

Report to the Senate  
January, 2009  
Joe Kutter

January has been a time to regroup and prepare for the season ahead.

I spent several days with the Professional Church Leaders group of the National Council of Churches in Christ. Each denomination's "point person(s)" in ministry with ministerial leaders was present and the focus was on doing ministry with our ministers. It's hard to summarize 3 days of conversation but this is very clear – we all are facing the same issues because we are all doing ministry in the same cultural environment. And we all share a common humanity and confession that Jesus is Lord.

I will share one article that is applicable to us all and very helpful both personally and professionally; "Shooting the Rapids, the Cycles of Pastoral Ministry" by Dan Pietrzyk of the Evangelical Covenant Church. He has found that there are three common, perhaps predictable, times in the minister's life when crisis comes, years 5-8, 13-15 and 20-25. It is a short article and I strongly recommend that you link up to it. [www.divinity.duke.edu/programs/spe/articles/200709/rapids](http://www.divinity.duke.edu/programs/spe/articles/200709/rapids). Chances are that you will find something descriptive of yourself or a friend.

I have just returned from meeting with the Extended Council of the Office of General Secretary. I was honored to preach at the worship service with the OGS that immediately preceded the inauguration of President Obama.

Please be looking for the next issue of *Minister* which will be available the first week in February. The focus of this issue is, what impact will the new ABC structure have on local ministers and ministries? This issue of *Minister* is one answer to the question, what do we get for our dues?

It looks like I'll make 7 trips in February and March, one of which will be back to Valley Forge to write the next TIM report for Lilly. I'll keep you posted.

What follows is a "thought piece" for your consideration, reflection, and response. Please take a moment to read. Thanks.

Towards a Vision of Ministers Council  
Joe Kutter

Our single biggest challenge as a Ministers Council is identifying ourselves within our denominational family. How do we picture ourselves? What is our vision of ourselves? I write this to move the conversation forward.

I have been helped by our conversations with Etienne Wenger and the book that he helped to author, *Cultivating Communities of Practice* and I want to use those insights in describing the Ministers Council. I want to think of the Ministers Council as a “Community of Practice.”

A Community of Practice has essentially 3 components:

1. A COMMUNITY
2. A community that shares a PRACTICE
3. A DOMAIN of shared knowledge and inquiry that are inherent to the practice.

**COMMUNITY:** When we are at our best, the Ministers Council is a community and, perhaps, a community of communities. We are a network of relationships, women and men in ministry, who seek together to be faithful to God’s call. We are as large as the denomination, perhaps larger, and we are as small as our Together in Ministry groups and our constituent councils. When we are at our best, we are a web of relationships, a community.

**PRACTICE:** We share a common practice. The practice of ministry can be described as the cluster of arts, skills and knowledge that are necessary for ministerial leadership. The practice is, who we are, what we know and what we do all bound up together in the practice of ministry. So, at our best, the Ministers Council is a community of practitioners in ministry.

**DOMAIN:** The domain is the cluster of interests, concerns, issues, inquiries, problems and opportunities that are inherent in the practice. It is the cluster of things encountered when attempting to be an effective practitioner. When the domain is well understood, at least well intuited, the community of practice tends to have a healthy life and when there is no common understanding of the domain, the community tends to flounder.

I believe that we have described the core of our “domain” in our mission statement. We have identified ourselves as men and women who “covenant together” to deepen or spiritual journeys and to increase our effectiveness as leaders in Christ’s church. To say it again, we agree that together we will seek to relate more faithfully to God and together we will attempt to be more effective leaders in the church of Christ. The interests, concerns, issues, inquiries, problems and opportunities that are inherent to those fundamental commitments constitute our “domain.”

So, who are we? We are practitioners of ministry who are intentionally forming a community within which we address those matters that are inherent to our shared commitment to deepen our spiritual journeys and to be effective leaders in that part of Christ’s church called American Baptist.

To say it briefly, we are an intentional community of ministerial practitioners attempting to be as effective as we can possibly be.

Is this helpful? How can we better describe or picture ourselves as The American Baptist Ministers Council?

Joe Kutter  
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