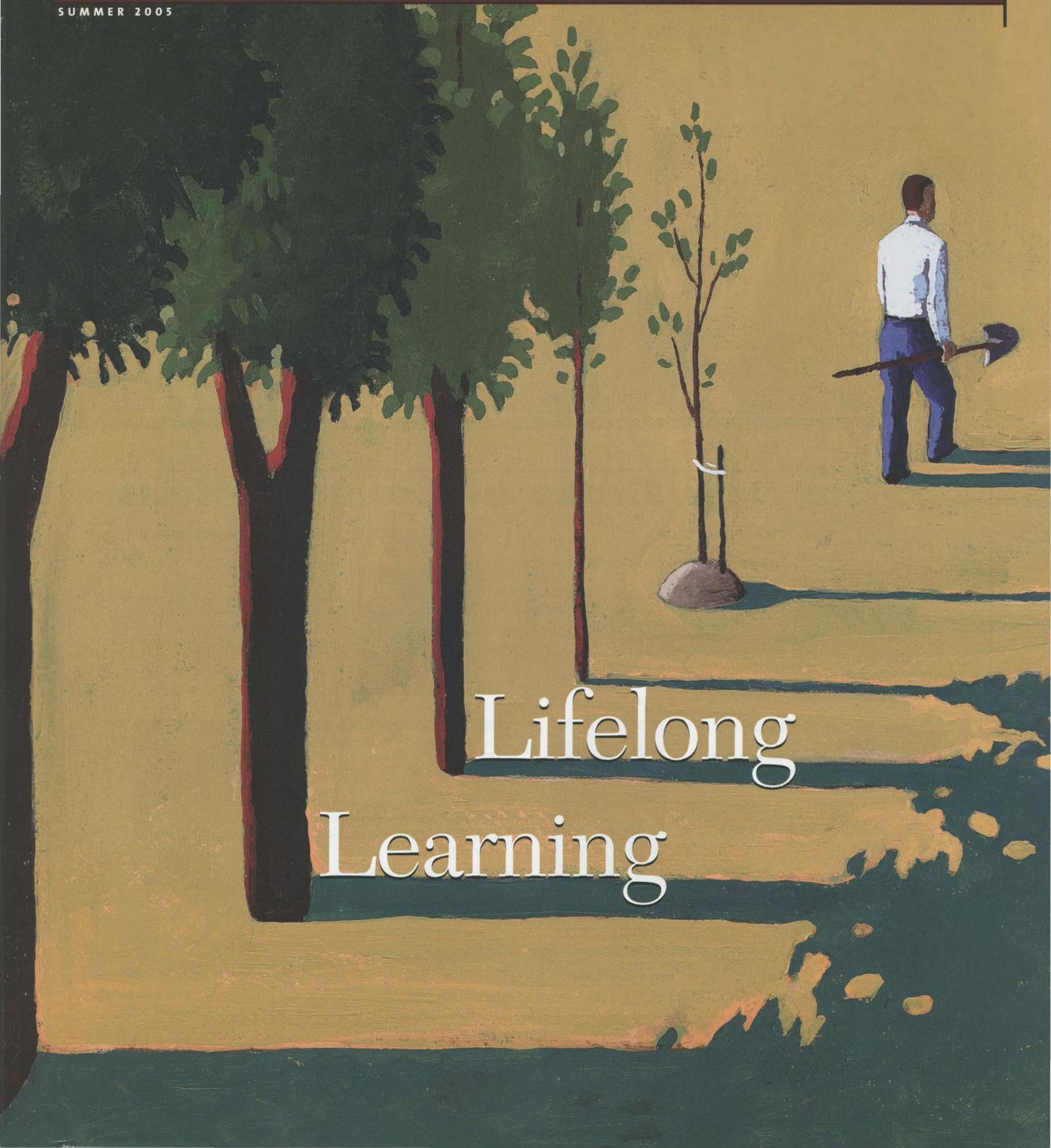


LEARNING LEADING CHANGING

Congregations

SUMMER 2005



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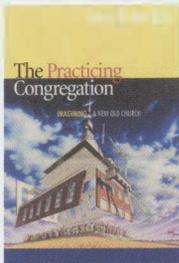
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The New Shape of Congregations



THE PRACTICING CONGREGATION
Imagining a New Old Church
by Diana Butler Bass

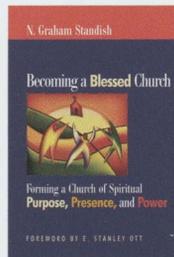
Historian and author Diana Butler Bass has identified a new type of mainline congregation that she has named "the practicing congregation"—mainline Protestant congregations that are flourishing as they intentionally and innovatively employ ancient religious practices.

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by Rick Barger

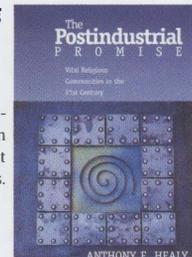
Lutheran Pastor Rick Barger calls for congregations to re-examine what it means to be an "authentic church" in a success-oriented society. He advocates for a return to a church grounded in Christ and the resurrection.

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LEARNING LEADING CHANGING

SUMMER 2005

Lifelong Learning



in Focus

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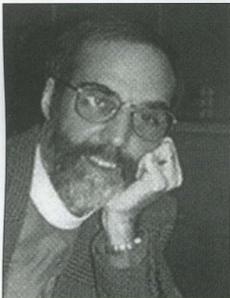
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Mark M. Beckwith



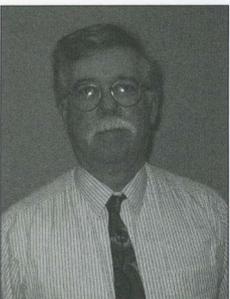
Carol E. Lytch



Alice Mann



K.C. Ptomey



John Wimberly

Rev. Lynne M. Baab is a Presbyterian minister who lives in Seattle. She is the author of several books, most recently *Sabbath Keeping: Finding Freedom in the Rhythm of Rest* (InterVarsity Press, 2005) and *Beating Burnout in Congregations* (Alban Institute, 2003). She served as associate pastor at Bethany Presbyterian Church in Seattle from 1997 to 2004, when she left to pursue doctoral studies at the University of Washington.

Rev. Mark M. Beckwith has been rector of All Saints Church, Worcester, a racially and socioeconomically diverse urban parish in Massachusetts, since 1993. A graduate of Amherst College and Berkeley Divinity School at Yale, Mark has been engaged in various dimensions of urban ministry for 22 years. He serves as a conference leader for CREDO, a renewal education program for Episcopal clergy.

Rev. Terry Foland has been a consultant for the Alban Institute since 1992. He is an experienced trainer and administrator who advises congregations and religious organizations in the areas of conflict management, clergy transition, and congregational revitalization. Prior to joining Alban, he served as an area minister for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Rev. Dr. Carol E. Lytch is a sociologist of religion and Presbyterian minister who served as coordinator of Lilly Endowment Programs for Strengthening Congregational Leadership with the Fund for Theological Education from 1999 to June 2005. She is adjunct faculty in practical theology at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Her study of Catholic, evangelical, and mainline Protestant congregations that hold teens in their religious tradition through the end of their high school years resulted in a book, *Choosing Church: What Makes a Difference for Teens* (Westminster/John Knox, 2004).

Rev. Alice Mann is a senior consultant with the Alban Institute. An Episcopal priest who has served six congregations, she is a nationally recognized consultant-trainer who specializes in growth strategies, leadership skills, strategic planning, spirituality, and congregational development. She is the author of several books, including *The In-Between Church* (Alban Institute, 1998), *Can Our Church Live?* (Alban Institute, 1999), and *Raising the Roof* (Alban Institute, 2001). Most recently, she co-authored, with Gil Rendle, *Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations* (Alban Institute, 2003).

Marlis McCollum is a freelance journalist who received her education from the University of Maryland. She has written and edited for a variety of organizations, including the Cathedral College of Preachers, the Alban Institute, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Gallery of Art, and National Geographic. She is also a published poet, as well as an artist and art teacher.

Rev. Dr. Kyser C. ("K.C.") Ptomey, Jr. has been the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Nashville, Tennessee, since 1981. His earlier pastorates included First Presbyterian Church of Arlington, Texas; First Presbyterian of Henderson, Texas; and Collierville Presbyterian Church in Collierville, Tennessee. A native of Birmingham, Alabama, K.C. holds a doctorate of ministry from McCormick Seminary, a bachelor of divinity from Louisville Seminary, and a bachelor's degree in philosophy from Rhodes College. His sermons and articles have been published in the *Presbyterian Survey*, the *Journal for Preachers*, *Weavings*, *Pulpit Digest*, and *Reformed Liturgy and Worship*.

