

# minister

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## *Together in Ministry*

*“...to fan into flame  
the gift of God”  
II Timothy 1:6*



*Minister 2007*  
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## *The Together in Ministry Story: Read and Rejoice*

*by Kate Harvey*



*The Rev. Dr. Kate Harvey has served as Executive Director of the Ministers Council of the American Baptist Churches since 1995. Her pastoral experience was with the First Baptist Church in America (1987-95) and Central Baptist Church, Providence, RI (1979-87). Prior to entering ordained ministry she taught high school French and worked as an employment counselor. Her education includes: B.A. from the State University of New York at Albany, M.Ed. from the University of Cincinnati, M. Div. from Andover Newton Theological School and D.Min. from Hartford Seminary. While serving as Vice President of the American Baptist Churches in 1994-95 she experienced a compelling call to work on behalf of pastoral colleagues through the Ministers Council. She is the mother of five children who have presented her with eleven beautiful grandchildren – so far. The twelfth is on the way!*

The Ministers Council has been richly blessed since 2001 by two grants totaling nearly three million dollars from the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence initiative of the Lilly Endowment Inc. The funds underwrite Together in Ministry, a project that offers pastoral leaders the opportunity to form collegial covenant groups. Since the inception of Together in Ministry over one thousand pastoral leaders in the United States and Puerto Rico have made the decision to participate in order to “fan into flame the gift of God” (II Timothy 1:6).

The congregation as Body of Christ is the hope of the world and those who lead it must do so from their identity as persons created in the image of the Trinity and thus intended for community. Together in Ministry stories are told repeatedly of shared laughter and tears, often around shared meals that seem

Eucharistic because God is so powerfully present in the interactions of God's called out ones when they are joined in a collegial covenant group. The tone of one covenant group member's words is echoed endlessly in countless evaluation responses to the question posed about outcomes: "We have no record of special results and nothing printed or on the web, but the impact of our discussions is internally evident in the life of each participant. We continue to meet because we make a difference in the lives of one other. This group offers the chance to be challenged not just by peers but by giants in the ministry."

Together in Ministry seeks to transform disciplines, habits, ways, or practices of pastoral leaders to enhance pastoral excellence by establishing the model of relational ministry and the norm of holy friendships.

The following goals have guided the project since its inception:

- Overcome pastoral leaders' sense of personal and professional isolation
- Enrich pastoral leaders' perspectives of themselves and their congregations
- Provide a supportive network of peers who will pray for one another
- Offer opportunities for disciplined focus through specific study
- Create a climate for checking in and mutual accountability
- Enhance the current network of Ministers Councils to become more supportive

The stories that follow are snapshots that witness eloquently to the ways God is fulfilling these purposes through the multitude of Ministers Council Together in Ministry collegial covenant groups. As you reflect on these stories, consider the invitation to form your own group. You will find details on the final page of this issue of **Minister** and on [www.ministerscouncil.org](http://www.ministerscouncil.org).

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## *R/Evolution*

by Alice Burnette Greene



*The Rev. Dr. Alice Burnette Greene has served as Pastor of Irving Park Baptist Church in Chicago, IL since December of 2003. She presently serves the American Baptist Churches in the USA as President of the National Ministers Council and at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago as an advisor to students working on the Doctor of Ministry in Preaching. She is actively involved in local community organizations. Dr. Greene received a Doctor of Ministry degree from Howard University Divinity School in May 2004, a Master of Divinity from Wesley Theological Seminary in 1997, and a law degree from Northwestern University in 1979. Dr. Greene previously served as the Executive Minister and Associate Pastor at Shiloh Baptist Church in Washington, DC. She also has worked at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC as a Pastoral Advisor in the Ministry and Missions course, and as National Organizer at Call to Renewal, in Washington, DC. Before responding to her call to ordained ministry she worked for fifteen years as a tax lawyer.*

### ***Irving Park Ministerial Alliance, Chicago:***

#### *Core:*

The Reverend Christine Hoffmeyer, Pastor of Irving Park Methodist Church  
The Reverend Kara Wagner Sherer, Rector of St. John's Episcopal Church  
The Reverend Joyce Brown, Pastor of Park View Lutheran Church  
The Reverend Brooke Petersen, Pastor of Irving Park Lutheran Church  
Ms. Susan Glassman, Senior Ministry Coordinator, SeniorLink Alliance

#### *Participants:*

The Reverend Isoken Aiwerioba, Jesus House, Chicago  
Father Jason Malave, St. Bartholomew Church  
Mr. Dale Tippet, Sr., SeniorLink Alliance  
Ms. Kate Kinsler, St. Bartholomew Church  
Father Jim Henegan, Immaculate Heart of Mary Church

Revolution is defined as “a complete cycle of events,” or “a complete change of any kind.” As a result of funding provided by the Together in Ministry grant, the Irving Park Ministerial Alliance has undergone a revolution of sorts. At the first meeting I attended early in 2004, five persons were present: four clergy and one layperson. They represented three churches and one faith-based organi-

zation. The group shared with me that not only did the organization have a history of much greater involvement of local churches, it also had been more involved in local community activities. When the Ministerial Alliance began approximately twelve years ago, it helped create the faith-based organization – Christian Churches Caring – a member of the Alliance which provides services to seniors in the community. Christian Churches Caring, in operation for approximately twelve years, recently renamed “SeniorLink Alliance,” is separately incorporated and funded from other sources.

Unfortunately, over the last several years, the involvement of area churches had waned considerably, and meetings became both sporadic and less well attended. I was told the group began to experience difficulties mainly because of theological differences among the pastors. One example of the problem was when the group leader invited a Planned Parenthood speaker to a meeting at a Catholic church. My sense was that the members’ different religious perspectives became more important to them than what they had in common in this community.

But there were five persons still meeting on a regular basis. I found it a good way to share pastoral concerns and to feel connected with the clergy in the area. As a new pastor, I needed that time of sharing with other religious leaders. I was not only a first time senior pastor – I also was new to the neighborhood. And the church I was called to serve was in a cultural environment that was very different for me. The local clergy gatherings helped me to feel connected, and to have a place to share clergy concerns.

When the Together in Ministry funding through the Ministers Council's Lilly Endowment grant became available, our group decided this could be an opportunity for us to do some things together in ministry. We had some common issues to address. The Irving Park Neighborhood was changing. It is a neighborhood of large older homes, many of which have been recently renovated for young, urban families. Most of the members of our congregations are older and no longer live in the community. All of our churches were struggling with how to reach out to the new, younger families who seemed too busy to participate in religious activities. So, the Together in Ministry grant proposal was put together with the intention of bringing our congregations together to focus on reaching out into the Irving Park Community.

Our first year plan was simple: we would undertake three activities. The first was to bring our congregations together at a Sunday afternoon gathering to hear a speaker on what it means for churches to be “in community.” That first gathering was well attended, and worked just as we had planned. All the churches participated, and it felt like a great start. The second gathering was to provide training for our congregations on ways to reach out in community. Unfortunately, the weather did not cooperate. The temperature that Sunday in the middle of the summer reached a brutal 110 degrees, and many of our older members could not come out for that session. The third gathering was a “reaching out” event – an outdoor community fair. We invited different community organizations to share their work, both for our congregations and for the community in general. The rain which fell that early fall Saturday brought us inside, but the event was well attended by community organizations and by our church members. We did not get very many community folk inside the building as we had expected to; had the event been held outdoors, the number most certainly would have been greater.

The Lilly Endowment funding paid for the costs of these events, including speaker and musician fees, publication costs, food for the receptions, and other expenses. But what was more important than the events themselves was the spirit of cooperation that developed among the group. We had a new energy and a sense of purpose for the group. Toward the end of that first year, we used some of the remaining funds on an event to invite back some of the church leaders who had participated in the past, as well as to invite new pastors in the area. That event brought two new pastors, the new priest of the Episcopal church and one of the Catholic priests. Later that year, the newly appointed pastor of the United Methodist church joined our group, as well.



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In our second year, we engaged in more congregational gatherings that focused on reaching out to the community: a family fun block party; another invitational event for pastors in the community; a Thanksgiving service; and an event to honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., to take place the following January. The Block Party was a great success, engaging our congregations in the community in new ways, including the involvement of local businesses and civic organizations. This time, the local pastors’ gathering brought out about twenty clergy from a wider range of churches, as well as a Buddhist Abbott. The Thanksgiving service was beautifully ecumenical, even though attendance was not as high as expected. And the MLK program was meaningful and moving. The participants included many members of the community who previously had not been involved in our events.

What became clear was that the people in the community were beginning to pay attention. They saw churches working together, and the comment I heard most often about this was, “Isn’t that nice!” The Reverend Joyce Brown, Pastor of Park View Lutheran Church, puts it this way: “The Ministerial Alliance has helped to build community. It’s hard for people to be involved because of heavy work schedules and family obligations. The unity shown by the Alliance helps to inspire community members to become involved.”

Our work together also helped us to see and begin to meet a community need, just like it did when it started what is now the SeniorLink Alliance. We’ve brought into existence another faith-based organization. The Hands to Help Ministries was officially formed as an organization in the Fall of 2006. Hands to Help started when a few of the group members saw a need to be more intentional about helping the homeless in our community. Some of the more social justice-oriented pastoral and lay leaders began the project, and it has grown into a joint effort with the local food pantry to provide long-term and meaningful support for homeless persons and others in crisis.

The Together in Ministry funding has helped our organization achieve a revolution. It has come around full circle, bringing the organization back to what it once was: a group of involved clergy and lay leaders sharing with each other and providing much needed services together in ministry. The Reverend Kara Wagner Sherer, the Episcopal priest who joined our group the second year, shares her expe-

rience: "I was invited to be part of the IPMA within a month of my arrival at my new church here. I was invited to a nice lunch and immediately saw the care and support the group had for each other. The group has helped sustain me in my ministry as we share our experiences, difficult times, our furthering education efforts, and ideas on self-care. I particularly appreciated the support I received when dealing with confronting an alcoholic in my congregation. The group has begun to do joint projects as a witness to Christians working together in our community. The Family Fun Fest has been a wonderful gift to the community and a great way to strengthen our ties. I expect it will grow and expand and become a neighborhood institution. Our work together to set up Hands to Help Ministries, a non-profit service to people in crisis in our neighborhood, has been especially exciting. Several members of IPMA are founding officers and doing the hard work of setting up the non-profit, as well as working as informal social workers and using each other as a network of resources to provide housing, transit, and food vouchers. I think this group has also helped me to see beyond my own denominational structures, expanding my vision of the Christian community both on a neighborhood and national level as we share our wider church experiences with each other as colleagues. I am privileged to be part of this group and grateful for the generosity of the Ministers Council of American Baptist Churches and the Lilly Endowment for giving us resources to live generously as we share God's abundance with each other and our community."

In addition to the revolution, an evolution, defined as "a process of development or growth," has taken place in our group. The pastoral leaders of the core group of churches involved in the Ministerial Alliance have changed over the past three years, and all of the newly called pastors are women. The Irving Park Community now has five female pastors in major churches: two Lutheran, one Episcopalian, one United Methodist, and me, the American Baptist. This so impressed one of our church members that she invited us, as a group, to speak to students at DePaul University during Women's History month. While we were at the table speaking briefly on issues involving women's leadership in the church, I think we were all encouraged by listening to each other, and we began to understand our group is really special. The newest member of our group, the Reverend Brooke Petersen, Pastor of Irving Park Lutheran Church reports, "I have only been a part of the group for a short time- but for

someone new in ministry I have found this group to be particularly helpful as I learn more about the neighborhood and the context in which I am serving. The opportunities for ministry- the MLK service, the DePaul [event], etc. have been places I never would have been able to plug into without this group." The Alliance has developed into a prime example of women's leadership for today's churches.

We are now working on the projects for this year: another Family Fun Fest block party, a peace weekend to commemorate September 11, a Thanksgiving service, a gathering for clergy and we will again celebrate Martin Luther King Day. We realize, however, that our meetings need to be more than planning events; we are committed to keeping the first hour of our gathering for self-care. When we gather, the person at whose church or organization we meet will lead us in reflection, and we will share concerns and joys before we begin planning our events.

We truly feel like we are together in ministry, and our congregations, organizations, and our community all see the difference. I'm sure our evolution to a predominance of women's leadership has helped to bring about our revolution. Susan Glassman, a layperson who represents the SeniorLink Alliance at our meetings, tells us, "The IP Ministerial Alliance has certainly blessed our organization, SeniorLink Alliance, by not only assisting us with community outreach, but by partnering with us financially, as well. Personally, this group has been my primary vessel of support in prayer, guidance and wisdom in serving our isolated homebound seniors. I have developed what I feel will be life-long friendships. I am extremely blessed, privileged, and honored to be a part of a clergy group that includes many of God's most gifted and talented women in ministry. Praise God!"

Our group has recycled itself back into an organization connecting with our community in new and meaningful ways. Our group has become an exemplar of women's leadership in the churches and in the community. Our community is inspired by the example of churches, religious leaders, and faith-based organizations working together with common purpose. Somehow, I think Christ would be pleased by this r/evolution. Thank you, Ministers Council, for providing the resources that have helped us to become a vital force in our community – together – in ministry!

# *Iron Sharpens Iron*

by James Bolin



*The Rev. Dr. James E. Bolin, Jr., is a licensed and ordained American Baptist minister with over three decades of experience in pastoral ministry. Dr. Bolin is Pastor of Bethany Church in Waterford, MI. He is currently Chair of the Commission on Ordination and Standing for the American Baptist Churches of Michigan and Adjunct Professor of Comparative Religion at Macomb Community College.*

### ***The Theological Reading Group:***

The Rev. Susan Beaumont, Senior Consultant, The Alban Institute

The Rev. Allan Bendert, Pastor, Cherry Hill Baptist Church, Dearborn Heights, MI

The Rev. Dr. James Bolin, Pastor, Bethany Church, Waterford, MI

The Rev. Michael Bryan, Pastor, First Baptist Church of Plymouth, MI

The Rev. Daniel Buttry, Global Service Consultant for Peace and Justice, International Ministries, American Baptist Churches

The Rev. Jane Moschenrose, Pastor, Wellspring Church, Farmington Hills, MI

The Rev. Dr. David Nichols, Pastor, First Baptist Church of Royal Oak, MI

The Rev. Dr. Wungreiso Valui, Pastor, South Wayne Baptist Church, Ft. Wayne, Indiana

The Rev. William Walker, Pastor, First Baptist Church of Detroit, MI

The Rev. Daniel Buttry has been a conscientious, caring, and skillful convener and discussion leader. His inspired selection of the books we have read has led us all to consider topics, ideas, and movements at which we might not normally have looked or even noticed.

We get together once or twice a month, depending on Dan's schedule. We rotate meetings among our several churches and homes. Our meetings generally begin with prayer and include spirited discussions. Dan keeps us up to date on his service to Christ and our denomination in his role as International Ministries' Global Service Consultant for Peace and Justice. We sometimes have outings, e.g., the local Holocaust Museum. Humor is a frequent visitor to our group.

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**How have you sustained the interest and momentum of your group over time?**

### **Prayer / Candor**

In the beginning of our group's life, we did two very important things. First, we made a covenant to pray for one another. This has been a crucial element in our experience of one another. We feel we are supporting one another in prayer. We are not competitors, but colleagues and companions on a journey of ministry. This has strengthened the bonds of love among us.

Secondly, we realized our work together would remain superficial unless we agreed to reveal our true selves and allow an atmosphere of candor to sustain our interactions. This "covenant of candor" we have among ourselves actually has been a main reason why our group has sustained its momentum over time. Our meetings are a place where each participant can express how he or she really feels or what he or she may really think about a subject or topic. It is a place where questions can be raised, frustrations can be addressed, and opinions can be freely made and freely challenged. This aspect of our experience kept us coming back.

### **Subject Matter**

All but two of us are long out of seminary. All of us are readers. What was different about this experience for us was that Dan Buttry was directing our reading. He selected the texts and took us places about which we didn't know or of which we had only the most cursory understanding. For example, the first two texts we read and discussed were ***The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America***, edited by George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder; and ***The Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America***, edited by Darrell L. Guder. Wow! These two books of captivating articles introduced us to the array of issues and challenges concerning the way we think about the church in North America, as well as our own context for ministry. Since we all are somewhat ecclesio-centric, we had to wrestle with this new perspective for a while. But our discussions bore fruit: we all began thinking differently about the church, the church's role in our culture, and how we need to be leading our churches to adapt and engage the new missional context. Especially helpful in getting us to see our place in the big picture of Christianity was

***The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity***, by Philip Jenkins. While it was humbling to come to grips with the fact that North America is no longer where the action is, it was encouraging to see the resurgence of Christianity in Africa and in South America. At a more practical level, the missional church trajectory we were entering was strengthened by the book ***The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live our Faith***, by Alan Wolfe. Another short volume with a powerful message was ***The Missionary Congregation, Leadership and Liminality***, by Alan J. Roxburgh, who put it bluntly: "Congregations must now learn how to live the gospel as a distinct people who are no longer at the cultural center." ***The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church***, by Reggie McNeal is a practical and useful treatise on how to wake up the local church to its new role in its missional context. An engaging and humorous side trip for us was the book ***American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon***, by Stephen Prothero. This business about the missional church is only one of the subjects that has so engrossed us and kept us coming back for more.

### Exploration / Integration

Naturally, the missional church challenge led us to an exploration of the context in which we live: post-modernism. We took a novel tack, i.e., we read post-modern novels. We each read several different novels in the post-modern genre so we could explore the commonalities we found: a sense of discontinuity, the blurring of borders and limits, the attitude of nihilism, and the common feeling of the meaninglessness of life, to name but a few. Some of these novels included ***Man Walks Into a Room***, by Nicole Krauss; ***Caramello***, by Sandra Cisneros; ***The Crying of Lot 49***, by Thomas Pynchon; ***Aloft***, by Chang-Rae Lee; ***Charming Billy***, by Alice McDermott; and ***Glamorama***, by Bret Easton Ellis. To help us with this exploration, we met as a group with Professor Cecilia Infante, Professor of Literature at Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Professor Infante was thrilled a group of (aging) ministers was interested in post-modern literature, and she generously gave of her time to help enlighten us to the importance of paying attention to this literary genre, as well as encouraging us to keep ourselves attuned to the "pulse" of the culture. Our exploration gave us all new eyes to see what had been going on around us all the time - we just had not seen it as clearly before our post-

modern exploration. For many of us, this tack informed our preaching in powerful ways. For some of us, it led to experimentations in ministry and worship.

**What has the impact been of enhancing the pastoral excellence of participants?**

### New Eyes

We have been given a gift, new eyes, to see the interplay between the church and culture. Our group experience has caused us to look outside our own circles of comfort to see the prevailing direction of our culture, and to pay attention to the crucial adjustments the church needs to make in order to be effective in today's world. We now can see the post-modern culture surrounding us, and the power of that post-modern culture's tyranny in the lives of so many. We now can see the necessity of leading the church into a missional mind set. We now can see the theological framework that must be embraced by the promptings of such books as ***Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation***, and ***The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World***, both by Miroslav Volf. We truly have been given new eyes.

### New Ears

We are hearing important voices we did not hear before. Brian D. McLaren's ***A Generous Orthodoxy*** and ***A New Kind of Christian***, as well as Dallas Willard's ***The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God***, all provided us with inspiration for giving voice to the gospel in a post-modern world. Voices from the Emergent Church movement like Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, authors of ***Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*** and Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, authors of ***The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century Church***, were voic-



es we needed to hear as we lead our churches forward. Some of us heard for the first time the voice of N.T. Wright through his books, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is*, and *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* Both of these texts provide a biblical foundation for dealing with the real questions and cares of persons who are ministering in the name of Christ, and who are being ministered to. For an interesting look at the ongoing Emergent community discussion, go to [www.emergentvillage.com](http://www.emergentvillage.com). We have been given the gift of new ears.

### New Feet

We have gone to convince “the powers that be” in our region that the “Healthy Church” movement is an inadequate source for the challenges before us. We have lobbied and labored to steer our joint regional mission effort toward a more missional model. We have noted a widening of effort in missions regionally with this new emphasis. Just recently, the region sponsored a series of Diversity Training events in the metropolitan Detroit area. These events focused on encouraging African-American and European-Anglo pastors to explore both the divergences of their respective cultures as well as the commonalities they share in engaging the post-modern culture.

We are also going to give witness to the truth about a local culture-shaping event, the 1967 Detroit Riot. This year is the fortieth anniversary of the riot sparking the “white flight” to the suburbs, and which thrust the city of Detroit into a trajectory that has exacerbated unemployment, poverty, and racism. Under the leadership of Wes Babian, our Metropolitan Detroit Association of American Baptist Churches is spearheading a public discussion and a March for Peace and Reconciliation. This is exciting stuff, and it might not have come to fruition without the new feet we grew in our discussions as a Together in Ministry group.

### Conclusion

If we may humbly appropriate a cultural cliché, it would be that ours was a “Value Added” experience. What was delivered by way of camaraderie, companionship, and creativity far exceeded our recollections of what was promised in terms of what we might expect from a theological reading group. Value added - definitely!

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Additionally, we were all surprised to discover the priority we give to this group. It has been such a positive experience that most of us have never missed a meeting, except for the occasional funeral. In addition, as demanding as our respective schedules were and are, most of us read all the books that were required reading for our discussions, and some of us read other books recommended by group members, such as *Dark Age Ahead*, by Jane Jacobs, and *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace*, by Miroslav Volf. To our delight, this was a high priority commitment for most of our group members.

Finally, in reference to the title of this paper (Proverbs 27:17), we agree it has been good for us to get together, discuss our readings, explore new arenas, support one another, challenge one another, and pray for one another. It's easy to feel isolated in ministry. It's easy to get in a rut. It's easy to feel like nobody cares about you and what you are dealing with as a minister. This group has been for most of us an experience of iron sharpening iron. Iron sharpening iron comes with dissonance, sparks, and effort – ah! – but also a new edge, a sharper edge. This is what we have done for one another, and what this group has done for us. We are better, sharper, and more prepared to engage the world of ministry as leaders in the Church of Jesus Christ.

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*Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, by Miroslav Volf. Publisher: Abingdon Press. 1996

*Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace*, by Miroslav Volf. Publisher: Zondervan Press. 2006

*The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*, by Miroslav Volf. Publisher: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 2006

*A Generous Orthodoxy*, by Brian D. McLaren. Publisher: Zondervan 2006

*A New Kind of Christian*, by Brian D. McLaren. Publisher: Jossey-Bass Inc. 2001

*The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*, by Dallas Willard. Publisher: Harper San Francisco. 1999

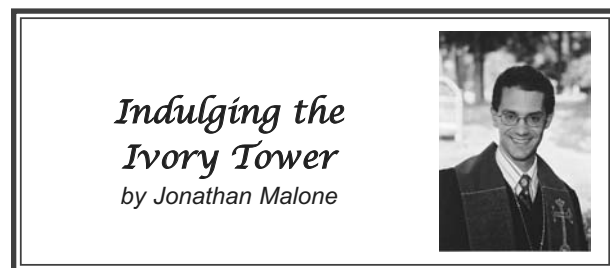
*Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*, by Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger. Publisher: Baker Publishing Group (MI). 2005

*The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century Church*, by Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch. Publisher: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. 2003

*The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is*, by N.T. Wright. Publisher: InterVarsity Press. 1999

*What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?*, by N.T. Wright. Publisher: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 1997

*Dark Age Ahead*, by Jane Jacobs. Publisher: Knopf Publishing Group. 2005



*The Rev. Jonathan A. Malone is currently the pastor of Lower Merion Baptist Church, PA. When he is not pontificating or postulating, Jonathan can be found producing powerful music on the bassoon or taking a nap. He is the proud father of three with one more on the way, and is very lucky to be married to a wife who can handle him. Jonathan is currently a doctoral student in the Ph.D. program of theology at the University of Dayton; his area of interest is Baptist ordination.*

#### *The Clergy Scholars Group:*

Pastor Douglas Avilesbernal, Pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Norristown, PA

The Rev. Dr. Kent Berghuis, Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church, Lansdale, PA

The Rev. Thomas Beers, Associate Executive Minister of the Philadelphia Baptist Association

The Rev. Dr. Robert Manzinger, Pastor of Mayfair Conwell Memorial Baptist Church, Philadelphia, PA

The Rev. Dr. Donald Brash, Professor of Palmer Theological Seminary, Wynnwood, PA

The Rev. David Braneky, Pastor of Lansdowne Baptist Church, Philadelphia, PA

The Rev. Jonathan Malone, Pastor of Lower Merion Baptist Church, Bryn Mawr, PA

I like to read. I like to read books many people consider boring, heavy, obtuse, or perhaps even obso-

lete. I like to read academic, technical tomes where one third of the book consists of either footnotes or endnotes or both. I like to read. My wife thinks I'm crazy when I sit down to read a journal article or theological text with my pencil in hand to take notes or scribble my own rants in response to the author. I call this relaxing – she rolls her eyes. My parishioners think I'm an anomaly as I line my bookshelf with volumes of the writings of the Early Church Fathers, Systematic Theologies, and obscure works dealing with the Baptist movement. Some of my non-pastoral friends roll their eyes when I tell them what obscure, tongue-twisting titled book I am reading for fun. I like to read the technical, the thick, and the dense works that cause your head to spin with awe at the ideas suggested by the authors. I like to read.

For a while, I thought I was alone in the world: I was a pastor who did not throw away his seminary text books. For a while, I thought I was the only one who continued to read and learn as much as possible even after leaving the safety of the Ivory Tower. Yet every now and again, I would meet someone else who enjoys turning philosophical phrases, musing ontological complexities, and considering the epistemological possibilities which may or may not inform one's faith. When I would meet such a kindred spirit, I often would lose track of time. I often would forget about those around me and stay locked in a conversation focused on the theological differences between Bart and Bonhoeffer, or the difference between the Holy Spirit and the Trinity as sources for Ecclesiology. I would get lost in these enriching, engaging, and challenging conversations. I would get lost - and I would find myself refreshed.

It was out of such a conversation that our TIM group emerged. I found someone else (or perhaps better said, God found each of us for the other) who liked reading a similar genre of works and once again discovered myself immersed in a conversation that lasted for hours. We decided to meet again for lunch and invited two more individuals who had the same thirst as we had for the obscure and the particular. In that first meeting, the four of us did not have any agenda - only a blank slate - and a lot of faith the Holy Spirit would engage us, challenge us, and lead us to something new. The conversation lasted almost three hours.

After two more meetings, we decided to invite three more people to join our conversation, and so the

group grew. We would agree upon a text to read and a place to eat, moving from place to place. Even before we made application for the TIM grant, we had an active group: the group existed first, and then we considered applying for the grant. It grew out of a need all of us had to read and to discuss at an almost arrogant level the material we read. Since receiving the grant, we do not feel inhibited by the price of a book if it is one we feel would be good to read. Nor do we feel we have to worry about getting together to enjoy fellowship over a meal. The grant has given us the freedom to focus on the reading and the fellowship, releasing us from the worry about financial barriers that otherwise would have existed.

Allow me to describe the band of scoundrels who emerged from this desire to read. All of us are ABC pastors in one way or another. All of us have served or are currently serving a local church. This is an experience which unifies many of our discussions, questions, and challenges. We have a seminary professor who was previously a pastor; a pastor who also teaches at a local university; a pastor who was previously a seminary professor; a regional staff person who was previously a pastor and university professor; a doctoral student who is also a pastor; and two recent seminary graduates, one of whom is an associate pastor, and the other, a solo pastor. This only scratches the surface of the diversity, the depth, and the gifts each person brings to the group. We come from different ethnic backgrounds, different theological backgrounds, different ecclesiological backgrounds, and different academic backgrounds. All have a love to learn, talk, and read. This is the group that emerged and applied for a grant.

In the organic way God often works, the group was gathered through one person taking a risk, inviting another to join, and then joining. After meeting a couple of times and finding the conversation to be fulfilling and engaging, we felt this would be a cohort that could commit to meeting on a regular basis for at least a year. Our covenant for the grant emerged



*Minister*

out of the unspoken rules already governing our conversations. We would respect each other, we would do the best we could to read the material, and we would challenge each other to deepen and to grow our faith and our understanding.

We have been meeting officially for three months now. Once we met with the author of a particular work; on other occasions, we have read works written by members of the group. The variety of works which we have explored has ranged from theology to history to Biblical studies.

In January, after reading his work, *The Weakness of God*, we had the opportunity to meet with John Caputo (the aforementioned author). He asked the interesting question, "What do you, as pastors, do with a work like this?" This question expands beyond Caputo's book to all the works we have read, engaged, and discussed. "What do we, as pastors, do with these obtuse tomes?" Or perhaps to ask the question more specifically, "What impact has our group had in enhancing pastoral excellence?" It is a good question which can shake the foundations of our group. We are not reading anything about pastoral presence, grief counseling, or marriage therapy. We are not reading anything about fund raising, stewardship campaigns, or administrative discipline. We are not studying group dynamics, system theories, or methods of homiletics. We are reading abstract theories - the very theories, the very works - that led some in seminary classes to throw down their book in despair and shout out, "How is this ever going to apply to the pulpit?"

Yet, our reading, our conversation, and our fellowship have enhanced the pastoral excellence of us all. I truly can only speak for myself, but I will presume to project my experiences upon my colleagues as being their experiences as well. When we read a book about theodicy and the power of God, such theology has and will continue to shape the way I can be present to someone who is suffering. The theological depth will inform my pastoral presence with those who grieve and who question the presence of God. When we read a biography of Jonathan Edwards, I found a model of leadership into which to live, an example of perseverance to which to aspire, and an illustration of the power of preaching to reach hearts and minds for which to strive to obtain. These are only two examples of the ways in which the books themselves have informed and shaped my vocational practices. Each book has

deepened my theology, my faith, and my approach to my calling as a pastor. Yet, it doesn't stop there. The fellowship has added to the experience. Apart from our monthly meetings, one can find an interwoven web of interactions between members of the group. Some meet to coordinate inter-church activities; some meet to offer pastoral support to each other; and others meet for a lighter fellowship. Within this group, intimate support networks have formed, and in the dark hours of ministry, such support is essential. The content and the context of the group encourage and cultivate pastoral excellence.

I like to read. I know I am not alone in my love for reading. I know there are pastors scattered throughout the denomination who have a similar passion. I am blessed to be among others who share that passion and who are willing to incarnate that passion monthly, in fellowship, and in the presence of the Holy Spirit. I enter each meeting full of ideas and questions, and leave full of energy, passion, and a thirst for more. It is both a challenging and relaxing group. It is a time that demands concentration and gives energy. It is a blessing to my professional life and my personal life. And it is a blessing from God.

***The Most Difficult Challenge for Clergy: Changing One's Own Emotional Process***  
*by Kim Egolf-Fox*



*The Rev. L. Kim Egolf-Fox is the pastor of Calvary Baptist Church of Norristown, PA, a position he began as a co-pastor in February, 1991, and assumed in full upon the resignation of his co-pastor wife, the Rev. Brenda L. Egolf-Fox in January, 1999. He and his congregation were recipients of a National Clergy Renewal Grant for 2003 from the Lilly Endowment, Inc. ([www.clergyrenewal.org](http://www.clergyrenewal.org)), which he learned about from the Ministers Council website. He is a Certified Counselor of the Myers Briggs Type Instrument ([www.mbti.com](http://www.mbti.com)) and a Fellow of the Academy of Parish Clergy ([www.apclergy.org](http://www.apclergy.org)). He began the Family Systems Group that meets at the ABC Mission Center, and serves as the Coordinator. You can reach him at: [pastorkim@cbsnorristown.com](mailto:pastorkim@cbsnorristown.com).*

*The Family Systems Group:*

- The Rev. L. Kim Egolf-Fox, Coordinator of Family Systems Group, Pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Norristown, PA
- The Rev. Nilson Assis, Administrative Director, Katartizo Healing and Discipleship Center, Reinholds, PA
- The Rev. Rothangliani Chhange, Director of Ecumenical Formation, ABCUSA, Valley Forge, PA
- The Rev. Rhonda Cushman, Chaplain at Deborah Heart and Lung Center, Brown Mills, NJ, and Military Chaplain Guard/Reserve
- The Rev. Brenda Egolf-Fox, Executive Director of Habitat for Humanity of Montgomery County, Norristown, PA
- Mr. Ken George, National Coordinator, Direct Human Services, ABCUSA, Valley Forge, PA
- The Rev. Richard Harris, Manager, American Baptist Personnel Services, ABCUSA, Valley Forge, PA
- The Rev. David Ludeker, Retired ABC Pastor and Denominational Leader
- The Rev. Steve McComas, Pastor of Rolling Hills United Methodist Church Pipersville, PA
- The Rev. Ginny Miles, Pastor of Penns Park United Methodist Church, Penns Park, PA
- The Rev. Dr. Frank Sanders, Pastor of Morrisville United Methodist Church of Morrisville, PA
- Supervisors:*
- The Rev. Dr. Michael D'Antonio
- The Rev. Dr. Vincent deGregoris

"I've been financially independent since I was 17 years old," said the speaker at the meeting. "What drove that?" he asked our group of twelve. Before any of us could answer, he answered the question himself: "Nothing good!" After that, he told us he had done seven quarters of Clinical Pastoral Education.

