

March Report to the Senate
Joe Kutter

March travels took me to Rochester, NY, for seminary board meetings. Again I was reminded of the rather fragile connection between our free standing seminaries and the need to prepare women and men for faithful and fruitful ministry in a world where both culture and church are morphing daily. My summary observation is that never has preparation for ministry been both more necessary and more difficult than, perhaps, ever before.

I was honored to preach at Calvary Baptist in Denver, CO on the 14th. Joe Greemore grew up in FBC Topeka where I served and was installed as an Associate Pastor at Calvary. The youngster I first knew as a sophomore has become a husband, father, and an excellent minister. I have no doubt that in the course of his ministry, our denomination will be blessed by his emerging ministry.

The 16th through 19th, I spent at the office in Valley Forge completing the annual report to the Lilly Endowment. Copies are available for the asking. Our contribution to the life of ABC ministry through the TIM groups has been remarkable.

The 19th and 20th, I led a retreat for ABC Ohio Ministerial Leaders including region staff. Again, I was impressed at the commitment to both spiritual deepening and leadership development.

Then we took a vacation trip to Nicaragua, 21-28, to visit with our son Josh who is serving as a Board of International volunteer missionary this year. We've been there before on mission trips where we saw the poverty and need. This time, on vacation, we saw a country ripe with potential. It's a beautiful place. We were thrilled to worship Palm Sunday with, in English, The First Baptist Church of Managua and Dr. Gustavo Parajon.

A brief observation: When we first visited Nicaragua, we met a group of youngsters that we believed to be wonderfully talented. While in Nicaragua this time, I had a chance to reconnect with some of them, now doctors and lawyers and teachers – incredible witnesses to the gospel and to the importance of our missionary support in that land.

Through the month, our Fund Raising Team has begun to work. The Women In Ministry Task Force is making significant advances. We published a significant issue of Minister, Mike Saylor editing, and other committees met via conference call.

The Community of Practice workshop/retreats continue to help me to reflect on the distinctive nature of our vocation. This is becoming clear to me – I think. The ministerial leader, as practitioner, thrives in the concrete, flesh and blood, messy, relational, places in life. It's in the experience of ministry, with all of its nuances and ambiguities that the practitioner experiences the fulfillment of his or her vocation. It's where principles collide and values cross one another, and simple clarity about right and wrong is elusive that the ministerial practitioner finds her or his reason to be in that place. When the

Ministerial Leader is functioning in apparent chaos and is blessed to point to the presence of the Spirit that "The Call" is realized. Theological and ethical abstractions have a serious purpose and fulfill an essential need but, for the practitioner of ministry, those abstractions are servants of flesh and blood encounters -- person to person and human and divine. The abstract serves as an aid to understanding but is never regarded as a substitute for the real thing.

God bless and I look forward to seeing you at the Senate meeting in August.