Rev. Dr. John Wimberly has been pastor of Western Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., since 1983. John helped found Miriam's Kitchen for the Homeless, which feeds 200 of Washington's homeless daily, as well as the Houston Rape Crisis Coalition and the Network for Abused Women in Montgomery County, Maryland. His education includes a master's in divinity from McCormick Theological Seminary, a Ph.D. in systematic theology from The Catholic University, and a master's in business administration from The George Washington University. John is heavily involved in Washington's social justice networks and has considerable knowledge of First Amendment issues.

Toward a Truer Form of Governance



Congregations

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As Alban senior consultant Ed White pointed out in his review of *Here I Am Lord, Now What? Transition and Survival in the First Parish*, "theological seminaries do not and probably cannot fully prepare people for parish ministry. Seminaries can provide theology, Bible, church history, and certain skills training in homiletics. They can give attention to the spiritual and emotional development of a person. But there are some things that you can only learn about being a pastor when you are actually living and working in the role of the pastor in a congregation. Normally you become a pastor after you finish seminary."

Few who have entered pastoral ministry would disagree. To some extent, this experience parallels that of many other professionals. There is a dawning awareness in our culture that, to survive in today's complex and rapidly changing world, we must be continuously learning. But for clergy, whose roles are more complex than those of most professionals, this need is even more pronounced. The difference goes far beyond that, however: for pastors, continuing education is not merely a matter of taking the occasional seminar or workshop but a lifelong path of learning and growth.

The church understands this: Seminaries have been offering continuing education programs to their graduates for decades. Other training is available through denominational offices, judicatories, and synods. The Episcopal Church has even made continuing education for its priests mandatory. Other organizations, including the Alban Institute, have also developed their own programs to fill ongoing education needs. The need for pastors' continuing education is clear, but much about continuing education for clergy is not.

Each week, pastors may receive dozens of continuing education brochures (and as many e-mails) and see countless continuing education ads in the magazines they receive. But how, we wondered, can pastors best choose from the available offerings? How can they structure learning agendas that really fulfill their needs and those of their congregations? And where, we wanted to know, could they learn of the programs or formats that were proving most helpful to others? We also wondered about recent developments in continuing education—research and experiments that are pointing to new and more effective ways of delivering the continuing education pastors so need. And perhaps more importantly, how can clergy make learning part of their practice of life and help their congregations become communities of learning?

In this issue we've attempted to address these questions both for ourselves and our readers. Consideration is given to a variety of topics, including peer learning groups, the use of a coach, the involvement of the laity in one's learning agenda, getting help from one's pastor-parish relations committee when selecting continuing education programs, the inclusion of artistic endeavors in one's continuing education plan, and ways in which we can prepare our youth—while still in high school—for the call they may find later in life. We offer our authors' thoughts and experiences in these pages not as endorsed programs but as inspiration and food for thought for our readers as they continue to contemplate and shape their own lifelong learning agendas.

Richard Bass
Director of Publishing



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of Washington National Cathedral

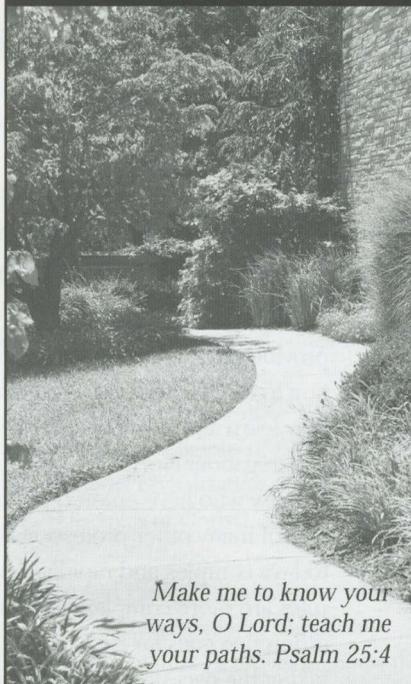
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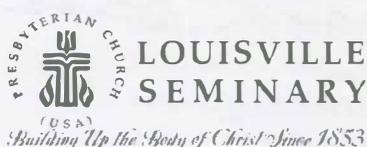
Louisville Seminary announces openings for two professors

Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary is seeking professors in **Theology** and **Homiletics and Worship** who have both a heart for teaching and a vibrant and critical love for the Church to sustain them in helping students prepare for all the tasks of Christian ministry. The Seminary offers an inclusive and diverse community and welcomes individuals from wider ecumenical backgrounds.

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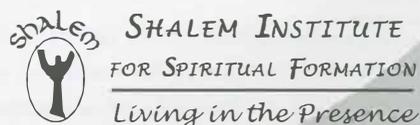


Clergy Spiritual Life and Leadership: Going Deeper

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Visit our web site at www.shalem.org

The Difference a Trustee Can Make

Not too many years ago, I found myself squarely on the “hot seat.” I was a board member attending a meeting where the question before us was whether to keep or fire the chief executive. The board had listened to all the pros and cons and had considered a variety of options. We were in executive session and the tension was high. Finally, a motion to fire was on the table. One by one, we proceeded around the board table, with each trustee declaring her or his vote.

As the decision juggernaut moved toward me, I became increasingly certain that I was going to cast the decisive vote. I regretted that I habitually chose a seat at the corner of the table so I that I could spread out all my papers. My normally roomy spot felt suddenly confining. Indeed, my vote was going to be the last one and my fellow board members were equally divided. I voted and we called the chief executive back into the room to announce our corporate decision. Then we moved into a new future. For a moment, I really felt the weight of being a trustee, and I knew firsthand just how large a difference one trustee can make in an institution's life.

Although situations like this one occasionally remind us of a board's power, for most of us, for most of the time, boards of directors and trustees are invisible entities that we hear little about. More inscrutable still are the individuals who make up a particular board. Since boards act collectively, we rarely hear of the difference an individual board member makes.

Recently, however, the Alban Institute had a moment to do just that. At our most recent board meeting, the trustees adopted a resolution to honor Dorothy (Dottie) T. Yingling, who had served as an Alban Trustee from 1987 to 1994, and as Alban's treasurer for five of those years. Her death on April 12, 2005, gave us an occasion to gather up our “Dottie stories” and reflect on what she had done for us.



Dottie's board years preceded my coming to Alban as president, but her interest in the organization was a constant, so I met with her frequently and learned about her from the stories she told and through the lore that had attached itself to her name in our institutional memory. Her colorful personality had made board meetings vigorous and board dinners a delight, I learned, and she had a great life story, too, one that included airplane crashes, World War II adventures, life as a pastor's wife, and success at breaking the glass ceiling at one of the largest corporations in the U.S.

Dottie loved to tell her story, and never missed a chance to do so. She claimed that she had saved Alban from fiscal disaster, and many agree. Dottie had significant corporate and business experience and she pressed the institution to improve its fiscal and management practices. Her tenacity challenged the Alban ethos, but it also made real growth and change possible.

Perhaps most memorable is how much Dottie loved the church and its ministers. She felt that the church and its clergy were in crisis and she doggedly believed that

Alban could and should make a difference. She invested her time and her resources to create programs that could help pastors make the transition from seminary to congregation, and she did one of the things that institutions most need from their trustees: she believed in the organization she served.

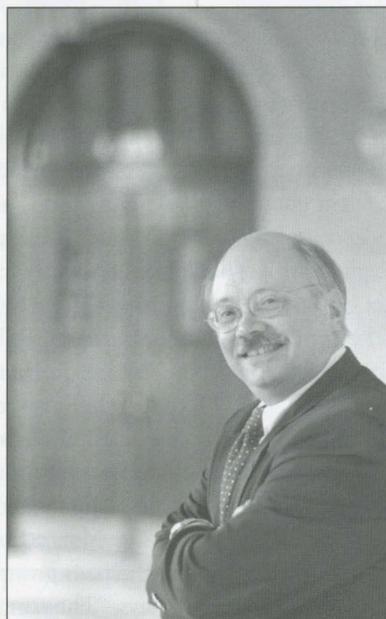
Dottie's story gives flesh and blood to one of my favorite definitions of trusteeship: to hold an institution in trust for a public good and service to many. During my first visit to her home, Dottie wrote out a check for \$10,000, saying, “Here, this is to prove to you that people will give money to the Alban Institute.” When she died, she left one more legacy, the largest personal gift to Alban in our 30-year history, a gift equaled only by her many years of service, support, and faith.

It's no wonder, then, that our board responded on April 22, 2005, with a resolution to recognize Dottie for the ways she strengthened and furthered the work of the Alban Institute, and to remember the ways in which Alban, congregations, clergy, and lay leaders will benefit from her generosity and vision for years to come.