The twelve members of the Family Systems Together in Ministry Group meeting at the American Baptist Mission Center were listening to Rev. Dr. Stephen Treat, LMFT, Director and CEO of Council for Relationships in Philadelphia ([www.councilforrelationships.org](http://www.councilforrelationships.org)), the oldest and largest counseling agency in the United States. His topic was, "Can you hold onto your differentiation?"

Differentiation of the Self is one of eight key concepts of Bowen Family Systems Theory developed by Dr. Murray Bowen (1913-1990) as a way to help him understand the emotional forces that were at work in families, and in the society at large.<sup>1</sup> Differentiation is about our ability to carve out an "individual self" from our parents and relatives, while at the same time staying in relationship with them, or those like them, without being enmeshed with them, controlled by them, or trying to control them.<sup>2</sup>

The bottom line of what Dr. Treat looks for in those clergy and religious leaders wishing to maintain some semblance of self differentiation centers on the following areas: 1. Where do I react (automatically, without thought or plan), rather than respond (integrated self, preplanned, stay in relationship)? 2. Where do I get angry? 3. Where do I withdraw? 4. Where do I personalize (This is the most heightened way we lose control of our self, blending our own background into a situation and making it about us, when it is not about us.) 5. Where do I position myself? (Over, under, or beside another person with respect to power.) 6. Splitting. (Reducing our choices to good versus bad, us versus them.) 7. Safety. (Personal safety is not about our lack of confidence in others but about our confidence in our own abilities and multiple choices. If you know how to swim, you do not need to trust your canoe mate to get you safely to the shore. If you do not know how to swim, you have to trust your canoe mate to get you safely to the shore.)

Dr. Treat's short list of areas for self-examination left us each with plenty to work on with respect to our various ministry placements. What he had shared with us enlarged our ability for Self Differentiation, and also gave us tools to help us understand the persons and institutions by which we were employed as religious leaders.

You may never have heard of Dr. Stephen Treat or Dr. Murray Bowen, but you may have heard of Rabbi Ed Friedman. Friedman was a student of Dr. Bowen. I must confess I owned the book **Generation to Generation**<sup>3</sup> by Friedman (1932-1996) for many years before I was ready to read it.

Rabbi Friedman is known in many clergy circles as the rabbi who saved their back sides while Rabbi Jesus was saving their souls. Friedman, who was also a family therapist, made Bowen's theory popular beyond its original context of psychotherapy. He translated the theory to congregational life, and then into leadership principles in his posthumous work, **A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix**.<sup>4</sup>

The Rev. Dr. Lawrence Matthews, a protégé of Friedman and regular participant in "Friedman Fridays"<sup>5</sup> as they became known, began Leadership in Ministry Workshops ([www.leadership-inministry.org](http://www.leadership-inministry.org)) in 1991 to teach clergy how to deal with the root causes of issues rather than simply treating symptoms in their own lives or in their

places of ministry.<sup>6</sup> Matthews' website has a wealth of information on Bowen Family Systems. Click on the Resources and Updates tab to find a plethora of material, some of which is without financial cost.

I began attending Leadership in Ministry Workshops in the spring of 1997. I continue to go twice yearly for three days at a time to gauge my functioning as a pastor and a person with many roles. I have a small group to whom I am tethered for our common good, and a mentor whom I have known for more than a decade. I still have a lifetime of work ahead of me, but I believe I am functioning better now as a pastor and leader in my same setting than what I was in 1997.

The Family Systems Group which meets at the Mission Center in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, has been gathering regularly for eleven years. Begun in 1997, we bring our genograms<sup>7</sup> and case studies, and ask the person presenting the case as many questions as we can, from a Bowen Family Systems Theory perspective. According to Bowen theory, we each have our own answers within our selves, our feelings, our thoughts, and our functioning. Sometimes we fall into diagnosing or giving advice, which is not the same thing as facilitating another's exploration of what is below the surface of his or her awareness.

"What do you think it was like for your youngest born mother to grow up with four older brothers?" was an insightful question that enabled one participant in the group to reflect differently on how his mother "overprotected" him while he was growing up. His unconscious emotional reaction to those feelings he had of being overprotected had been transferred to his own children, whom he took pains not to overprotect. Other "systems questions" the group asked that helped him gain clarity into his functioning included: "What did that behavior look like in his pastoring? Had he been more passive when he had needed to be more active, or even proactive in caring for or responding to those in need?"

In 2003, the members of our Family Systems Group applied for and received funding secured by Dr. Kate Harvey, Executive Director of our American Baptist Ministers Council ([www.ministerscouncil.com](http://www.ministerscouncil.com)), from the Lilly Endowment ([www.lillyendowment.org](http://www.lillyendowment.org)) to form two separate Together in Ministry groups. With the funding, we were for the first time able to hire two Supervisors trained in Bowen

Family Systems Theory, as well as other therapies. The Rev. Dr. Vincent deGregoris, Retired Professor and Developer of the Doctor of Ministry in Family Ministry program at what at the time was Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary<sup>8</sup> is one of our Small Group Supervisors; the other is Dr. Michael D'Antonio, Senior Staff Therapist with the Council for Relationships.

Our Family Systems Together in Ministry Group has been able over the past few years to sustain two groups, meeting concurrently once a month, with separate supervisors. Here's how one pastor describes the impact of his group membership: "Participation in the Family Systems group has helped me to understand and respond to congregational dynamics from a family systems perspective. In many respects, congregations are very similar to families. The same forces and behaviors which create chaos and dysfunctionality in families exist in congregations. It has helped me to specifically understand issues from my family of origin, e.g., my need for acceptance and nurturing, and how these issues can influence my intra-congregational relationships. Healthy relationships begin with awareness."

In 2006, we were able to host a one day Continuing Education Event with Dr. Israel Galindo. He is a widely sought after author, educator, and consultant ([www.galindoconsultants.com](http://www.galindoconsultants.com)) who serves as Professor of Christian Education at the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, Virginia. He is also a faculty member of Leadership in Ministry Workshops.

"Emotional process determines the outcome," Galindo teaches. In other words, process is always more important than content. How we do things is just as important, if not more so than what we do. For example, I know a married couple who can fight about anything. The content does not matter. What is broken is not any particular unresolved issue in their relationship, but the way they continuously relate to each other on a very reactive immature, emotional level. All their outcomes are the same, because their emotional process will always determine the outcome.

The same holds for the systems which we lead. Ask constituents to make a major group decision on a new issue upon first presentation, and you can expect the group anxiety to say, "No way!" Give the

same group enough time to absorb the issue, ask questions, pray about the leading of the Spirit, meet several times to discuss the issue with one another, and you can expect less reactivity from the group when it comes time for the decision to be made. Emotional process determines outcome.

I am convinced that clergy who are trained in Bowen Family Systems Theory and who are actively doing their family of origin work have the capacity to function better and in more self-controlled, responsive, less reactive ways than if they were not trained in this way of thinking and functioning. Hear what one of our group members, who is now a national staff person, has



to say about being part of the group: "The Family Systems Group at the Valley Forge American Baptist Mission Center helps me to remain alert to the 'systems' dynamics both in the congregations we serve, but also in the larger organizations to which our congregations relate. I work in the larger church environment, and 'systems analysis' helps me to understand that the issues and concerns we face each day are not necessarily isolated or unique, but are part of the fabric of systems. This assists in my strategic planning within the organization. This group has been an invaluable asset and support for me in my present position."

How many times have you said to someone, "Christianity is a very personal religion, but it is not a private religion?" The same goes for doing the work of changing one's unconsciously learned, mindlessly managed emotional process with which we each emerged from our childhoods, no matter how idyllic, routine, or rotten a childhood you might have had. While the work we have to do is uniquely personal, it is not work we can do by ourselves. When we are told to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12), we must remember Jesus sent his disciples out to do ministry in pairs (Mark 6:7). Long before that, we are told we are bound one to another as a fact of creation (Genesis 1:26-28). As members of the body of Christ, it takes two or three of us to find Christ (Matthew 18:20).

This is not just another intellectual exercise, as one might learn another language or how to sing or to play a new piece of music. This is about changing what is at the core of who we are. I know an extremely intelligent individual who knows Bowen Family Systems Theory (BFST) inside and out, but, when push comes to shove, that person is unwilling to do the family of origin work necessary to lead beyond the current state of personal stuckness. Knowing something about BFST is helpful, even necessary,<sup>9</sup> but the key to functioning better as a leader, child, sibling, spouse, parent, pastor, chaplain, counselor, and child of God is all about behavior. Did not Jesus imply the same in the parable of the two sons asked by their father to go and work in the vineyard (Matthew 21:28-31)?

This is work that can only successfully be done with a trained coach, therapist, or supervisor. That is why the members of our Together in Ministry group are so committed to each other. We are accountable to each other to grow in self-understanding and in our functioning as leaders. We serve somewhat in the same way as does a Quaker clearness committee: by asking questions of the person bringing the case study and genogram so he or she can look with new vision into his or her behaviors, in order to fashion more redemptive behaviors than those driven by his or her own unexamined emotional processes. According to Bowen trained family therapist, Elaine Boomer, who has a private practice and is a faculty member of Leadership in Ministry Workshops, "To change one's emotional process is the single most difficult thing we must do."

This is the power and the promise of the Together in Ministry groups. With the funding made available, you can hire a professional counselor to supervise your group of eight persons to do your own work of examining how your childhood still impacts, for better and for worse, your functioning as a leader. "Learning enough about the multigenerational emotional history of one's family to change the way one thinks about the family and about oneself probably contributes more to the effort to 'grow up' than anything else a person can do."<sup>10</sup>

My first twenty years of ordained ministry I successfully fought God's call on my life to be a solo pastor in a congregation. I did not want the responsibility. I feared the enormity of the task. Then my wife, who had co-pastored with me for fifteen years in two separate congregations, resigned. I was panicked. I

was angry with my wife. I was mad at my parents who gave me to God before I was born. I was furious with God.

What I learned about all that through my participation in a Leadership in Ministry Workshop was that my avoidance of being a solo pastor in a congregation had nothing to do with being a pastor. The root issue resided in a childhood incident that left me deciding not to place myself in any situation where I would be ill equipped or perceived to be incompetent. I discovered God was more interested in my growth than my comfort.

What do you know about what you do not know about your self? What issues in your life are more than skin deep -- that need more than band-aid treatment? For as surely as Heaven calls faulted human beings into ordained ministry, all that we are, for better and for worse, impacts how we function in our various leadership positions as American Baptist clergy. How we fill our clergy roles impacts, for better and for worse, the health of our constituents, as well as that of our own families.

A Together in Ministry group that is committed to learning more about Self as an instrument in the hands of a Mighty God will do well to find a Supervisor who is trained in BFST. You can find out more about Bowen Family Systems Theory at the website for the Bowen Center for the Study of the Family at [www.thebowencenter.org](http://www.thebowencenter.org). Click on the tab, Links to Bowen Programs Elsewhere for locations beyond the Washington D.C. area.

Theologically, I believe the major work we have to do as clergy is to allow God to do transforming, redemptive work within our lives. We can lead others no further than we ourselves have traveled. The Good News is that as American Baptist clergy leaders, we do not have to travel alone.

Rabbi Friedman taught that the people who survive are those with the biggest repertoire of responses. Rabbi Jesus taught his disciples to cope with a hostile, toxic environment by being as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves (Matthew 10:16). Where are you currently stuck in your



ministry or your life? The answers to your stuckness are inside you. What is stopping you from finding someone who can ask you the questions you need to answer to move beyond your stuckness?

Together in Ministry Groups provide a covenanted cadre of committed companions who are traveling along the same journey, with the benefit of a trail guide to point the way. Only in community can we work on, and hope to maintain some type of meaningful Self Differentiation.

<sup>1</sup>Triangles, Differentiation of Self, Nuclear Family Emotional System, Family Projection Process, Multigenerational Transmission Process, Emotional Cutoff, Sibling Position, and Societal Emotional Process.

<sup>2</sup>Bowen defined differentiation as the ability to distinguish the feeling process from the intellectual process. "Increasing one's ability to distinguish between thinking and feeling within self and others and learning to use that ability to direct one's life and solve problems is the central guiding principle of family psychotherapy." Kerr, M.E & Bowen, M. *Family Evaluation*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1988, pp. 97-98.

<sup>3</sup>Friedman, E.W. *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. New York, Guilford Press, 1985.

<sup>4</sup>Treadwell, M. W. & Beal, E.W., (eds.) *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, 2nd ed. New York, Seabury Books, 2007.

<sup>5</sup>These Fridays continue to occur from September to June, with excellent presentations and discussions in Bethesda, Maryland. You can find out more about them at [www.centerforfamilyprocess.com](http://www.centerforfamilyprocess.com) The Center for Family Process runs the ongoing Post Graduate Seminar in Family Emotional Process program begun in 1990. The program calls for three meetings of three days each, separated by several months. The 2007-2008 tuition cost is \$1450 plus room, board, and travel. Application Deadline is July 15, 2007.

<sup>6</sup>Matthews Leadership in Ministry Workshops are held in several locations across the country, and provide a more cost effective option than can be found elsewhere. The 2007 costs for the Workshop held at Lost River, West Virginia is \$625, which includes both of the three day spring and fall sessions.

<sup>7</sup>A genogram is a format for creating a family tree which shows information about family members and their relationships with one another over three or more generations.

<sup>8</sup>Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary has since changed its name to Palmer Theological Seminary ([www.palmerseminary.edu](http://www.palmerseminary.edu)). The seminary still offers a Doctor of Ministry program in Marriage and Family Ministry.

<sup>9</sup>Bowen Family Systems Theory can be illustrated by this ancient Sufi quote: "You think because you understand one, you also understand two, because one and one makes two. But you must also understand 'and.'"

<sup>10</sup>Kerr, M. E. & Bowen, M., *Family Evaluation: An Approach Based On Bowen Theory*. New York, W.W. Norton, 1998, p. 309.

*"See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." Matthew 10:16*

## *Worship and the Arts Inspire Ministry Colleagues*

*by Nancy Hall*



*The Rev. Dr. Nancy E. Hall, Together in Ministry Group Leader in Berkeley, California, is a member of the faculty at American Baptist Seminary of the West since 1989. Nancy is ABSW's Director of Contextual Education and Associate Professor of Ministry. She also served for thirty years in church music ministry, fifteen of those at First Baptist Church of Berkeley, where she is still a member and Sunday pianist. Nancy is passionate about worship planning, teaching, creating liturgical art, photography, and staying in touch with fellow graduates and former students of ABSW (several of whom are a part of this TIM group). She is also a founding member of the board for the Pacific Coast Baptist Association and serves on the editorial advisory board for The Hymn Society in the United States and Canada. You can reach Nancy at [nhall@absw.edu](mailto:nhall@absw.edu).*

### *The Ministry of Worship Collegial Covenant Group:*

**Edie Abbott:** An accomplished singer/songwriter, Edie currently works with the Bay Area Rescue Mission and blesses our group with her poignant and poetic sacred songs.

**Jennifer Davidson:** As a Ph.D. student in liturgics at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, Jennifer approaches worship from scholarly, artistic, and pastoral viewpoints and shares these gifts as Minister of Worship and Spiritual Growth at Shell Ridge Community Church in Walnut Creek, CA.

**The Rev. Brian Dixon:** Brian is the Pastor of Dolores Street Baptist Church in San Francisco and has a passion for liturgical arts and environments, as well as social justice ministries.

**The Rev. Greg Ledbetter:** As Pastor of Shell Ridge Community Church, Greg's talents in music, liturgical writing, and photography regularly enrich the congregation's worship services.

**The Rev. Michael-Ray Mathews:** Grace Baptist Church in San Jose is blessed by their Pastor's skillful preaching and beautiful singing voice, as well as his community activism.

**The Rev. Dr. Albirda Rose-Eberhardt:** A staff member at St. Paul Tabernacle Baptist Church, San Francisco, Albirda has a Ph.D. in dance and has been a cherished teacher in that field at San Francisco State University for many years.

[Note: The Rev. Dr. Russell Yee; worship professor, writer, and musician, was a part of the TIM group for our first year together.]

In 2005, eight people with a passion for worship and the arts gathered together to form the Ministry of Worship Collegial Group in the San Francisco Bay Area. Diverse in racial/ethnic background, age, and life experience, our objectives included encouraging

each other in writing liturgical materials, doing focused reading together, and wrestling creatively with questions about free church worship in the twenty-first century, both in our own personal ministries and in the church at large. A central activity for our group is making opportunities to share in fellowship and relaxation over good food. Now in our third year as TIM colleagues, I am pleased to say we have kept our covenant, including many tasty meals together!

Our group is gifted with members who sing, play instruments, dance, compose songs, teach worship, and write, as well as engage in the visual arts. All are seminary-trained; several are currently pastors of churches. The group is spread widely across the Bay Area, living in San Jose, the East Bay, and San Francisco. This makes it challenging to get together, so we have tried to be equitable with the meeting locations by gathering in our various churches and homes; sometimes our group has met at a museum or attended a concert together, as well.

In April, we fulfilled an invitation by the Ministers Council of the Greater Bay Area to plan and lead worship at its spring gathering. We hoped this would be an uplifting time during which collegiality and creativity could be celebrated, as MCGBA recognized the work of twelve TIM groups in our constituency.

What have we learned in these years together? How can a collegial group enhance pastoral excellence in worship leadership? Being a part of this TIM group has sharpened our skills for planning and fine-tuned our eyes and ears for the nuances of congregational worship. In other words, because of the discussing and sharing we do in our group, our “worship radar” is more acute. We have set the bar higher for each other, striving to creatively plan the seasons of the church year, to stretch our people’s minds and hearts through new hymns and songs, and to wrestle thoughtfully with the temptation to buy into worship trends and fads.

By feasting our eyes on the museum exhibition, ***The Quilts of Gee’s Bend***, we were reminded about the important role color and shape play in worship environments. By visiting each other’s churches, we have been able to offer suggestions and encouragement about particular issues concerning the use of space. By attending a performance of Leonard Bernstein’s Mass, we witnessed how voices, instruments, and dancers together can engage all of the

senses in liturgy, and reminded ourselves how lament is essential to corporate worship, as is praise. By gathering around the table of fellowship and eating and drinking together, we have proclaimed, “Taste and see that God is good!” By holding each other in prayer through times of growth and accomplishment, as well as through times of discouragement, we have bonded as sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus, and felt less alone in the demanding profession of ministry.

Each of us has found our TIM group a welcoming place to raise questions about worship – questions we feel are not probed often enough in a world that sometimes seems bent on stripping Christian worship of its majesty, awe, symbols, and historical depth. We are blessed by each other and nurtured for the continuing journey of ministry and faith, as pastors, teachers, artists, friends, and workers in God’s worship vineyard.

Together met, together bound  
By all that God has done,  
We’ll go with joy, to give the world  
The love that makes us one.

(“I Come With Joy to Meet My Lord.”  
Lyrics by Brian Wren.  
Copyright 1971 by Hope Publishing,  
Carol Stream, IL)



*Praise God with trumpet sound; praise God with lute and harp!*

*Praise God with tambourine and dance; praise God with strings and pipe!*

*Praise God with clanging cymbals; praise God with loud clashing cymbals!*

*Let everything that breathes praise the LORD! Praise the LORD! Psalm 150:3-6*

## Multicultural Collegial Covenant Group

by Augie Bau



*The Rev. Augie Bau has been on the staff of The Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board (MMBB) since 1990, and he is a regional representative serving churches in Arizona, California, Hawaii and Nevada. He received an M.B.A. from U.C. Berkeley and an M.Div. from the Pacific School of Religion, and he is a Certified Financial Planner. Augie, his wife Katharine Hsiao who is an elder law attorney, and their two children (Alex age 14 and Elizabeth age 9) live in Castro Valley, California. In his free time, Augie plays basketball and tennis. Also, he leads a monthly worship service at the CityTeam homeless ministry. He may be reached at [augie.bau@mmbb.org](mailto:augie.bau@mmbb.org).*

### **The Multicultural Collegial Covenant Group:**

David Ankcorn (who is a Euro American from Washington state) is the associate Pastor of the Hispanic and historic Portola Baptist Church in San Francisco.

Augie Bau (who is an Asian American raised in the Bay Area) is a Regional Representative for The Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board in four states.

Clark Flesher (who is a Euro American from Minnesota) is the Senior Pastor of the First Baptist Church in Alameda where the staff and the members are becoming intentionally multicultural. Micky Holmes (who is a Euro American from Iowa) is the Vice President for the American Baptist Seminary of the West, where the staff and students are quite multicultural.

Michael Ray Mathews (who is an African American from southern California) is the Senior Pastor of Grace Baptist Church in San Jose, which has been historically Euro American.

Valerie Miles-Tribble (who is an African American from Philadelphia) is the Associate Pastor of Imani Community Church in Oakland, which is predominantly African American; she is also a part-time professor at the San Francisco Theological Seminary.

Charlotte Myers (who is an African American from Texas) is the Associate Pastor of Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church in Oakland, a multicultural congregation since the 1960s.

### **Collegial Covenant Groups**

The Ministers Council of the American Baptist Churches USA received a grant in 2003 from the Lilly Endowment to fund collegial covenant groups for sustaining excellence in pastoral ministry. I have been serving as a regional representative for The

Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board since 1990, and I have met many ministers at conferences and other venues over the years. However, I yearned for a setting where I could establish deeper and ongoing relationships with some of these colleagues. The Collegial Covenant Group provided the impetus for such a forum.

### **Forming our Group**

There were two possible approaches to forming a group. A homogeneous group would gather similar people, and it generally would be easier to form deeper relationships faster. A diverse group usually would take longer to gel, but the members would gain some invaluable lessons from working through and learning from the differences. I decided to go with the latter approach in forming the group. I called a few ministers in the area and explained my vision of what the group could become. Most responded positively to the opportunity. Initially, we had eight members in the group; one woman participated for a year, but she decided not to continue. The remaining seven members still meet actively. The group is diverse on many levels. There are four men and three women, and our ages range from the thirties to the fifties. There are three African Americans, three Euro Americans, and one Asian American in our group. There are single and married members, those with children (ranging from young kids to grown adults), and others without children. We serve in the local church as well as in other ministry settings.

According to CCG member Charlotte Myers, *“Justice is the work of restoring equalization to what is unequal. It is the restoration of balance in a situation where balance has become upset. We sometimes envision justice as a scale weighed down on both sides, but balanced. It is the work of embracing equality in our group that inspires me. For me, our Multicultural Collegial Covenant Group provides balance to what is unequal in ministry and community for women and men of different races and ethnic groups. Together we work for justice by deeply and truly valuing each member of the group.”*

### **Our diverse backgrounds and ministry settings**

Jesus called a motley group of twelve disciples to follow him, including a tax collector and fishermen. Our current group consists of an interesting mix of people from various backgrounds. In the group list that precedes this article I note our racial/ethnic backgrounds to highlight God’s serendipitous calling to unexpected ministries.

### **Our first year together: spiritual autobiographies**

We began meeting on a monthly basis in 2004. We used the grant to pay for our lunches, books, and other resources. Each of us told our spiritual autobiographies, including our successes and failures, with an emphasis on how God influenced our plans. We discovered we all had baggage from our families of origin: alcoholism, workaholism, depression, drugs, death of parents, divorces, etc. We realized each of us had challenges and obstacles to overcome. We also heard about our calls to ministry, and we shared current responsibilities. In the span of less than one year, we learned some things about each other which normally would take a lifetime to discover. I was moved by the depth of sharing, and I felt it was a safe environment to talk about our joys and our struggles.

David Ankorn comments: *"When we first began, it was difficult to see just what we had in common other than our relationships through ABSW and our church work. But, as we shared our personal biographies, I began to see how God's calling, while always incredibly personal and specific, also reaches beyond ourselves to impact communities we can never imagine. How else and where else would a group like this meet and share for four years without the calling of God? Each time we meet, the prayers and insights of my brothers and sisters in Christ inspire me in my personal walk with God and ministry in my church in San Francisco. I thank God for them, and I minister more effectively because of them. 'All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation'" (2 Corinthians 5:18).*



### **Holiday gatherings**

At the end of 2004, we decided to have a holiday party to celebrate our year together as a Collegial Covenant Group. We wanted to invite our families to the gathering, but since the Christmas season is an extremely busy time for local church pastors, we planned our gathering for January 2005. Valerie Miles-Tribble opened up her home to all of us, and she prepared an elaborate and delicious spread. We had a fun time of fellowship, and we had a white elephant gift exchange. After Valerie set the precedent of meeting in a group member's home, we started meeting in each other's homes, as well as places of ministry. Doug Adams, my worship professor from seminary, visited the homes of each of the 50 students in his class during the first month. He suggested one can learn a lot about peoples' lives, personalities, and passions by visiting their homes. Indeed, Jesus visited many homes during his short public ministry. David Ankorn hosted our holiday party in January 2006, and one of the highlights was a mariachi band from his church. Augie Bau hosted the January 2007 gathering, which featured Asian food. These gatherings were great opportunities to meet the spouses and children of the members.

### **Our second year together: the praxis of helping the poor**

After sharing our stories and spiritual journeys during the first year, we decided to engage in a book study in 2005. At that time, Valerie Miles-Tribble was working on her D.Min. and was inundated with books and papers. We asked her for a book recommendation from her reading list, so she would not need to increase her reading load. She suggested ***Empowering the Poor*** by Robert Linthicum. The book talks about how dedicated Christians need to be engaged in the lives and the activities of the poor.

Valerie Miles-Tribble explains: *"The reason I joined the collegial group was the diversity of participants whom I already respected a great deal. I felt that the opportunity to work, reflect and fellowship together was a God-sent blessing - especially to have the array of backgrounds and perspectives for shared input. My passion is social justice ministry that incarnates a prophetic discipleship. My contribution has been to raise the specter of need in our communities and to suggest readings that enriched our discussions on mission outreach, advocacy and community organizing. My colleagues have become my*

*friends, and I feel that we share not only a vocational bond, but a faith bond that nurtures us in God's kingdom work."*

That year, we had some fascinating theological discussions about how to translate the concepts into our actual ministries. God challenged me to begin leading a monthly worship service at the CityTeam homeless ministry in downtown Oakland. The Spirit has moved in mighty ways in my ministry there, and I have been able to pray with members to turn their lives away from addictions over to Christ. We have had creative forms of worship (including a puppet show) at CityTeam, and other churches have participated (a wonderful children's musical is one example). By God's grace, five of the homeless men are now members of my ABC church. The CCG was a comforting support while I tiptoed into this new area of ministry.

#### **Our third year together: looking introspectively**

2006 was our third year together, and we decided to spend some time looking introspectively. The demands of our ministries require a lot of time in preaching, pastoral care, teaching, shepherding, and programming. We often are inundated with taking care of the needs of others. Sometimes, we have limited time and energy left over for our own spiritual care and nurture. Our guide was Parker Palmer's book ***Let Your Life Speak***, in which the author wrote eloquently about his inner life and struggles. His ideas were an excellent springboard for sharing our own inner journeys. We also read Frederick Buechner's book ***Telling Secrets***. Our group talked about occasions on the high mountains where God's presence was full and overwhelming, and we also shared about periods of sloshing through the shadow of the valley of death where our Shepherd felt quite distant.

Clark Flesher observes: *"Our fellowship together is not based on uniformity of thought, common background or even necessarily shared interests. We have benefited from our times together because each one of us longs for more authentic relationships with respected colleagues who are willing to share their struggles and joys with one another. What has encouraged me most - more than the occasional advice or helpful reflection - is our ongoing committed relationships that say we each matter to one another. I have discovered more my own ministry purpose by experiencing more personally*

*the uniqueness of each minister's strengths and calling. I feel both proud and privileged to be a member of this group of caring friends."*

#### **Our fourth year and future together: friends and colleagues on the journey**

We are now in our fourth year together. This year, we are working through "A Spiritual Formation Workbook," a Renovare Resource for spiritual renewal, spiritual growth, and formation. Together, we will learn about the six major dimensions of the Christian life: contemplation, holiness, charismatic, social justice, evangelical, and incarnational. Far too often in ministry, we are "Lone Rangers" in terms of our spirituality. The advantage of working as a collegial covenant group is the accountability and feedback from other colleagues. Also, because of our diverse background and experiences, we have had some fascinating and occasionally heated discussions on topics such as whether all churches should be multicultural or whether there is a role for ethnic specific churches. We recognize we are all busy people, and our calendars and PDAs are filled with events and obligations. However, in the midst of our busyness, we realize the importance of a spiritual oasis where we can be friends and colleagues, where we can shed our ministerial mantles and just be ourselves. Each member in our CCG has prioritized the meetings, and we often rearrange our obligations in order to meet and fellowship. Our members drive from distant parts of the Bay Area in order to meet regularly. I feel I have gained some invaluable companions to share my spiritual journey, hopefully for the rest of my life.

***After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" Revelation 7:9-10***

## *Hispanics in the US: Challenge and Opportunity for Transformation*

*by Miriam Chacón Peralta*



*The Rev. J. Miriam Chacón Peralta is an ordained American Baptist Churches minister. She has served national staff positions as director of Hispanic Christian Education and Young Adult Ministries and as Missions Communications Specialist, for the American Baptist Churches, USA. She has been a local church educator, planter, and pastor. Today she is a Hispanic church consultant, translator and one of Encuentro Ministries' directors. Miriam is currently serving the Ministers Council in the role of Vice President of Membership and Constituency. Her passion is seeing persons come to Christ, and being involved in the passing on of resources, so ministry is effective, and people mature in their Christian journeys. You may contact Miriam at [encuentromin@aol.com](mailto:encuentromin@aol.com).*

*The best offer we can make to waves of Hispanics arriving and settling down around us, is the gift of Jesus Christ!*

Something is happening, and some of us began to take notice of it a while ago. Take a look at the “ethnic” or “Spanish” section in your local supermarket. Items like *tortillas*, *chiles*, and *jalapeños* have become staples. Perhaps these were common fifteen years ago in certain neighborhoods of LA or Chicago, but not in my local grocery store. About eleven years ago, when I moved to the Philadelphia area, I remember the difficult task it was to find Mexican *tortillas*. They were available at upscale groceries in small quantities and as gourmet items made by American companies. Today, any chain grocery in your area will carry 24 packs and 48 packs of flour and corn tortillas. If you take a look at their origin, you'll see places near your own hometown; in my case, Kennett Square, PA, Elizabeth, NJ, or Homestead, FL.

Tortillas may only pertain to Mexico, but what does this analogy mean for the rest of the country? The evening news almost always has some news about Hispanics, whether it is immigration law, the fence, or illegal immigration. Walk the streets in the U.S. and you will very likely hear Spanish. This is not just happening in the city, but in large and small towns alike throughout our nation.

Hispanics have always been around. They were in the Southwest before the state boundaries, as we know them today, were reconfigured. For many years when we thought of Spanish-speakers, we knew that clusters existed in certain neighborhoods of Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami. Now Hispanics are in our own neighborhoods everywhere in the country.

In recent years, we have seen the Hispanic population explode in the United States. There are roughly 50 million Hispanics in the States now; by the year 2050, the numbers are estimated to grow to 75 million. One out of every six persons in the U.S. today is Hispanic, and 50% of the population growth in the U.S. in the years 2003-2004 was Hispanic. Hispanics are the largest and fastest growing minority in the United States.

*What implication does this reality have for the Church in the United States?* While some see it as a crisis, for the Church of Jesus Christ, it is a great opportunity. We have the chance to reach a great multitude of immigrants without having to travel across the oceans, but in being “missionaries” and ministers within our own back-yards. The best offer we can make to waves of Hispanics arriving and settling down around us, is the gift of Jesus Christ!

