he was and deeply lived out and into his gifts as a field educator, scholar, writer, minister, mentor, colleague, and more. By the

¹ Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Milkweed Editions, 2013), 239.

time I met Matt in 2019, this knowing had become fine-tuned through decades of teaching, ministry, and leadership.

I remember clearly our first encounter at the ATFE Biennial Consultation that year in Asheville, North Carolina. I was new to field education and nervous about attending this large gathering. No sooner had I selected a seat for the first plenary when a man with a kind, smiling face approached me. “Hi, I’m Matt,” he said warmly. At that consultation, we discovered a shared commitment to writing and scholarship of relevance to field educators and students alike. This is where Matt first invited me to collaborate with him and others on a writing project, one of several such projects that he initiated over the years.

Of Matt’s litany of gifts, invitational collaboration was one that many within ATFE experienced. Such invitations were never haphazard, however, as he had an ability to identify gifts in others and encourage those gifts to be put to use for “good in the world,” as Robin Wall Kimmerer asserts. This was possible because Matt’s own formational path provided space for processes of discovery to unfold throughout the course of his life, allowing him to know and live more fully into his divine gifts. In *Explore: Vocational Discovery in Ministry*, one of the books in his Theological Field Education Series, Matt writes of his own journey as a string of “yeses” from various communities over the years—people and places that provided “intentional mentoring, training, support, and being given what felt like huge amounts of responsibility.”² He received affirmation of his calling to ministry both externally and internally, offering his individual “yeses” back to these communities in ministry, leadership, and service.

In sharing pieces of his narrative, Matt never forgot his audience for the book: field education students. He writes, “What all of it underscores for me, and *I hope you have already come to understand*, is that call is about discernment...not merely a decision.”³ As most know, Matt was a prolific writer; and the *telos* of all he wrote was education, from the Latin *educare*, meaning to draw forth or to call forth from within. Matt’s enduring desire as a field educator was that others

² Matthew Floding, “A Community Said Yes,” in *Explore: Vocational Discovery in Ministry*, ed. Kristina Lizardy-Hajbi and Matthew Floding (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 1.

³ [3] Floding, “A Community Said Yes,” 3.

know themselves and their gifts so that they might “have life and have it abundantly.”⁴

I had the honor of co-editing the *Explore* book with Matt as a result of him living out his *educare* spirit. Were it not for his continual encouragement, invitations, mentoring, and friendship, I and countless other field educators—nay, the entire discipline of theological field education—would not be who we are/what it is today. Through his example, I pray that I might reflect a portion of Matt’s commitment to discovering “what we can give,” thus embodying more abundantly the vocation of a field *educator*.

Rhonda Parker, EdS, Director, Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, Duke University, Durham, NC

A Tribute to Matt Floding: Visionary, Mentor, and Builder of Inclusive Community

In 2024, we said goodbye to an extraordinary colleague, mentor, and friend, Matthew Floding—a man whose life and work reflected deep faith, boundless creativity, and an unwavering commitment to building community and advancing ministry. To those of us who had the privilege of knowing him, Matt was more than a leader—he was a co-conspirator, a fellow traveler, and a constant source of encouragement as we worked together to shape field education at Duke Divinity School, where I knew him, and beyond.

Matt’s impact on field education was nothing short of revolutionary. Through his work with the Association for Theological Field Education (ATFE), he reimagined the possibilities for ministerial formation. His contributions—spanning works like *Brimming with God: Reflecting Theologically on Cases in Ministry* and the *Explorations in Theological Field Education* series (*Engage, Empower, Enlighten, Explore, and Experience*)—were not merely books but collaborative endeavors that brought together diverse voices. Matt had a gift for seeing what others might overlook in themselves, and his unrelenting

⁴ John 10:10 (New Revised Standard Version).

encouragement often resulted in students, colleagues, and practitioners contributing ideas that shaped the field in transformative ways.

Among his many other contributions, Matt founded Friendship House in Durham, a transformative community where Duke Divinity students lived alongside suite mates with cognitive disabilities. This beautiful model of shared life—centered on eating together, praying together, and celebrating together—epitomized Matt’s vision of the kingdom of God: inclusive, relational, and marked by joy. Friendship House has since inspired similar communities nationwide, extending Matt’s vision far beyond Durham.

Personally, Matt was a steadfast friend and mentor. He was always ready to brainstorm new ideas, to share a laugh, and to dream about what could be possible in field education. His generosity of spirit and deep faith inspired those of us who worked alongside him to aim higher and dig deeper. He didn’t just teach or lead—he walked with us, cheering us on and drawing us closer to God’s vision for the world.

Matt’s vision was never confined to a single classroom, project, or book. His life’s work was about including others in the kingdom of God, whether through his writing, his mentorship, or the countless ways he brought people together to learn, grow, and serve. His influence continues to ripple through the lives he touched, the communities he built, and the ideas he championed.

As we reflect on Matt’s legacy, let us be inspired to carry forward his passion for mentorship, his unwavering commitment to inclusion, and his vision of a world transformed by love, community, and shared purpose. His life was a gift to all who knew him, and his work continues to inspire us to build communities that reflect the love and inclusion he so beautifully embodied.