There are countless Dotties out there, serving on congregational, community, civic, and not-for-profit boards. It is so important that we recognize the difference they make, that we thank them, and that we hold them up as examples for the rest of us to emulate.

Rest in peace,
Dottie—and thanks.

Rev. Dr. James P. Wind is the president of the Alban Institute. Prior to joining the Institute in 1995, he served as program director at the Lilly Endowment's religion division. Dr. Wind is the author of three books and numerous articles, including “The Alban Institute Special Report on Leadership.”





A Journey with One's Peers: The Power of Group Learning Programs

MARLIS MCCOLLUM

Seminaries and other organizations offer a plethora of continuing education programs for ministers, but many of these same organizations are conducting research to discover new continuing education models that can provide even more benefit and impact. What is being discovered may have the potential to transform the face of ministerial continuing education.

Peer group learning experiments, in particular, appear to hold great promise. Bruce Roberts, professor of congregational education and leadership at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, is director of one such experiment, the Indiana Peer Group Study Program (PGSP), a program funded by the Lilly Endowment and based upon evaluation research Roberts conducted with Robert E. Reber of a peer group program initiated by The Dixon Foundation in Alabama in the early 1980s.

Of the 14 peer groups in the PGSP, six have completed their three-year programs of study. Without exception, Roberts says, participants "are all reporting being highly energized by what has happened, describing it as the best continuing education they've ever had. One participant said he thought the denominations should shut down all the individual events and just fund peer learning."

There is evidence that the congregations have experienced the impact of their pastors' participation in the peer group study experience, as well, though it's difficult to quantify. Nevertheless, Roberts says, "The congregations are telling us that they have noticed a difference in their

pastors—that the pastors have been more energetic, have started more programs, and have interacted better with the congregations than they had before.”

In the PGSP, the question of what is to be learned is turned over to participants. “We say to the clergy, ‘As a group, come up with a plan for your learning that all of you can get excited about and that you are willing to hold each other accountable for over the next three years.’ And what we’ve found is that that creates a lot of energy for continuing education.” In Roberts’ opinion, the accountability system the group provides is one of the keys to the program’s success. “When you send somebody away as an isolated individual, they may come back on fire, but they still end up in the old system, where there are no accountability structures in place, so there’s no ongoing reflection about what went on there, and pretty soon the learning just gets lost.”

Also at the core of the success of peer group learning, he believes, is the freedom each group has to decide on its learning agenda. “I don’t think it’s a good idea for someone outside of a given context to be giving advice to ministers about what they ought to be learning,” he says. “What ministers should be working on learning will depend on what’s going on in the context in which they work, what they are experiencing, and what they believe they need to work on.”

Michael Ross, executive director of the Pastors Institute in Anderson, Indiana, agrees. Ross recently completed a research project examining the combined findings of six studies on pastoral attrition (a project funded by the Louisville Institute), discovering that many departed ministers felt that their education—both seminary and post-seminary—had left them ill-prepared, and needed to be more relevant to the congregations they pastored. “This whole notion of contextual education is on the front burner, but it has not made its way into lifelong learning plans,” Ross says.

Among the other seven primary factors that led to decisions to leave the ministry were a lack of connectedness and support, insufficient self-care, and poor “people skills”—some of the same areas in which

the PGSP groups have chosen to focus their efforts. Most of the six PGSP groups who have completed their work focused on leadership skills, and most also paid attention to spiritual and self-nurturing practices. “They are all feeling the burnout, so they do have a spirituality component and a self-care component in their learning plans,” Roberts says.

The Institute for Clergy Excellence in Huntsville, Alabama, has developed its own peer group learning project, also funded by the Lilly Endowment, and is experiencing results similar to those of the PGSP groups. The project grew out of an earlier program that Institute Executive Director Larry Dill was instrumental in forming. In that program, groups of ministers from the North Alabama United Methodist Conference came together to work on their preaching. The current project expands on the earlier program in a number of ways: It is ecumenical, includes participants from a wide region, and includes not only preaching but also worship and leadership components. It has a lay component as well.

The project includes 11 groups, some of which are ending their first year of work together. Others are still working on designing their learning agendas. “It takes six months to a year for them to design their projects,” explains Dill. Like Roberts, Dill believes the key principles underlying the peer group learning model’s success are that the groups are self-selecting, they design their own learning agenda, they study together over time, and the members hold each other accountable for the learnings. “It’s not like going to a seminar,” he says. “Each time they meet we expect them to give evidence to one another about what they are learning.”

Dill finds particular power in the opportunity for the groups to design their own learning agendas. “That’s one of the most exciting and energizing aspects of this program. It’s based on the idea that the world is your classroom.” He cites the example of one group that worked with the Dzieci Theater Group of New York City to improve their preaching. “People from the school worked with the group on things like presence,

breathing, and voice. The members of the group said it was really transformational for them. The freedom to experiment, to be creative, often winds up being transformational,” Dill says. In addition, the Institute encourages groups to change their plans as they go along. “It’s a plan that grows with them as they grow,” Dill says.

Involving the Laity

Involving the laity in the work of the groups has also proven a successful strategy. “There’s a lot of energy among the laity,” Dill says. Although originally included based on the premise that they would be helpful in implementing any changes the minister wished to make in worship, the laity’s participation has proven to be more influential in the group members’ efforts to improve their preaching, Dill says. “From the laity we heard comments like ‘I thought I could help my minister be a better preacher, but I couldn’t find a safe place to do that.’ So this program provided that safe space.”

As with their learning agendas, the groups are free to determine exactly how they will involve the laity. Some laity teams have been invited to participate in the ministers’ training sessions with outside speakers. Others have been offered the opportunity to travel with the groups. One group has developed an instrument it will use to have its laity teams evaluate its members’ preaching. Another group even invited its laity teams to participate in the design of its project.

Recent research seems to indicate that lay participation in a pastor’s learning agenda may be more important than has previously been thought. In Ross’s research on pastoral attrition, a significant finding is that pastors who have left the ministry believe they would have had a better experience if their congregations had been more involved in the development of their learning programs.

“What we’re finding is that there seems to be a detachment of the pastor’s continuing education from the congregation’s involvement—and even their awareness. Former pastors seem to be

saying they made a mistake in not involving the congregation earlier in their continuing education process.” The way in which pastors believe congregations could have helped the most, Ross says, is by providing input into the minister’s lifelong learning plan. Much of the learning pastors receive in continuing education programs “is misunderstood or mischanneled because the congregation is often unaware of what the pastor is doing,” he says.

Dean McDonald, director of the Cathedral College of Preachers, says the College has found it very effective to involve the laity in its core curriculum program. “Participants in that program form a listening group of members of their congregation to provide feedback on their sermons. This has tremendous benefit to the preacher, who now has a lay group that has an increased sensitivity to what goes into planning worship and preaching.”

“Clergy are very reticent to ask for things they think others might view as being just for themselves,” adds Dean Wolfe, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Kansas. “That’s why it’s very important to involve lay members.” When the laity become involved in a minister’s continuing education, he says, they can more readily recognize its benefits not only to the minister but also to the congregation.

Milwaukee, says one of the most beneficial continuing education events in which he participated was a stewardship partners program held last year by the Wisconsin Conference of the United Church of Christ. “In order to participate I had to bring laypeople from my church to participate with me. The idea was to recruit a team that could learn with me.” Warner recruited two members of his congregation to be part of his team, an architect and a development director for a nonprofit organization. The participation of these members provided continuity and ongoing inspiration for Warner when he returned to his pastorate. “We could have a conversation about what we’d learned and each of us had different insights, so instead of having only what I had gleaned from the program I also had the insights of my team members. It made the experience more well-rounded. And instead of just having a great experience away from the church I could continue to process that experience with others when I returned.”

Group Learning Benefits

Peer group learning project directors and researchers believe this ability to continue to reflect on and build on the learnings from a continuing education event is one

homiletics together. “Initially I looked upon that as not a very creative idea, but soon I realized that to go to that event together was quite different from going to it as individuals. Within the group there were three women and five men, and after the event they realized they had heard the speakers very differently. The men had related more positively to the male speakers than to the female speakers, and for the women it was just the opposite. So they have begun exploring why that is. That’s something they wouldn’t have discovered if they had attended that conference by themselves.”

Dill also believes there is a cumulative knowledge available to ministers in the group learning experience, whether that takes the shape of shared insights, information, advice, tips, or reminders of wisdom shared by guest speakers or trainers. “Sometimes we aren’t able to hear something at the time that it is said. Later, when we are ready to hear it, a group member can remind us.”

Wolfe sees other benefits of peer group learning. “Traditionally,” he says, “it has been very difficult for clergy to build community with each other. There is often a competitiveness among clergy, a reticence to share. Groups like these break those negative patterns and help clergy establish more positive connections with one another.”