This situation, however, does not come without its challenges for the Church. As the numbers of Hispanics rise, the number of pastors and leaders faced with the great demands that this culture change presents also rises, and they have not been able to keep up. Existing pastors and ministry lead-



ers are generally over-worked, underpaid, scrambling over crammed calendars, hectic homes, splintered dreams, starved of intimacy, and their purpose in life and ministry has shriveled (London and Wiseman, ***Pastors at Risk***). Take the normal demands of doing ministry in our society, and add the additional challenges of dealing with a language other than English, histories, traditions, cultures,

etc., of peoples coming from more than twenty different countries, and you have ... ministry with Hispanics.

Another commonality among pastors and leaders working with Hispanics is their socio-economic reality. Many become bi-vocational, serving a local ministry while employed elsewhere to sustain their ministries and families. Because of time and financial constraints, fewer pastors and leaders are able to attend seminary or Bible Institutes full-time to obtain a degree, receive care, training, or resources that facilitate being effective in ministry.

The burden on God's servants serving with Hispanics is diverse, enormous, and constantly changing, but there is hope. There is hope because although the harvest is plenty and the workers are few and tired, God has not given us a spirit of timidity, has promised to be with us always, and is seriously personally interested in both Hispanics and those that minister with them. There is also hope because organizations have taken note of this need and are working toward embracing it.



National organizations and denominations attempt to provide resources for its leaders by way of offering massive events. We know them as conferences, gatherings, annual meetings. Almost exclusively, these events are in English and cater to large groups. They often provide excellent speakers and seminar leaders, but are not necessarily for doing Hispanic ministry. If you are savvy, you may be able to adapt and translate some materials, that is, if you have time. They generally offer little, if any, "personal" follow-up. Many of us experience being energized for ministry at these events; they are wonderful "reconnecting" opportunities, but a few days later, we return to our local contexts, file our conference binders on the shelf, and go back to doing ministry –just as it had been.

One way pastors and leaders, Hispanics and non-Hispanics, within the American Baptist family, may address issues related to working with Hispanic churches and communities, is through Together in Ministry. The Ministers Council of the American Baptist Churches USA received a grant of \$1,959,600 and a second grant of \$979,800 from the Lilly Endowment for sustaining excellence in the pastoral ministry. The money funds Together in Ministry, making possible the formation of collegial covenant groups for the strengthening of ministerial leaders. A collegial covenant group is a meeting of ministerial colleagues around a specific topic, whose ultimate goal is to be supportive of colleagues in ministry. The development of these groups is to get the job done of clergy support and encouragement so that ministry might be enhanced and improved because the minister has a sense of well-being and support. For multiple reasons, TIM groups work. They may address issues of Hispanic ministers or pastors in Hispanic ministries, offer small group settings, financial resources for meeting face-to-face, are tailored to the group's needs or issues the group desires to cover, offer a safe setting and confidential environment, are personal, aim to remain focused on the group's purpose, are facilitated from within the group, present opportunities to be held accountable, and among other benefits, they create friends in ministry and a support network. For more information, please visit the Ministers Council webpage at <http://www.ministerscouncil.org/TogetherInMinistry>.

Another opportunity that is currently being developed is through Encuentro Ministries, a fairly new organization that specifically provides pastoral care, skills development, and resources for pastors, planters, missionaries, churches, and leaders serving Hispanics. Its directors, Miriam Chacón Peralta and her husband, Carlos Dario (also an ordained ABC pastor), have lived the rise in the Hispanic population in the U.S. They have also experienced the escalating demands of Hispanic immigrants on the lives and ministries of pastors and leaders in ministry with Hispanics. They have firsthand awareness of the toll these burdens have on God's servants. And they are fully convinced that pastors and leaders must be cared for and nourished, so they may respond effectively to their God-given call to ministry; Encuentro Ministries aims to do just that. Throughout their diverse ministries, the Peraltas have practiced and met the need to walk side-by-side with pastors and ministry leaders. EM caters to


those in need of spiritual and relational vitality, wholistic balance, development of leadership skills, and discerning and sustaining vision for doing Hispanic ministry. Through small group retreats, seminars, workshops, as well as personal consultation, mentoring, training, coaching, and other ways of caring for individuals, the ministry is able to address the needs of leaders doing Hispanic ministry. If you would like more information about Encuentro Ministries, please write the Peraltas at: EncuentroMin@aol.com. A ministry website is soon to come at [www.EncuentroMinistries.com](http://www.EncuentroMinistries.com).

*"You can do what I cannot do.  
I can do what you cannot do.  
Together, we can do great things!"  
--Mother Theresa*

*We have the chance to reach a great multitude of immigrants without having to travel across the oceans, but in being "missionaries" and ministers within our own back-yards.*

## *A Buffet of Beatitudes*

*by Lauren Ng*



*The Rev. Lauren Ng currently serves as Assistant Pastor (serving Young Adult Ministries) of the First Chinese Baptist Church in San Francisco, California. She is a 2005 graduate of the American Baptist Seminary of the West in Berkeley, CA and was ordained by the Growing Healthy Churches region of ABC/USA in October, 2006. The Rev. Ng has served the American Baptist Churches on the staff of International Ministries, on the Biennial Program Committee for the 1999 and 2001 Biennials, and as staff for numerous American Baptist Youth Gatherings. She and her husband Daniel Kushner are proud parents of daughter Sage (13 months) and dog Ginger (6 years).*

***Asian American Women in Professional Ministry Group:***

- Ramshang Khanleila Lolly, Church Secretary, New Life Christian Fellowship, Castro Valley, CA
- The Rev. Lauren Ng, Assistant Pastor, First Chinese Baptist Church, San Francisco, CA
- Pastor Marie Onwubuariri, Senior Pastor, MacArthur Community Baptist Church, San Pablo, CA
- The Rev. Sook Grace Sohn-Chung, Children's Minister, God's Will Church, New Jersey
- The Rev. Motoe Yamada, Associate Pastor, Wesley United Methodist Church, San Jose, CA

***There's Always a Variety***

Vegetable samosas. Lentil soup. Filipino sweet coconut stew. Sushi rolls. Japanese rice crackers. Korean dried seaweed with rice. Dim sum. And good ole' chocolate chip cookies with a scoop of Rocky Road.



We could try and blame this intense love for eating on our Baptist heritage, but alas, one of us is a Methodist. Her name is Motoe and she is the one responsible for the rice crackers and sushi. As we place dish after dish upon the table, our eyes widen and our hearts are content. We are among family. Khan, Marie, Sandra, Grace, Motoe, and I are sisters—a family based not on believer's baptism or even bloodlines, but rooted in the body of Christ.

And what we bring to the table could not be more various. My sister Motoe is a Japanese pastor with a love for international travel. Her home is adorned in shades of blue (her favorite color) and her bold personality puts her out on the dance floor on salsa night—a place you would never find the likes of me. She is also one of the most committed servants of the Lord I have ever known. My sister Khan is from Nagaland in northeastern India. A devoted wife and mother to her thirteen-month old son, Khan has a wonderful sense of humor and a contagious smile. If you were to hear her preach, you would never believe that such power and presence could come from someone so petite. And to hear her pray is to hear the voice of a prophet. My sister Marie, a Filipina American pastor, is always feeding her mind and spirit. She is a pianist who also has taught herself to play guitar. And she never fails to take advantage of a continuing education opportunity. She is a doting mother to her dog Winnie, and about to be a doting mother to her first child, due this September.

Marie is also the first among us to be called as a senior pastor, and we are all eager to learn from her experiences. My sister Sandra is a Chinese American bi-vocational pastor who manages to balance a busy life with superb grace. Sandra is always up for fun, and she reminds the rest of us to practice one of our favorite things in the world—self-care. She is a true giver, made evident in her passion for denominational ministries and overseas missions. My sister Grace is a Korean pastor with an incredible work ethic. Her commitment to ministry and to her family (including her eleven-month old daughter) is unwavering. Grace is one of the most beautiful women I know—inside and out—and we miss having her close by: she and her husband moved to New Jersey two years ago to follow God’s call to professional study and ministry.

These are my sisters—my family. As the *Emerging Asian American Women in Professional Ministry* (EAAWPM) Together in Ministry group, we each bring something different to the table. Like the variety of dishes we prepare for our monthly gatherings, when we come together in Christ’s name, our lives are laid down side by side so we may learn, grow, and be encouraged by one another. We come to bless and be blessed. We become a buffet of beatitudes.

### ***It’s All You Can Eat***

That night, we sat huddled in a circle, squeezed so tightly into the tiny room that our knees practically touched. The evening was late – it was already quiet time at the retreat center. Marie softly strummed her guitar, and in hushed voices we sang praises to our Lord and Savior. We then took turns sharing—in nothing more than a whisper—the burdens upon our hearts. Each of us took our time. No one rushed. As the hour got later and later, we continued to listen.

That night was no exception. Again and again, we come to the table to empty our heavily laden plates and fill them up again with Christ’s blessings of love and fellowship. No matter how many servings we need to satisfy our hunger, we are committed to providing for one another through the nourishment given us by Jesus Christ. So when one of us is hungry for a listening ear, with God’s help, we fill her plate. When one of us is hungry for encouragement, with God’s help, we fill her plate. When one of us is hungry for accountability, with God’s help, we fill her plate.

Like good Baptists (and one Methodist), we leave no part of the buffet untouched. We support one another in both our personal and professional lives. We talk about marriage, ministry, friends and children. We discuss the past, the present, and our hopes for the future. And so long as any one of us is still hungry, we stay awake—hour after hour—to heap her plate high with the blessings of our Lord.

### ***And You Even Leave With a Doggy Bag***

The best buffets allow you to take something home with you after the meal. Not only do I leave our group’s gatherings with all sorts of food to share with my husband, I also take home a doggy bag filled to the brim with goodies to feed my life and ministry.

Through Bible study, retreats, worship experiences, book studies, guest speakers, devotions, fellowship, ministry training, and self-care exercises, my sisters and I always bring something home from our gatherings to equip us to become more effective ministers of the Gospel, and to become more loving and compassionate servants to the people around us. From a fresh idea for my context of ministry... to advice on how to find more time to spend with my husband and daughter... to tips on how to make Khan’s killer lentil soup, it is truly a buffet of beatitudes to which we come each month.

I remember the first time we met together as the Emerging Asian American Women in Professional Ministry TIM group. It was over two years ago. We were in Motoe’s beautiful blue home. We sat around a table of delicious food—a tradition of ours from the very start—and we took turns introducing ourselves. Here were my sisters: Khan, Marie, Sandra, Grace and Motoe. All of us exploring a call God had



recently given us to serve him through professional ministry. Each of us nervous and excited at the same time. Each of us ready to jump in as students and as teachers on this journey of faith. As I looked around the room at each of my sisters, I knew we already had become a family. And like any family sitting around the dinner table, we leaned forward and breathed in the aroma of the buffet of beatitudes that lay before us. And after giving thanks, we each grabbed a plate and dug right in...



*The Rev. Dr. Joel Velásquez-Peralta, Coordinator of Together in Ministry Group Pastores Distrito Norte II, is the general pastor of Iglesia Bautista de Roosevelt, San Juan, PR (since 1993) and President of the District II, Puerto Rico Ministers Council (since 1995). On March 2006 the PR Baptist Churches endorsed his previous Southern Baptist ordination. In his native Guatemala, he earned a masters degree in Theology and Divinity from the Seminario Teológico Bautista de Guatemala, two other master degrees: Superior Education, and Specialized Education for Adults (1967-1969); and became a Doctor in Medicine and Surgeon in 1977. God's calling led the then Dr. Velásquez to extensive evangelizing experiences that include the world-wide ministry Puertas Abiertas, while a pastor to the Primera Iglesia Bautista de Guatemala (PIBG) (1977-1980); international television programs, Club Para Todo Latino and Buenos Amigos (1979-1981). He published a weekly column (Reflexión) in the local newspaper Prensa Libre for two separate periods (1978-1980 and 1989-1992), and served as a missionary/evangelist doctor (1980-1988) with Evangelismo Mundial (Latin America and the Caribbean). He again became a pastor of the PIBG from 1988 to 1990 and then of the Iglesia Evangélica C.A. "Roca de Salvación" (1991-1992). Since 1993 he has lived in Puerto Rico with his loving wife of twenty-three years, Rebeca Esther Quilo-Rosales, and continues to serve the Lord as He calls, for example, as Secretary of the PR Ministers Council (2001-2005).*

**Unidos en el Ministerio Group:**

Pastor Carmen Pérez, General Pastor, Misión Bautista "Cristo Restaura" at Levitown, Dorado, PR  
 Pastor Daniel Juarbe, General Pastor, Iglesia Bautista La Nueva Jerusalén, Bayamon, PR  
 The Rev. Eneida Angleró, Ordained Minister and General Pastor, Iglesia Bautista El Redentor, Bayamón, PR  
 Pastor Edwin Rivera-Lanzó, General Pastor, Primera Iglesia Bautista de Guaynabo, Guaynabo, PR

The Rev. Heriberto Muñoz-Roldán, Ordained Minister and General Pastor, Primera Iglesia Bautista de Puerto Nuevo, San Juan, PR  
 Pastor Ignacio M. Gómez-Elibo, General Pastor, Primera Iglesia Bautista de Puerta de Tierra, San Juan, PR  
 The Rev. José Flores, Ordained Minister and General Pastor, Primera Iglesia Bautista de Bayamón, Bayamón, PR  
 Pastors Julio González-Paniagua and Anátalys González-Ortiz, a clergy couple, General Pastors, Primera Iglesia Bautista de Santurce, San Juan, PR  
 Pastor Migdalia Flores-Iglesias, General Pastor, Iglesia Bautista de Altamesa, Rio Piedras, PR  
 Pastor Migdalia Núñez-Mercado, Interim General Pastor, Iglesia Bautista Central de Villa las Lomas, Rio Piedras, PR

*El Rev. Dr. Joel Velásquez-Peralta, Coordinador del Grupo UNIDOS EN EL MINISTERIO es el pastor general de la Iglesia Bautista de Roosevelt, San Juan Puerto Rico desde el 1993, y el Presidente del Distrito II del Concilio de Ministros de Puerto Rico desde el 1995. En marzo del 2006, las IGLESIAS BAUTISTAS DE PUERTO RICO reconocieron la ordenación al Santo Ministerio que le otorgaron las Iglesias Bautistas del Sur en Guatemala, su país natal; donde también obtuvo la preparación académica que sigue: Maestría en Teología y Divinidad (Seminario Teológico Bautista de Guatemala), y dos maestrías más: en Educación Superior y en Educación Especializada para Adultos durante el periodo de 1967 al 1969. En el 1977 completó su doctorado en Medicina y Cirugía. El llamado de DIOS llevó al entonces Dr. Velásquez a una extensa experiencia evangelizadora que incluyen su participación en el ministerio de renombre mundial, Puertas Abiertas, mientras pastoreaba, en un primer término, la Primera Iglesia Bautista de Guatemala (PIBDG) (1977 al 1980); y los programas de televisión de alcance internacional: Club Para Todo Latino y también Buenos Amigos desde el 1979 al 1981. También publicó una columna semanal (Reflexión) en el periódico local Prensa Libre en dos periodos separados: 1978 al 1980, y también del 1989 al 1992. Sirvió como misionero-evangelista-médico con Evangelismo Mundial en Latinoamérica y el Caribe del 1980 al 1988. 2. Del 1988 al 1990 pastoreó de nuevo la PIBDG y luego la Iglesia Evangélica C.A. Roca de Salvación, del 1991 al 1992. Desde el 1993 vive en Puerto Rico con su amada esposa Rebeca Esther Quilo Rosales y continúa sirviendo al Señor según llame, como por ejemplo, de Secretario del Concilio de Ministros de Puerto Rico del 2001 al 2005 y predicando.*

**Grupo "Unidos en el Ministerio"**

Pastora Carmen Pérez, Pastora General, Misión Bautista "Cristo Restaura", Levitown, Dorado, PR  
 Pastor Daniel Juarbe, Pastor General, Iglesia Bautista La Nueva Jerusalén, Bayamón, PR  
 La Rev. Eneida Angleró, Ministro Ordenada y Pastora General, Iglesia Bautista El Redentor, Bayamón, PR  
 Pastor Edwin Rivera-Lanzó, Pastor General, Primera Iglesia Bautista de Guaynabo, Guaynabo, PR  
 El Rev. Heriberto Muñoz-Roldán, Ministro Ordenado y Pastor General, Primera Iglesia Bautista de Puerto Nuevo, San Juan, PR

Pastor Ignacio M. Gómez-Elibo, Pastor General, Primera Iglesia Bautista de Puerta de Tierra, San Juan, PR  
 El Rev. José Flores, Ministro Ordenado y Pastor General, Primera Iglesia Bautista de Bayamón, Bayamón, PR  
 Los Pastores y esposos Julio González-Paniagua y Anátaly González-Ortiz, Pastores Generales, Primera Iglesia Bautista de Santurce, San Juan, PR  
 Pastora Migdalia Flores-Iglesias, Pastora General, Iglesia Bautista de Altamesa, Río Piedras, PR  
 Pastora Migdalia Núñez-Mercado, Pastora General Interina, Iglesia Bautista Central de Villa las Lomas, Río Piedras, PR

*“Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given me, that they may be one as We are.” (John 17:11)*

This was one of our Lord Jesus Christ’s most important prayer requests throughout His ministry on earth: asking His Father to make us “one” as He and His Father were one. Fifteen years ago, we covenanted to meet once a month, and our group’s name challenges us on a daily basis to be united in ministry. We wanted to overturn the personal and collective isolation a pastor’s busyness can bring about into a steadfast response to God’s calling on behalf of the Body of Christ we serve.

Our previous meetings provided a common ground from which we delved, shared, cared, supported, and ministered to one another. There were celebrations and also tears as we joined in prayer, seeking God’s strength and guidance to lead His church. It was our time-out to voice our innermost feelings with others who could relate and help us heal. Our churches took turns hosting the meetings, and provided hearty breakfasts and lunches. We further affirmed our unity during those meals.

Our former local Ministers Council President, the Rev. Victor Mercado, urged us to participate in the Ministers Council project, Together In Ministry, funded by the Lilly Endowment Inc.’s Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Program. Though it involved our rising up to a “collegial covenant group,” God set it in our hearts and compelled us to try. We are now into our third cycle of continued education with a renewed emphasis on excellence in ministry.

For our covenant group, we sustained our earlier pledge to block every second Tuesday in our calendars as a time when we would meet. God’s grace blessed us with evangelical professionals such as seminary theologians, university professors, and private sector specialists who make up a group of twelve experts dedicating over four hours of their

time, resources, and effort. The prominence of the themes and the eagerness with which we all engage in discussions, reading materials (including two books), and report on assignments pleases our resource professionals, who teasingly grant us “honorary” credits and titles. Needless to say, distributing the grant amount among the twelve calls for a significant in-kind contribution on their part. This amount, in addition to our churches’ continued support in providing meals and facilities, enhanced by far our program’s financial potential. There is no doubt the covenant group dynamics affirmed a more enduring relationship among us as spiritual leaders and partners in the kingdom of God on earth. The prayed-for renewed faith and enthusiasm inspired by the knowledge acquired have increased our confidence in dealing with our congregations’ demands and the postmodernism of our times. The amity is extended to our resource professionals, who are invited to share during meals, thus lengthening our learning time. Our congregations have benefited, as well. This is evident by their expressed desire to share in regional activities more often.

I join the thirteen pastor-participants of our Region II covenant group in rejoicing and thanking our Lord Jesus Christ for this opportunity, for the vision of the ABCUSA Ministers Council, and for the Lilly Endowment Inc. Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Program for their continued financial support that opened such a window of opportunity.

*A Cord of Three Strands Is not Quickly Broken*

*by Julio González- Paniagua*

*Article follows in Spanish:*

*Cuerda de tres hilos no se rompe fácilmente*



*Julio González-Paniagua is Pastor, together with his wife Anátaly, of the First Baptist Church of Santurce, in San Juan, PR. Julio combines the pastoral ministry with his passion for music, being active as a teacher, composer, and choral / orchestral conductor; he offers workshops and conferences to churches, particularly in the areas of worship and music. Pastor González has earned a B.A. in Music, a Master in Education, both from the University of Puerto Rico, and is com-*

*pleting a Master in Divinity from the Evangelical Seminar of Puerto Rico.*

*Pastor Anátalys González-Ortiz is Administrative Assistant of the Evangelization, Church Planting and Special Ministries of the Puerto Rico Baptist Churches. She was member of the ABC-USA General Board, Secretary during four years of the Hispanic Caucus, and presently, member of the Alliance of Hispanic Baptist Churches Steering Committee.*

*As a couple they work together, not only as partners in the pastoral ministry at their church, but in diverse educative and musical ministries. You can write to Julio and Annie at one of the following: musikdei@caribe.net, anniegonzalez@ibpr.org or pibs@caribe.net.*

Pastoral life is full of challenges. The pastor should be, among other roles, a counselor, administrator, preacher, teacher, Bible expert, good communicator, as well as being sociable and discrete. Even more, people expect that pastors will excel in everything.

Since we have received God's pastoral calling, there is a suspicion that it is impossible to live up to the responsibility the position requires. As we find ourselves frail and insufficient before the call, we acknowledge that, prior to being in the ministry, people often have idealized the pastoral figure as one who is unapproachable and irreproachable, wise and honest, with an answer for everything, and the truth as an answer. Now that we are standing at the other side of the fence, life and its perspective are completely altered. Then, after the spiritual, physical, and emotional shock set in, we begin to feel the loneliness. Now we understand that we are clay and instruments of God, but not the potter ourselves.

The pastoral ministry is one of the most isolated professions in the praxis. This notion perhaps is provoked by the unique and particular vision God gives to every pastor in his or her church and community context. Pastors are at risk of being cut off from their partners in ministry, from other churches in their community, and even from their denomination. I need to give special thanks to God for the gift of my wife, Anátalys, who is also a pastor, for with her at my side, the burden is lighter. She is support and guide for my ministry, and I hope to provide something to her ministry, as well.

During the first weeks of my ministry, I received a phone call that triggered a change in the perspective about what I expected to be the loneliness of the ministry. A colleague called to invite me to the

monthly meetings held by a group of pastors from the district to which my church belongs. I clearly recall my response was filled with happiness and hope. — When? Where? — I asked immediately, although I have to admit I became sad when the answer was every second Tuesday of the month. It had to be precisely Tuesday, the day of the week that was taken up with evening meetings! She corrected me immediately, — No, Brother, Tuesday mornings! Of course, now I have a new job! I'm a pastor! At that time, I was still used to working for the church after business hours. But thanks be to God I wasn't in a secular job anymore, so I was able to attend the meetings.

During the same phone call, I learned about the beginning of a new activity within the group: workshops. Although the group had been meeting uninterrupted for twelve years, it was the first time we were about to receive funds through a grant. We were the only group of pastors from the Baptist Churches of Puerto Rico who met consistently, and we became the first district in the Island to apply and be approved for funds to cover the costs of the workshops during a year. To God be the glory!

It is vital for a healthy ministerial life to have the feeling of support from colleagues who can identify with what we need and experience. No man (or woman) is an island. Being together helps build up strength and helps us to know comfort at times of anguish, pain, and uncertainty. Being together permits us to grow from others' experiences: we are so understanding with each other that we are moved as a whole body. I give the glory to God, because in the few years of my pastoral ministry, I have seen this kind of fusion that goes beyond bumping into one another during a meeting. It is a bonding that goes way further. The author of Ecclesiastes present us with an image of what a group of pastors should be:



*Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!* (Ecclesiastes 4.9-10 NIV). If only we pastors can take this advice and make it a reality!

I have been a witness to how we support each other through phone calls, visits, and above all, during our meetings. We have shared our experiences, as well as our frustrations and tears, our anecdotes and knowledge, and we have trusted one another with our dreams and hopes. As we keep together, we forge a strong web that is able to resist the attack that faces every pastoral ministry. *Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken* (Ecclesiastes 4.12 NIV).

The beginning was three years ago, yet even today, we keep receiving and using the incentive from The Lilly Endowment through the effort, vision, and commitment of the Ministers Council, both locally and nationally. Even more, now we have two other districts which benefit not only from the Endowment's contribution, but also from the joy and privilege that it is getting together in ministry.

Our victory requires us to depend on God as the One who called us, to form collegial relationships in the love of Jesus, and to take hold of the action of the Holy Spirit throughout our ministerial and personal lives. Let us pray to God for the creation of more Together in Ministry covenant groups for the well being of the Lord's people and for His glory!

*Julio González-Paniagua pastorea, junto a su esposa Anátalys, la Primera Iglesia Bautista de Santurce, en San Juan, Puerto Rico. Combina el ministerio pastoral con su pasión por la música, manteniéndose activo como maestro, compositor, director coral y orquestal; ofrece talleres y conferencias a iglesias, principalmente en el área de adoración y música. Posee un Bachillerato en Música, una Maestría en Educación, ambos de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, y está completando una Maestría en Divinidad del Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico.*

*La Pastora Anátalys González-Ortiz es Asistente Administrativo del Programa de Evangelización, Nuevas Obras y Ministerios Especiales, de las Iglesias Bautistas de Puerto Rico. Ha pertenecido a la Junta General de las ABC-USA, secretaria por un periodo de cuatro años del Caucus Hispano y miembro del actual Equipo Facilitador para la Alianza de Iglesias Bautistas Hispánicas, nombrado por Ministerios Nacionales.*

*Juntos colaboran, además de compartir la pastoral en su Iglesia, en diversos ministerios educativos y musicales. Puede escribirle a los pastores González a los correos electrónicos: musikdei@caribe.net, anniegonzalez@ibpr.org o pibs@caribe.net.*

### **Cuerda de tres hilos no se rompe fácilmente**

La vida pastoral presenta muchos retos. El pastor debe ser, entre otras cosas, consejero, administrador, predicador, maestro, experto en la Biblia, buen comunicador, sociable y discreto. Más aun, la gente espera que uno sea excelente en todo.

Desde que uno recibe del Señor el llamado pastoral, ya tiene la sospecha que no va a poder mantenerse a la altura de la responsabilidad que amerita la posición. Al encontrarnos frágiles e insuficientes ante el llamado, reconocemos que nosotros mismos, antes del pastorado, hemos idealizado la figura pastoral como una intachable, sabia e íntegra, con una respuesta para todo y lo correcto como respuesta. Ahora nos encontramos al otro lado, la vida y su perspectiva alterada por completo. Entonces, luego de la sacudida espiritual, física y emocional, comenzamos a sentir la soledad. Ahora entendemos que somos barro, instrumentos de Dios, pero no somos alfareros.

La pastoral es una de las profesiones más aisladas en su desempeño. Tal vez esta noción sea provocada por la visión única y particular que Dios da a cada pastor en su contexto de iglesia y comunidad. El pastor corre el peligro de aislarse de sus compañeros en el ministerio, de las otras iglesias que se encuentran en su comunidad y hasta de su denominación. Tengo que dar gracias especiales a Dios pues junto a mi esposa Anátalys, quien también es pastora, la carga se hace más liviana. Ella es sostén y guía para mi ministerio (y espero colaborar en algo con el ministerio de ella).



En las primeras semanas de mi labor como pastor recibí una llamada que provocó un cambio de perspectiva en lo que yo esperaba fuera la soledad del pastorado. Una colega me llamó para invitarme a las reuniones que mensualmente realiza un grupo de pastores del distrito al cual pertenece mi Iglesia. Recuerdo claramente mi reacción llena de alegría y esperanza. — ¿Cuándo? ¿Dónde? — pregunté inmediatamente, aunque tengo que admitir que me entristecí al responder que todos los segundos martes de mes. ¡Tenía que ser precisamente martes, el día de la semana que estaba comprometido en las noches! La pastora corrigió inmediatamente, — No hermano, martes en la mañana. — ¡Claro, ahora me encuentro en un nuevo trabajo! ¡Soy pastor! En ese momento permanecía en mi mente la costumbre de trabajar para la iglesia después de horas laborables; gracias al Señor me encontraba fuera de un trabajo secular, por lo que podía asistir a las reuniones.

En la misma llamada conocí sobre el comienzo de una nueva actividad en el grupo. Se estarían ofreciendo talleres de capacitación para la pastoral. Aunque el grupo lleva reuniéndose ininterrumpidamente por espacio de 12 años, por primera vez recibía la ayuda económica necesaria mediante una propuesta. Éramos el único grupo de pastores de las Iglesias Bautistas de Puerto Rico que se reunía consistentemente y nos convertimos en el primer distrito de la Isla en solicitar y recibir la aprobación de estos fondos que pagarían los recursos durante un año. A Dios sea la gloria.

Sentir el apoyo de colegas que se pueden identificar con nuestras necesidades es vital para una vida ministerial saludable. Nadie es una isla. Mantenernos juntos nos ayuda a desarrollar fortaleza, a darnos aliento en los momentos de angustia, de dolor y de incertidumbre; permite que crezcamos de las experiencias vicarias, pues la compenetración es tal que nos conmovemos como si fuéramos un cuerpo. Doy gloria a Dios, pues en los pocos años que llevo en el ministerio pastoral, he visto esta unión que va más allá de coincidir en un lugar de reunión. Es una unión que nos lleva más allá. El autor del libro de Eclesiastés nos presenta la imagen de lo que debe ser un grupo de pastores y pastoras unidos en el ministerio: Mejor son dos que uno, pues reciben mejor paga por su trabajo. Porque si caen, el uno levantará a su compañero; pero ¡ay del que está solo! Cuando caiga no habrá otro que lo levante (4.9-10 RV95). ¡Si todos los pastores tomáramos este consejo y lo hiciéramos realidad!

*Minister*



He presenciado cómo nos hemos sostenido unos a otros mediante llamadas telefónicas, visitas, y sobre todo, durante nuestras reuniones. Hemos compartido experiencias como también frustraciones y lágrimas; anécdotas y vivencias, así también nuestros sueños y esperanzas. Al permanecer unidos, forjamos una red fuerte que resiste los embates a los que se enfrenta el ministerio pastoral. Uno solo puede ser vencido, pero dos podrán resistir. Y además, la cuerda de tres hilos no se rompe fácilmente (4.12 DHH).

El comienzo fue hace tres años, aún hoy continuamos recibiendo y utilizando el incentivo de la Fundación Lilly, a través de la gestión, visión y dedicación del Concilio Ministerial, tanto de Puerto Rico como del nacional. Más aun, ahora tenemos otros dos distritos que también se están beneficiando, no tan sólo de la aportación económica de la Fundación, sino del gozo y privilegio de reunirse como grupo pastoral.

La victoria requiere que dependamos de Dios como Aquel que nos llamó, formemos lazos de hermandad en el amor de Jesús y nos sujetemos al mover del Espíritu Santo en nuestras vidas ministeriales y particulares. Oramos a Dios para que sigan creándose grupos Unidos en Ministerio, por el bienestar del pueblo del Señor y para su gloria.

*Uno solo puede ser vencido, pero dos pueden resistir. ¡La cuerda de tres hilos no se rompe fácilmente!*  
~Eclesiastés 4:12

*"Porque donde dos o tres se reúnen en mi nombre, allí estoy yo en medio de ellos."* ~Mateo 18:20

## *If This is Not the Place, Then Where?*

*by Darla Dee Turlington*



*The Rev. Dr. Darla Dee Turlington is Senior Pastor of the First Baptist Church (FBC) of Westfield, NJ, and President of the American Baptist Churches of New Jersey (ABCNJ) Ministers Council. She earned a Ph.D. in New Testament Studies from Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary, New York, in 1988 and an M.Div. from Union in 1979, majoring in New Testament. She has served FBC Westfield since her ordination in 1991, as Minister of Christian Education and Evangelism through 2000, before becoming the first female senior pastor in Westfield. She has been an adjunct professor at nearby schools, remains a member of the Society of Biblical Literature, and has been active in leadership of her local ministerium and denominational association. She is married to R. Donald Turlington Jr., a retired tax attorney, and they have one nineteen-year-old son studying at the West Point Military Academy.*

### ***The Central Jersey Women in Ministry Covenant Group Members (in addition to the Rev. Turlington):***

The Rev. Elizabeth Congdon, Associate Regional Pastor for New Church Development, American Baptist Churches of NJ and Interim Pastor, Hamilton Square Baptist Church, Hamilton, NJ

The Rev. Estelle David, Associate Pastor, Stelton Baptist, Edison and Chaplain, Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women, Clinton, NJ

Pastor Jane Harlan, Co-Pastor, Preakness Baptist Church, Wayne, NJ

The Rev. Kathleen Tice, Pastor, Stelton Baptist Church, Edison, NJ

The Rev. Dr. Gloria White, Associate Regional Pastor for American Baptist Women in Ministry, ABCNJ and Interim Pastor, Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Union, NJ

The Rev. Mildred Williams, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Kenilworth, NJ

This article represents the collaboration of Covenant Group members.