Rev. Dr. John Senior, Assistant Dean of Vocational Formation and Doctoral Education,
Wake Forest University School of Divinity, Winston-Salem, NC

In theological field education, we talk a lot about sharing wisdom, particularly through the work of mentoring, in our area of theological education. Field educators are particularly attuned to the complex ways in which mentors occasion the emergence of wisdom in processing life experiences, field-based

learning experiences, and classroom learning experiences. When I started in field education almost 13 years ago, I didn't appreciate how badly I needed a wise mentor. I had no idea what I was doing. There weren't many conversation partners to process what I was learning. I didn't understand that field educators have to bring together whole areas of inquiry: theological reflection, mentoring, practical theology, adult learning, ministry practice, administration, and the like.

I came to Wake Forest having read just one book about field education. That was *Welcome to Theological Field Education!*, which Matt edited. So I knew vaguely who Matt Floding was. And then Matt came to Duke from Western just a year or two after I came to Wake Forest. Not too long after that, I got an email from Matt. He wanted to meet with me. I think he came to Winston-Salem, and we had coffee. I didn't know what to expect. I was impressed with Matt's generous and creative spirit right off the bat. And then Matt started doing what I came to understand is what Matt does, which is building communities of practice. He organized regular meetings with me and Sung He Chang at Union in Charlotte. He invited us into collaborative research and writing projects. And through our collaborative work, I learned more fully what it means to be a theological field educator. His mentoring has been absolutely vital for me in my career development.

Since I met him, Matt has been an important mentor in my life and became a good friend not too long after that. We met to have beers several times, once at a brewery near Greensboro, in neutral territory between Duke and Wake Forest. I didn't know how important it would be to have a mentor, friend, and walking and drinking partner in the work that we do. I am so grateful that Matt has been a part of my life. He's impressed on me how important it is for us to be proactive in seeking out our newer colleagues and sharing our wisdom in whatever ways we can. I am also grateful for the opportunity to join with all of you in praying for Matt and his family in this challenging season.

Rev. Dorothee E. Tripodi, D.Min., Assistant Professor, Supervised Ministry and Director, Supervised Ministry & Vocational Planning, Union Presbyterian Seminary Richmond

Rev. Dr. Matthew Floding embodied field education at its finest. His meticulous attention to mentoring the relationships between supervisor-mentors, interns, directors, and instructors, in person or through publications, created an environment that challenged all to be the best possible in preparation for and practice of vocation. Matt encouraged so many by affirming our gifts, and our vision of what field education could be and needed to become. He fostered supportive collegiality, mentored, and served many, created writing projects, and encouraged contributions to Reflective Practice. In writing we were encouraged to engage in exchange of spirituality, theological reflection, integration with academic rigor, and contextual application in the practice of ministry. Matt was a visionary and a leader who generously and yet relentlessly furthered field education as a means of grace to ministry and academic disciplines. His humility, sense of humor, and love for good food made Matt an engaging mentor and friend who enjoyed life, lived into the call to ministry, modeled leadership, and was supportive during difficult times. Matt's humility, courage, and resilience will continue to inspire us as we strive to embody field education, reflecting on his legacy and following his example, whether in an academic setting or a local congregation. Matt's love for God and God's people and his passion for field education as a call to ministry is a legacy that I will continue to strive to embody focusing on the aspects of field education that require deep spirituality, adaptive leadership, and resilience during rapidly changing times.

Christina R. Zaker, D.Min., Director, Field Education, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministry, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, IL

My first experience of Matt Floding when I took my first job in Field Education. I was new in my position, and picked up his book, *Welcome to Theological Field Education*. It offered exactly what I needed as I began understanding my field educator role. When I showed up at my first Association of Theological Field Educators Conference in Santa Fe, Matt was hosting the "Welcome to field education" gathering for us new folks and he was so welcoming, interested in each of us sitting in that room, encouraging us to get the most out of the conference. I remember thinking, "this is the guy who edited

that book!" I quickly realized that Matt's style of radical hospitality set the tone for all of ATFE interactions. Everyone was here to support each other.

Next conference, I walk in and Matt stands up saying in his delightful voice, "Christina, Welcome to St. Paul!" Being known, being appreciated, being encouraged to add a chapter to this edited volume, to think about joining this committee, to consider what you might write for Reflective Practice. Matt has done that for me, for each of us. Matt edited seven volumes in the world of field education! He encouraged so many of us to step up to share our thoughts. He served as co-editor of the Reflective Practice Journal, and with each edition he asked us to remember that our own voice was worth sharing.

Tim Coltvet observed that Matt had the unique gift of Discernment of Hidden Capabilities; he always saw something in us and invited us to see it too. Matt saw everything as a treasure hunt; he taught us all how to look at life, knowing full well that God's Joy and Love are there – everywhere! We only have to look at life, or at our own capabilities with the expectation of a joyful treasure hunt.

I remember talking to Matt at the January 2023 conference in Colorado. He mentioned that he was thinking about who a good collaborator for the next book in the series. He said, he was just watching - how we all interacted with each other, how the fun and joy and work played out. He was waiting for the Spirit to let him know who the next guide might be he could learn from and encourage on their journey too. What a beautiful statement of trusting the collaborative nature of this type of work – discernment with the expected joy of a treasure hunt with the Spirit.

I owe so much of who I am as a field educator, teacher, writer and minister to Matt's joyful, expectant, prodding, invitations. He blessed all our lives richly with a legacy of written and embodied wisdom. I miss him dearly and promise is try to follow in his footsteps – inviting, encouraging and expecting others and those who will follow in field education to share in God's abundant and radical hospitality!