Jennifer Thomas, pastor of Lake Park Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, says her most helpful continuing education experiences have involved colleague groups, one of which is Christ Clarion Fellowship, a group of young clergy that meets once a year for a four-day retreat. Each retreat has a topical focus, such as public witness or devotional practices, which is explored in depth. Fellowship is an integral part of the event, as is mentoring, Thomas says. She considers the ecumenical and interracial composition of the group another benefit. “We wrestle with the same issues, but because our contexts are different we learn about other denominations. We help each other hone our gifts and skills, and as we develop relationships with one another we can challenge and affirm each other as well.”

“The congregations are telling us that they have noticed a difference in their pastors—that the pastors have been more energetic, have started more programs, and have interacted better with the congregations than they had before.”

—Bruce Roberts

Along that same vein, other organizations have begun encouraging clergy to involve their lay members in their continuing education efforts, and they are receiving positive feedback about these initiatives. Andrew Warner, pastor of Plymouth United Church of Christ in

of the primary benefits of group learning, whether one’s group consists of other clergy or members of one’s congregation.

“There’s an unusual dynamic that develops when learning with a peer group,” says Dill, recalling one group that decided to attend a conference on

Warner, a co-founder of Christ Clarion Fellowship, wouldn't miss the annual retreat. "I consider that a real anchor group. The clergy in that group are the ones I stay in touch with throughout the year." Warner recognizes the increasing returns from relationships that have developed over time in the group. "We can press each other in ways that we wouldn't if we were coming together for the first time. For instance, at our last meeting we had a very honest conversation about clergy salaries. That's not something that gets talked about a lot in deep and personal ways."

Learning with laity offers added benefits to the group learning experience, Wolfe believes. "Most doctor of ministry degrees require participation of lay people on the journey," he says. "It involves the laity in some creative learning. It also counters some of the resistance clergy sometimes experience from the parish to their continuing education proposals ('Well, gee, you already get vacation'). If the congregation participates in the continuing education experience, it dissipates some of that resistance."

Permission to Risk

All of these initiatives began as experiments, and in Roberts' opinion, the freedom to experiment is essential if clergy are to continue to be supported in their lifelong learning efforts. This freedom, he says, needs to be extended to both those who design continuing education programs for clergy and to clergy themselves. Both, he says, need the opportunity to try some new things and to sometimes fail when they do so, with the understanding that even failed experiments provide valuable information that can help to shape future efforts.

"I think we ought to ask of clergy, 'What energizes you when you think about learning? What really grabs you and is something you really want to do?' And then we ought to encourage them to go and do it. In terms of adult learning, one thing leads to another. So even if it's not quite on the mark of what

CONTINUING EDUCATION ADVICE FROM THE EXPERTS

Make continuing education a priority. "Value continuing education," says Dean Wolfe, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Kansas. "If you make it a priority, it tends to happen."

Pursue excellence. Recognize that there is a qualitative difference among the continuing education programs available. "Talk with others about their experiences to determine which programs are best," Wolfe suggests, "and don't be afraid to take a program that will challenge you. Those programs are very often where the juice is."

Involve others. Form a peer learning group or take another minister or a member of your congregation with you to continuing education events, advises Bruce Roberts, director of the Indiana Peer Group Study Program and professor of congregational education and leadership at Christian Theological Seminary. These "others" can provide a structure of support and accountability for the minister.

Take charge of your own learning. Design your own learning plan, and don't limit your continuing education plan to the offerings made available through institutions and organizations, suggests Larry Dill, executive director of the Institute for Clergy Excellence.

Keep stimulating yourself intellectually. "Most of the satisfied ministers I know are people who always find something new to work on, something new to learn. I think that's what keeps them fresh," says Wolfe.

Follow your passions. Don't be afraid of asking for what you want, Roberts advises. Taking care of one's own needs and following one's own passions, he believes, will foster enthusiasm for learning and energy for one's ministry, so the congregation is the ultimate winner.

Cultivate advocacy. "Pastors need to cultivate advocates in their parishes and in the judiciary who will communicate to others that the overall health of the pastor is important, and that if it's not attended to the congregation will suffer," says Dean McDonald, director of the Cathedral College of Preachers.

Be open about your continuing education endeavors. Share your continuing education plan with your board or your vestry and encourage them to hold you accountable, suggests Darren Elin, rector of St. John's Episcopal Church in Saginaw, Michigan. Sharing also has other benefits, notes Wolfe: "When you reveal yourself as a learner it engages other people to be learners as well."

the congregation thinks the pastor needs to learn, getting the pastor involved in something that excites and motivates him or her will be well worth it to the congregation as well. To congregations, I would say 'Pastors need time away to focus their thoughts, to pursue study, and to continue their learning, so fund their continuing education. It will pay off,'" says Roberts.

In Roberts' opinion, experimentation in continuing education may not only be a shot in the arm to individual ministers, but a possible remedy for other

difficulties facing mainline denominations. "Let's face it, for the most part the oldline churches are in serious decline. We need something to shake up what's going on in those systems, and it's not going to happen unless clergy find the support they need to take some risks, to try some new things, and to understand that even if those things don't work out, they learned something. Congregations are like oil fields; you have to keep drilling until you find the energy. The assumption is that it is there someplace." ♦

MAKING CONTINUING EDUCATION A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN PASTOR AND CONGREGATION

TERRY FOLAND

Most informed congregational leaders recognize that pastors need to be involved in regular continuing education opportunities in order to stay up-to-date on the latest information, knowledge, and resources for effective ministry. Most pastors understand this, too. After engaging in active ministry for a few years, they discover that they have a need to learn more about certain aspects of ministry that, for whatever reason, they did not learn in seminary.

But understanding the need for continuing education is only the beginning of the pastor's dilemma. If most pastors' experience is like mine, they are inundated with promotional materials about continuing education programs ranging from the "latest proven effective" way to grow congregational membership to the most efficient type of software for doing sermon preparation. The training programs offered through the hundreds of sponsors that send these mailings run the gamut from basic skills training to various types of ministry enhancement techniques. I counted a total of 138 different possibilities just from the magazines and mailings that arrived on my desk this past week. Included in the offerings were at least 20 programs for improving my spirituality, at least two dozen for enhancing my skills in doing pastoral care, and another 15 or so through which I could learn various methods of conflict management or resolution. Among the more specialized offerings were an opportunity to explore what is beyond contemporary in the field of worship today and another to learn what research has revealed regarding church growth motivating factors for different age groups. And if I wanted to learn how to make my church more "missional," I could take a course in "Christian Bodybuilding in a World Torn Apart."

When faced with such a vast array of continuing education opportunities, the pastor must confront several questions: What is the best way to pick the most appropriate continuing education offering from the available choices? How can I be sure the continuing education event I select will be the wisest use of my limited time and the financial resources of the congregation? What will help ensure that the congregation will get the greatest benefit from what I learn in the program?

In my experience, the wise pastor will ask the pastor-parish relations committee for help in addressing these questions. One major responsibility of a pastor-parish relations committee is to give counsel and guidance to the pastor in regard to using continuing education time and budgeted funds. A pastor-parish relations committee has the responsibility to help foster the best possible working relationship between the pastor and the congregation; working with the pastor to decide on appropriate continuing education opportunities can help accomplish this goal in three ways:

- First, it will help the pastor clarify the priorities for his or her continuing education. Through the input and feedback of church leaders, the pastor can learn how these leaders experience and perceive what is happening in the church and where improvements may be needed.
- Second, selecting the best continuing education option in a collaborative way increases church leaders' sense of ownership of the pastor's training, enhancing the likelihood that what the pastor learns through the program will be utilized in follow-up efforts in the church.
- Third, there will be more of a willingness to support the pastor in trying new things if the decision-making regarding his or her continuing education is done with church leadership involvement and is based on real felt needs for improvement. When continuing education decisions are made in this collaborative fashion, church leaders are more likely to believe that the time and funds invested will provide some payoff for the church.

Rev. Terry Foland has been a consultant for the Alban Institute since 1992. He is an experienced trainer and administrator who advises congregations and religious organizations in the areas of conflict management, clergy transition, and congregational revitalization. Prior to joining Alban, he served as an area minister for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).



Life After Seminary Begins in High School

CAROL E. LYTCH

Presbyterian pastor Wade Halva believes that his experience in high school playing three varsity sports was one of his most valuable preparations for pastoral ministry. He says individual sports, like swimming and track and field, taught him to compete against himself, to compare his performance times to what he had done before, not to the times of others. He asked himself the question, “What have I learned from this meet that will help me the next time?” As a young pastor serving in a three-point charge in Indiana, he asks the same question: “What have I learned?” There are many experiences in the first years of ministry that are painful. A pastor constantly disappoints others because of unrealistic expectations members of a congregation often have of their pastor, expectations the pastor sometimes shares. It helps a new pastor to ask the constructive question that Wade Halva asks himself, the question that moves toward mature leadership: “What have I learned?”