I couldn't believe my ears! We were rising from dinner at the end of an emotionally engaging 24-hour retreat, thinking about heading home, when I heard Kathleen's voice: "I need to deal with something before we leave." All six of us sat back down at the table and waited.

Kathleen described her hurt feelings over an action taken by her associate pastor Estelle, also a member of our group, who was seated at the table next to Kathleen. Estelle has a "what you see is what you get" temperament, and spoke back from a different perspective, sharing her frustration and hurt. Their situation was complicated by the senior/junior roles they fill, and by the different expectations of leadership from their Euro-American and African-American backgrounds.

Prior one-on-one and direct confrontation clearly wasn't enough, which is why Kathleen felt compelled to raise the issue while still with our covenant group. The rest of us coached our two sisters through the process of clarifying their own positions and hearing the other's. Eventually, mutual apologies came.

What would have happened to the professional and personal relationship of these two women if they did not have our covenant group? They would have persevered, with a rift in their relationship that likely would widen over time. But in the safe place made by our covenant friendships, they were able to take greater personal risks and to aim higher than getting along; to aim for regaining trust.

An hour later, we piled into a mini-van and headed home. En route, Liz described the process through which she had gone in helping her daughter address a long-past, but still aching, event. The need to address this painful issue had first become obvious to us when Liz shared her concerns at a prior covenant group retreat, and we applauded her for the follow-through with her daughter.

Estelle shared an approach to identifying spiritual gifts she had employed with success, and we all discussed how the next step of identifying ministry areas where a person's gifts could be used might be accomplished. An exchange of written resources was arranged.

Mildred acknowledged the frustrations of caring for both her ailing husband and her ailing sister whom she moved into her home six months ago. Mildred is a nurse, a social worker, and a pastor, and she easily identifies all the dynamics going on with the trio in the house. But she is also a giver, and easily absorbs demands and takes responsibility for meeting needs. Mildred talked about some boundaries she wants to set, and she knows we will hold her accountable to them in the future.

These are just a few examples of the value of the Central New Jersey Women in Ministry Together in Ministry Covenant Group. We have met monthly for more than three years, and we come together at least twice a year for overnight retreats facilitated by a counselor or professor. Each facilitator brought her own way of getting all of us high-powered women to step out of our leadership roles so we could and would relax, recreate, and open ourselves to new insights from one another and from God.

We have grown past initial judgments into appreciative friendship, and have even grown beyond that into knowing one another's weaknesses while still appreciating each other. We turn to one another for advice, tips, consolation, encouragement, and even correction. We have participated in the ordination services for two of our members and the installation service of another. We function as an informal steering committee for American Baptist Women in Ministry in New Jersey. The result is that we are more comfortable and confident in our pastoral positions and more intentional about our professional development.

Our monthly breakfasts involve case studies and prayer, and also allow us to monitor our ministries and adjust our goals. I know my local church leadership has grown more culturally sensitive, and my style has become more directive as my sisters increased my awareness and my courage to lead. Members of our group have studied, assessed, and set goals in the areas of self-care, keeping Sabbath, and dealing with relationships (or lack thereof!) with significant others.

Understanding across the black/white divide is one of the most exciting aspects of this group for me. The three African-American members are completely approachable and non-judgmental when I have questions about their church culture. When I was invited to deliver the sermon at an African-American pastor's anniversary service, they filled me in on what would customarily be expected of me. I arrived at the right time, with my robe, and the appropriate gift for the occasion. Our covenant group members have compared the customs related to robes and stoles, honoraria, pastoral anniversaries, acknowledgements, advance preparation to preach or teach, deacon responsibilities, licensing, decision-making, and respect of office. Though our African-American members consistently move between two cultures, the Anglo members of our

covenant group are also becoming more bicultural.

On the other hand, our African-American members were on the learning curve when they served largely Anglo congregations. Group members discussed different perspectives on the care of parsonages, Deacon readiness for the laying on of hands or anointing with oil, pastoral authority for making financial contributions, and whether a choir cantata should ever replace a sermon!

When Kathleen said she needed to deal with an issue before we left our retreat, I should not have been surprised. Our retreat gathering was the right place for burdensome (and joyful) issues to be discussed. After all, had not our day begun with Ken Medema's song about Christian community echoing in our ears, "If this is not the place where I can find tears to heal and Spirit to have wings... if this is not the place, then where?"



*But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love. Ephesians 4:15-16*

## TOGETHER IN MINISTRY DVD DISCUSSION GUIDES



### **Directions for all groups:**

1. View the DVD, available at no charge from the Ministers Council office.
2. Discuss your own ministry context.
3. Visit [www.ministerscouncil.com](http://www.ministerscouncil.com), Together in Ministry link, for further information about collegial covenant groups and how to access funding.
4. Commit to involvement, either as a collegial covenant group participant or as a supporter/encourager.
5. Spread the word that Together in Ministry groups enhance ministry.

### **For pastoral leaders and seminarians:**

1. What does the DVD convey to you about collegial covenant groups that stirs your interest? Why?
2. Why is it important for pastoral leaders to commit to a collegial covenant group as essential for excellence in ministry?
3. Have you experienced any of the issues described that makes group participation an essential for ministry? Any other experiences or feelings that cause you to want to explore group participation?
4. How do you see your connection to and responsibility for the broader Christian community?
5. Where is the place in your life where you are being renewed?
6. How might you take the initiative to form a collegial covenant group?
7. Pray for God's leading in this matter.

### **For area ministers working with congregations or for pastoral relations committees:**

1. What are the benefits to a congregation of a pastoral leader's participation in a collegial covenant group?
2. How do we encourage our pastoral leader to be plugged in for the sake of renewal?
3. How much do we think it is appropriate to spend for funding pastoral participation in a collegial covenant group?
4. How can we encourage and support pastoral participation in a collegial covenant group?
5. How can we communicate to other members of the congregation that pastoral participation in a collegial covenant group benefits the ministry of the congregation?
6. Commit to pray for our pastoral leader(s).

*Together in  
Ministry: A  
Male  
Perspective*

*by Leon Grant*



*The Rev. Leon Grant has served as the Senior Pastor of the Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Rockville, MD since 1987. Mount Calvary is one of the leading and more progressive churches in Montgomery County, MD. It was established in the Lincoln Park community in 1902 and continues to make a positive impact on the residents of Rockville, Montgomery County, and the surrounding communities of the Metropolitan Washington area. The Rev. Grant is a graduate of the South Carolina State University, Orangeburg, SC, with a B.S. Degree in Business Administration. In preparation for ministry, he studied at Washington Bible College, Lanham, MD; Howard University School of Divinity, and Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. and received the Masters of Theological Studies in 1980. His affiliations and service extend beyond the local church and community. He has served in leadership roles and holds membership in numerous organizations, including as Ministers Council Senator and Moderator, Area I, American Baptist Churches of the South; as Field Education Supervisor, Wesley Theological Seminary; and on the Board of Directors, Montgomery County Mental Health Association. He is married to the former Rose Huggins of Greenville, SC. This union has been blessed with two sons, Leonard, daughter-in-law Laura and Jonathan, and one grandson Leonard David II and a granddaughter, Laila.*

***The Together in Ministry Collegial Covenant Group:***

The Rev. Leon Grant, Senior Pastor, Mount Calvary Baptist Church, Rockville, MD  
The Rev. Dr. Myrtle Bowen, Pastor, Clinton AME Zion Church, Rockville, MD  
The Rev. Chester L. Burke, Pastor, Pilgrim Baptist Church, Silver Spring, MD  
The Rev. Lora Hargrove-Chapman, Assistant Pastor, Mount Calvary Baptist Church, Rockville, MD  
The Rev. Dr. Carl E. Davis, Pastor, First Baptist Church Kengar, Kensington, MD  
The Rev. Donald V. Evans, Pastor, Village Community Church, Gaithersburg, MD  
The Rev. Donald Kelly, Pastor, Olive Branch Community Church, Laurel, MD  
The Rev. Eldridge Spearman, Pastor, Mt. Jezreel Baptist Church, Silver Spring, MD  
The Rev. Dr. Paulette M.E. Stevens, Pastor, Emory Grove United Methodist Church, Gaithersburg, MD  
The Rev. Jane Wood, Pastor, Jerusalem/Mt. Pleasant United Methodist Church, Rockville, MD

Our Together in Ministry collegial covenant group was formed three years ago, consisting of clergy persons serving in Montgomery County, MD. It is a very diverse group made up of members from several denominations who have varied experiences in ministry, serve full-time and part-time, are females and males - all come together with a common goal of achieving excellence in ministry. Our group consists of long-term pastors, assistant pastors, a hospice chaplain, pastors of church plants, and student pastors completing professional education and advanced degrees. After much consultation and deliberation, we concluded that our ministry goals could be achieved best through spending more time in personal and group prayer.

The formation of the group was very methodical. We held our first meeting with spouses and significant others in a private dining room of a restaurant in Baltimore, MD. It was important to us the persons closest to us share in our professional and spiritual growth, and participate as much as possible in the ministries God was calling us to lead and serve. Early in the formation process, we realized the possible benefits of not only becoming intimately acquainted with the covenant group participants, but also the value of becoming well acquainted with the persons who were encouraging and supporting us in ministry. Our entire group of pastors and spouses meets annually during the Advent Season to celebrate growth and successes, to fellowship, and to strengthen personal relationships.

It was very important to get the group started and moving in the right direction. We chose a facilitator, Dr. Coralyn Pinkney, who had served for many years as an assistant pastor, assistant to the president of a local seminary, and as a member of the General Board of the American Baptist Churches USA. She proved to be the ideal leader for getting the covenant group focused and off to an excellent start. She used directed prayer, soft music, and a setting quite conducive to reflection and meditation. The group covenanted to meet for focused prayer two hours monthly, rotating among the ministry sites of group members. Our prayer time centered on each of our ministries, our personal needs, the church or place of our ministries, and that ministry's life in the community and wider world. We also pledged to pray for each other daily. Our prayer time was directed by books, periodicals, pamphlets, and the Bible. Three of the books which proved very beneficial to us were:

●**The Pattern of Prayer**, W. E. Sangster and Leslie Davison

●**We Have This Ministry**, Samuel D. Proctor and Gardner C. Taylor

●**The Power of Praying Together**, Stormie Omartian with Jack Hayford

Dr. Pinkney facilitated our collegial covenant group for two years. After she moved to Raleigh, North Carolina, members of the group are rotating in leading the sessions.

There are currently six males in our collegial covenant group; I am sharing the reflections of two. The first is the testimony of Dr. Carl Edward Davis, Pastor of the First Baptist Church Kengar, Kensington, MD. Carl celebrated his sixth pastoral anniversary in March 2007. He has participated in the covenant group from its inception.

“The Together in Ministry collegial covenant group has become a vital part of my pastoral ministry. The fellowship has not only enhanced my ministry spiritually, but also socially. I have come to know my colleagues in a safe place, and can share trials, tribulations, struggles, and most of all, victories. Over the last three years, we have developed a trust level that cannot be measured in financial terms, because a price can not be placed on the value of the time spent together with fellow laborers of the Gospel. In Dietrich Bonhoeffer's master work, **Life Together: Prayer Book of the Bible**, it is stated that, ‘Pastors should never complain about their congregations, certainly not to people, but also not to God. Congregations have not been entrusted to them that they should become accusers of their congregations before God and their fellow human beings. When pastors lose faith in the Christian Community in which they have been placed and begin to make accusations against it, they had better examine themselves first to see whether the underlying problem is not their own idealized image, which should be shattered by God’ (at page 37). I thank God for this community of ministers who remind and encourage each other to keep the faith!”

My experience has been different from Carl's in that I had served as senior pastor of my church for more than fifteen years, and as assistant pastor and youth minister for twenty years prior to becoming senior pastor. I also have been part of the collegial covenant group from its inception. My attitude and expectations might have been similar to that of Peter and the disciples who were professional fish-

ermen before being called to follow Jesus. They had experienced a bad night, fished all night, but had not caught any fish. Jesus instructed Peter to "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." Peter replied, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." The disciples caught more fish than they could have ever imagined (Luke 5:4-7).

The Together in Ministry collegial covenant group has had a phenomenal impact on all of our ministries. As a male participant in the group, my growth in shepherding and serving the congregation and community have excelled my wildest expectations. I served for twenty-three years under a pastor who had more than fifty years of pastoral experience. He shared everything he thought would be helpful to me in ministry, and carried or sent me to many clergy seminars, conventions, and training and leadership conferences. Participating in the covenant group has helped me by solidifying and enhancing the training opportunities and vicarious experiences shared with me. It has given me more confidence in my leadership ability, preaching skills, effectiveness as a pastor, and has reduced my stress level. My physical health has steadily improved, blood pressure is more stable, and my faith in God is stronger, and my prayer life is more powerful and fruitful.

I grew up in the Deep South where the personal role and life of the minister were considered very private. Clergy persons were put on a pedestal, and held in high esteem. They could not show too many signs of weakness or just be ordinary human beings. He (as was always the case) was seen as super-human, knowledgeable about everything, and had only a few friends with whom to share intimate details and problems. My experiences with the programs and activities of the American Baptist family have been gradually changing my outlook on ministry, but the collegial covenantal group opened the floodgate. We are reaping tremendous benefits from shared experiences and prayer. I feel more open to share and receive blessings from others that come through the tried and tested experiences of colleagues in ministry.

Many seasoned pastors sometimes overlook programs like Together in Ministry because they feel they have reached their apex – or "the top of their game" – in ministry. No long ago, I had the privilege of attending a Pastors Leadership Conference. I met a pastor who had announced to his church his

plans for retirement. It is possible he came to the conference for a chance to get away to reflect, or use it as a semi-vacation. But on the final day, as we were evaluating the effectiveness of the conference, he expressed regret for not having known about this particular resource for pastors earlier in his career. He was genuinely motivated to the point of considering delaying his retirement plans. I feel the Together in Ministry collegial covenant prayer group has been extremely valuable to our ministries. To paraphrase the words used by the late President John F. Kennedy, "Ask not what Together in Ministry can do for you – rather, ask what you can do for others by participating in a Together in Ministry collegial covenant group."



*And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25*

## Holy Friendships

by Karen Yee



*The Rev. Karen Yee, serves as the Associate Pastor of First Baptist Church, Alameda, CA, a multiethnic extended family of Christ followers. Previously she worked as a public school teacher and served as a lay leader at the First Chinese Baptist Church of San Francisco. Presently she is a teaching pastor at the American Baptist Seminary of the West and serves on their Board of Trustees. She is also on the Board of Redwood Glen Camp, the National Council of Chinese Churches, and has served as a Senator at Large for the Ministers Council Senate.*

### *The Women in Professional Ministry Group:*

The Rev. Dr. Debra Mumford has served as an Adjunct Professor at the American Baptist Seminary of the West and has just been named as Assistant Professor of Preaching & Worship in a Louisville, KY, seminary.

The Rev. Denise Bowman-Wylie is Associate Pastor, Hillside Church of Marin, CA.

The Rev. Patricia Cupik is Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church of Antioch, CA.

The Rev. Anne Lau-Choy is Associate Pastor of Asbury United Methodist Church of Livermore, CA.

Ms. Jennifer Platenberg is Children and Youth Pastor at Community Baptist Church of San Mateo, VA.

Ms. Kristen Preston is currently serving as a volunteer minister.

*"Together in Ministry seeks to transform disciplines, habits, ways, or practices of pastoral leaders to enhance pastoral excellence by establishing the model of relational ministry and the norm of holy friendships."*

When I first began my Minister in Training internship at my church, my teaching pastor and I began to read a book together entitled, **Connecting: Learning how to Learn from Others**, by J. Robert Clinton and Paul D. Stanley (NavPress Publishing Group, 1992). The authors emphasized the importance of finding mentoring relationships that would help you succeed in life. It was a great way to begin our mentoring relationship, one which has continued for twelve years. "Connecting" suggests there are three dynamics vital to a mentoring relationship: attraction, responsiveness, and accountability.

Basically, you have to like one another; you have to have a responsive attitude of receiving and being attentive to one another; and there must be a feeling of accountability to and for one another. These dynamics came to mind when I first heard about the Together in Ministry collegial groups.

I had been part of many ministerial groups in the past. Some groups were task groups and others were based simply on geographic location or local association, but none of them met my needs as a woman in professional ministry. They lacked the dynamics of attraction, responsiveness, and accountability. As I began to think about forming a group, the first question I asked myself was, "Whom do you like? With whom would you want to spend time?" There had to be some kind of "attraction" that would bring the people in the group together. Today, there is nothing more valuable than time, and I realized if we didn't like each other, there would be no motivation to come together. Ultimately, it didn't matter where the people whom I invited to form a TIM group lived or in what kind of ministry they were involved. They were invited because we had two things in common: we were all women in professional ministry – and we all liked each other!

One of the most exciting things about our TIM group is our diversity. We come from all over Northern California – the bay area, the peninsula, marin, the delta, and the Sacramento area. We are Caucasian, Asian, and African- American. We are senior pastors, solo pastors, associate pastors, seminary professors, doctoral students, and volunteer ministers. We are liberal and conservative, evangelistic and justice driven. We are single, married, re-married, and in committed partnerships. We are from different generations and denominations. We vary in ages and interests, worship styles and tastes in food. But what we do have in common is a commitment to listen to one another, to struggle and learn together, to be attentive to each others' needs and dreams, and to share and pray for one another. Just the other day, one member of our TIM group said that while she is part of many different collegial groups, "There is something different about our group. The level of diversity makes it such a rich experience, yet our commonality as women in ministry brings us all together." The term "holy friendships" is a wonderful way to describe our TIM group. Our regular meetings consist of a meal together to live out Jesus' example of "table fellowship," and then we have a time of connecting and sharing of our lives and ministries. There is no doubt the

responsiveness of each member is guided by the Spirit. I remember at one of our gatherings, one person began to speak of the death of a close friend, and how she experienced and gave pastoral care in the midst of that situation. The group listened and offered our love and support, and slowly we each shared our own experience of death and ministering to those who grieve. The level and degrees of experience varied, as did as our different cultural and generational differences, and our conversation greatly enriched our understanding and unique call we bring to the situation as women in ministry. We believed that moment was designed by God to prepare us for the days ahead, for in the weeks after that meeting, several of us found ourselves in similar situations of ministering in the midst of loss. We were grateful for the discussion and sharing that took place that day in our TIM group. We were prepared to be more open to the moving of God's Spirit and to minister even more effectively to those who grieve.


In addition, we spend time discussing various books and theological topics. Too often, we get so involved in our daily ministry tasks we do not find the time to read, or to stretch or challenge ourselves intellectu-



ally, so it is a privilege to meet with others whom you respect and admire to "wrestle" with how theology and daily ministry intersect. One of my colleagues said, "I have been so graced by the intelligent and thought provoking theological discussions we have had through reading books together." The intellectual depth of the group is extremely rich. In addition to our regular meetings, we also have an annual retreat. It is an opportunity to spend an extended time away to cook together, play together, and once again grow together. Time and deadlines no longer guide our gathering – only the moving of God's Spirit among us.

Perhaps the best way to explain how this TIM group enhances our effectiveness and our ministry is from this quote from one of our members: "It keeps me sane!" There is not just one event or one meeting that stands out; instead, it is the ongoing knowledge we are all part of a group that is a safe place – it is a place to be with others who understand and who will not judge, and who are willing to provide a loving sense of support and encouragement. All of us know that at any time, we can call or email each other, and we will find a group of women willing to let us vent our frustrations, share our joys, offer an idea, give encouragement, and lift up one another in prayer. We are thankful for the opportunity to find and experience this precious gift from God – the gift of "holy friendships."

4th Sunday  
of the  
Month, 6:30  
p.m.



by Bill Maury-Holmes

*The Rev. Bill Maury-Holmes is Associate Pastor of The First Baptist Church of Redlands, CA, with whom he has served since 1997. Bill is married to Marybeth and they have three children who keep domestic life interesting and wonderful. For his sabbatical in 2006 he was awarded a Clergy Renewal grant from the Lilly Endowment to further learn from the legacy of Father Damien de Veuster and the residents of the Kalaupapa community on Molokai. Contact: bill@fbcredlands.org*

**The Men's Issues in Contemporary Context group:**

- Michael Burke, architect
- Matt Dedoes, physical therapist
- Mark Estey, dentist and professor
- Kevin Fisher, high school drama teacher
- John Hoopes, computer wizard
- Wilt Kishimoto, college soccer coach
- Michael Tramell, child psychiatrist

O for a good life, we just might have to weaken  
and find somewhere to go  
go somewhere where we're needed  
find somewhere to grow  
grow somewhere we're needed  
We grow where we are needed  
("It's A Good Life If You Don't Weaken")  
- The Tragically Hip

**BEGINNINGS:** I suspect we began like a lot of the Together in Ministry groups. The opportunity got my attention, and set whirling something I had wanted to give a try for a while, but had not gotten around to doing. Ran the idea by some friends, and most of them were at least interested. Seven bought.

Our lives had their similarities and their differences. The similarities helped. Thirty-somethings, most married, starting to add children. Guys all; egalitarians all, as well, but if we were going to be honest with each other, we would have to be able to drop the guard and admit we were lousy men at times. "Move along, there's nothing to see here." The prescribed confidentiality was an easily established grounding and has been maintained scrupulously ever since. That can't be underestimated.

**CONTENT:** The first year's proposal was pretty good: four seasons studying an exemplar of our faith, Father Damien of Molokai, who ministered with and to those ill with Hansen's Disease; he later succumbed to the same illness. It was good to initially delve into a subject that explicitly challenged us in our faith and missions. I also think the material provided a context from which interior and personal matters flowed naturally.

Year Two gave us another chance to work with something topically relevant and of captivating content. We started with Biblical and cultural studies of the Ten Commandments, then viewed and discussed Polish filmmaker Krzysztof Kieslowski's magnificent *Decalogue* series, watching one film per month for the last ten months of the year.

We found watching and discussing good films really worked for us. So we did more of that in Year Three, morphing into our current format of exploring men's issues through cinematic portrayals – the good, the bad, and the ugly – as seen through the lenses of Martin Scorsese and Noah Baumbach and many others. There is no lack of relevant films to watch; we've compiled quite a roster.

**PRESENCE:** I'm pretty sure it was Woody Allen who said that 85% of success is showing up. Everybody had busy lives. But folks continued to show up, with only occasional exceptions. Why? Some reasons are obvious. The material has been pretty good. The friends are basically responsible sorts and tend to honor commitments made. The effort is apparently worth itself.

But there are other reasons. Levity helps, and our internal dynamic finds it often. So does food. We always have had snacks.

I knew we were onto something when some of the guys, whose paths did cross from time in the normal course of things, started doing more things together outside of either the structure or random occurrence. Some found common cause in cycling; others in those confounded late-night video gaming sessions. We helped each other move things. A couple of us once shoveled out another's driveway after the most freakish of all acts of nature, a Southern California snowstorm.

**MAGIC:** Most of us in ministry have read articles here and there about why small groups either work or don't. My father-in-law has been part of a small group that meets one morning most weeks - and has been doing so for nearly three decades. The participants are actually not all that alike, personality and position-wise. But I have noticed over the years that at weddings and funerals, most of them are there.

I have no illusions our group will last anywhere near that long. Professional mobility alone for our generation would mitigate against it. But my hopes have already been far surpassed, and we keep moving forward. Perhaps magic isn't the right word; synergy, Greek for "work together," is probably better. Whenever I perform weddings, I always state in the welcome (addressed to the couple and the congregation) that, "Marriages are not to stand alone. They need the help of friends and family, and that is why we are here today."

One friend took a new (and better) pastoral position in the Midwest. He was replaced by another friend, one who brought the integrity and struggle and skills of one living in recovery. After two years, he moved on when a better situation arose for his whole family.

One marriage took place, several children were born, a parent died, and in a highly dramatic fashion, another parent nearly did. We've been through professional failures and messes and big decisions, and the advantage of having at least one place monthly where these could be heard, and prayed about, if needed.

**CURRENTLY:** Year Four now. I'm grateful for what has developed. To do good and sustained ministry, and to set ourselves up as life-long blessings in local congregations, requires we attend to basic discipleship, a big part of which is embracing the fact we are not to be in this life alone. So we will continue to see how this works - it's a commitment we have embraced since the first happy year, and one we will pursue even after the funds go away.

## *Clergy Mamas - Together in Ministry*

*by Peg Lewis*



*The Rev. Peg Lewis is an ordained ABC minister, APC board certified chaplain and ACPE supervisor. She has served as chaplain and CPE supervisor at Yale New Haven Hospital for nearly twenty years, the last ten as the director of the Department of Religious Ministries. She is a member of the First Baptist Church of Southington, CT. She has raised two children, a daughter aged thirty and a son aged twenty-six, and is soon to become a grandmother.*

### *The Clergy Mamas (Mothers in Ministry):*

The Rev. Erica Wimber Avena is currently the Interim Minister at the First Baptist Church of New Haven, CT. She and her husband Robert are raising four children, one in college and three who are still at home, ages two through eight. Erica is not pictured since on the day of this April gathering she was attending her daughter's school play.

The Rev. Claudine Crooks is the pastor at Poquonnock Bridge Baptist Church, CT. She and her husband the Rev. Kevin Butler, who is also on American Baptist Churches of Connecticut staff, are raising two daughters ages eleven and eight.

The Rev. Stacy Emerson is the Associate Minister at Union Baptist Church in Mystic, CT. She and husband Kevin are raising two children, a two year old son and one year old daughter. The Rev. Katherine Fagerburg, after twenty years in congregational ministry, is currently serving as the Chaplain at Connecticut Baptist Homes, an elder care facility in central Connecticut. She and husband Vern are raising an eight year old daughter and a five year old son.

The Rev. Amy Johnson is at present staying at home to raise two children, a four year old son and a three year old daughter, with husband Brian. She also does pulpit supply preaching.

Ms. Michelle Madsen-Bibeau is currently serving as the Interim Minister of Niantic Baptist Church, CT. She and her husband John are raising two daughters ages five and eight.

In 2004, several women in ministry who are also mothers with pre-school and school-age children began to discuss with each other their wishes for colleague support that could address their unique combination of concerns. After becoming mothers, some of the women continued to work as professional ministers; others took time away from professional ministry and then returned; and still others stayed at home with their children and delayed for a longer period a return to professional ministry.

Encouraged by the Together in Ministry program, they decided to draft a covenant and seek a facilitator.

Since being a clergy mama inevitably involves much juggling of care of children and self, as well as congregation, we decided to meet in a child-friendly space, provide childcare, and share a meal and conversation. One of our members had a very new baby, and graciously offered her house as our initial meeting place. As we gathered, we would sing grace with the children and watch over their meal; once they were fed and settled with their sitter, we would enjoy a meal provided by another member and have some time for sharing the challenges and rewards of multiple roles and callings.

As with any new group, we spent our initial time getting to know one another better and deciding how best to structure our discussions so that all felt supported. In that first year, we experimented with reading and discussing articles and sharing book recommendations. We also focused on how to manage and live into the many internal and external expectations of ourselves as mothers and as ministers.

Finding ourselves in the midst of multi-tasking in so many arenas, we began to simplify our time together. We met for a while in a church with a bigger play space for children. Rather than expecting one of us to provide a meal for all, we began bringing our own lunches. We refined our structure, insuring time for each member to fill us in on the areas of joy, sorrow, and transition in her life. Out of those times of catch-up, themes emerged for a discussion during the second half of the meeting. These themes explored the various facets of our multiple contexts and roles. We have spent time discussing the dynamics of family systems and of congregational systems, and the ways in which we can thoughtfully and faithfully participate in those systems. We have asked for and offered prayers for one another, our families and our congregations, both in our monthly time together and via email communications in between gatherings.

We have changed meeting times and places as some children got older and began attending school in various settings, as new children were born and as ministries changed. At present, we meet mostly without children, since other care arrangements are already in place. We continue to honor our needs for flexibility. Sometimes clergy mamas are at home taking care of sick children, at school for their special performances, or at congregants' homes at times of crises. The bonds of the group are such that even when a member isn't present, she is very much within the circle of colleague care.

#### **What we are learning with one another:**

Erica: What I have appreciated most about our group, affectionately known as The Mamas Not the Papas, is that each of us has made very different decisions about how we will be simultaneously Ministers and Mothers, and yet we are committed to being there for each other. In Ministry, there is no clear "career ladder," and each of us in the group has had different opportunities available to us, and decisions to make, based on the variety of Ministries to which we were called and our own family situations. Yet we have also sought to support one another in the roles to which we are called. Sometimes support takes the form of listening, sometimes a gentle challenge, sometimes remembering to laugh at ourselves and to have friends to laugh with. Sometimes our facilitator asks us to see beyond stereotypes of Mommies and Ministers to help us find an authentic calling, and our authentic voice in our personal and professional lives. None of the churches that I have served have ever had a Minister before who is also the mother of young children. While I personally feel the churches are very open to the experience, none of us have done this before! I'm grateful for the colleague group, and for a place to go where I know I'll be understood as we find our way together.



Amy: Having been born in 1960 and raised during the birth and development of feminism, becoming a mother in my early forties caused me to reexamine and re-frame all aspects of my life. After a year of continuing in professional ministry while being a mother, I became a stay-at-home mom and continue to be one, currently. The choice to stay at home with my children caused me to wonder what makes one a professional minister. Even though I wasn't currently working as a professional minister, did I continue to be one? Is ministry something one *does*, or something one *is*? Was I mistaken when I thought I was called to professional ministry? These are some of the questions I brought with me to the Clergy Mamas group. My children will both be in

school next year, and as I weigh options and make decisions about how much, when, and where to work, I continue to bring such questions to the group. The trust and intimacy that have grown among us in the group enable me to work through the issues inherent in my questions while supporting others as they work through their issues and answer their questions. I believe the trust and intimacy we experience in the group to be an aspect and a sign of God's kingdom, a little piece of heaven here on earth, and the foundation of the church, without which we have no community of God's people.

Stacy: I have been so appreciative of our circle of wise women as we all wonder at and struggle with the many callings of life: as mother, minister, wife, citizen...Drawing energy, insight, vision, and even comfort in their companionship has strengthened me and enlivened me as I continue to seek God in and through my life and its myriad of roles and relationships. What an incredible gift to know these women.

Katherine: Like so many of you, time is perhaps the most precious commodity in our household. Therefore, it is always a source of amazement to my husband when I tell him that I will be spending four or more of those valuable hours on a rare day off to travel to a central location and be with my sisters in ministry for the monthly Clergy Mama gathering. The reason it is worth taking the time is that these women understand my life as few others do – understand the ministry, understand the mothering, understand the pulls and pushes, tensions and joys, challenges and delights. I have found it is always worth the time I've given up for the support I have given and received, the laughter we have shared, the understanding and wisdom and counsel we have exchanged. I give God thanks for the gift of this group and the friendship of these wonderful women!


Michelle: The Clergy Mamas group has blessed us with structured time to listen to one another's stories of parenting and pastoring. In the listening, we have deepened our connections to one another and been supported in our many different roles as women and ministers. I am grateful for my sisters' insights and humor, and for our shared strength as women in ministry. I am especially glad when I think about our TIM Group offering a professional connection for those not currently serving in compensated positions. These women have great gifts for leadership – and also deep commitments to caring for their young children themselves. If being part of the "Clergy Mamas" helps retain these professional church leaders, our denomination can look forward to being blessed by their contributions for many years.

I don't think the importance of a skilled facilitator for our colleague group can be stressed enough. Thinking at one time that the habit of gathering would provide sufficient structure, we attempted for six months to meet without one. The immediate result was a decrease in our commitment to attendance. Later, as we reflected on the quality of our discussions, we realized how much we needed a "leader of leaders" among us to push the conversation to wider and deeper places. At different times, our facilitator has functioned as a colleague, elder sister, CPE Supervisor, spiritual director, therapist, and friend. I am so grateful for the Lilly Endowment/Ministers Council partnership that allowed our group of women to move past vague promises of "lunch sometime" and into building intentional community with her help.

Peg: I am fortunate to have been asked to facilitate this covenant group of very talented women in ministry. I am awed again and again by their resilience and wisdom. I enjoy their gentle generosity with each other, their openness in sharing the hard places, and their authentic support of one another as peers. I appreciate their willingness to examine their different roles within their many different contexts and to consider and negotiate their own expectations and those of others. We are learners together as we continue to explore the many facets of God's call and the many modes of God's guidance in our lives.

*Just Give Me  
One Good  
Thursday a  
Month*

*by Scott Kavanagh*



*The Rev. Dr. Scott Kavanagh is an American Baptist Pastor for over thirty years. He is currently serving as the Senior Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Syracuse, NY (since 1987). In addition he is an endorsed Pastoral Counselor, AAPC Fellow, a Licensed Mental Health Counselor and trained Spiritual Director. Scott may be reached at [fbcps@twcny.rr.com](mailto:fbcps@twcny.rr.com).*

***Clergy Thursday Group-Syracuse, New York:***

Professor James Krisher has been working in full-time ministry in the Syracuse diocese for thirty-two years. In his present position as founder and director of the Spiritual Renewal Center (twenty-eight years) he oversees a wide variety of services and ministries, gives classes, retreats and workshops, spiritual direction and training to spiritual directors. Jim has written numerous articles on scripture and spirituality, and some fiction, for various Christian publications. He is the author of

*Spiritual Surrender: Yielding Yourself to a Loving God*, released in 1997 by Twenty-Third Publications, and a second book, titled *The Ongoing Work of Jesus: His Mission in our Lives*, released by Twenty-Third Publications in 2002.

The Rev. Leon Oaks-Lee is an American Baptist Pastor for nearly three decades, currently serving as the Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Manlius, New York. He participates in both the Nehemiah Leadership Network and also another TIM study group.

The Rev. Dennis Doerr moved in 1975 to the First Presbyterian Church, Chittenango, New York, where he currently serves as Senior Pastor. He enjoys traveling and has been to Ghana several times, Germany, Korea, and Mississippi on mission trips. When not working or enjoying the family, Dennis likes to golf, swim, hike, and meeting new people.

The Rev. Robert Langston has been in the ministry for twenty years and currently serves as Pastor of Onondaga Hill Presbyterian Church. "Highlights on the ministry Christ has called me to include leading many mission trips and wilderness experiences, including trips to the Dominican Republic, Harlem in NYC, Florida, Missouri, Maine, the Wind River Range in Wyoming, the Adirondacks and Otter Creek Wilderness Area in West Virginia. A highlight of each year is leading what has become the Annual Canoe Trip for Pastors in Algonquin Park, Canada. (Want to go in 2007? October 7-14, 2007! CALL ME UP AND LET'S TALK! 315-492-2692)."

It all began on a Thursday over 420 Sundays ago. The first meeting was eight years ago. Ever since then, the fourth Thursday of every month from September through June is always a good day. The weather might be irksome and inconvenient. Church administration might be piled high. Parishioners may be chewing nails and spitting rust. But the fourth Thursday of every month is always a good day, in spite of the conditions of life and the circumstances around ministry.

There is a formula that makes this day so consistently "a good day." It is a bit like a predictable recipe. We start with a Roman Catholic Spiritual Director who has had a heart for clergy for over twenty-five years. Then we add a Presbyterian Pastor who loves the wilderness and being in primitive settings. Let's remember the American Baptist Pastor who relocated from a small plateaued congregation to a church that has high expectations and a mind of its own. Then we have the Presbyterian Pastor who loves to golf and is a sort of missionary who travels all over the world bringing good news and encouraging others. And lastly, let's add that ABC Pastor who, after thirty plus years in ministry, is the common thread. And this Pastor just loves being with colleagues who love what they do for work and are immersed in life and ministry. Put all these ingredients together and viola! You have all the ingredients for a wonderful Thursday!

Each of our gatherings includes several predictable components. The greetings are always jubilant. The embraces are genuine as we wrap arms and hearts together. The bag lunches are to sustain the body, but the collegial company is there to sustain the spirit. We catch up on what is happening in the lives of one another. We keep in touch with the highs and lows of family life and transitions. Our kids have gone on to colleges and then into the work force. Our homes have felt the modifications that come with children becoming adults, and with traditions within the family experiencing major changes. We laugh a lot. We tease each other. Sometimes we torment one another. Then there are the moments of heavy hearts and inner tears. There are multiple expressions of concern and questions of accountability. Sometimes the room gets pretty warm as we stoke up the fires of caring and hold one another's feet to the fire of purification and challenge.

When we move from the relational side of life to the spirit side, we experience times of tremendous learning and growth. A highpoint for us a year ago was when our friend and group Spiritual Director walked us through a comprehensive study of the Enneagram. We each identified our own personality types and the ways we function. We looked at our healthy sides, as well as our unhealthy tendencies that arise under stress. We integrated that information and began to look beyond ourselves to the people in our respective work places. That became a time of significant revelation and learning! We have studied a few of the great early church leaders and learned lessons on prayer. We have shared resources with one another and met outside the group setting. This is a collegial group at its best for each one of us. Recently, as we were all leaving the meeting room, one of our members remarked that he knew many clergy and had lots of friends, yet he would never want to give this up. It was the only place where everything could be placed on the table safely... everything.



Did I mention the fourth Thursday of every month is always a good day in spite of the conditions of life and the circumstances around ministry? Did you know that “TiM” really stands for “Thursday in Ministry”? The Thursday Clergy Group in Syracuse, New York, wishes all sister and brother clergy a good Thursday...every month!

*Clergy at the Movies:  
Building Collegial  
Relationships  
Through a Film  
Discussion Group*

by Dave Russell



*The Rev. Dr. David Russell is pastor of the First Baptist Church of Ames, Iowa. He and his wife, the Rev. Susan Russell, are in their eighth year of ministry at this church located adjacent to the Iowa State University campus. They are parents of a teen-aged daughter, Zoe. Dave received the Doctor of Ministry degree from United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities in May 2007, with a thesis on American Baptist university congregations. You can contact him at [dave@fbcames.org](mailto:dave@fbcames.org).*

*Film & Theology Colloquium Group:*

- The Rev. Cheryl Thomas, Pastor, Calvary Baptist Church, Des Moines, Iowa
- The Rev. Tim Stewart, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Grinnell, Iowa
- The Rev. Soozie Whitten Ford, Associate Executive Minister, Mid-American Baptist Churches
- The Rev. Homer Ford, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Indianola, Iowa
- The Rev. Dr. Marshall Peters, Executive Minister, Mid-American Baptist Churches
- June Peters, newsletter editor, Mid-American Baptist Churches
- The Rev. Dr. Forest Cornelius, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Waterloo, Iowa
- The Rev. Susan Russell, Associate Pastor, First Baptist Church, Ames, Iowa
- The Rev. Dr. Dave Russell, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Ames, Iowa
- The Rev. Royce Jones, retired denominational staff and director of American Baptist Disaster Relief Ministry, Des Moines, Iowa
- The Rev. Dr. Gary Grogan, retired regional executive minister, Des Moines, Iowa
- The Rev. Naomi Kirstein, Pastor, Wellspring Community Church, Des Moines, Iowa
- The Rev. Timothy Bonney, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Johnston Iowa

- The Rev. Janelle Bloem, Associate Pastor, First Baptist Church, Johnston, Iowa
- The Rev. Diana Holland, Pastor, Altamont Baptist Church, Harlan, Iowa
- The Rev. Emily Beltrame, Youth Minister, Westover Baptist Church, Des Moines, Iowa
- Ms. Jan Ash, Children’s Minister, Westover Baptist Church, Des Moines, Iowa

Pastoral support and accountability for one another can be critical for ministry, but it is not always an easy thing. In our Mid-American region, support and accountability traditionally have taken place in a formalized way through clergy cluster groups. In recent years, however, these cluster groups have declined in number and participation. Our Des Moines, Iowa, area cluster had dwindled significantly from an earlier era to the point that the future of an organized cluster was in question.

It was at about this point the Ministers Council received a grant from the Lilly Endowment to encourage collegial covenant groups. Several clergy in our area agreed to begin a group, and we applied for a Together In Ministry grant. Seeking a focus to our group, we decided we would watch a movie once a month and discuss together the theological implications of the film and what it had to say about ministry.

When our grant was approved, we enlisted a local United Methodist pastor with some expertise in the interface between faith and culture to be our facilitator. The Rev. Denny Coon got our group off to an excellent start by choosing some offbeat and lesser-known films that encouraged plenty of conversation. After that first year, we applied to renew our grant. Denny was not available for the second year, so group members decided to take turns choosing films and leading discussion, and to use the facilitator funds to finance a group retreat. This had been our practice for years two and three, and now, year four.

From the beginning, this has been an “open” group. While eight members signed on to our covenant as a part of the grant application, others have been welcome. Even with this open policy, those who participate have been quite faithful in attendance. There are about fifteen regular participants with twelve or so present at a given gathering. Our sense of togetherness as a group of clergy and churches has grown. Members now actually look forward to clergy gatherings! And through the group, we have managed to discuss a wide range of issues important to our lives, our families, our churches, and our ministries. We find ourselves discussing not only the film, but our lives.

We have tried to watch a wide range of movies – pretty much anything is fair game. *Jesus Camp* led us into a conversation about the relationship between church and state, as well as our concerns over the melding of right-wing religion and politics. *Citizen Ruth* is a strange comedy about a woman used by both pro-choice and pro-life activists and who manages to play them against one another. It helped us talk both about abortion and about the way we can make issues more important than people. *Sordid Lives* and *Pieces of April* examined dysfunctional (sometimes really dysfunctional!) family relationships and led to fruitful conversations. *Saved*, about the goings-on at a Christian high school, led us to discuss the hypocrisies of the evangelical subculture – and some of our own.

Films like *Pleasantville* and *The Matrix* led us to talk about the nature of reality. Likewise, *The Matrix* was a good vehicle for considering the idea of redemptive violence, as was the Clint Eastwood western, *Pale Rider*. *Million Dollar Baby* helped us to talk about issues of life and death and difficult end-of-life decisions. *Rabbit-Proof Fence* led to conversation about prejudice and racism, as did the excellent film *Crash*. We viewed *An Inconvenient Truth* and discussed the problem of global warming, as well as the ways our churches respond to such societal concerns. Our conversations are not just hypothetical and analytical; we share personal stories from our lives and ministries. This is not always easy – in a clergy group of this size, there are inevitably some big talkers (myself included). But we try to be mindful of group dynamics, and to make sure all are included in the conversation. The group has worked well to this point, but we are at the upper size limit for a group of this sort.

All the fare is not so heavy. We enjoyed films such as *Bruce Almighty*, *Nanny McPhee*, *The Greatest Game Ever Played*, and *Millions*. In each case, we were able to make theological connections. We often ask, “Where is God in the movie?” or “Where is the church?” We sometimes also ask, “Could we show this movie at church?”



Minister

We rotate locations, with most of the participants from in and near Des Moines, but with some members also from Ames, Grinnell, Harlan, and Waterloo – up to 125 miles away. A supportive group of colleagues is important enough that folks are willing to drive a good distance to participate. There is a lot of laughter in the group, and we genuinely enjoy the time together. The annual retreat has been important, for it affords us more leisurely time together as a group.

We are a fairly diverse group. Members have included solo and senior pastors, associate pastors, youth ministers, children’s ministers, denominational staff, a pastoral counselor, and retired clergy. We serve in full-time, part-time, and bivocational ministries. There are three couples in the group and a fairly even number of men and women. The size and openness of the group precludes it from being a place to share intimate concerns—we do not function as a pastoral support group per se. But the group has fostered relationships so that we all have more and deeper friendships in ministry. The level of connectedness and support among clergy in our area is much greater than when this group began.

Personally, this group has been very energizing and engaging for me, as well as being great fun. It has become the strongest connection I have with others as an American Baptist. God bless the Lilly Endowment!

*Cultivating  
Wholeness Covenant  
Group*

by Dixie Potratz-Lehman



*The Rev. Dr. Dixie Potratz Lehman, Executive Director of Fargo-Moorhead CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education), developed a congregational-based CPE center at First Baptist Church, Fargo, ND where her husband, the Rev. Vic Lehman PhD is lead pastor. Pastors, seminarians, and lay leaders from many denominations are trained at this center. She has served as Coordinator of Pastoral Care Education, MeritCare Health System, Fargo, ND; Grant coordinator, Catholic Family Services, Sioux Falls, SD; Dean of Student Life, North American Baptist Seminary, Sioux Falls, SD; Marriage and Family Therapist, Wholelife Counseling Center, High Prairie, AB, Canada; and served as a pastor at Trinity Baptist Church, Kelowna, BC, Canada. She can be reached at vlehman229@aol.com.*

*Cultivating Wholeness Covenant Group:*

The Rev. Vic Lehman Ph.D., Lead Pastor, First Baptist Church, Fargo, ND

The Rev. Allen Lively, Pastor, Immanuel Baptist Church, Minot, ND

The Rev. Theodora Boolin, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Pierre, SD

The Rev. Karen Dvirnak, Pastor, Immanuel Baptist Church, Dickinson, ND

The Rev. Dixie Potratz Lehman D.Min., Peer leader, Executive Director, Fargo-Moorhead CPE, Fargo, ND

We are American Baptist clergy from the Dakota Region, which includes both North and South Dakota. We have been fortunate to receive funding for our covenant group since 2004. Some of our members have taken churches in other regions, have retired, or have made other choices. Four of the original seven remain, and we have added new persons as others have left. The Rev. Dixie Potratz Lehman, D.Min., has been our peer/leader since the formation of the covenant group. She was curious to see if the transformational leadership model she uses with CPE students also would be helpful in a covenant group context with peer colleagues – so far, it has been working.

Since many of us are geographically isolated from one another, and since we work in ecumenical or multi-faith contexts, we cherish the time to meet with other American Baptist clergy. We have been trying to promote a spirit of generosity rather than scarcity. As we evaluated the group, we named what was **appreciated**.

- Each person has shared major stuff. We had a parent die, a son dying, major church conflict, and church transformation/progression/regression.
- Overnight format from Friday dinner to Saturday noon in a hotel, with no interruptions.
- A place to come to discuss what I experience with my gender as useful and helpful in a safe environment.
- A place to share all experiences with similar things to be understood.
- Growth in our camaraderie, and how well we know each other.

**Learning and Growth Areas:**

- We as a group grew close. It takes time until a group can share from the heart.
- Challenged to be open to a volunteer mission trip to the Philippines, which has been a joy of my ministry.
- It is ok to be weak and come broken.
- One member came at me at my lowest strength. She was challenged by the group and could not hear the challenge until later.

● The group understood conflict and church politics. I felt supported by American Baptist colleagues through the church conflict and into church transformation.

● One member came into the region as an outsider and was able to find colleagues.

● Scheduling and finding times to meet with major times between our meetings because of the distances we travel. Most of us travel between two-three hours to meet.

● We have grieved those who have left.

● Inspired by another peer to lose weight, one member lost thirty-eight pounds to date with two pounds to go for a mid-range healthy weight.

● One member who had fears was stretched to embrace the hopes and dreams she long desired. We launched her into ministry.

We have been attempting to experience community in healthy partnering with one another. Relationships are authentic and transparent, with both support and challenge. We have managed our differences, and we have worked with them. Peers have brought challenging cases from their churches, and we have discussed them openly, along with the parallel issues for the presenting pastor. We have shared our family genogram along with our church genogram. What we have been learning is that when we can have healthy partnerships with other clergy, it then is easier to model healthy partnerships in our congregations. Thank you to Lilly Endowment, Kate Harvey, and the Ministers Council for giving this opportunity to us to learn and grow together by cultivating wellness with one another and ourselves.



*We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every-one of you for one another is increasing. II Thessalonians 1:3*

## *Leadership Transformation in Maine*

*by Alan Shumway*



*The Rev. Alan L. Shumway serves as pastor of First Baptist Church, Waterville, ME, and as Leadership Transformation Mentor/Coach with American Baptist Churches of Maine. He has been an Area Minister and Minister of World Mission Support as full-time denominational staff for 1988 to 2006. He served as ABCOM staff liaison to the ABCOM Ministers Council for many years. He has received training in coaching through the Green Lake Coaching Center. Alan has extensive training and experience with Bowen Family Systems Theory, having attended clergy graduate seminars with the Center for Family Process and having taught and led pastoral systems consultation groups over the past ten years under the auspices of Western Maine Pastoral Care Services. His ministry began with ordination twenty-eight years ago and has included pastorates at First Baptist Church, Waterville for one year, as well as previous pastorates in Brookville, PA (1979-84) and Farmington, ME (1984-88).*

### ***Leadership Transformation Group participating pastors:***

The Rev. David Zamboni, Dryden Baptist Church, twenty-four years ordained; social worker

Pastor Everett Maxim, Vienna Baptist Church, thirteen years licensed; postal carrier

The Rev. Steve Rogers, North Vassalboro Baptist Church, eleven years ordained

Pastor Gary York, Riverside Baptist Church, four years licensed; social worker

Pastor Jon Olson, North Wayne Church, two years; seminary senior; Executive Director, lobbyist, Maine Farm Bureau

Pastor Russ Laflamme, Canton Baptist Church, three years licensed; benefits specialist

Pastor David Ricker, Phillips, four years ordained

Pastor Paul Keller, Quaker Hill Church, one year, insurance agent

Pastor Steve Donahue, Shawmut, two years; factory worker

The Rev. Alan Shumway, Waterville First Baptist Church, one year; ordained nineteen years; American Baptist Churches of Maine staff

Ministry in rural congregations can be an isolating and discouraging experience. This is even more likely when the pastor is part-time and has commitments to another employer. The pastor often finds attending typical weekday clergy gatherings very difficult to schedule. Pastor retreats are even less likely to attract him/her because it would require vacation time away from the "other" job.

Thanks to a Together in Ministry grant from the Lilly Endowment funds received by the Ministers Council of American Baptist Churches USA, a LEADERSHIP TRANSFORMATION GROUP (LTG), meets the first Monday night of each month to connect and encourage several such pastors. They gather with Maine's Executive Minister, Al Fletcher, and Leadership Transformation Mentor/Coach Alan Shumway at the Baptist church in Vienna, Maine, to talk about new ways of providing pastoral leadership in the congregations they serve. They come with a common goal of growing as leaders who guide congregations through change. It is not a place to compare war stories or complain about the people with whom they minister. Instead, these pastors learn together about being change agents as they read books and discuss their impressions and challenges to their thinking from the reading. They also talk about the things God is doing in the churches they serve as new approaches are introduced that move congregations from a stagnant "inward" focus to a more dynamic "outward" focus in ministry.

These pastors are discovering new ways to think about and practice pastoral ministry. While continuing to take seriously their roles as preachers/teachers/worship leaders and pastoral care providers, these pastors are seeing "the leading of a congregation through change" as a primary function they may have overlooked in the past. In fact, they are seeing the way they approach the regular duties of being a pastor can be transformed by a new vision for the future of the church. It is a significant shift in thinking and practice to move from "maintenance mentality" to "transformational leadership" with a congregation.

Early in the life of this group, participants were challenged to look at their spiritual life-journeys and the churches they served to honestly discern whether or not they were all they could be. A "holy discontent" was discovered and encouraged as a beginning place for envisioning and creating a brighter future in ministry. Together, these pastors encourage one another to "imagine a possible future, a preferred future", for themselves as pastoral leaders and for their congregations as expressions of the mission of Jesus Christ.

The LTG is a place of "coaching leaders" and "leaders coaching" to live into the future God wants for them and the churches with whom they minister. They share ideas as well as the successes and disappointments in their pastoral leadership. They encourage and inspire one another to try new things and dare new things for Christ the practice of pastoral ministry.

In one meeting, the group looked at the titles they gave to sermons they preached. They were challenged to create titles that call people to forward movement, to change, and to transformation both individually and corporately. They also considered the creating of orders of worship that had a sense of forward movement and vitality. Leading individuals and congregations toward action that evidences the presence and leading of Christ.

This group is composed primarily of bi-vocational pastors, most of whom are also second-career pastors. They are all too aware of the limited time they have to “do the ministry for the church.” That is probably a good thing! They are eager to find approaches to and practices of pastoral ministry that “equip the saints” to be people of vision and passion in ministry together. Two group participants have served with their congregations for more than ten years, and two are serving new charges for less than two years. The remainder are in five to ten year pastorates. Some have formal seminary education and some don't. Some are ordained and some are not. For six of the ten, this is first congregation where they have been pastor. These congregations range in size from twenty to fifty attending Sunday morning worship.

Through the funding provided by Together in Ministry, these pastors gather on a Saturday in the spring and in the fall, with key lay leaders from their congregations, as well as with other pastors from across the state, for INSIGHT conferences. At these events, nationally recognized pastoral leaders provide education and inspiration for transformational ministry in local congregations. Dan Southerland, author of *Transitioning*, Jeff Johnson, National Ministries promoter of GOT STYLE? training in evangelism for the local church, are among the presenters.

Together in Ministry is making a difference for these pastors and for the congregations where they are growing into transformational pastoral leaders. They are not isolated or discouraged, for they have become a learning community.



*Support  
Through the  
Transitions*  
by Alan Newton



*The Rev. Dr. Alan Newton's family heritage is out of the German Anabaptist tradition settling in central Pennsylvania in the early 1800s. These "Dunkards" were pacifist and among the first identifiable groups in America to oppose slavery. Alan chose to become an American Baptist forty-one years ago and accepted the call to ministry thirty-two years ago. He was ordained in 1979 and has served churches in Cranston, RI, Madison, WI and Milwaukee, WI. He accepted the call to the American Baptist Churches of Rochester-Genesee Region as their Executive Minister five years ago.*

***The Learning Cluster on Transformational Leadership:***

- The Rev. Dr. W. Kenneth Williams, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Rochester, NY
- The Rev. Dr. Keith Harrington, MSW Student
- The Rev. Steve Hartman, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Penfield, NY
- The Rev. Arlen Vernava, Pastor, Baptist Temple, Rochester, NY
- The Rev. Harry Williamson, Pastor, First Baptist Church, East Rochester, NY
- The Rev. Ken Watkins, Chaplain, Fairport Baptist Home, NY
- The Rev. Jim Hegley, Pastor, United Church, Pittsford, NY
- The Rev. Peter Carman, Pastor, Lake Avenue Baptist Church, Rochester, NY

Four years before coming to the Executive Minister position, I had the opportunity to participate in what I now regard as a “ministry makeover.” My seminary training had carried me through two decades of ministry and had served me well, but suddenly I found myself unequipped for the challenges of ministry at the brink of the new century. The church I served had been in significant decline for nearly a half a century, and it was becoming clear it would not survive unless something changed. The church was over structured and without the personnel to support the structure. The ministry was under funded and understaffed. Building maintenance and expenses were taking a greater share of the budget and the time and attention of leadership each year. The membership had no vision for the future, and had become increasingly dependent on paid staff to carry out the ministry. It wasn't a pretty picture - and the view of the future was shadowed by clouds of depression. It was clear to me my ministry toolbox did not contain the tools necessary to turn this situation around.

Fortunately, the Rev. Sam Brink, the Minister of Congregational Resources and Mission Support of the ABC of Wisconsin, had developed a new program for congregational transformation which he called New Church/New Century which introduced clergy and lay leadership to persons such as Leonard Sweet, Tom Bandy, Bill Easum, and John Savage. While the eighteen month “retraining” program did not provide all the answers, it did set me and the church I served on a path toward greater health and vitality.

Participating in New Church/New Century taught me two important lessons which I carried with me into this new calling as Executive Minister. The first was that transformation was possible for almost any congregation, and the second lesson was that transformation was very difficult for every congregation because it meant change. Transformative change is the most difficult sort of change because it is strategic and systemic, which means changing not only what we do but also who we are at the core. Transformative change is significant change which almost necessarily places substantial stress on both church and pastor. Therefore, any pastor desirous of making the journey was going to require a substantial amount of support.

The support came miraculously through the Together in Ministry Grant program. Literally within months of my coming to Rochester as Executive Minister, the Ministers Council announced their receipt of a Lilly Endowment Grant to provide support to clergy. Once the request for proposals was available, I started making calls to pastors who might benefit from a collegial support group. I came up with an initial list of eight potential group members who might be interested in what I was describing as a Learning Cluster on Transformative Leadership. The idea was that we would use the yearly grant to purchase reading materials which we



would study and discuss at our meetings which were to be held every three weeks. To my surprise, all eight invited pastors eagerly agreed to be a part of the cluster.

After four years and more book discussions than any of us can remember, we continue to meet monthly and retreat annually with a group of pastors who have become trusted friends. One pastor transitioned out of the ministry; he has gone back to college for a new career in social work, but continues to meet with the group. One pastor who told me he was too close to retirement to consider retooling for ministry now embraces change in his congregation and in his life. The group has carried one another through personal crises and has provided honest feedback in facing the challenges of congregational transformation. The support group has gone from being a “nice idea” to an important part of each of our lives. The group members seldom miss meetings, and those few times where individuals have to miss, they are intentional about checking in to find out what happened and what are the next steps and future dates.

Transformation is not an easy process, nor does it occur quickly. In some ways, transformation is a post-modern description of sanctification – the ongoing process of drawing closer to God. When a church is in the process of transforming, one of the identifiable marks is an intentional process of drawing near to God’s heart for that congregation. They seek the answer to, “What is God’s hope for this congregation in this time and place?” Similarly, the members of this learning cluster are drawing closer to the heart of God’s will for their lives.

The role of pastor and shepherd is shifting to that of spiritual director and leader among leaders. The dominant role of clergy, the dependence congregations have on their pastors, and the excessive expectations of pastors is slowly giving way to a shared ministry approach where the gifts of lay members are being claimed and used for significant ministry.

Congregations transform as they become more tied to their communities through ministries of compassion and mercy. These changes are not subtle or insignificant. For some churches, it is a 180° shift at their eleventh hour when any change is particularly challenging and difficult. Similar radical changes must occur with the pastoral and lay leadership and the expectations on their time. For example: one of the first steps toward transformation for pastors is seeking the congregation’s blessing to spend a greater share of their time and energy devoted to those outside the church rather than ministering to church members. First steps are always the most

difficult and demanding. When an infant takes her very first step, it is scary and shaky and unsteady. The distance between zero and one is huge for this child, and yet there is no other way except to take that first step. In a church which has for decades focused its attention on survival, releasing the pastor and church leaders to fulfill the Great Commission is a huge first step, but it is one which must be taken if the church is to be faithful, vibrant, and relevant.

Our reading resources initially were focused specifically on books by the leading “experts” on transformation. One of the first books we read was ***Kicking Habits*** by Tom Bandy. In some ways, this is a transformation primer where Bandy leads the reader through the process of deconstruction/reconstruction of the church, thus creating a new paradigm. Later, we moved to two books by Brian McLaren, ***A New Kind of Christian*** and ***A Generous Orthodoxy*** which brought us on an experiential journey of post-modernism.

In the second and third years, our interests have broadened to Malcolm Gladwell’s ***The Tipping Point, God’s Politics*** by Jim Wallis, and ***The Heart of Christianity*** by Marcus Borg. Our interests broadened as our focus on our role as pastors today expanded.

On the current docket for the group are ***The New Rabbi*** by Stephen Fried, ***Saving Souls, Serving Society*** by Ronald J. Sider and Heidi Rolland Unruh, and ***Awareness*** by Anthony De Mello. These three books on our reading list typify the journey we are on. Through Fried’s book, we fishbowl a congregation’s search for leadership. Sider and Unruh help us explore the spiritual meaning of social action, and De Mello’s work jolts us to a new recognition of Jesus’ calling to be Christians. The breadth of the subject matter of our reading demonstrates our expanding understanding of transformation which must be integrated into all aspects of our lives.

What has become the highlight of each year is our annual retreat. We take off for two and a half days to one of our State Parks. There, our sole agenda is building relationships. We hike, we cook, we talk, we pray, we recreate and renew ourselves and each other. The hikes we take, like the journey we are on, are challenging, invigorating, and inspiring. The journey is not linear nor is it always rational, but we are finding that it is faithful. The important point is that we are on this journey together. We now are nine sojourners wandering in a wilderness which is sometimes exotic and other times outlandish - but always authentic.

## *Together in Ministry: A Way of Life*

by Vivian Martindale



*The Rev. Vivian H. Martindale is currently pastor of Middle Street Baptist Church in Portsmouth, NH. He has been involved in “old first church” ministries for over twenty-five years. He likens the work to renovating an old house... while you live in it. You cannot do over all the rooms at once; some floors will always be slanted and corners out of plumb. It will take more time than you could conceive, be more complex than you could imagine, cost more than you ever expect, and requires a realization “the project” will never be done. However, the beauty and character of ongoing legacy and livability are exquisite.*  
[www.middlestreetbaptist.org](http://www.middlestreetbaptist.org)

### *Transformational Ministry Group, American Baptist Churches of Vermont-New Hampshire:*

- The Rev. Dr. David Doyle, Pastor, United Baptist Church, Concord, NH
- Ms. Stephanie Johnson, minister in transition, Epping, NH
- The Rev. James Malkemes, Pastor, Newton Junction Baptist Church, Newton Junction, NH
- The Rev. Vivian H. Martindale, Pastor, Middle Street Baptist Church, Portsmouth, NH
- The Rev. Chris McMicken, Pastor, Goffstown Christian Fellowship, Goffstown, NH
- The Rev. Dr. J. Ramsey Michaels, Retired New Testament Professor, Portsmouth, NH
- The Rev. Jamie Moynihan, Pastor, Exeter First Baptist Church, Exeter, NH
- The Rev. James F. Smith, Pastor, Danville Baptist Church, Danville, NH

Seeds were planted while studying at American Baptist Seminary of the West—Covina in the late ‘60s during the time of the experimental team-teaching curriculum. Professors with “turf” invested themselves in working together to give us a holistic team-teaching approach to faith, learning, and ministry. They were my first models for how the sum of the parts becomes more than the whole. I watched as highly accomplished academics/clergy modeled respect, appreciation, and even dependency on each other as New Testament, Church History, and Systematic Theology, etc., came together in one classroom. I watched them spin off each other and go down paths we would not have explored had we not been traveling together.

Since that time, I have sought out collegial relationship with others in ministry. These relationships have taken different shapes over my thirty-five years of ministry in both parish and specialized ministries. There has been no single model that fit all the time. Early in ministry, the model was an ecumenical community clergy group; later, in an isolated ministry setting, it was a colleague from a different denomination, old enough to be my father, who agreed to meet me for breakfast every Friday morning. I wonder if I were approached the same way now if I would give away that much of myself for nearly five years as he did. I hope so.

Later in my ministry, a group met for breakfast for informal conversation, food, and sharing. That was helpful but very unstructured. A need arose to deal with more concrete issues and events in our ministries. Some of us gathered and proposed a Case Study Method Colleague Support Group. The Case Study Method requires participants rotate presenting a ministry situation/event based on a model developed by the Academy of Parish Clergy and growing out of the Harvard Business School model. This group lasted approximately eight years. The group, which was extremely helpful, included men and women, young and old, and all from a wide variety of theological perspectives. Confidentiality allowed us to share deeply. An important component was sharing a meal in between two cases; it was a very personal and unstructured hour of just "being with" each other. The women at the church hosting lunch used to say how much they enjoyed the loud laughter of lunchtime. Humor was always evident, necessary, and helpful.

After twenty-one years in Michigan, I moved to American Baptist Churches of Vermont-New Hampshire: I found myself in a different culture and ecclesiastical history, and deep into an extended period of instability and seismic change. I was adrift. Our region, like many others, was going through financial, structural, and staffing changes which left most of the preexisting support systems in tatters. I tried external continuing education events, the occasional breakfast meeting, regional retreats, and judicatory workshops. They didn't quite fill the bill. I asked around for more structured and close knit groups but none were found. I was three years into my move and feeling "collegially parched." There seemed to be few colleagues who had ever experienced the depth of collegial support and engagement upon which I had come to depend in my ministry.

When the TIM proposal came forward, I immediately responded: I began to recruit colleagues, twist arms, and even bribe with the reminder there was a \$100 book grant. Our original group included full

and part-time pastors, ordained and not, seminary students and a retired professor, men and women, ages from 20s to 70s, cradle roll ABC members as well as others from different denominational backgrounds. We all, however, were serving in ABC affiliated ministries.

We have created a hybrid case study method for the group. We meet off site from any of our congregations and use some of the grant money to contribute toward the cost of space. We do a "check-in time" and usually find out how we are doing personally. There is a case study process for about an hour and fifteen minutes, and then we eat a bag lunch together and continue conversations around check-in and case study issues. We have occasionally substituted a book reading and discussion, and also have used grant money to cover the cost of attending workshops together.

Using the case study method as a core helps us to stay focused on issues with a purpose in mind. The process includes a Facilitator to keep on task, and a Process Observer who gives feedback on how we interact with the subject and each other. The Presenter offers a one page description and self-analysis of a ministry event. The Presenter then listens to the group conversation about the case, but remains quiet for approximately forty-five minutes while the "issue" and "event" of the case are discussed. The Presenter then gives feedback to the group on their helpfulness, and the Process Observer gives feedback on how the group did in the big picture.