Halva is one of a new generation of pastors who are starting to graduate from seminary after sharing an unusual experience during high school. He, and approximately 50 other high school students per year since 1993, attended the Summer Academy of the Youth Theological Initiative (YTI) sponsored by Candler School of Theology. This program is designed to create a safe space for intellectually talented and theologically curious high school seniors to ask complex questions and imagine new possibilities related to important issues of the public good within the context of theology. Now Catholic and Protestant theological schools across

Many young people say they do not feel support from their parents or from their peers to explore a call to ministry. “During a large group discussion on vocation and listening to God’s call, James stood up and said to the group, ‘I believe God is calling me to the priesthood.’ His peers immediately starting clapping and cheering for him.”

—Jeff Kaster, director of the St. John’s School of Theology-Ministry

the United States and Canada host 50 such programs that engage youth in theological study and exploration of vocation, including the option of a church vocation.¹ Today a high school student attending one of these programs takes classes taught by seminary professors, participates in intense discussions about issues of public theology, and lives in a Christian community for a period, on average, of two weeks.² These experiences form young people in powerful and lasting ways. As one young person said, “The fact that I am sitting here as a college senior talking about . . . something I did as a junior in high school says a lot.” While it is still too early to draw any firm conclusions about how having had this experience in high school assists young pastors to flourish in their first years of ministry, some of the early indicators point in that direction.

A look at these programs offers some insight into formation of high-school-age young people who exhibit identifiable gifts for a church vocation, even if they do not know if they have this call. (Most of the young people who participate in these programs do not sense that they have a call at the time they participate.) Two things are striking: in these programs, high school students learn Christian practices, especially that of asking theological questions, and they are deeply shaped by the experience of living in a residential Christian community.

As one young woman said of the Summer Youth Institute (SYI) at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, “SYI stirs thought in people. It makes you question things. It challenges you in ways that you still will think about years later. You’ll say, ‘I remember when I had that conversation,’ and now I am talking about things on a much deeper level.” For some, like Noelle York-Simons, SYI was a place to find her voice. “In that month I went from a kid who wasn’t taken seriously to becoming a person who had opinions—informed opinions—that people listened to.” Some students who later became pastors say they still use the question-asking model they learned in the high school programs in their current ministries with both youth and adults. One of these pastors leads a monthly “Faith Talks” session in his rural church, where he says “people have never had room to ask questions.” As a pastor, he is nurtured in his own faith as church members explore theological questions linked to their personal struggles.

Derek Davenport, an alumnus of the SYI program, not only learned to ask questions; he believes SYI also “planted seeds of a prayer life and spiritual disciplines that took root later.” As a seminary senior seeking a call, he hopes this will help him to combat burnout in ministry.

A second formative experience gleaned almost universally from the seminary-sponsored theological

programs for high school youth is learning to see oneself not as an individual on a career track but as part of a company of people who do ministry together. Typically, alumnae and alumni of these programs say: “I learned that it is all about community.” “I learned to connect with other people.” The webs of relationships that these young pastors develop as high school students can be strong and enduring. One young woman describes another person in the high school program “who was very much like myself—musical. We did not keep in touch, but she turned up at seminary too.” It was reassuring to her that there are people from her high school years with whom she shares a call to a vocation in the church.

Occasionally these young pastors also name seminary professors and mentors from the high school years who are still part of their lives. More significantly, they tend to transfer this value for community to their current collegial relationships. As one young pastor who attended YTI says, “Clergy friendships are important to me, including relationships with older ones. I ask them, ‘Am I being an idiot?’ or ‘Can you believe what they said to me?’”

Matthew Williams, now a graduate of the Interdenominational Theological Seminary in Atlanta, describes his poignant experience of “living bumper to bumper” with high school peers of different races who suddenly recognized their racism. As an African American, he was troubled by subtle assumptions imbedded in comments he heard from his fellow scholars at YTI as they passed through an inner-city neighborhood during one of their excursions off campus. In a close, trusting Christian community, he was able to name his discomfort and help his friends identify attitudes they did not know were racist. These programs often focus on difference and teaching people to see the common humanity in others who are different from themselves or with whom they disagree. This respect for difference learned in community is another value that has helped young pastors. One found

himself serving as a pastor in a community with a much lower educational level than he was accustomed to. Despite this difference, he is gratified that the community has accepted him as a pastor, as evidenced in the high number of nonmember weddings he has been asked to perform.

Besides formation in Christian practices and community, young pastors who participated in these programs name a third thing that has had a lasting impact: they were helped to identify their call to a church vocation at an early age. Several said they consider this a great advantage. Becky Rowe, who attended the Theological Exploration of Youth (TEY) at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, is one who is grateful for her experience in the program. "TEY started a chain of events in my life that led to a call to explore ordination." Derek Davenport, who is a pastor's son and a pastor's grandson, would not consider a call to ministry because "it was the family business." But at SYI, he says, "I was allowed to think about it on my own terms. That's where the idea started. In college, I realized this is for real."

Many young people say they do not feel support from their parents or from their peers to explore a call to ministry. Jeff Kaster, director of the St. John's School of Theology-Ministry, tells about James, who attended Youth in Theology and Ministry (YTM), "During a large group discussion on vocation and listening to God's call, James stood up and said to the group, 'I believe God is calling me to the priesthood.' His peers immediately starting clapping and cheering for him."

Noelle York-Simons, the associate rector for campus and neighborhood ministries at All Saints Episcopal Church in Atlanta, knew that she was going to be a priest at age 14—before she attended YTI. For her, the experience shaped her drive. "I went from being like a six-year-old who looks at the man on the fire truck with the spotted dog and says, 'That's cool,' to someone who knew what it was to be a firefighter. I went from thinking it would be nice to play with

dishes on the altar to learning to think theologically in real terms and to becoming a public theologian."

In these programs, high school youth are encouraged to ask what God is calling them to do with their lives, whether it is to enter a church vocation or some other calling. Youth also learn that there are many options for work in the church besides the pastorate. Several mention how liberating it was for them to meet television personality Fred Rogers ("Mr. Rogers") through SYI and to learn that he was an ordained Presbyterian minister serving in a non-parish call.

The strategies for Christian formation mentioned here that are shown to be effective when used by theological schools with high school youth are, in fact, tried-and-true methods used for years by congregations, camps, schools, and other institutions that work with high school youth. What is notable is the intentionality and creativity with which these seminaries utilize them. Further, in this work, seminaries are venturing into territory that is new for them. They generally educate graduate students—not even college students. They are reaching to the high school age group to shape the kind of young person who will have the capacities to train for ministry. And there is evidence among the early cohorts that seminaries are forming youth in significant ways not only to prepare to become pastors but also to thrive in their early years of ministry. ♦