When the case study method is first used, it can feel very awkward and even a bit contrived and stilted. However, as time passes, the usefulness of each role becomes clearer as each group member rotates through the roles and becomes more attuned to the experience as a whole. I am convinced the case study method works best when the other personal dimensions of the support group relationships grow and deepen. The structured and unstructured aspects feed each other.

The check-in process creates a relational foundation for the case study through giving personal and professional updates on life as a whole, genuinely listening to each other, sharing experiences, and periodically praying for one another. There is a rhythm that establishes itself between the discipline of the case and the more informal relating over food and conversation. We occasionally add the different dynamic of reacting to a book reading, a resource person, or a shared continuing education event.

While we meet only once a month, there is an unmistakable bond which is evident when group members encounter each other in different settings. Relationships built in ministry support groups are not limited to the monthly three-hour time frame. The support splashes over into personal lives, job searches, kids, spouses, grief-work, and in serving our region and communities.

Certain characteristics seem to be essential for the success of support groups. There must be an awareness, or at least a willingness to consider, that life in ministry is better when done with a support group. There are some colleagues who have never been exposed to these kinds of relationships and consequently have no frame of reference for judging them positively or negatively. I have great respect for colleagues who may not have experienced this from the beginning of ministry, but who take the risk and choose along the way to try a ministry support group as a new part of ministry.

There must be a commitment to the group and the schedule, as well as personal respect between members. Typically, we are all present unless we are ill, there is a funeral that cannot be rescheduled or there is vacation scheduled.

The agreement of confidentiality within the group helps develop trust and transparency, which encourages interchange, affirmation, and critique to flow comfortably. Trust grows through all of these dynamics and develops like a suspension bridge. First, thin strands of wire are strung back and forth from side to side until those thin and fragile wires become a sturdy cable of trust and confidence. This level of relationship, while taking the most time and effort to develop, is by far the most important characteristic of the support group. It bears the weight of all the other dimensions of the relationships.

Together in Ministry is respect, transparency, mentoring, sharing, structure, flexibility, laughter, confidentiality, and commitment.



## Exhorting in the 21st Century

by Kevin Walden



*The Rev. Kevin Walden is currently the Senior Pastor of Miracle Hills Community Baptist Church in Omaha, NE. He was raised in Omaha, where his parents still attend First Baptist, the church that first issued his License to Preach some twenty plus years ago. He holds degrees from Ottawa University, Central Seminary and is nearing the completion of a D. Min. at Fuller Theological Seminary. Kevin has served churches of various sizes in Kansas and Nebraska for over twenty years. In addition, Kevin also serves as the American Baptist Churches of Nebraska Regional Coordinator for Theological Education, and Grant Coordinator and Vice President for the ABC/NE Ministers Council. His wife Melody is an elementary school counselor in the Omaha Metropolitan area, and serves the church as praise team coordinator.*

### **The Exhorters Group:**

The Rev. Dr. Larry Adams, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Columbus, NE  
 The Rev. Leland Foreman, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Fremont, NE  
 Chaplain Diane Jorgensen, Chaplain, Maple Crest Care Center, Omaha, NE  
 The Rev. Dr. Gam Lahpai, Pastor, First Kachin Baptist Church of America, Omaha, NE  
 The Rev. Paul Marine, Pastor, Benson Baptist Church, Omaha, NE  
 The Rev. Carl Ratcliff, Pastor, United Faith Community Church, Valley, NE  
 Ms. MaryBeth Robertson, Program Director, Camp Moses Merrill, Linwood, NE  
 The Rev. Joan Stewart, Pastor: Parkside Baptist Church, Omaha, Nebraska  
 The Rev. Kevin Walden, Pastor, Miracle Hills Church, Omaha, NE

Years ago, long before American Baptists were blessed with TIM (Together In Ministry) Groups, a small band of five Christian brothers began to gather monthly to exhort one another in ministry. Their original goal was simple: to survive the pressures and trials of ministry, and at the same time to remain open to the leadings of the very Spirit of God. They already had discovered that the tendency under the pressures of ministry circumstances was to solve one's own struggles and not first look to the Lord – "from where our help comes." (Psalm 121) They named their group, "The Exhorters."

One time in particular, one of the brothers was going through a particularly rough time with his church leadership – could have been any of us. The group banded together to purchase T-Shirts for the brother and his wife which read, “Thanks For Your Opinion, But You Didn’t Die For My Sins.” The print was large enough to easily have been read from a distance – on purpose. You may laugh at that, and it’s okay. But in retrospect, the group realized that each of us is a part of the problems with which we struggle in our congregations. Here’s a challenge: try wearing that shirt, looking in the mirror, as you pray to God.

Dallas Willard wrote in *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* that we should praise God we [pastors] have not been called to be the accusers of His people. Sometimes in pastoral gatherings, it seems as though we believe this is exactly our call: to accuse God’s people of being less holy than they should be. We even try to one up each other with stories of whose congregation is better at the lack of holiness. We don’t say it in that way, but our intentions are clear. Our small group began to realize the Lord desired something very different of us and from us.

What does it mean to be an exhorter in the 21st Century? Webster’s Dictionary says an exhorter is one who urgently warns and/or gives advice. The Greek word often translated as “encourage” is *parakaleo*. This is where our English language loses a bit in translation, because truth be told, it is a strong encouragement – akin to pleading or begging. The idea here is that you are addressing someone you know well, and you “encourage” them *strongly* to consider something. *Parakaleo* is from the root word *para*, which is a prime word meaning to be near or beside. Sound like *parakletos*? Sound like the word used in 1 John 2:1 to describe that when we sin, we have an advocate or helper who intercedes for us before the Lord? The idea again here is that the Counselor or Advocate comes *alongside* us to *plead* on our behalf. This is the work of the heavenly exhorter.

So, we gather to exhort. We push each other on ideas, decisions, theology, and life. It is difficult at times, and at times, feelings get hurt. But, there is love and trust in the group, and we all believe that everyone is looking out for the other person’s best interest and spiritual growth. In a nutshell, we are striving to foster excellence in each other’s walk with Christ. We are striving to encourage or exhort each other’s quest for holiness. We have discovered that all too often life and ministry is all about us, instead of being all about Christ. The TIM group is a great encouragement to keeping the focus on the Lord.

There are two of our original five still in our TIM group, which now numbers seven plus our facilitator. The group is now multi-ethnic, and includes both men and women pastoral leaders who gather monthly from fifty plus miles apart. We’ve studied books aiming at intentional individual spiritual growth. We spent a year studying and practicing Ignatian Spirituality. This year, we are studying the impact of film and media on our culture and ministry.

I asked our group how the covenant group helps to maintain pastoral excellence, and here are their responses:

- The group has helped me in the areas of trust and accountability. I have grown to trust the members as we’ve met and shared things that are difficult in almost every other setting. The trust has grown my ability to be honest and share.
- The group has helped me to maintain emotional and spiritual stability against the stresses of ministry. And, the group has kept me in the ministry when I considered leaving.
- The group has been instrumental in keeping me sane, seriously.
- The group has pushed me in the areas of trust, openness, vulnerability, and encouragement. It has been a safe place to discuss theology and the implications of how I think and how others think.
- The group has helped me be a better recipient of God’s grace, and helped me to focus on someone other than myself.
- The group has enabled me to work out solutions to serious problems.
- The group has created a space for me to experience a greater freedom in my walk with Christ.
- The group has shown me great wisdom, because some of them have “been there and done that.”

I asked our group if they had any theological insight into why pastoral leaders need one another to be at the best God desires of them, and here are their responses:

- As iron sharpens iron, we need each other in order to grow. None of us has all the gifts of ministry. None of us possesses all knowledge needed for effective ministry. Together, in our sharing, as well as in the content of our group’s curriculum, we learn and grow in our relationship with Christ.
- We as ministers often feel “alone at the top” and like Lone Rangers in our ministry. In that process, it’s possible to get in the mode that “I” am the most important part of ministry and lose the focus on God being the reason for the church. In maintaining my “theology,” I need to hear from my group how God is working, and be accountable to Him alone.
- It is the best anti-Lone Ranger activity I know.

- We are challenged to become more – the best that we can be. To be transparent and real.
- We are fairly good at explaining to the people in the pew why church relationships and church involvement is important, but sometimes we forget we need these relationships ourselves. And, it isn't appropriate for us as clergy to be struggling through all of these issues in front of our congregations. A peer group is crucial in fostering God's best for our lives, too!

As you review the comments from our covenant group, I believe you can begin to see we really are "exhorters" in one another's lives. One of members said the other day that without this kind of leadership in their lives, they might not be married, their adult child might not be in college, and their associate in ministry might not still be their associate! The covenant groups make a difference.


As the grant coordinator from our Region (American Baptist Churches of Nebraska), I can tell you that all six of our groups have similar stories. The vast majority of our pastors are in a covenant group – either a TIM group or a group they've designed on their own. The quality of leadership in our Region has substantially increased in the past five years. Many of the pastoral leaders are the same, but they are less alone, more accountable, and doing ministry in a more excellent way – and it is noticeable. Most dramatic to me are the few pastors who have been asked to leave their churches; they are able to do so with hope and grace, because they are surrounded by a support group.

I close with two major personal learnings. 1) My identity is not in being a pastor, but rather is rooted in Christ, and 2) The people who annoy me the most are often the people most like myself – and they exhibit what I most dislike about myself. Learning and accepting these truths has been a freeing and liberating experience for me. My heartfelt thanks on behalf of "The Exhorters" and the ABC/NE Regional pastors in covenant groups to the national staff of the Ministers Council and the Lilly Endowment for the vision and encouragement in sustaining pastoral excellence. You have made a quality difference in our lives. We are thankful, and we believe the kingdom is blessed because of it.



*Truly  
Together in  
Ministry*

by David DeMott



*The Rev. David DeMott was raised in an American Baptist parsonage and never left. He has served three churches in the Great Rivers Region. Most recently, he has served as the Executive Director of the Baptist Student Foundation at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He is President of the American Baptist Campus Ministries Association, (ABCMA). For four years, he has facilitated a group of American Baptist Pastors in the Mattoon, Illinois area. Currently David is doing free-lance interim work while finishing his Doctor of Ministry degree through Fuller Theological Seminary in the area of Christian Spirituality. With his wife Sheryl, he has three grown children. David currently lives in Mahomet, Illinois. He can be reached at [dndemott@gmail.com](mailto:dndemott@gmail.com).*

***The Mattoon Cluster Group:***

- The Rev. John Stewart, Pastor, First Baptist Church of Arthur, IL
- The Rev. Pat Murphy, Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church of Charleston, IL
- The Rev. Dr. Mike Snow, Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church of Mattoon, IL
- The Rev. John Lobos, Pastor, First Baptist Church of Paris, IL
- The Rev. Bob Bertrand, Assoc. Pastor, First Baptist Church of Charleston, IL
- The Rev. Bob Clapp, Pastor, First Baptist Church of Arcola, IL
- The Rev. Stephanie Johanpeter, Pastor, Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, Cooks Mills, IL
- The Rev. Gene Godfrey, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Sullivan, IL

*"But since often, when preaching is abundantly poured forth in fitting ways, the mind of the speaker is elevated in itself by a hidden delight in self-display, great care is needed that he may gnaw himself with the laceration of fear, lest he who recalls the diseases of others to health by remedies should himself swell through neglect of his own health; lest in helping others he desert himself, lest in lifting up others he fall. For in some the greatness of their virtue has often been the occasion of their perdition; causing them, while inordinately secure in confidence of strength, to die unexpectedly through negligence." (The Book of Pastoral Rule by Gregory the Great, c. 590)*

Let it be clear from the start. I am uncomfortable with self-disclosure. The way I see it, my life is a room with a single door. I will keep this door open only to the degree I feel safe. Some people walk by and ignore it. I do not mind. I can smile and wait for the next passer by. When someone is in the area, looks in, and pretends to be interested with a comment or two about mundane things, I will act cordial, but may close the door a bit out of laziness, or open it out of curiosity. Moods do that. Too many of these kinds of people make life superficial and meaningless. Worst of all, however, is when someone stops, steps in, convinces me of interest, comments on the ambiance, stays for coffee, shares deeply from their story line, and then leaves to tell others of clutter, smells, bad tasting java, and the need for new neighbors. Then, I close the door, hoping that guests will miraculously come in through the peephole.

I am nervous when I talk about myself. It makes me too vulnerable. So why have I already used the first person singular twelve times? Because my door is open for a few moments. Come and see. Maybe my room is similar to yours.

I am a pastor. I am one of you, one of us. And I need you. Maybe, just maybe, you need me. Our stories are not the same, but we share so much. I know what it means to be clergy in today's world. You see, I, too . . .

- skipped Hebrew class in seminary
- wondered what ordination is, at my own
- helped some teenagers figure out God's randomness (while looking for a finger in the river)
- preached a bad, really bad sermon
- gave a cancer victim permission to die
- officiated at a grave side service with an audience of one
- said, "I don't know," when asked "Why did God let this happen?"
- baptized the stage as well as the businessman when the baptistry was too full
- shoveled snow, cursing the custodian who didn't show
- refused to talk stewardship because it was my salary
- finished preparation of a sermon on the way to the pulpit
- preached while I was sick
- yelled at my kids in front of parishioners
- got burnt by the transient, again
- prayed over the cold and still body of a two day old
- stood and watched as the parents wept inconsolably
- felt my own soul go limp while doing the theology of tears
- taught a bible study on a text I didn't fully understand

- breathed the strong breath of an irate parishioner
- counseled the divorcing couple I married
- slept all Sunday afternoon because of the euphoria of a well preached sermon
- slept all Sunday afternoon because of an unfair criticism
- was asked to love
- was asked to leave

I am one of us. And woven into all these experiences are two things: a call into the reconciling ministry of Jesus Christ, and a rebellion against that same call. I love what I do, but I sometimes hate what it does to me.

We need each other. Not because we need a place to share show-and-tell, I-can-do-better-than-that, well-look-how-many-I-had stories that are as shallow as a poorly told joke. But because there is something rich and holy but heartrending and lonely about being asked to carry out God's own mission along side His Son. It is glorious work. But it is a hard vocation. We need to share more than our stories; we need to claim our corporate nature in the Triune God. We must feed from and with each other or "*die unexpectedly through negligence.*"

### **The work of the Group**

Over the past three and one half years, I have had the privilege of facilitating a group of Pastors who have come together because of a shared calling. While the cluster did have a pre-TIM<sup>1</sup> history, the reason we are what we are today is that someone somewhere thought highly enough of the church and its servants to provide a space for leaders to find themselves, and to honestly face each other and the issues that make a difference. There are too many who have not responded to this opportunity. Our Together In Ministry group chose to accept the gift.

Our group began four years ago with a study of the spiritual disciplines. With the help of Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, and others<sup>2</sup>, we looked at the practices that invite an intensification of life in Christ.<sup>3</sup> Right out of the gate, then, we chose to give attention to our own spirituality. Issues of justice and mercy, social consciousness and church structure, being programmatically well informed and having a generous orthodoxy, are all crucial aspects of the minister's task. However, if pastors are not being spiritually transformed, any effort they lead will be off center. Peter Scazzero is on target. "The overall health of any church or ministry depends primarily on the emotional and spiritual health of its leadership." (Scazzero and Bird 2003) Our group determined to begin by addressing our spiritual well being on our way to good health.

In group work, it is crucial to move beyond individuality. This is neither automatic nor easy. One of the dangers of a clergy group is that members can come away more focused on their own ideas and perceptions. This may validate the individual, but the life of the group does not mature. There must be a communal spirituality. Without a consciousness of a shared spirituality, a group will bear little fruit for the Kingdom.<sup>4</sup> If individuals simply vent, pontificate, share opinions, or get information without truly sharing life together, then the Holy Spirit is limited in what he can do and the body of Christ is crippled. Someone can be “self-differentiated,” but there is still need for a corporate identity. Over the years, our group found this out. Even as a facilitator, I feel a kinship to this group of seven men and one wonderful woman, more so than I have felt with any other group. I believe they share the same sentiment. We have become one in Christ.

### **The work of the facilitator**

Because I have had the privilege of facilitating, I will take the rest of this opportunity to articulate my findings from that perspective. Choosing a facilitator is obviously an important task if a group is serious about ‘taking care of (God’s) businesses.’ I do not pretend to be an expert by any stretch of the imagination. I am only a sojourner, seeking my place on the path. That said, I hope the following is helpful for both clergy groups and their facilitators.

### **The Person**

The role of the facilitator in clergy groups is to invite both the selfing and unselfing of group members. This follows the Biblical mandate to find one’s self by losing it<sup>5</sup>. As members develop a deeper understanding of their individual identity, they are able to discover self-in-service to the whole body of Christ and to the world. The opposite is also true. When one sacrifices for the sake of the whole, one can discover his or her truest self. This can only happen when members face their own humanness and readily accept each other’s offerings of grace. Ray Anderson, speaking on the importance of discernment in ministry, says, “*The capacity for discernment begins with openness to the reality of one’s own life as humanly flawed and spiritually graced.*” (Italics original) (Anderson 1997) Group members have to be real, true to themselves and others, and be open to self-discovery. They must also enable the same in other members. As Anderson indicates, the capacity for discernment in all aspects of ministry begins as pastors give attention to the totality of their human nature, both what it needs and what it offers.

The facilitator, then, encourages member vulnerability by inviting introspection. This must be done gently; it takes place over time as trust between

facilitator and group members matures. As individuals begin to invite others into their room, the facilitator encourages the exchange of healing words, and reminds each of the promises of scripture and the presence of the Holy Spirit. The wise facilitator uses a variety of formats. He or she might wrestle transparently with a common issue. Sometimes reflective listening is best. At other times, the gift of silence is needed. Probing questions are appropriate only insofar as they help meet the needs of the group and bring all to a deeper self-awareness in the context of the subject matter.

The facilitator can exemplify vulnerability, but self-disclosure is useful only when it helps the group develop deeper levels of trust. Facilitators do the group a grave disservice when they use the group for their own ego needs. The group will soon discover the subtle motives and begin to counter with their own agendas. Trust will not develop and the group will not reach its full potential.

### **Theology**

A clergy group facilitator must be willing to think theologically about group identity and process. What embedded theology do individuals bring to the group? (Stone and Duke 1996)<sup>6</sup> When is it appropriate to expose theological assumptions? What role does deliberative theology play in the group setting? (Stone and Duke 1996)<sup>7</sup> How does the facilitator’s own theology, embedded or deliberative, affect the group?

All members of a clergy group must assume that each one has the capacity to think critically about matters of faith, and is able to give a ready defense for his or her belief structures.<sup>8</sup> Howard Stone says, “Our faith is at once a gift of God and a human response; theology is an integral part of that human response. Theology is a seeking after understanding – a process of thinking about life in the light of the faith that Christians engage in because of their calling.”(Stone and Duke 1996) Because theology is our personal response to God, theological discussions can sometimes be argumentative. However, agapic love must rule the day. When it does, the group is able to reach new depths of understanding and entertain more creative ideas about the life of faith.

The role of the facilitator is to create an invitation to theological inquiry, and at the same time, be sensitive to emotional baggage that can hinder one’s search for truth. It is not the role of the facilitator to judge, but to allow for a healthy exposure to doubts, all the while affirming deeply held beliefs. This is not the responsibility of the facilitator alone, however. He or she must invite the entire group to be *with* the others in the critical thinking process.

Two areas of theological inquiry are of particular importance. The first has to do with the theology of the call; the second with the spiritual dynamics that make the group what it is. While these will underlie everything the group does, there are times when these must be brought into greater focus.

Facilitators must invite clergy to talk about their own 'with-God' lives, and beginnings matter. Accounts of the conversion experience are life informing. This is true for clergy as well as anyone else. Newbigin reminds us that, "The conversion for which Jesus calls, and which the Spirit now effects in those who turn to him, is a radically new way of understanding: it involves at the same time a demand for total self-surrender and the gift of utter security." (Newbigin 1989) Conversion is a humbling experience, representing a personal paradigm shift, affecting both one's thinking and behaving. When members share under what circumstances their covenant with God through faith in Jesus Christ began, the group is enriched. When members can admit to both the willingness and the struggle for self-surrender and utter security, members come to see the similarities in their journey.

A clergy group allows for focused discussion on the theology of one's individual call to ministry: What is it? How does our discernment of a 'call' shape understanding of our personal world? In what ways does it connect us to the mission of Jesus Christ?

A humble re-assessment of the role of the laity in ecclesiology is crucial if clergy are to face vocational issues head on. Stevens reminds us that church leaders come from *among* the people (*laos*). "When we enter the world of the New Testament we find only one people, the true *laos* of God, with leaders among the people." (Stevens 1999)

An honest appraisal of our place in God's rule begins with a Biblical understanding of what happens between God and His people. God supplies the needs of His people as they make their requests known to Him in prayer. Anderson explains.

"The calling of a minister is first of all to participate in Christ's calling to serve the Father and, secondarily, to go where one is sent, as did Jesus. A congregation in need of pastoral leadership calls out to God, preparing its self-study and specifying its needs. The 'call' is thus not directly to the candidate for the position, but directly to God and only indirectly to the candidate. The assumption is that God hears the 'call' of the people (as in the case of the people in Egypt) and 'sends' a pastor to lead the people in the ministry of God (as in the case of Moses)." (Anderson 1997)

The facilitator attempts to keep these matters in perspective. It is so easy to lose one's self in the mundane details of current church life as well as one's assessment of it and reaction to it. One's human relating easily overshadows the divine relationship. Only as we see the deeper truths of our calling are we empowered to carry out our sent-ness and meet the needs, not of our people, but of God's people. The facilitator must keep these truths before the group, whatever the topic of discussion.

The facilitator of clergy groups must understand the nature of Christian community if the group is to move toward a deeper awareness of God's activity in and among group members. Group life, even though it is punctiliar<sup>9</sup>, can still exhibit all the characteristics of body life. I suggest an environment where fact-finding, truth discovery, insight sharing, and relation building are matrixed so that we invite, dare I say expect, an identity change.

Robert Bellah, the Berkley Sociologist, writes profoundly about how the external world defines us.

"We find ourselves not independently of other people and institutions but through them. We never get to the bottom of our selves on our own. We discover who we are face to face and side by side with others in work, love, and learning. All of our activity goes on in relationships, groups, associations, and communities ordered by institutional structures and interpreted by cultural patterns of meaning. ... We are parts of a larger whole that we can neither forget nor imagine in our own image without paying a high price. If we are not to have a self that hangs in the void, slowly twisting in the wind, these are issues we cannot ignore."<sup>10</sup>

Grenz and Franke pick up this same theme when they write about the community as being 'theology's integrative motif'. (Grenz and Franke 2001) There are three community identifiers; the consciousness of a shared frame of reference; a group focus; a balance between group orientation and its 'people focus', thus, "The members draw their personal identity from the community." (Grenz and Franke 2001) What makes clergy groups community, then, is the shared pastoral reference, focus on the issues pertinent to pastoral leadership, and the fact that we gain an understanding of ourselves and our roles from other clergy. Clergy must avoid at all costs the postmodern understanding of individualization. If they do not, not only do they impoverish their ministry, they will ultimately lead their congregations away from Biblical truths that speak of body life and shared ministry.<sup>11</sup>

Again, the facilitator can keep these matters before the group, not as the group conscience, but as a guide, exposing the space into which new ideas and discoveries find a safe home. Of course, the ultimate authority is scripture, and groups are made wealthier when they can affirm, through the grid of God's revelation, the benefit or threat of new ideas.

### **Hospitality**

Clergy groups must be warm and welcoming spaces. The practice of hospitality in our churches can have its beginning here. Dorothy Bass explains.

"Hospitable places where guests can disclose the gifts they bear come into being only when people take up this practice and grow wise, by experience, in doing it well. In the face of overwhelming human need for shelter and care, and in the face of our own fear of strangers, we need to develop ways of supporting one another in the practice of hospitality." (Bass 1997)

In a world where hospitality is in short supply, clergy especially need to experience a place where being one's self is expected, wounds and all. Christine Pohl reminds us of the need for intentionality. "Hospitality will not occur in any significant way in our lives or churches unless we give it deliberate attention. Because the practice has been mostly forgotten and because it conflicts with a number of contemporary values, we must intentionally nurture a commitment to hospitality." (Pohl 1999) Pohl goes on to remind us we all need space to explore our "uncertainty, contingency, and human tragedy." (Pohl 1999) Places of hospitality, then, can be at times uncomfortable. Terse language, tear filled stories, emotionally intense descriptors are all part of the creating of hospitable space. We cannot forget each other's humanness. However, when we speak out of who we know ourselves to be, and listen to others as they help define who they are, we are moved from a kinetic existence toward the full range of human potentiality. We are selves-in-creation. Spiritual formation is happening, both for the individual and for the group.

A facilitator must create this hospitable space for the group. This has to be intentional and of the utmost priority. The subject matter is immaterial. The door to each member's room is open and we each must step into the other's soul. Each member has to be encouraged to begin where he or she is, right now, with his or her own set of feelings, attitudes, thoughts and intentions. Any honest exploration of one's truest self must begin with present realities. A facilitator can manage these fragile times by coaching members into being a healing presence. While

reflective listening is crucial at this point, without agapic love, we cannot move beyond our nothingness.<sup>12</sup>

When a member admits a sexual addiction, confesses anger, announces a pending divorce, talks about a vengeful church leader; these are hard moments that need tender attention. But these times define a group. Hospitality demands we enter these troubled waters together. As we one-another these highly emotional episodes, we come to know the suffering and the healing of Christ as a single body of believers.

When a group is skittish about revelations of fallenness and impropriety, exploitation and abuse, the facilitator must take a role in bringing the group to their knees in humble acceptance of the presence of the Holy Spirit. This is not the time for questions, but for kind affirmation, recollection of appropriate scripture, and reflection on similar experiences. Clergy hurt, and some of us hurt badly. When crisis hits a member, true hospitality can bring wholeness and healing. Pohl speaks of hospitality's promise. "Hospitality becomes less difficult and more 'natural' as we grow more familiar with the practice. Grace and gift infuse it in ways that are not easily accounted for. We experience fulfillment as we give of ourselves." (Pohl 1999)

### **When it all works**

Clergy groups work when members move toward the fulfillment of clarified expectations, when the group meets real needs, when no one threatens new ideas or shared experience, when group members are moving toward wholeness, and when the group is forming a communal and spiritual identity that informs individual identity.

The following is a peek into our groups' corporate room. Most of the items listed above are characteristic of our cluster. Because of confidentiality, I am limited to generalizations and exact quotes.

Fundamentally, what has made our group successful is that we have taken the time needed for the Holy Spirit to ferment the fruit of our togetherness into a fine wine of trust and respect. While we are nine in number now, five have been members from the beginning. These five form the relational core that is strong enough to withstand members transitioning in and out. The facilitator has also remained constant.

In the words of group members, these gatherings have been "a good and necessary experience." "What makes this group (is) diversity with depth." It is a "helpful environment (where) you do not get cur-

sory answers”, where you “are able to go a little bit deeper, draw from a deeper well.” “There are not many people in our congregations with a seminary level grasp of the Bible, so it is good to get the perspectives of other pastors who are from a variety of backgrounds and age levels.” Thus, this is truly “an oasis for pastors.” “Preachers that don’t have this, God help them. They are out there driftin.”

One group member states that ‘we’re all in this together.’ I will cherish the words of an older pastor, mostly because he was looking at me when he said it, although he was addressing the whole group. “I need you, forever,” he confessed. In the words of another pastor who is approaching retirement, “I believe I am a different person because I’ve been in this group.” We are together in our brokenness, our discoveries, and our confession.

In the beginning, the topics we covered were important. Now, “subject matter is secondary – the success of the group is the life of the group.” One group member has experienced other groups where the focus was so much on the book or topic that personal growth was minimalized. The groups died.

One member has an interesting perspective on group prayer life. “I learn who people are through how they pray.” What we say to one another is one thing. What we say to God is soul revealing.

With regard to the role of the facilitator, one member says, “We needed someone to come in and say this is where the group needs to go. Someone who would say, first, ‘I’m going to lead you,’ then, ‘I’m going to push you,’ and then, ‘I’m going to drag you if I need to.’” How did this play out? Another member answers, “Sometimes the facilitator takes us down the rabbit trails, but sometimes that has been the best thing because he gets us out of the little boxes.” Yet another member confesses, “These groups would not exist without facilitators. You can try to get together but it just goes all over the place. It’s like herding cats.” He goes on. “As pastors we are very busy and unless there is someone in that role to call us together... if it’s nobody’s job, it won’t get done.”

### Conclusion

One may argue what is written here is too idealistic. Pastors need to meet just to have fun, relax, let their hair down, and tell jokes. I argue that clergy need to be real, but that this includes thinking about eternal realities that underpin all that we are. We must have fun together. However, to refuse ourselves a partnership in the soulful pilgrimage that defines our mutual call leads to a fuzzy view of what Jesus has commanded us to do and be and ultimately to deny ourselves the deeper joys of pastoral ministry.



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<sup>1</sup>Together in Ministry (TIM)

<sup>2</sup>Foster, R. J. (1988). *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. San Francisco, Harper & Row.

Willard, D. (1998). *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering our Hidden Life in God*. San Francisco, HarperSanFrancisco.

<sup>3</sup>This phrase is attributed to Shults and Sandage, who write, “Our interest is less in delineating stages than it is in understanding the dynamic movement of the human spirit itself, and so we want to refigure the ways within a description of the patterns of an ongoing process of the qualitative intensification of relationality.” Shults, F. L. and S. J. Sandage (2006). *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology and Psychology*. Grand Rapids, Mich., Baker Academic.

<sup>4</sup>Jer. 32:39; John 17:20-23; Rom 12:5; etc.

<sup>5</sup>Matt. 16:25

<sup>6</sup>For a good discussion on the importance of both embedded and deliberative theology, see Stone, chapter one.

<sup>7</sup>"*Deliberative theology* is the understanding of faith that emerges from a process of carefully reflecting upon embedded theological convictions." Stone, H. W. and J. O. Duke (1996). **How to Think Theologically**. Minneapolis, Fortress Press. pg. 16

<sup>8</sup>1 Peter 3:15

<sup>9</sup>This term is taken from the Greek aorist verb, denoting a regularly recurring action.

<sup>10</sup>Bellah, R. N. (1985). **Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life**. Berkeley, University of California Press. As quoted in Grenz, S. J. and J. R. Franke (2001). "Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context."

<sup>11</sup>Romans 12, etc.

<sup>12</sup>1 Cor. 13:1-4

## *Building a Solid Foundation*

*by Jim Autrey*



*The Rev. Dr. James Autrey is a retired American Baptist minister. He has served as a solo and senior pastor in Horton, Concordia and Hutchinson, all in Kansas. He was an associate pastor at Independence, Kansas and Redding, California. Prior to going into the pastoral ministry he was a high school instrumental and vocal music teacher in Kansas for nine years. He has served as president of the American Baptist Churches of the Central Region Ministers Council and also on the Ministers Council Senate. He has also served as president of the ABCCR. He and his wife, Marsha, are now living in Council Grove, Kansas, where they are opening their home to pastors and related groups for personal or planning retreats. Jim currently works with three Together in Ministry groups.*

### **Finishing Well Group:**

Group is for those who are within five years of retiring. We are learning how to prepare for our retirement and also holding each other accountable so that we won't be guilty of quitting before we retire. This group is in its second year of functioning.

The Rev. Dr. Fred Ansell, recently retired Executive Minister of the American Baptist Churches of the Central Region

The Rev. Dr. Robert Southard, Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Kansas City, KS

The Rev. Dr. Dr. Warren Smith, Senior Pastor of Community Baptist Church, Tulsa, OK

The Rev. David Ford, Interim Pastor of First Baptist Church, Belleville, KS

The Rev. Harry Fink, Pastor of First Baptist Church, Meade, KS

The Rev. Richard Zimmerman, Pastor of First United Methodist Church, South Hutchinson, KS

The Rev. Tom Koranda, Pastor of First Baptist Church of Norwich, KS

The Rev. Dr. Joe Kutter, Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church, Topeka, KS

The Rev. Art Campbell, Senior Pastor, West Side Baptist Church, Topeka, KS

### **Central Kansas Pastors' Fellowship:**

The Rev. Dr. Dusty Cowell, Senior Pastor, Countryside Baptist Church, Hutchinson, KS

The Rev. Les Cantrell, Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, McPherson, KS.