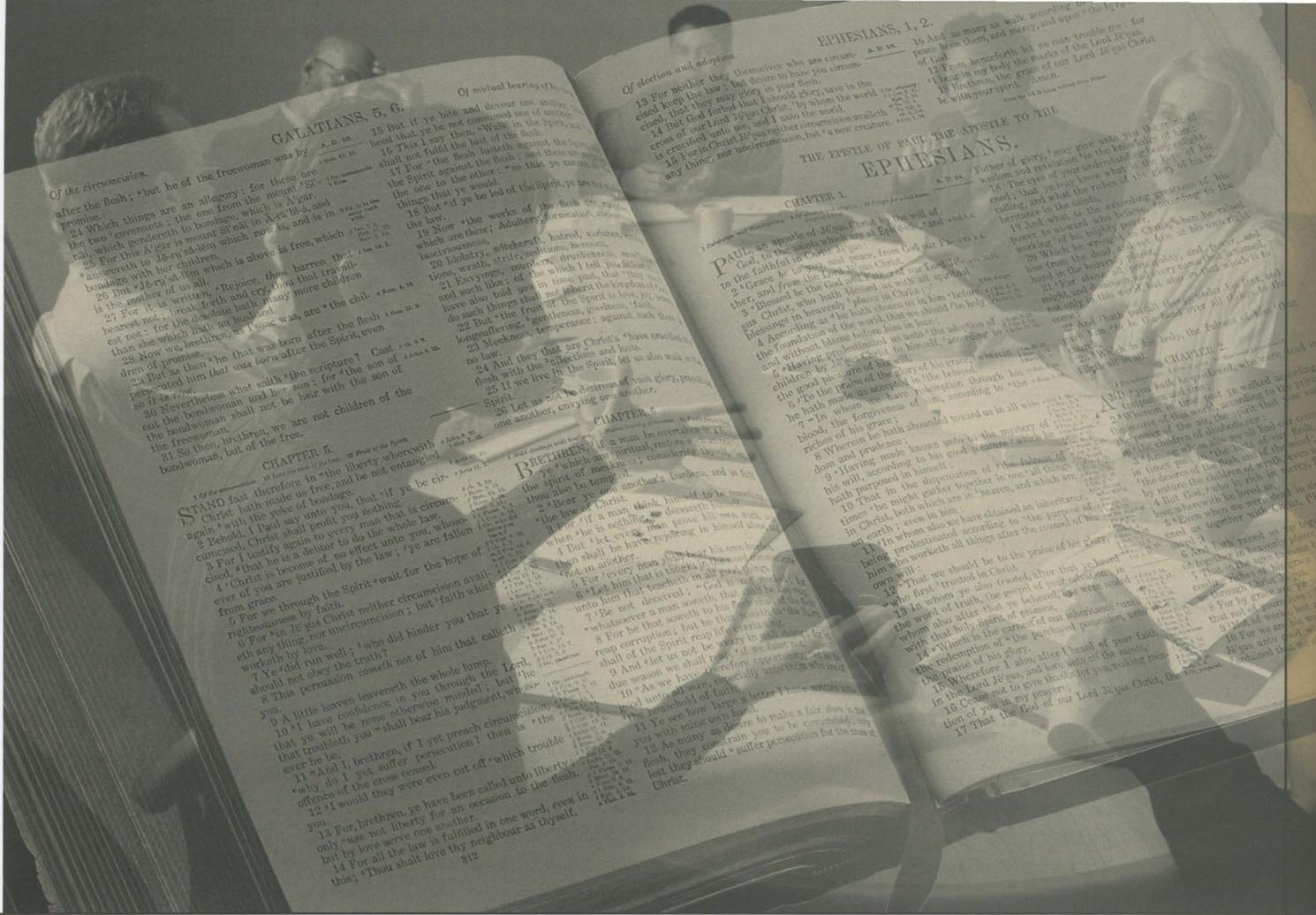
NOTES

1. For a list and contact information on theological programs for high school youth sponsored by theological schools and funded by the Lilly Endowment, contact the Fund for Theological Education at www.thefund.org.
2. There is tremendous variation in the models for these programs developed by theological schools. Some schools host the program off-campus at colleges, camps, and retreat centers. Some take youth on wilderness treks, local and international mission trips, pilgrimages to religious sites, and visits to national denominational meetings. Some involve a variety of institutions, including the home, congregation, school, and local

community service organizations in the "village" that forms high school youth in Christian faith. Some ask youth to design and execute a project in their church or community after they return home. Many utilize mentors from the home congregation to extend the learning. For more information, please see "Strategic Advances in Theological Education: Theological Programs for High School Youth, 1999-2004," by Carol E. Lytch, in Summer Reports of Lilly Endowment Grant Programs, 2005, made available through www.thefund.org.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What experiences did you have during your high school years that prepared you for your work in the church?
2. In what ways do you believe congregations, schools, camps, or other organizations create a space for teens to ask serious intellectual questions about their faith? What factors do you believe undercut their efforts?
3. In what ways do congregations, schools, camps, or other organizations create experiences of Christian community for teens? Is there evidence that this community is profound and lasting?
4. At what age do you believe people should be invited to consider what God is calling them to do with their lives? How might this topic be broached with teens? Are there particular resources that are useful in this endeavor?
5. Is it desirable for seminaries to be educating high school youth? What unique things might seminaries have to offer?



The Moveable Feast

A Continuing Education Dream Made Real

K. C. PTOMEY

Twenty-three years ago, a conversation among three pastors planted the seeds for what was to become the most successful continuing education program of their careers, as well as that of many other pastors. It began in 1982, when these pastors met at a preaching seminar at Austin Presbyterian Seminary and developed a friendship. They enjoyed one another's company and appreciated the seminar leader, Fred Craddock, so they agreed to participate in another Fred Craddock seminar the following year. During that next seminar, hosted by Louisville Presbyterian Seminary, the three ministers met several other pastors who shared their interest in participating in a disciplined, ongoing continuing education seminar focusing on homiletics. I was one of them. One evening, the group—now consisting of eight pastors—began to talk about the possibility of forming the “perfect” continuing education experience. We fantasized about what it might look like: “It would be limited to those who are preaching on a regular basis and are willing to do serious preparation,” one pastor suggested. “We would choose our own visiting scholar, as well as the subject matter,” another added. Several others expressed a desire for an event that would move about the country.

Since we were meeting at Louisville Seminary, we sought out the seminary's director of continuing education to get some feedback on the feasibility of our idea. Craig Dykstra, who held the position at the time, assisted us in shaping our dream into a reality; he gave us permission to hold meetings at the seminary, at the same time allowing us to retain the right

to determine who could participate. (We wanted to include only those pastors whose passion for improving their preaching and willingness to do the work necessary to prepare for meetings were as high as our own.) Soon after getting the green light from Dykstra, we formulated a plan to gather again at Louisville Seminary and to invite Tom Long, then professor of homiletics at Columbia Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, to be our presenting scholar. In addition, we agreed to recruit other participants. It wasn't long before we had expanded our group to include four other pastors who shared our commitment to the study of homiletics. So it was that in 1984, 12 ministers assembled in Louisville and *The Moveable Feast* was born. Since then the group has grown to include 25 Presbyterian pastors from across the country, the youngest in her thirties and the oldest in his sixties. At present, group members serve churches in 15 states, and three are presidents of Presbyterian seminaries.

Unquestionably, this group has been the most significant continuing education program of my career. One can't help but become a better preacher in this environment.

Perhaps the most obvious benefit of *The Moveable Feast* is the opportunity it provides to be with some of the finest biblical scholars in the nation. Since the group began its work, it has been assisted by an impressive array of top-notch scholars, including Walter Brueggemann, Gail O'Day, Fred Craddock, Daniel Patte, John McClure, David Buttrick, Beverly Gaventa, Luke Timothy Johnson, Tom Long, Patrick Miller, James Sanders, Clifton Black, Beth Johnson, David Bartlett, and Dennis Olsen. In fact, the group's reputation is such that some scholars have sought an invitation to participate in our gatherings. More typical forms of continuing education simply do not offer the same access to such luminaries.

But the scholarship of *The Moveable Feast* doesn't end there. That of the participants is also of great significance. Each participant arrives at the meeting

To have an opportunity to participate in a group in which all members are committed to improving their own preaching and to doing the advance work necessary to be of the greatest possible assistance and support to other members is truly an honor and a gift.

with papers on two different selections from the lectionary, so each of us comes away with 35 to 40 well-researched papers. The value of having this sort of scholarship at one's fingertips when preparing sermons cannot be overstated.

The most intangible yet one of the most significant benefits of *The Moveable Feast* is the community it has become. To have an opportunity to participate in a group in which all members are committed to improving their own preaching and to doing the advance work necessary to be of the greatest possible assistance and support to other members is truly an honor and a gift. Here, we communicate with one another in an honest yet supportive manner. We have come to know, trust, and love one another through our participation in this unique gathering, and our congregations have benefited from our combined work. For me, this community has become church in a very real sense.

Planning the Event

Here's how it works: Every year we hold a business meeting where we determine the topics, speakers, and locations for future meetings. These decisions are established by vote and are made three to four years in advance because both facilities and scholars tend to be booked far into the future. The scholars we select are typically people who are deeply committed to the church and have a passion for preaching. Since many of these individuals are professors at seminaries or other institutions of

higher learning, we purposely hold our meetings in early January, when many schools are still on their winter break. Nevertheless, we typically decide on one or two alternates to prevent the need to reconvene the group for another discussion and vote should our first-choice scholar be unavailable.

Once the topic, scholar, and location for a meeting have been decided, one group member agrees to contact the speaker, another offers to make the logistical arrangements, and a third agrees to lead worship at the meeting. *The Revised Common Lectionary* is central to the group's work, so another member will volunteer to make the text assignments. Each participant then agrees to prepare a five- to ten-page paper on each of the two lectionary selections he or she is assigned.

Our papers contain exegetical material and suggestions of homiletical trajectories. Instead of choosing from among the lessons for the assigned Sundays, we focus on texts suggested by the visiting scholar. If, for example, the scholar's field is Old Testament, we write papers on Old Testament lections.