The Rev. Timothy Conner, former Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church, Newton, KS, now Director of Missional Church Network Ministries, Newton, KS

The Rev. Dan Hahn, Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, Wichita, KS

The Rev. Terry Deaver, Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, Augusta, KS

The Rev. Ron Jones, Pastor, Central Baptist Church, Augusta, KS

The Rev. Brian High, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Clay Center, KS

Pastor Rick Neubauer of First Baptist Church, Council Grove, KS

### **Flint Hills Cluster Group:**

This is their first year of being a TIM group. We are discussing the book, **The Ten Dumbest Things Christians Do**, as well as spending time in fellowship, prayer, and sharing. We organized a most successful cluster singspiration in March and are planning a summer outing with our wives:

The Rev. Lynne Smith, Interim Area Minister, Northeast Area, American Baptist Churches of the Central Region

The Rev. Tom Shepard, Pastor, Burlingame Federated Church, Burlingame, KS,

The Rev. Vic Powell, Interim Pastor, First Baptist Church, Emporia, KS

The Rev. Alan Epp, retired Pastor and member of First Baptist Church, Wichita

The Rev. Bill Secrest, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Lebo, KS  
Pastor Rick Neubauer of First Baptist Church, Council Grove, KS.

The Rev. Darrell Geist, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Herington, KS

The Rev. Raymond Cook, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Enterprise, KS.

Pastor Steve Hervey, Alta Vista, KS.

When I was asked to write about the mechanics of starting and maintaining a Together in Ministry group, I thought about the four TIM groups with which I have been involved. Based on those experiences, I share with you the following observations.

The first thing I observed is there must be someone in the group (whether or not the facilitator) who is

totally sold on the concept and is willing to be the one to do the paperwork required to receive the grant, and to be responsible for communicating to the rest of the members the meeting dates and times, locations, and program responsibilities. There is some time involved in carrying out these components, but I felt the benefits received by the group were important enough for me to commit to do the "legwork" for all four groups of which I have been a member.

The second thing I observed in a successful TIM group is there must be a common denominator to the group that will have a point of interest beyond that of just being in ministry. Sometimes, the denominator is geographical location, so that cluster pastors might agree to meet on a regular basis. It has been my experience that if this the group's reason for being, the fellowship and camaraderie will be enhanced with a focus of study (e.g., a book study, topical studies, or guest facilitators). But it is essential to allow time for informal interaction with each other and to pray together. There are other TIM groups who gravitate to one another because of their ministry settings - they are drawn together as a result of facing challenges unique to their settings. Some of these groups could include: senior pastors of multi-staffed churches; women in ministry; inner-city ministry; and so on. Another configuration could be a "stages of ministry" group. Examples of the participants in such a group might be those who are within five years of retirement (learning how to finish well), or those who are in their first church as a solo pastor, or those in specialized ministries like music ministers, youth pastors, Christian Education directors, media specialists, and so on. I have found that particularly with non-geographical groups, quarterly sessions (during which participants meet for a longer period of time) rather than monthly meetings seem to work better, both in terms of reducing the frequency of travel and having enough advance notice of gatherings so it is more possible to avoid schedule conflicts.

I also observed that sometimes, the biggest challenge is keeping the group going and enthused. I have found the most effective stimulant is for the group to become a team, and for that to happen, the following components must be developed:

**T - TRUST.** There must be trust that what is said in the group stays in the group, and that the members really care about each other. The result of this trust is that there is no sense of competition among the members or "one-up-man-ship."

**E - ENERGY.** In order for the "team" to succeed, all the members are required to expend the energy

necessary for participation and preparation (when called for), as well as for the purpose of edifying the others in the group.

**A - ACCOUNTABILITY.** This is not "legalistic grilling," but caring enough to question each other, to gently confront one another in love, and to "kid around" together.

**M - MEANINGFUL "STUFF."** No-one wants to feel their time is being wasted, so the "stuff" received at a TIM group may be information, inspiration, deepening fellowship, genuine caring, and a sense that we, as a group, are incomplete when one of the group is missing.

I had been active in collegial covenant groups before my involvement with the TIM groups, and I will continue to do what I can in that area when the grant is completed. But the beauty of the Lilly Endowment's commitment to Sustaining Pastoral Excellence is that finances are now available so groups can do some things we would not have easily been able to do before. I strongly encourage all clergy to become part of a clergy covenant group. Being part of a pastors' T.E.A.M. can help strengthen your ministry and make you a healthier pastor.

*In Season and  
out of Season*

*by Mary Scheer*



*The Rev. Mary Scheer has served Brewster Baptist Church on Cape Cod, MA, as an Associate Pastor for the past five years, with a focus in the areas of Pastoral Care, Adult Education and Assimilation. She also serves as a Chaplain with the Air National Guard at Otis Air National Guard Base, MA. She received her M.Div from Northern Baptist Theological Seminary. Mary and her husband David have six children, most of whom she home schooled,. A daughter will leave for college this fall to pursue a degree in Criminal Justice, two of her children now have Masters degrees, one son is in the Army stationed in Italy, one daughter who is recently back from a tour of duty in Iraq is now a Cadet at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, and another lives and works in Michigan.*

***Cape Cod Pastors' Group:***

The Rev. Mary A. Scheer, Associate Pastor, Brewster Baptist Church, Brewster, MA

The Rev. Kevin J. Saxton, Associate Pastor, Brewster Baptist Church, Brewster, MA

The Rev. Dr. Douglas V. Scalise, Senior Pastor, Brewster Baptist Church, Brewster, MA

The Rev. Bruce R. Bardon, Pastor, Covenant Community Church, Sandwich, MA  
 The Rev. Dr. Carl D. Heick, Pastor, First Baptist Church Hyannis, Hyannis, MA  
 The Rev. Edmund C. de la Cour Jr., Pastor, First Baptist Church Pocasset, Pocasset, MA

The Cape Cod Pastors' Group has been meeting together for at least twelve years. Although the group predates some of the current members, it graciously welcomed new additions, which I say speaking for myself as a relatively new addition some five years ago.

One of the strengths of our group is the way the spirit of collegiality has encouraged longevity. Several of the pastors in our group have been in pastoral ministry for fifteen plus years, with four serving their current church from more than a decade. The length of service ranges from twelve to twenty-one years.

Throughout the years, this group of pastors has encouraged and sustained each other through the various seasons of the church life, and has supported each other through all the various seasons of personal and family life including having children for the first time, caring for family members facing major medical issues, life transitions with aging and dying parents, etc.

The Together in Ministry grant received by the Ministers Council from the Lilly Endowment has been a resource support as we share together in fellowship over lunch and grow together through various book studies we've done, especially in the areas of healthy pastoring and self care. The ease and comfort of the group make it a safe place to share areas of struggle, to challenge each other, and to receive the kind of wisdom that can only come from pastors seasoned with many years of solid service.



Part of our story flows from our unique setting on the Cape. Each of our churches faces similar challenges, such as the ebb and flow of the changing seasons, the influx of vacationers, and the absence and then later return of the "snow birds." As a result of this ebb and flow, our ministries and relationships have to have a certain flexibility to allow for the changing seasons. Because our churches are geographically spread apart on Cape Cod, it is helpful to have a regular opportunity to check in with one another.

I thank God that in the midst of the invariable change which seems so pronounced for us on the Cape, this collegial group provides sustainable support with continuity and constancy.

*An Unexpected Blessing*

*by Kasey Jones*



*The Rev. Kasey Jones is the current president of the ABCUSA, DC Baptist Convention Region's Ministers Council. She serves as pastor of National Baptist Memorial Church in Washington, DC. In 2006, she was the first woman and African-American called as Senior Pastor in the church's 100 year history.*

***Sisters United in Ministry:***

The Rev. Vanetta Rather is a full time Youth Minister at Mt. Ennon Baptist Church and working on her Doctor of Ministry degree from Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, DC.

The Rev. Melissa Brown graduated with a Masters of Divinity degree from Wesley Theological Seminary. She is an ordained Elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church working part time as the Director of Christian Education Silver Spring Presbyterian church. Also, she started her own business "Life Purpose", where she provides Christian counseling and life coaching.

Minister Audrey Wiggins is the Minister of Christian Education at Covenant Baptist Church in Washington, DC. Also, she works full-time as Program Manager Engineer for the Federal Government.

The Rev. Gloria Grant is ordained American Baptist, working as Associate Minister at University Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Part time, she serves as Executive Director of Congregations United for Compassion and Empowerment. The DC Baptist Convention recently hired her as a consultant for Older Adult Ministries.

The Rev. Ostein Truitt serves as Assistant Pastor of St. Johns Baptist Church. She is pursuing a Doctor of Ministry at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC.

Ms. Barbara Edwards is an Associate Minister at Mount Zion Baptist Church. She works full-time with the Federal Government.

The Rev. Iveracottis (Ivy) Short was ordained into Environmental Stewardship with the United Church of Christ. She is pursuing a Doctor of Ministry degree from Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC and has become an Eco-Theologian.

After much reflection on the past few years with the Together in Ministry Group Sisters United In Ministry, it makes me wonder if our experience with each other is what Mary and Elizabeth felt when the two pregnant ladies came together to support each other as they prepared to do what God called them to do. Sisters United In Ministry are women called by God, pregnant with purpose and divinely connected. Our time together has offered support, encouragement, affirmation, and accountability for women striving to do what God called us to do.

Our collegial covenant group is a tremendous blessing. Members of the group graduated from divinity school in 2003 or 2004. When the group initially was formed, we agreed to gather once a month to discuss a book chosen to give us insight for ministry. Our first book was **Circle of Life**, by Ella Virginia Redfield and Diane Brenda Williams. After reading the book, one of our members, the Rev. Gloria Grant, organized a reading and discussion with the authors for the Women's Ministry at her church. Our group attended, and we were able to ask questions and gain new insight from the authors.

However, **Rest in the Storm** and **Addicted to Hurry**, both authored by Dr. Kirk Byron Jones, made the biggest impact on our covenant group. After reading his books, the group really began to grapple with the theme of "self-care." We began to encourage one another to make self-care one of our priorities. We looked at the responsibilities we all were carrying. Besides ministry responsibilities, some group members had decided to continue their education by pursuing Doctor of Ministry degrees. A number of our members carry the responsibility of

being wife, mother, and/or grandmother. We have a newlywed who has also been blessed with a baby in the last two years. Some of our ladies work in either part time or full time secular jobs. All of us want to give God our best in every aspect of our lives. In order to do so, we want to make sure that as we move into ministry, we do it in such a way that is healthy. Dr. Jones helped us understand how ministers participate in self-abuse by not taking time out to care for self. As a result, the core of our covenant has been for the past three years:

*We are women involved in ministry as a second career, and believe that Together in Ministry can continue to provide a forum to help each member learn that a call to ministry does not mean we are called to live unbalanced lives. We are women coming together in exploration of self-care experiences. The lessons we learned from Dr. Kirk Byron Jones' book, **Rest in the Storm**, continue to influence the direction of our covenant group. We adopted the following purpose as our own: "to help those who care for others develop strategies of self-care and prevention of self-violence."*

The way in which we have tried to accomplish our pursuit for self care is through monthly gatherings, Bible study, and prayer, reading various books, and participating in retreats and/or conferences that are restorative, energizing, and resourceful.

Our journey together over the past three years has established a love, respect, and trust for one another. The Together In Ministry opportunity created space for our group to share many joys and concerns. SUIM have celebrated graduations, ordinations, and an installation. We have prayed and supported one another through the loss of loved ones, health challenges, and job concerns. When members embark upon endeavors to further ministry or pursue full-time ministry opportunities, the sisters encourage one another during our prayerful pursuits. We strive to hold one another accountable for pursuing God's direction.





## *Summary of Evaluation Findings*

*by Virginia Smith*

*Dr. Virginia Smith is Associate Professor in the Masters of Human Services Program at Lincoln University, where she teaches social science research and planning. She is a member of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Philadelphia, PA, where she serves as Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees, Secretary of the Deaconess Board, and Assistant Director of the Youth Department. She is a member of the Board of Directors and of the Executive Committee of the Philadelphia Baptist Association. Dr. Smith has a Ph. D. in City and Regional Planning from the University of Pennsylvania. Her area of concentration during her doctoral studies was social analysis and planning for the older population. She also holds a Master of Social Work Degree from the University of Pennsylvania. She is a member of the Academy of Certified Social Workers of the National Association of Social Workers and a Licensed Social Worker in the State of Pennsylvania. Dr. Smith completed her undergraduate work at Temple University, receiving a Bachelor of Science Degree.*

Over the past three years, TIM Collegial Covenant Group facilitators and members completed annual evaluation surveys. Some of the key findings from these surveys are listed below:

- Facilitators' descriptions of the origins of these groups reflect a high level of appreciation for the opportunity to work together, to develop friendships and supportive trusting environments, to study at a deeper level, to pray together and for each other, to promote spiritual growth, and to generally enhance personal ministries.
- Although there was wide variety in the types of activities that focused the TIM groups' time together, facilitators pointed to topic and book discussions as the most common types of study.
- Facilitators gave the groups very high ratings for being successful in relation to the original purposes established for their work together.
- Over 80% of the facilitators thought their groups would continue either at the same level or at some reduced level if TIM funding were not available.
- Almost 80% of the facilitators thought the local councils were committed to the concept of collegial covenant groups, and slightly over 60% thought the local councils had the ethos for sustaining the concept.
- Group members reported a variety of benefits of participating in the collegial covenant groups. When asked to select from a list of possible areas of personal impact from involvement in the groups, the 2006 survey respondents most frequently said they gained a supportive network of colleagues who will pray for one another.
- Group members identified spiritual growth and personal growth as areas which benefited from participation. They also valued the opportunity to study to enhance their personal ministries. Some members also expressed the value of the covenant group experience in broadening their perspectives and opening them up to new ideas.
- Group members gave their experiences high ratings for helping them to become better equipped for ministry.
- Approximately 95% of the group members in the 2006 survey said they would participate in a similar group in the future.
- One measure of the importance of the collegial covenant groups to the members is rate of attendance at sessions. None of the facilitators reported average attendance rates of 60% or less. The majority reported attendance average rates at 90% or better

The overall conclusions for the surveys over the three year period are that the concept of collegial covenant groups has been embraced by those participating, and that the project has met the objectives of facilitating a process that values others as vital to the enhancement of the individuals' own personal ministries.

Areas of impact of collegial covenant groups as reported by 2006 survey respondents	Percent selecting each area
Gained a supportive network of colleagues who will pray for one another	87.9
Enrichment of your perspective of yourself and of your congregation	83.7
Gained a sense of the availability of other ministers to support your work	78.2
Gained a climate for mutual accountability among peers	66.7
Opportunities for disciplined focus through specific study	54.9

## *Seeking Balance Together*

*by Daniel Cash*



*The Rev. Daniel Cash has served as an Area Resource Minister with the American Baptist Churches of Indiana & Kentucky since 1999. Previous ministry positions included two pastorates in Warren, Indiana and Snohomish, Washington. Dan resides with his wife, Lori, and three children in Bloomington, Indiana. Dan can be reached at: [dancash@abc-indiana.org](mailto:dancash@abc-indiana.org).*

### **The WC Area TIM Group:**

The Rev. Brent Meyer, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Bloomfield, IN

The Rev. Dr. Kregg Burris, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Bedford, IN

The Rev. Bernie Jackson, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Terre Haute, IN

The Rev. Tim Fleace, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Sullivan, IN

The Rev. Kyle Witmer, Pastor, Avoca Baptist Church, Avoca, IN

The Rev. Roger Smith, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Martinsville, IN

The Rev. Dan Cash, Resource Minister, ABC/IN-KY

The Rev. Charles Newman, Group Facilitator

Ministry in today's changing and challenging contexts is too often undertaken in isolation. Pastors, even those in multiple staff situations, often work independently and spend a majority of their time alone. Even when an average week of ministry may have entailed rubbing elbows and sharing conversations with numerous parishioners and church leaders, the honest and vulnerable clergy person will often confess he or she feels the weight of the work, church, or ministry squarely resting on his or her own shoulders.

The irony of experiencing ministry in isolation is that often the pastor just down the road, in the next community, or on the other side of the county, is feeling the same way. Living in an age with ever greater means of communication and connection, clergy (like many in our culture) are at risk of living alone in the midst of a crowd.

I share these observations from the first hand, eyewitness experience of one who walks alongside pastors, knows the journey of the pastorate, and knows the pull of going it alone. As an Area

Resource Minister on the staff of the American Baptist Churches of Indiana and Kentucky, I have had many conversations with clergy who feel isolated. I have had days when I, too, felt this way. I've marveled that we who share such common passion and goals so often fail to share the journey of our vocation. I've worried about the clergy person who continues to give and give, but cannot seem to make time to receive.

One of the best correctives to these tendencies in my own context of ministry has been the emergence of a few Together in Ministry clergy groups. Enabled through the Lilly Endowment grant received by the Ministers Council, these groups have done more to promote collaboration, collegiality, companionship, and a sense of common vocation than most initiatives tried in my tenure as a judicatory minister. While as many as three groups have functioned within the Area in the past, I participate in an ongoing group called "The West Central Area TIM Group." Our group is made up of seven ministers and a facilitator. The group initially formed as I invited pastors whom I felt shared some points of affinity in terms of ministry interests, outlook, and challenges. During an exploration meeting, we spent time getting acquainted, sharing stories of call and family, and exploring the possibility of a group covenant. We talked about the mechanics of meeting times, topics, and a group facilitator. But we intentionally delayed finalizing our covenant until each person had taken time to discern if this group was a good fit for them.

The theme that surfaced for our group covenant was "Seeking Balance" in life and ministry. Having spent time with Luke 2:52 in our initial gathering, we discussed the different aspects of growth and wholeness this text suggests in Jesus' own development. The worthiness of spiritual, relational, physical, and intellectual formation can all be found within that verse of scripture. We recognized these components are vital to a healthy, balanced ministry vocation, and that at times, we each have struggled with keeping them in balance.

When it came time to approach a group facilitator, one name quickly rose to the surface. The Rev. Charles Newman, a retired Area Minister and active Interim Pastor in our region, known by almost all in the group, was favorably considered because of his genuine loving spirit, listening ways, and giftedness in group process. We asked Charles to join us for a day away as we continued to get acquainted with one another, and as he explored with us the possibility of facilitating the group. By the time the day ended, there was consensus that we had found our facilitator.

The WC Area TIM group meets quarterly for day-long retreats at a local retreat center. We are currently following our theme of seeking balance by looking at the topic of Sabbath keeping. We often have prepared for the day by reading a book in common; the book is then the topic of discussion. But it is the friendships, the listening, and the sharing of the common struggles and joys that enlivens this group. The day has a refreshing pace that we are learning to guard and cherish.

In addition to the retreats, we also have met with our families for a Christmas gathering and plan to share a summer picnic. Meeting and getting to know clergy spouses and children has been an enriching element to our common group life.

The challenges of our vocation have not lessened as a result of our participation in this TIM group. But there is a sense of “together” growing among us. “Together” in ministry is such a preferred identity to that of isolation. It’s a step toward health, a step toward seeking balance, and a step we are taking . . . together.

*Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. I John 4:7*



## *A Growing Intimacy*

*by Nancy Leport*



*The Rev. Nancy Leport, a second career pastor ordained in 1990, served the First Baptist Church of LeRoy, NY for twelve years. Following that she began a ministry of workshop/retreat leadership, spiritual direction and now life coaching. Currently, working as an interim at the First Baptist Church in Chili, NY, she is using life coaching skills to work with churches in transition. Her coaching business, Fresh Perspectives, strives to bring a boost of spiritual energy to congregations seeking a new direction or vision. Nancy can be reached at nleport@yahoo.com. Nancy Leport, Fresh Perspectives, Life Coach/Church Coach, 585-768-4684*

### *The Mavericks:*

Dr. Robert Giambrone, Facilitator/Leadership Coach  
 The Rev. David Pepper, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, LeRoy, NY  
 The Rev. Steve Matteson, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Newark, NY  
 The Rev. William Hockey, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Attica, NY  
 The Rev. Charles Leport, Interim Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Chili, NY  
 The Rev. Walter Steenson, Pastor, Hilton Baptist Church, Hilton, NY  
 The Rev. Michael Childs, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Hornell, NY  
 The Rev. Carol Holtz-Martin, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Macedon, NY  
 The Rev. Lisa Drysdale, Pastor, Brighton Community Church, Tonawanda, NY  
 The Rev. Nancy Leport, Interim Pastor, First Baptist Church, Chili, NY

Bill arrives and lovingly takes out his guitar, a strong presence in his own spiritual life, and the rest of us settle into our chairs ready to begin the first part of our face to face gathering of our TIM group, “The Mavericks.” Bill sings and Carol prays. Thus begins our time of group spiritual direction. Nine pastors leave their heads and open their hearts. We are about to enter into a time of spiritual vulnerability and intimacy, knowing God will speak to us and through us when we listen in the silence, and listen deeply to the meaning of the spoken words.

Our group has been together for four years, but only in the last two have we become intentional about entering into group spiritual direction for the first

hour and a half of our time together. Previously, we had spent time in corporate prayer and opening worship. We shared our pastoral struggles and supported one another as we delved into leadership development under the direction of our facilitator, Certified Life Coach and Leadership Trainer, Dr. Robert Giambrone. Holding each other accountable to use these new findings, we discovered the richness of our leadership learnings as those learnings were successfully translated into action with our congregations.

Walter Steenson, pastor at Hilton Baptist Church in Hilton, New York, and an Army chaplain, writes:

*"The Mavericks have been an essential group in finding my way home after my deployment. Having my life, family, and ministry interrupted by a military deployment and then returning has been a challenge. This group has encouraged me, befriended me, and kept me alive and growing spiritually and professionally. I have trusted colleagues who care, and who care enough about me to challenge and keep me accountable."*

As we became a close group of colleagues, we began to go deeper with our spiritual lives. We stepped back from the 'busyness' of church life and really looked at how God walks with us and works through us. We were longing to share an "Organic Spirituality," as Nicki Vandergrift defines it in her book of the same name: "A growing intimacy with God experienced through persons, places, events, and things in everyday life."<sup>1</sup>

Once we began this journey of group spiritual direction, we never looked back and only looked forward to each gathering. Group spiritual direction is a process where people come together to assist one another in an ongoing awareness of God in all life. Rose Mary Dougherty, SSND, a pioneer in group spiritual direction wrote:

*"Having been touched by God's desire, people in group direction want to make their desire for God the determining factor of all of their choices. This shared desire of the group gives coherence as well as a shared commitment to be there for one another in that desire. The group's primary task is to make the shared desire explicit and to hold one another in it."*<sup>2</sup>

There are a variety of ways to do group direction, and we have tried many different approaches. Whatever the approach - guided imagery, sharing of spiritual journeys, prayer through art, sitting in silence, or listening to music, to name a few - it is the process of holding one another in a space of

prayer and understanding that allows us to model a Christ-like presence to each other.

We do not sit in judgment, we do not come together to fix each other, we do not offer platitudes or pronouncements...we simply 'are' with each other. We silently pray for the one sharing as he/she speaks, we hold a sacred space where we acknowledge the other as a beloved child of God, and we experience a shared journey reminding us that our spiritual journeys are similar and connected. As Ann Kline, a spiritual director, writes in ***Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction***, "In group direction...We are open to the desire of God being lived out through each person and the group as a whole."<sup>3</sup>

This is what we have come to know deeply in our very spirits through our time together as a colleague group. Lisa Drysdale, member of the group and pastor of Brighton Community Church in Tonawanda, New York, expresses so well the feelings and sentiments of how important this time together is for our lives as pastors. She writes:



*"The Mavericks, the TIM group of which I have been a member for over two years, are the people to whom I trust my spiritual development. This amazing group of pastors, representing a wide variety of experiences, gifts, passions, and possibilities, has both comforted me and challenged me in my quest to develop and deepen my spiritual life and my leadership capacities. As we wrestle with the joys and the traumas that are peculiar to the pastoral role, I have found great delight in the times we spend in prayer, in spiritual reflection, and in storytelling. I have witnessed the power of God's spirit moving among us as we have shared our needs, dreams, fears, and frustrations, and as we have committed ourselves to being in deep prayer for each other, reflecting back to one another what the spirit of God places on our hearts for the other. As a professional church leader, you would think this time of spiritual connection wouldn't surprise me, and yet my spir-*

*it is regularly surprised and my breath taken away by the depth of love and fellowship I find with these colleagues. What an amazing gift of God they are to me!"*

I can only echo her comments, and as I write this, I am aware we will be together again next week, ready to open ourselves to God and each other. Each of us will bring our love of God and willingness to be vulnerable. Specifically, Bill will bring his guitar through which he will speak the truth of life's experiences. Carol and Chuck will bring their poetic prayers. Mike will offer us a presence of joy and concern. David will bring the depth of a bottomless well of insight. Steve and Lisa will bring humor and laughter that ground us in life and lift us to the heavens. Walter will bring his wit and New England wisdom. Rob will bring passion, enthusiasm, and creativity. And I, Nancy, will bring a heart brimming with gratitude for this incredible group of pastors who share their lives, their hopes, their dreams, their fears, their failures, and their spirit with me each month and allow me to do the same with them.

We also would like to express our gratitude to the congregation of First Baptist Church of Rochester, under the leadership of the Rev. Dr. Kenneth Williams, for the use of their sacred space for our meetings.


<sup>1</sup>Vandergrift, Nikki, *Organic Spirituality: A Sixfold Path for Contemplative Living*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY 2000, p. 4

<sup>2</sup>Dougherty, RoseMary, *Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment*, New York: Paulist Press, 1995), p. 37

<sup>3</sup>Kline, Anne, *Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction*, Vol. 10, NO. 2, June 2004, p. 38-4

*Online Affinity  
Groups: Virtual  
Connections, Real  
Relationships*

*by Alan Selig*



*The Rev. Dr. Alan Selig and the Rev. Karen Selig are a clergy couple. They have been co-pastors at the First Baptist Church of Manhattan, KS, since 1992. In 2004 their church was blessed with a Lilly Endowment sabbatical grant given for the purpose of clergy renewal. For three months, they were able to step back from the day to day responsibilities of pastoral ministry and take time to play and pray. After twelve years as co-pastors of the same congregation, they were ready for personal re-charging. They also valued the time to read and reflect on ways to move ahead in an intentional church transformation process*

*that had begun in the congregation in 1998. For more information on the Priscilla and Aquila Network visit their website [www.priscillaandaquila.net](http://www.priscillaandaquila.net) You may also visit the Ministers Council website and follow the links there. If he can help you with an online group in any way Alan is open to contact at [alan\\_selig@prodigy.net](mailto:alan_selig@prodigy.net).*

At the 2005 Denver Biennial, the conversation at the Clergy Couples breakfast included the idea to create an online network. We even came up with a name – the Priscilla and Aquila Network – after some conversation about which name came first most often in the New Testament! Two years later, the group exists and has around seventy members. We have discovered that an online affinity group is not only possible, but that such a group can be a very positive experience.

### **ALL AFFINITY GROUPS SHARE BASIC SIMILARITIES**

**In any affinity group, a shared need or desire is critical.** Most Baptist clergy already have enough meetings to attend. Only a desire to fill a real need will get us involved in a new project like an affinity group. Nearly every time a group gathered at a Biennial Clergy Couples breakfast, we would barely begin to get to know each other and share our stories when the time was gone. Many participants expressed a desire to connect more often than one hour every two years.

**Affinity group participants also need a point of common identity.** In face-to-face groups, it may simply be location intersecting with denomination – all the Baptist clergy within a reasonable driving distance, for example. It may be a gathering of women clergy within a region, youth ministers, Christian Education directors, graduates from the same seminary, etc. For the Priscilla and Aquila Network, our point of common identity was our status as “clergy couples.” By our self-definition, a “clergy couple” exists when both partners are in theological formation and/or are serving in a ministry setting, and both consider themselves to be clergy. This distinguishes us from couples where one partner is clergy and the other is not. There are certain unique elements that exist when both members of the couple are clergy. For example, my wife, Karen, and I are both called by God to professional Christian ministry. How do we honor both callings while remaining husband and wife? How have others worked that out? These and other issues unique to that “one couple - two calls” reality were what we wanted to explore.

In the Priscilla and Aquila Network, that has been a sufficient common identity. We purposely left any further definitions unformed. Our network includes

pastors, other church staff, missionaries, chaplains, missionaries, educators, and more. The point of common identity is our understanding of ourselves as clergy who are married to clergy: one couple - two calls.

### **ONLINE AFFINITY GROUPS OFFER DISTINCT ADVANTAGES**

There are ways in which an online affinity group is very distinct from its face-to-face counterpart. The online environment creates some uniquely advantageous circumstances that affect the development of an affinity group.

**Geographic limitations disappear.** Some American Baptist clergy struggle to find people who share their common identity and desire for fellowship and are near enough to be able to gather together for fellowship and mutual support. Because the Priscilla and Aquila Network meets online, it doesn't matter where we are located. We aren't limited to the local phone book, or even a region directory, for potential members. We issued our invitation to participate globally. We started with one hundred and forty names and have added many more since that first list. About half of those initial contacts wanted to join. That meant we had much more than enough for a viable group, with sixty initial participants. Some of those have been too busy to be involved as much as they would like, yet we have contributors from Mexico to Maine, from ABC of the Pacific Northwest to ABC of the South, and plenty of "lurkers" who are blessed simply by reading what others write. In nearly three hundred emails over the first twelve months, we have shared introductions and discussed a variety of issues related to being clergy couples. We have discussed a variety of ways of responding to those dual calls that far exceeds what we could have heard from any single geographic area.

**Meetings are quite inexpensive.** Internet access and an email account are all that are required at present for our network. We have intentionally kept our technology requirements at a minimum in order to maximize the opportunity to participate. As our network continues to develop, there is the potential to move into pod casting, real-time gatherings in a chatroom or a virtual classroom (often referred to as "synchronous" meetings). We could organize virtual tours of our ministry settings, or arrange for an MMBB rep to meet with us to discuss benefits issues unique to the clergy couple context. We plan to use the network to create a book/resource that explores our common identity and the issues related to it. I expect we will arrive at the final product without ever having had all the contributors in the same physical room at the same physical time.



Because we are a Collegial Covenant Group, we received support from the Lilly Endowment Grant administered by the Ministers Council. Those resources covered all our network costs and supported my work as the network facilitator. This year, a portion of those funds will subsidize the attendance of Priscilla and Aquila Network members at the Clergy Couples breakfast in Washington DC.

**Time becomes both compressed and extended in the online environment.** There is both a sense of immediacy and of extra time where we exist. Immediacy is experienced when I don't have to wait until next month's meeting to share a thought with the group. On the other hand, I don't always have to respond immediately to what another participant shares because "we're all going home in an hour." I can think about how I want to respond before I send a reply. When I travel for work or vacation, I can go through the email conversations for the time I was away and respond to parts of the conversation I may have missed. Time is weird and wonderful online.

The way we developed our definition of a clergy couple is an example of the benefit of "online time." The network struggled with how to define ourselves in a way which distinguished us from couples where only one of the couple is a clergy member. We did not want to deny the effectiveness of the ministry those couples accomplish. That is, after all, the most common type of ministry couple across our denomination. But we did want to identify how we are distinct from that common model. One network member who had been away from her home office for several days read the emails related to this discussion after she returned. Her thoughtful response provided the insight and phrasing that allowed us to articulate that common identity critical to group formation. If she had simply been absent from a physical meeting because of other commitments, we may have never achieved that same clarity.

**The online environment fits well with the regularly hectic schedule of Baptist clergy.** Giving an hour to the network each week requires exactly that - an hour. There is no drive time, no need to block out an entire day or even half a day to drive, meet, eat, and drive home.

### **ONLINE AFFINITY GROUPS' CHALLENGES**

The positive benefits of such a group are many. But there are also potential liabilities to the online environment. Like these . . .

**It is easy to put it off reading and responding, the key elements for participation, “until tomorrow.”** In an online group, especially one that meets through email, such participation is crucial. But tomorrow nearly always has its own set of demands, and before we know it, time has stretched so far that the relationship is lost. One of the most frequently cited reasons for dropping out of any sort of online group is, “I just got busy with other stuff.” For some, it is much easier to protect large blocks of time for a regular group meeting than to take the time needed on a weekly basis to maintain contact through the internet.

**The online environment has a limited set of information channels, primarily written text.** Most clergy get very good at reading nonverbal cues. We often know how folks are reacting before they say a word. In the Priscilla and Aquila Network, a silent participant is an unknown entity. We do not know if a suddenly silent group member is unhappy with the conversation or just has family members demanding equal time on the computer. The person may be leaning back with arms folded and shaking the head side to side. They may be leaning forward intently anticipating the next comment in the conversation. They may be lost in thought generated by a previous comment, needing time to think it through. All these realities are equally invisible online. Unless they type something we won't know.