Our meetings always span five days in January, but the site of the meeting changes from year to year. In addition to Louisville Seminary, the group has met at a state park outside of Nashville; at Princeton Seminary; at Columbia Seminary in Decatur, Georgia; at the College of Preachers in Washington, D.C.; at a church camp in Memphis; at Holmes Retreat Center in New York; at The Michigan League on the campus of the University of Michigan; at Stoney Point Retreat Center in New York; at

For me, this community has become church in a very real sense.

San Damiano Retreat Center in San Francisco; and at Ghost Ranch in Santa Fe. Once a site has been selected and the necessary arrangements have been made to secure meeting space, members are notified. They are then responsible for the cost of their own travel and accommodations. Each of us also pays an annual fee of \$150 to underwrite the honorarium and expenses of the visiting scholar.

At the meeting, we begin each day with morning prayer. This is led by the individual who assumed responsibility for developing the liturgies for the meeting. Over the years, our emphasis on the worship element of these gatherings has grown, becoming a richer and richer part of our experience together. Later, we gather to hear the presentation of papers. Our visiting scholar presents first, typically for about 30 minutes. We then hear papers from group members. Thirty minutes is set aside for the presentation and discussion of each paper. The visiting scholar and members of the group then engage in a lively discussion about the paper. In order to accommodate the volume of papers to be presented, the group works from Monday morning through Friday noon and sometimes one or two nights as well. Each participant leaves the event with a copy of each of the papers presented, along with notes from our discussions.

Of Friendship and Commitment

We're not all work and no play, however. Just as we have devoted more time and focus to worship as the years have progressed, so too have we recognized the importance of having a social component to our meetings. Taking the time to relax and enjoy dinner out with one another helps solidify our friendships and provides a much-needed balance to our

hard work of the day. Therefore, when we look for meeting space, we have become careful to select a location that offers convenient access to restaurants.

As you might imagine, there is a waiting list for participation in *The Moveable Feast*. Despite our openness to the idea of including new members, it is impossible to accommodate more than 25 participants per year given the length of the papers and presentations, so the group serves best as a model for a novel continuing education program rather than as a direct opportunity for participation. Exactly how one would go about putting such a group together would depend on the vision, personality, location, and contacts of the founder(s). However, the experience of a spin-off group to *The Moveable Feast* may provide some insight into possible sources

of funding or other support. During that group's first two years of existence it was supported by a grant from the Lilly Endowment. In its third and fourth years it was partially funded by the Valparaiso Project on the Education and Formation of People of Faith. By its fifth year it was well-established and had become self-supporting, with each member contributing an amount commensurate with his or her resources.

For those interested in creating a similar community of learning and support, I cannot recommend this format highly enough. *The Moveable Feast* is the most productive and helpful continuing education program in which I have been involved, and my colleagues from this community say the same is true for them. To have annually participated for more than two decades in a context where everyone has the same dedication to learning has had a profound and lasting impact on my ministry, my preaching, my congregation, and my life. I wish the same for all my clergy colleagues. ♦

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

If you have had a difficult time finding continuing education events that “scratch” precisely where you are itching intellectually and spiritually, seek dialogue with others who share your commitment to spiritual and intellectual growth, and can think of a few scholars with whom you would like to study, a continuing education program modeled after *The Moveable Feast* may be what would best serve you. To begin to formulate a more specific plan for your own *Moveable Feast*, consider these questions:

1. What specific spiritual needs do you feel are not being met?
2. Who among your colleagues has expressed a similar experience and shares your commitment to spiritual growth?
3. What specific intellectual needs are not being supported?
4. Who among your colleagues has expressed interest in this area of learning and shares your commitment to intellectual growth?
5. With which of your colleagues would you like to experience deeper dialogue and fellowship?

If some of the same names appear in your answers to numbers 2, 4, and 5, give those individuals a call and start a conversation about the possibility of developing your own group continuing education event.

Worship...

*sheer wonder at the beauty of God,
gratitude for the gospel of Christ,
and eagerness to deepen
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One-on-One: The Unique Gifts of the Clergy/Coach Relationship

ALICE MANN

During my 10 years as a senior consultant for the Alban Institute, my work with congregational leaders has revolved around three main roles: educator, consultant, and coach. Over time, coaching has become a much more prominent feature of my work. This shift was partly driven by cultural trends and fads. The term “coach” has been translated from the playing field into almost every aspect of human life—from childbirth to personal fitness, from dating to executive leadership. Sometimes this word is chosen more for its sound than its substance. One friend of mine who offers “executive coaching” in the world of banking often gets called in to give a failing leader one last chance to shape up before he or she is fired.

Beyond the hype and the euphemisms, coaching is an important option for clergy and lay leaders who recognize the challenges of ministry today and have given up the search for easy answers. Coaching can help leaders make critical connections—for example, between broad concepts and everyday leadership behavior, between their expected role and their actual gifts, or between the congregation’s historic strengths and its current options for ministry in a changing environment. Coaching is an ideal setting in which to forge these links so that more congruent and fruitful ministry can emerge.

The Coaching Relationship

Characteristics of a coaching relationship—as opposed to an educational event or a consultant intervention—might include:

- ◆ primary focus on one leader, typically a sole or senior pastor, or a very small leadership team (such as pastor and board chair, or senior and associate pastor)
- ◆ a declared intention or goal around which the coaching relationship is organized
- ◆ a consistent and supportive structure that keeps the stated intention in focus over time so that progress can be tracked
- ◆ an atmosphere of trust, in which the client(s) can explore any pain, fear, or confusion that may be experienced in the course of addressing the goal
- ◆ questions from the coach that elicit the wisdom and competence of the client(s), even as they explore uncertainties and vulnerabilities
- ◆ checkpoints when coach and client(s) assess both progress on goals and the experience of the coaching relationship itself

Coaching can help a leader clarify deeper intentions, size up the task, and test his or her commitment to doing the required leadership work...

While I might have classified that activity as a “team-building consultation,” Sayer and I would clearly be working in similar ways, regardless of the label we assign our efforts.

Sayer also notes the importance of coaching as a resource for the solo pastor. The clergy who seek her out, she says, “have discovered the benefit of sitting down with an outside person and exploring the obstacles in their personal and vocational life that are preventing them from performing to their highest potential.” As she puts it, alternative perspectives from the coach “broaden out the myopic view that often develops in a solo position.” Sayer typically uses a variety of assessment tools to help deepen pastors’ understanding of their personalities and leadership styles. With

materials, and consultants who work on-site in the congregation to help larger groups of leaders with planning, visioning, or problem solving. Clients often approach me for coaching in order to deepen, contextualize, and apply learning that has begun in another setting. For instance, many of my coaching clients have just completed some sort of educational experience: they have attended a seminar, read some books, or visited other congregations known for innovative ministries. Such learning activities set the leader a bit off balance and generate energy for change by providing new concepts, new questions, and sometimes new relationships. But there is usually a significant gap between the intellectual understanding produced by an educational experience and full integration of that new knowledge into one’s actual practice of ministry. Follow-up coaching after an education event can help a leader reap the full benefits of the experience—to relate the new ideas to his or her own gifts and context and to develop new patterns of behavior.

Other clients approach me when they are “stepping up to the plate” to attempt a challenging piece of congregational change, such as breaking through certain barriers to growth or becoming an “open and affirming” congregation with respect to sexual orientation. While the client brings a particular goal to the table as a proposed focus for the coaching relationship, full commitment to the task cannot be taken for granted. Organizational consultant Peter Block offers leaders a clever maxim for such situations: “The answer to how is yes.” I translate this to mean that method questions (in other words, *how* to do something) sometimes

Beyond the hype and the euphemisms, coaching is an important option for clergy and lay leaders who recognize the challenges of ministry today and have given up the search for easy answers.

The exact structure and emphasis of coaching, however, will vary with the practitioner and the setting. For instance, when Nancy Sayer¹, a consultant and coach with Samaritan Interfaith Counseling Center in Naperville, Illinois, provides coaching for a pastoral team, she describes her work as helping the team members “to understand each other’s styles and preferences and to develop a team that is built on the strengths of each member.”

this knowledge, she says, a pastor can then “apply strategies that help him or her to interact with staff, church leaders, and parishioners more effectively.”

When to Use a Coach

Coaching is just one element in the ecology of church leadership development today, alongside seminaries, clergy continuing education events, published

MARK BECKWITH

obscure deeper commitment questions (*whether* to do it and *why* one would take the attendant risks). Coaching can help a leader clarify deeper intentions, size up the task, and test his or her commitment to doing the required leadership work.

In her practice, Sayer finds that her clients are receptive to coaching at certain characteristic times in the clergy life-cycle, especially the transition moments in a pastor's life. Clergy settling into a new position, for example, may ask her to help them "understand the dynamics of particular personalities they encounter or the organizational dynamics of the system." Other pastors, she says, may want to gain insight into the "energy drives and drains" in their ministry situation so that they can discern where God is calling them to serve next. Still others are facing retirement and getting ready to move to a new life stage; a coach can help pastors in this stage of life to explore their values and to envision what comes next so that they can move through the transition more easily.