That's why there are online resources like emoderators.com ([www.emoderators.com](http://www.emoderators.com)) to help creators, facilitators and participants understand the dynamics of building an online group. Many group hosting sites (like the ones identified at the end of this article) offer support networks for group leaders to help them with things like coping with limited information channels and encouraging silent participants.

**There is a perception that the Internet is faceless and impersonal, and that it is impossible to develop strong, positive relationships online.** Certainly there are places on the Internet that are impersonal and even relationally and spiritually destructive. But I'm convinced this is more of a perceived liability than a real one. I wish you could meet the college students with whom I work at Baptist Campus Center at Kansas State University. Some of them have good friends they have never met in person. They only interact online. Through online social network sites like Facebook or MySpace, they have built a network of friends who are openly and unapologetically Christian – as well as being K-State Wildcats. They encourage one another in their faith. They commiserate when one of them encounters a professor who is antagonistic toward Christianity. They share the names of professors who are members of the churches they

attend. The Internet is seen as a natural way to form and strengthen relationships. One student even told me, “I thought everyone was on Facebook! Even my mother is on Facebook! I helped her create her page.” Those students don't see the Internet as impersonal. It is simply another way to connect with friends, develop new relationships, and strengthen their Christian walk.

## **PRACTICAL POINTS FOR STARTING AN ONLINE GROUP**

If reading this has sparked an interest in trying to build an online affinity group, you will need to decide which Internet Service Provider (ISP) will work best for you. Many of the same organizations offering basic internet and email service also host online groups. A search for “hosting online groups” will generate an overwhelming list of recommendations, so instead, start by looking at ISPs familiar to you or someone you trust. Yahoo ([www.yahogroups.com](http://www.yahogroups.com)) and Google ([www.groups.google.com](http://www.groups.google.com)) are well known providers, but there are others. Another option is a religious network like Ecunet ([www.ecunet.org](http://www.ecunet.org)). They offer already existing groups that are specific to a denomination. They will also help you set up your own group. For the Priscilla and Aquila Network I chose IXWebhosting ([www.ixwebhosting.com](http://www.ixwebhosting.com)). They advertised in a magazine I trust, and we have received excellent service and support from them. We were able to set up our own website through this group, and they provide the software to create and maintain the site. Remember to always check out a group out thoroughly before you make a final decision. And if I can help in any way write to me at [alan\\_selig@prodigy.net](mailto:alan_selig@prodigy.net).



## *One TIM Group: Three Lilly Sabbatical Grants*



### *Preparing for a Sabbatical*

*The Rev. Dr. Kent Harrop has been Senior Pastor of the First Baptist Church in McMinnville, OR, since 1994. He has a Bachelor of Arts from Rhode Island College and a Master of Divinity from Andover Newton Theological School in Newton Centre, MA. Kent has served congregations in Massachusetts, Montana, California and Ohio. He is the President-Elect for Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, a coalition of seventeen Christian denominations serving the needs of the poor throughout Oregon and advocating on issues of justice, peace and stewardship of the environment. He has served on the Linfield College Board of Trustees since 2000 and is also a trustee of the American Baptist Seminary of the West in Berkeley, CA.*



### *Transformation Along the Way*

*The Rev. Dr. Gregg Sneller is Pastor at a new church re-start in Portland, OR. The desire of Gregg's heart is to remind people of God's great love for them. Through being present with others he hopes to share joy and peace that can be known through Christ. Gregg loves to bicycle and walk, and is currently working on worship that really stirs the hearts of people. Be in prayer for Gregg as he has just stepped down from a wonderful thriving church and is moving into a whole new venture in life with twenty members of Grant Park Church. Gregg can be reached at [GPC1926@gmail.com](mailto:GPC1926@gmail.com)*



### *Coming in Third!*

*The Rev. Dr. Jeffery L. Savage is Senior Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Springfield, OR, where he has served since 1988. Prior to being called to Springfield, Jeff served on the ministry teams of the First Baptist Churches of Santa Barbara, Coatesville, Phoenix, and San Diego. A graduate of Westmont College (1979) and the Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary (1983), Jeff completed his Doctor of Ministry degree through Fuller Seminary in 2001. Jeff's passion in ministry is in fostering spiritual growth and congregational transformation by inspiring and empowering every disciple to practice spiritual leadership. Jeff may be reached at First Baptist Church, 1175 G Street, Springfield, OR 97477 or via email at [JLSav1957@netzero.com](mailto:JLSav1957@netzero.com).*

### *Other Members of the Mid Valley Group:*

The Rev. Dr. Wm. Wayne Brown is Executive Minister of American Baptist Churches of Oregon

The Rev. Chris Roush is Executive Director of Camping and Minister of Mission for American Baptist Churches of Oregon

The Rev. Dr. Horace O. Duke works for Veterans Affairs as part of the Chaplains Services program, and has a private counseling practice, Hope Ministries Northwest.

## Part I: Preparing for a Sabbatical ~ Kent Harrop

While reading through a professional journal, my eyes lit upon an ad for the National Clergy Renewal Program, funded by the Lilly Endowment. The year was 1999, and I was in the midst of my fifth year as pastor of First Baptist Church, McMinnville, Oregon. My church by-laws allow for a sabbatical during the seventh year for the purpose of professional and personal renewal. So with the sabbatical nearly two years off, I began preparation for what I hoped would be a time apart to renew and reflect.

I went on line and discovered a lengthy application needed to be filled out by the summer of 2000. Part of the application required my congregation to affirm both the importance of the sabbatical, as well as the content of the sabbatical itself. Two years seemed none too soon to begin the process of preparation! I was applying for what would be the first national offering of the National Clergy Renewal Program.

The vision for the Renewal Program states: "This program is for pastors who are serious about parish ministry and who can - in conversation and discernment with their congregations - envision this program as a means of renewing a long-term commitment to that congregation and to ordained ministry." The promotional material spoke to me: "We would say to pastors, 'Don't go from one draining activity to another. Allow time for freedom of exploration, for the primary, essential, and restorative work of discovery, reading, and prayer.' We would say to congregations, 'See this as the extraordinary thing it is. The renewal program speaks the language of grace.'"

My own congregation had set aside a modest amount of \$5000 for my sabbatical. A quick review of the cost of flights and conferences told me this amount would be quickly gone. I was excited by the National Clergy Renewal Program's offer to fund up to \$30,000 the dream of an applicant. (This amount has since been raised significantly.)

It should be noted that one of the particularly progressive aspects of the Renewal Program is that the program encourages pastors to propose fun activities for the entire family – times during which we can simply relax and be with our loved ones. This program component acknowledges the stress and strain of daily ministry upon the entire family unit - spouse and kids alike - and that all of us need and deserve time apart for renewal. With the hope my sabbatical would be fully funded, and with the desire the sabbatical would renew me for the next seven years in ministry, I set to work with leaders of my congregation.

Once I received the application packet, I sat down with members of my governing board and received their support for the sabbatical. What particularly excited my board was the proposal that the sabbatical be for both me and for the congregation. I was inspired by an idea from my friend and longtime ABC pastor, Walt Pulliam, who, during a sabbatical in the 1970s, had approached his sabbatical as an opportunity for the congregation he served to also be on sabbatical. Walt proposed a "theologian in residence" to be with the congregation while he was away. In this way, both Walt and the congregation would be on a parallel path of renewal and reflection.

Inspired by Walt's model and with the support of my congregation, we prayerfully crafted our "dream sabbatical." For my part, I cooked up a dream list that to my mind didn't seem to have any coherent theme, other than a list of fun and stimulating opportunities for me and my family (my spouse, Tricia, and our two daughters, then age seven and ten).

To my great surprise, the Lilly Endowment approved my "wish list!" That list included airfare and conference cost for my family to Oberlin College in Ohio for the summer camp of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America. We also went on a family trip to Costa Rica for one month. Highlights of that trip included traveling for a week with faculty of Central Seminary and American Baptist Seminary of the West as we learned about theological education in that country. Then we rented a jeep and traveled for remaining weeks as a family throughout the country (our kids still talk about our adventures). In addition, I attended conferences on preaching, an interfaith conference, and another conference on theology of the environment. I also spent eight days on a Zen Kayaking retreat in southeastern Alaska. We camped on islands and kayaked with humpback whales. I attended half of these events with my family, and spent the remaining half alone. When we were not traveling, we simply relaxed at home.

The total cost of my portion of the sabbatical was \$20,200 in 2001. For the first time in our lives, we did not travel on the cheap. The Lilly Endowment allowed our family to stay at nice hotels and even paid for my kids to go on a river rafting trip in Costa Rica while I was hobnobbing with theologians.

For the congregation's portion of the sabbatical, we were very fortunate to have Dr. Rod Romney, recently retired pastor of First Baptist Church Seattle, come and serve as "sabbatical pastor." Rod provided a new voice and encouraged the congregation to listen for the Spirit in new ways. Rod's ministry revolved around Sunday worship and a mid week all church discussion. Both were very well

attended, and both inspired the church to reflect upon where they had been, how God was at work in the present, and where and how they sensed the Spirit to be leading. In addition, the entire congregation was given a wonderful book by Wayne Muller entitled, ***Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight In Our Busy Lives.*** (New York: Bantam/Dell Publishing, 2000) This book provided a theological context for the all-church sabbatical, as well as practical ways of incorporating Sabbath into daily life. The book also served as a common discussion point when we reconnected after the sabbatical. All of this was funded by the Lilly Endowment.

At the end of four months, I had changed, and the congregation had changed. It should be noted there is a risk with a sabbatical. A sabbatical initiates a process of change that continues long after a congregation and pastor are reunited. It is a process of change that has a life of its own. It is an act of faith to intentionally open up to such change. As with a married couple apart for any length of time, it takes time to find a renewed sense of rhythm. Indeed, if the time apart has included significant change, then it will move you into the future in new and unanticipated ways. The good news is that God is surely in the mix!

I am very grateful for the sabbatical time. It was a time full of grace. Today, as I approach my fourteenth year in McMinnville, I'm preparing with the congregation for our next sabbatical in 2008.

## **Part II: Transformation Along the Way ~ Gregg Sneller**

God cares about the hearts of pastors. Many years ago, an area minister said to me, "Without a life of prayer, it becomes increasingly difficult to stay in the ministry." I did not get it because in the ministry in which God placed me, I was serving the church well and doing all the stuff needed to keep the machine well oiled. When on sabbatical, I was wandering around Prague and discovered I was unaware of the tough times riddling the Church's history. Jan Hus gave up his life because he believed you and I should be able to partake of the Elements at the Lord's Supper, and that we have the right to hear words of scripture in our native tongue. After spending time in Prague, my journey continued, and I learned what had taken place in Greece and how many in the Greek Orthodox tradition gave up their lives for Christ. Going back even further in Church history: during my visit to the Bema in Corinth, as well as other places where Paul had sojourned, I saw ancient prisons and relived much of which is recorded in the Book of Acts. Over and over again, God spoke to me about the fact that God enters our time and wants to touch our hearts.

*Minister*

The journey of ministry is filled with many potholes. We may not face persecution as did the early Church, but we do face apathy, complacency, and indifference, all of which can spread like a cancer in a pastor's life. During my sabbatical, I learned that a connection with others was critical for continued growth in Christ. I thank God for the process begun on sabbatical and which has continued since 2002. God has allowed me to be in a process at the Center for Excellence in Congregational Leadership. During the past three years, it has become absolutely vital to continue to work on personal and spiritual transformation in my life. As I continue to read, to learn how to experience grace in all of life, and to move beyond "past tapes" of what it means to be a Christian, God is shaping my heart.

An important component in that journey has been going to the monastery for days of reflection, thus allowing the creative work of the Spirit to continue sprouting up in my life. Another critical component has been meeting together with trusted friends who have challenged and encouraged me to continue growing with Christ. As I have contemplated a ministry change, these dear friends have been able to reflect back to me the ways in which they see me gifted, as well as to identify the times when they have sensed the Spirit really calling me forth.

Four of us have been on sabbatical in the past several years. One is in process. As we re-enter our ministries, there are vital questions we can ask and ways in which we can support one another. The new calling in my life may be seen as a "downward mobility" move in the world's eyes, but in God's eyes, it's the greatest adventure of my life. With the support of a Together in Ministry group and a renewed sense of calling through the Spirit, I fully expect God to continue the process of growth and transformation in my life. Now, thanks to a seed planted many years ago, one of the greatest joys in the life of this pastor is to be able to pray for others, to pray through a day, and be more aware of the presence of God in all situations.



### Part III: Coming in Third! ~ Jeff Savage

“As I reflect on the sabbatical in light of transformation, I find that these have been days of being put in my place . . . and paying attention.” Journal entry, September 18, 2006.

The people of First Baptist Church and I have been sharing life together as pastor and people since May 1988. What’s more, we have every intention of extending our ministry together to twenty years and beyond with intentionality and vision, God willing. In order to accomplish this aim, I began to recognize in my sixteenth year a need to gain fresh perspective and regain a sense of place. It was time to lay the groundwork for a sabbatical . . .

When I learned that two members of my Together in Ministry group (Kent Harrop and Gregg Sneller) had received funding for their own sabbaticals, and that these experiences were to focus on rest and renewal, I was all ears. I had taken sabbatical time in the past (a benefit of staying in one place for some time), but such time had primarily centered on my Doctor of Ministry studies. This time around, however, a renewal time of reflection and transformation for the congregation, my family, and me was just what we believed we needed, so we began stepping through the grant application process.

In 2005 I became the third member of my TIM group to receive a clergy renewal grant from the Lilly Endowment! As the third recipient, I cannot overemphasize the contribution of my TIM group, and of Kent and Gregg specifically, in that successful venture. Our congregational process was strengthened by paying attention to the models of our sibling churches, and I personally benefited greatly by Gregg’s and Kent’s combined experience. Our sabbatical leave was greatly enhanced by their application tips, travel savvy, cautionary tales, and encouraging words. This is, in fact, one of those “being put in my place” lessons, for I found myself more than happy to be in third place behind these two!

So. . . . What about this sabbatical time? In terms of the congregation, we built upon Kent’s concept of “theologian in residence,” by utilizing grant funds to bring in gifted leaders for one month at a time. Over the course of the three-month period, this allowed the First Baptist family to be blessed and stretched by Adalia and Ray Schellinger, Brad Berglund, Barbara Galbraith, and Christine Roush. It was a rich and transforming time for all involved! What’s more, they did quite well without me (put in my place again)!

For my family’s part, we approached the time in three phases: decompression, exploration, and

reflection. The first revolved around a ten-day family scuba-diving trip in Bonaire, Netherlands Antilles. The island and the waters surrounding it offered a phenomenal setting for enjoying God’s creativity and allowed us to begin the sabbatical far removed in every way from the ongoing demands of ministry and the familiar routine of daily life. It was a great way to prepare for the second phase, which involved travel to France and the British Isles. While sojourning there, we lived the experience of the Taizé Community in France and visited other communities recognized as playing a sacred and key role in the ministry of transformation.



The third phase was one of reflection; this, following my son’s departure for college and preceding our return to the First Baptist family. For this phase, Janet and I traveled to Saint Benedict’s Monastery Retreat House in Snowmass, Colorado, to devote the week to paying attention through prayer, silence, and listening, while reflecting on what had been and what would, by God’s grace, come to pass. In this way, we sought to allow the Spirit to prepare us for a purposeful reentry into congregational life.

As I write this article, my sabbatical is six months past, and even now my reflections on that amazing respite put me in my place. The wonders we’ve seen! The hospitality we’ve received! The generosity of the Lilly Endowment! The support of our church family! And the contribution of my Together in Ministry group. It is truly grace upon grace . . .

Even now, I am still blessed to be in third place, for, as both Kent and Gregg cautioned far in advance, it has been difficult to transition back into congregational life and find that renewed sense of rhythm. The truth is that Janet, Christopher, and I returned with more than pictures to show and stories to tell; we also re-entered life together with new insights and renewed convictions about living together in Christ and the congregation did as well! As a result, we still are getting reacquainted as we prepare to enter our twentieth year together! What a gift, then, once again, it is to be part of a group of colleagues that includes folks who have “been there” and are therefore able to lead others along the way!

So, now . . . Perhaps we can be a resource to you as you seek to gain fresh perspective and regain a sense of place.

*Take and Read - A  
Comprehensive  
Bibliography  
by Debbie Kamm*



*The Rev. Debbie Kamm is a second generation American Baptist minister who has pastored churches in New York State and Vermont. She resides in Clifton Springs, New York, where she is engaged in the ministry of caring for her father full-time. She currently serves as Pastor of Reed Corners Federated Church in Canandaigua, NY, is Secretary for the New York State Ministers Council, and is Editor of Minister.*

“So many books ~ so little time!” That thought frequently echoes in my head and my heart as I graze my way through catalogues or bookstores or, as was most recently the case, the splendid articles found within the pages of this edition of *Minister*. Through the words of the authors, you will be introduced to TIM groups which reveal the rich tapestry of ministry and collegiality woven with threads of mutuality, laughter, accountability, compassion, and – because we are Baptists – being at table with one another! You will discover much to ponder, much to learn, and much for which to rejoice.

TIM groups read many and wondrous works; some of those works are cited in their articles, and those works have been compiled in this comprehensive bibliography, which follows in the same order as the articles. In addition to the books listed here, you will find an even longer list of books read by TIM groups on [www.ministerscouncil.org](http://www.ministerscouncil.org), by following the Together in Ministry link. There you also will find other fascinating input and suggestions from TIM groups – but there is always room for more! Please consider sending along a list of books you have read or resources which have proved beneficial to you – they always are welcome additions.

So...Take and Read... feast on the wealth of wisdom and depth of experience captured in the words of your Sisters and Brothers in ministry as you spend time reading their revealing and challenging and encouraging perspectives. Take and Read... and most of all, be blessed by this extraordinary collection of articles, written for you ~ by you ~ so that holy friendships may increase, and so that we will continue to be joined at the heart by the Holy Spirit as we minister in the name of and for the sake of Jesus Christ.

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*For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. II Timothy 1:6-7*

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Other less obvious examples of sibling, spousal, familial, or clergy support are found in many other places in the Scriptures. They might be less noticeable to us because they do not directly relate to clergy, or because they do not place the participants in the best possible light. Permit me to lift up three quick examples. First, on the day David sent Joab out to fight the Ammonites, the battle lines were drawn with the Arameans on one side and the Ammonites on the other side. Joab went out against the Arameans and placed the rest of the army under the command of Abishai, his brother, and they were deployed against the Ammonites. They agreed that if either one of them found the fighting “too hot to handle,” they would indeed come to the other’s rescue (II Samuel 10: 7-12). In ministry, as in war, it’s good to know that someone’s “got your back.” Second, a more familiar story comes from the pages of the history of the early church. It is a sad story, and not a positive example of what Christians should do, and so in some sense, it may be deemed inappropriate to include. Perhaps some might feel this story should come with the warning, “Don’t try this at home.” Still, I mention it because it provides clear evidence of support for a cause, be it ever so ignoble. In Acts 5:1-10, the account of Ananias and Sapphira represents a case where a husband and wife conceived a plan to withhold their resources from the common treasury of the church. Their scheme cost them their lives, but they stood by one another with their plan. They supported each other to the end; literally, “till death do us part.” Third, let me simply say that on the night that Jesus was betrayed and denied, the disciples fled from His side. In the shadows of His suffering and passion, we see the religious leaders supporting one another in their scandalous deed of accusation and crucifixion. Sadly, people with scurrilous agendas are often bound together and united in ways that believers are not.

*Moses’ father-in-law said to him, “What you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You should represent the people before God, and you should bring their cases before God; Exodus 18:17-19*

For the purposes of this article, though, I will attempt to focus my lens on some of the biblical examples that may lend themselves more directly to the need for collegial covenant relationships. Two examples are lifted from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament. Not surprisingly, in the first

snapshot, I return to a scene from the life of Moses. In Exodus 18, we find the account of the day Moses received a visit from Jethro, his father-in-law. Jethro, who is identified as the priest of Midian, was told about all of the good things the Lord had done in rescuing Israel from the hands of the Egyptians. It should be noted that by this time in the nation’s development, Moses had organized a group of elders who supported him, as did Aaron and Miriam.

On the day following Jethro’s arrival, Moses sat to judge the many cases brought to him by the Israelites. Seeing what took place, Jethro spoke these words, “What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you” (Exodus 18:17-19).

This is an important story concerning collegial covenant relationships for several reasons. First, there was a trusting relationship already established between Moses and Jethro. Therefore, it is safe to assume that what Jethro shared with Moses was born out of genuine concern for his well-being, his effectiveness, and his efficiency. Second, Jethro was a priest in his own right, and a man of some years of experience. This was not just theoretical hypothesizing or the mere babble of an intellectual. This was practical advice and common sense born out of experience and maturity. This is not too much unlike many of those experienced practitioners who have helped to facilitate our collegial covenant groups through Together in Ministry. Third, Jethro watched and waited before he spoke, and when he did speak, he had something to say. He did not just criticize Moses. No. This was not a personal attack. There was no axe to grind. There was no assault on his character. Jethro critiqued the effectiveness of Moses’ leadership style. In a real sense, this is about accountability. But here, accountability was not just reduced to keeping someone from doing wrong. It had more to do with helping Moses to do good, that is, to be a better leader and to avoid burnout. Moreover, this is not criticism devoid of alternatives. Jethro offered Moses another paradigm for leadership. Fourth, the Bible tells us Moses listened to his father-in-law, did what he suggested, and then sent him away. Advice like this is hard to ignore. It was seasoned and sincere, heartfelt and helpful. Clearly, the hand of God was at work. It seems to me Jethro’s very purpose in coming to Moses was directed by God. What started out as a routine family visit became so much more. In fact, before Jethro made his recommendations to Moses, he recommended Moses to God, saying, “May God be with you” (Exodus 18:19). I have

thought of this passage as an example of collegial support, because Moses then was able to organize his officials who would serve to support his leadership. As I have reflected on what it means to be Together in Ministry, though, I have come to discover that the first level of support was between Moses and Jethro, and that without this primary covenant relationship, the leaders would not have been so organized to offer Moses the other support he came to enjoy. In other words, this kind of holy friendship made for more effective leadership and ministry.

Another Old Testament example comes from the familiar story of David and Nathan. In this snapshot, the scene is set in the spring of the year, at the time when kings went off to war. Yet, David was at home. David had sent Joab off with the entire army for their military campaigns, while he himself remained in Jerusalem. David was restless. Perhaps he was anxious about receiving news from the frontlines. There was no way to get an immediate update about how the fighting was going. Sorry, there were no BlackBerries. There were no instant communication systems like those to which we have grown so accustomed – no cell phones, faxes, emails, or text messaging systems. David, himself a man of war, was at war within himself. He sought company in the arms of a beautiful woman, whose husband was off at war. She conceived a child, and David conceived a plan to cover his tracks. When his first plan failed, he failed to correct his mistake, choosing instead to cover his actions with an even more grievous sin. He arranged for the fatal injury of Uriah the Hittite, who was Bathsheba's husband. What follows is a pastoral visit to a royal palace. In II Samuel 12:1, we are clearly told, "The Lord sent Nathan to David." Nathan was on a divine assignment. Through the use of a short story, he was able to get David to see his sin. David made his confession. Nathan absolved him of his sin and pronounced God's judgment. Similar to the story of Moses and Jethro, David and Nathan had a previous relationship that helped to make it possible for a level of trust to be established.

Like Moses, David was a political leader, but such leadership in a theocracy is understood to be divinely appointed. In spite of the fact we have pastor selection committees, letters of recommendation, and resumes, clergy should always see their appointments as under the auspices of God, and not just the denomination or search committee. As in the previous story, the leader was open to the advice of the trusted confidant. David was able to listen to Nathan, as Moses listened to Jethro. This is made possible because of the trusting relationship that had been established, and the fact both Jethro and Nathan were on divine assignments. But let's not ignore the fact both Jethro and Nathan said what they had to say directly to Moses and David.

They didn't talk about them; they spoke with them. Theirs was not an occasion of gossip or slander, but sincere concern and wise counsel. There is no record of either Jethro or Nathan being malicious or mean-spirited. Neither of them was guided by personal agendas or selfish motivation. Quite the contrary, there was some risk taking on the part of each of them. And in both instances, there was a positive outcome. In the present case with David and Nathan, there was confession, forgiveness, and restoration (II Samuel 12:1-25; Psalm 51).

Perhaps it is not surprising the first New Testament snapshot, more like series of snapshots, of ministry support I would mention is found in the relationship that Jesus had with His disciples. In the early days of Jesus' public ministry, He gathered unto Himself those who became His followers. There were different levels of discipleship, and not everyone who was counted a disciple became an apostle. Many who were followers did not rise to the ranks of leadership. And not everyone who became a leader demonstrated the best leadership skills at all times. This is not unknown to you and me in our various callings and ministries. Try as we may, we do not always demonstrate our best intentions. Still, we have the twelve apostles as the chosen disciples. Their small ranks were filled with excitement and energy. They found wonder in His words. They marveled at His miracles. They were mesmerized and moved by His message. Yet, there was room for betrayal, denial, and doubt. The pressures of doing ministry with Jesus and providing Him with genuine support were made more difficult because of the constant demands on His time and energy, as well as the dangers surrounding "the passion of the Christ."

*They went to a place called Gethsemane; and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." Mark 14:32-34*

Nevertheless, there is another triad of support towering above most of the other biblical examples found in the New Testament. This would be Jesus' own inner circle of Peter, James, and John. The examples of collegial support stand out for me when Jesus asks these three disciples to stay awake and pray in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46), when he takes them with Him to the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36), and when we later see Peter and John going to the Temple at the hour of prayer and healing a crippled man who was carried to the gate called Beautiful (Acts 3:1-10). One clear example of ministry support comes from the

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ministry of Jesus when the disciples assisted Jesus in feeding the multitudes (Matthew 14:13-21; 15:29-39; Mark 6:30-44; 8:1-10; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-15). In the telling of these stories, large crowds gathered as Jesus was teaching. As the day was spent, so too was spent the energy and food supply of the people. Understandably, the disciples were concerned about sending the people away before they passed away from hunger and fatigue. But Jesus was more concerned with teaching them the importance of never “Underestimating Our Resources,” (in the words of the late Rev. Dr. Sandy Ray, former pastor of the Cornerstone Baptist Church, Brooklyn, New York), especially when we give what we have in service to God. In an organizational plan reminiscent of Jethro’s advice to Moses, the people were directed to sit in groups, the disciples were given oversight for certain blocks of people, and a great miracle took place. In a real sense, this miracle was made possible because of the ministry support Jesus received from His disciples.

The final of these four brief snapshots of ministry support and collegial covenant relationships is seen in what I identify as ministry couplets or partnerships that rose up in the early church. This is much in the same way Jesus sent out His seventy-two disciples two by two (Luke 10:1-24). Peter and John have already been mentioned (Acts 3:1-10). But we see Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13:1-3), Barnabas and Mark (Acts 15:39), Paul and Silas (Acts 15:40; 16-40), Paul and Timothy (II Timothy 1:1-7, 4:9), and Paul and Luke (II Timothy 4:11), just to name a few. Mention is now made of the familiar story of Paul and Silas (Acts 16:16-40), who were on their way to the place of prayer, and got into trouble along the way. Paul relieved a certain slave girl of a spirit that possessed her, and for his actions, the owners of the slave girl dragged both Paul and Silas into the marketplace. Charges were brought against them, and Paul and Silas were stripped, beaten, and thrown into prison. While chained to the walls in maximum security, Paul and Silas spent the night and early morning hours praying and singing. Heaven took notice, the earth quaked, “all the prison doors flew open, and everybody’s chains came loose” (Acts 16:26). Rather than trying to escape with their lives, though, Paul and Silas used this as an opportunity to keep the jailer from taking his own life. They then led the jailer and his family to believe in the Lord Jesus and become saved. At daylight, orders came for Paul and Silas to be released from prison. Yet, they refused to leave until the magistrates themselves came and escorted them from prison. With a night like this, Paul and Silas were still not through! Before leaving Philippi, they went to Lydia’s house, where they met with other believers and encouraged them. What a part-

nership in suffering and service! No minister of the gospel should have to endure the extreme hardships and challenges of ministry without having someone to sing with, someone to pray with, and someone with whom to share the obstacles and opportunities of ministry.

*...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. Galatians 5:22-23*

Any attempt to reflect theologically on the basis for collegial covenant groups, especially in light of the passages that have been presented herein, needs to place this discussion in the context of the larger community, that is, the church or the people of God (*laos theou*). The early Christians believed themselves to be the continuation of the house of Israel (Romans 9:25, 27; I Peter 2:9). As such, Abraham is our forefather through the righteousness that comes by faith (Romans 4:12ff). Flew (1956) notes that, “The disciples were Israel; they were the church or the people of God. They did not separate from Israel. They could not. It was the rebellious Sons of Israel who forfeited their covenant by rejecting Christ.”<sup>1</sup> The references, then, to the Old Testament examples, especially those associated with Moses and David, are relevant for today’s church. The church as the *ecclesia* or the “people called forth by God” should be in the business of manifesting *charismata*; that is, the gifts and “fruit” of the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 4:1ff, Paul makes the case for the kind of support one might find in the church. Here Paul calls us to bear with one another through humility, gentleness, patience, and love. This passage also reads like the kind of covenant statement clergy colleagues might have between themselves in a support group. Of course, this is not possible apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The basis for manifesting the qualities needed to support one another is found in living by the Holy Spirit. Paul says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). One of the ways we evidence the work of the Holy Spirit is through Christian unity. In fact, John A. T. Robinson (1960) asserts that unity transcends all other forms expressed by the Church.<sup>2</sup> This is consistent with God’s Revelation. John Eddins (1981) notes that, “The unity of the Church is Theocentric.”<sup>3</sup> There is one God and one people of God. There is one Lord Jesus Christ, the head of one body, the church. And there is one Holy Spirit creating *koinonia* or unity within the church.<sup>4</sup>

On a personal note, serving as a member of the Together in Ministry Steering Committee has been a most rewarding experience. Perched in this posi-

tion, I have seen many contemporary snapshots of these biblical models in practice. In many ways, the Steering Committee became for me such a collegial covenant group. There was a clear intention to model the best practices of what it means to be Together in Ministry. Like Moses and David of the Old Testament, I have experienced genuine collegial concern, accountability, and the call to a more effective ministry. The examples from the New Testament help me to see I have been called to experience holy friendship, first with Jesus and then with those who are colleagues with me in ministry. Like the grace of God, this is a free gift that involves free choice. First comes the invitation, then the response, and then the place in the community with peers. This sounds a lot like the process of becoming a member of the local congregation and a disciple of Christ. Not surprisingly, this reduces the likelihood of clergy burnout and makes for a much more effective ministry. Collegial covenant groups are important, therefore, because they can serve to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of Christian ministry, help to maintain unity in the church, and aid in the expansion of the visible witness of the body of Christ.



<sup>1</sup>Flew, R. N. (1956). Jesus and His church: a study of the idea of the ecclesia in the New Testament. London: Epworth Press, p.101.

<sup>2</sup>Robinson, J. A. T. (1960). On being the church in the world: essays. London: SCM Press.

<sup>3</sup>Eddins, J. (1980) Systematic theology: class notes, p. 100.

<sup>4</sup>ibid.

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### *Snapshots from the Scriptures: Biblical Models of Collegial Covenant Groups*

by V. DuWayne Battle

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As I stand before the vast expanse of the Scriptures, I have my imaginary camera in hand. Rumor has it there are some good snapshots to be had of biblical models that provide a basis for understanding the importance of collegial covenant groups and what it means to be "Together in Ministry," I find myself drawn to examples from both the Old and New Testaments. Some of these examples, however, do not relate directly to the role of the minister. Instead, they have more to do with leadership in general. People around kings and judges, for instance, supported their leadership. Likewise, there are examples of how people who were not a part of the official ministerium, that is, they were not prophets or priests or apostles, participated in circles of support and friendship. And the mere mention of the word friendship brings to mind the biblical example of support and friendship that David and Jonathan enjoyed. There are also instances of sibling support. One can consider two such sibling triads. In the Old Testament, there are two brothers and one sister who figure quite prominently in the history of Israel. Moses and Aaron and Miriam each provided leadership for the people of Israel, as well as supporting one another. One could say they were "Together in Ministry." In the New Testament, the example of the sibling triad that stands out for me consists of two sisters and one brother. Arguably, Mary and Martha and Lazarus not only enjoyed a unique friendship with Jesus, but their circle of support for the ministry of Jesus also made room for their own system of support for each other.

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