There are some situations, however, where coaching may not be the best resource. Leaders whose goal-oriented energies have been swallowed up by persistent depression might benefit more from therapy than from coaching, while leaders who have lost their deeper sense of call may want to schedule a retreat or find a spiritual director. In other cases, a one-to-one coaching relationship may not be as effective as a consultative intervention that brings key parts of the congregational system into the same room for a wider conversation. Take, for example, the pastor who wants to engage church leaders in a demanding project related to congregational development, growth, or change. If the foundations for teamwork—including common language, knowledge of each other's stories, and shared assumptions about mission and ministry—have not yet been built, or have been shaken by painful events, it is often helpful to bring in a third party to facilitate conversations on-site. Once a working relationship has been established, follow-up coaching may help the

pastor to build on those emerging relationships or to bring other leaders on board as time goes on.

The life events, ministry challenges, and career transitions described in this article are just some of the instances where coaching would be appropriate. For clergy seeking to become more intentional leaders, integrate new ideas into their ongoing practice, navigate personal and congregational transitions, or sustain their focus on important goals, coaching can be an opportunity for deep and fruitful learning. ♦

NOTES

1. Nancy Sayer is a licensed clinical professional counselor and master personal and executive coach who works at Samaritan Interfaith Counseling Center in Naperville, Illinois, coaching clergy in the Chicagoland area.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

How do you know you need a coach? If you answer "yes" to any of the following questions, hiring a coach could be helpful.

1. Do you need support to follow through on good ideas you have gained from books or education events?
2. Are you having trouble selecting which ministry approaches really fit you or your situation?
3. Beyond your family and your congregational leaders, do you lack a sounding board for ministry issues and options?
4. Do you feel you are reacting all the time rather than establishing your own sense of direction in your ministry?

I recently discovered the value of coaching in my ministry, and how it differs from traditional therapy, which has also provided benefit to me in my career.

I had my first therapeutic experience 25 years ago, after a ministerial training program exposed dimensions of my psyche that were new and frightening to me. This was the first of several therapeutic relationships I would have over the next two decades. Each began in the aftermath of an emotional trauma—a divorce, a job change, a challenge to my professional integrity—and each was remarkably helpful. Because I lived in different places over the years, I engaged with different therapists. Each clinician brought a unique style and giftedness to the therapeutic process, and each relationship—which ranged from six months to two years—was remarkably helpful. All three therapists, I noticed, drew connections between my past experiences and the current situation, doing so with a skill and compassion that went a long way toward resolving the issues I was grappling with and enhancing my self-understanding.

Coaching, I discovered, is equally powerful, but in a different way. A year ago I embarked on what turned out to be a year-long engagement with a professional coach. Unlike my therapeutic relationships, the impetus for this relationship was not trauma or crisis, but confusion: about my role in an ever more complex congregational system, about how best to lead a congregation into new opportunities and growth, and about what was "next" for me in my professional and vocational life.

During our first conversation, my coach asked me to define what it is that I do. He was not seeking simply a generic description; he challenged me to get as clear and comprehensive about my work as I could: what groups I was responsible for, what programs I led and participated in, what worship roles I played, which pastoral

relationships I initiated and which ones others initiated with me.

I was then asked to consider what I wanted to do: Where were my passions? What were my gifts? Where were my energy and desire? What was my vision for this unique piece of the body of Christ? As I began to create my “vision portfolio”—on the basis of giftedness and abundance—I began to see the congregational system in a different light. Instead of a complex system of personalities, agendas, and diverse opinions on issues from worship to community engagement—a system I felt called to manage—I began to see my role as the vision bearer. This was not an easy transition. There was a lot of resistance to it—in me. For more years than I care to recall, I had taken pride in seeing how many tasks I could accomplish, how many obligations and responsibilities I could meet, how many problems I could solve.

Vision and overall purpose were often lost in the midst of managing an endless list of tasks. From a clinical perspective, there was some secondary gain in my hyperactivity. There was a kind of martyr quality to it all. I took great pride in a line from Peter Drucker, the systems management guru, who said that parish clergy have the hardest job of anyone in America.

My coach was not impressed. (As it turns out, I don't think many other people were, either). At one point, he suggested I fire myself from my job. The challenge, he said, was to live into the vision, not react to an archaic series of obligations. Clearly, some obligations were triggered by neurotic impulses, such as the need to be liked and needed, and while these impulses were sometimes identified, the real work was building on my gifts and strengths. And this was work. It was not only difficult to hold onto the developing vision in the midst of internal resistance and the reluctance to break some professional habits, but there were three critical components that needed to be put in place—communication, trust, and team—if this process was to have any hope of success.

Communication: In my case, the communication component was not so much about creating more reliable information and feedback loops within the congregation but about my being clear with others about what I was doing—and not doing—which meant I needed to take all the ideas and projects that I had always kept track of in my head or in my day planner and put them on the table for staff and parish leaders. It also meant that I needed to be clear with myself about my

that I wanted their input), but as long as I worked at communication and trust, we moved forward.

Subtle shifts began to emerge. I think I first noticed them in my prayer life. While I had always given a conceptual assent to a God of abundance, my prayers were often taken up with atoning for errors and faults, forgiving slights, and seeking God's comfort in periods of anxiety and difficulty. Through the “asset-based” orientation of coaching, I was less inclined to look back

Through the “asset-based” orientation of coaching, I was less inclined to look back and more open to looking forward—and to seeing the opportunities, blessings, and abundance that were there for the reaping.

priorities. Too many unprocessed and uncommunicated ideas tended to spin too many people around, myself included.

Trust: For me, trust involved learning about the need to delegate responsibility. I had to trust that people would do, and would have the giftedness to do, what they said they would do. This had always been difficult for me; what I turned over to others had always been so shrouded in lack of trust that the person to whom I delegated ended up spending more time alleviating my anxiety than implementing the assigned task. No wonder people didn't step forward, and if they did were often anxious about my anxiety, which certainly affected their work.

Team: The notion of team was a natural evolution of communication and trust. One coaching assignment was to share my vision with the staff and invite them to participate in reworking and reshaping it so that we could all be aligned with the same vision. This process was a bit bumpy (at first it was hard for some to really trust

and more open to looking forward—and to seeing the opportunities, blessings, and abundance that were there for the reaping. Instead of managing the system (including my own internal system), I felt inspired to create a new one, trusting that opportunity and abundance would be part of the mix.

Instead of minimizing flaws and trauma, which tended to follow the therapeutic model (and which had become an ingrained part of my mindset), I was becoming more oriented to maximizing opportunities. Theologically, this was a movement from an atonement model to one of redemption. “Behold, I make all things new” is a wonderful homiletical flourish but one that I had always had a hard time allowing to take anchor in my soul. There had always been too many issues and memories to work through before I could even begin to think of anything new. I credit my coaching relationship with having provided a venue and forum for trusting the God of abundance.



A Matter of the HEART

Over the past 22 years, continuing education has been a big part of my life: I earned a Ph.D. in systematic theology, mastered the art of creating wheel-thrown ceramic pots, and completed an Executive MBA program. During that time, I was pastor of an evolving urban congregation blessed with worship attendance doubling and our age demographic becoming about 25 years younger. So how did I have time to be both pastor of a growing congregation and student? Why did I—a minister—pursue an MBA and want to learn pottery? And what do a theology dissertation, a ceramic pot, and accounting skills have in common?

Pastor John Wimberly shares how his passions have shaped his lifelong learning agenda

The answer to the last question is “my heart.” As I contemplated the thought of mastering the subject of systematic theology, the potter’s wheel, and disciplines such as accounting and finance, my heart started to beat a bit faster. I got excited about what I might learn. Of course, there was also a fear factor because I felt more than a little anxiety that I might fail (especially in the MBA program). But in each case, I felt drawn to the educational project just as I feel called to ministry. I experienced a call to move deeper into the complex and fascinating doctrines of

the church, the untapped artistic side of my being, and a totally alien world of monetary policy and financial reports. Following these calls to grow has been as important to me as anything I have done in ministry.

While I have definitely increased my skill set with these projects, I am not convinced that better skills should be the primary goal of our continuing education as clergy. I think we need continuing education projects that feed our souls. Ministry drains and depletes, empties and exhausts us. Continuing education can revive and renew, fill up and fuel us. After a challenging day of pastoral counseling, dealing with stubborn problems in the congregation, or handling administrative tasks, I have loved coming home to read a few chapters of Aquinas, throw a pot, or work through a managerial economics problem. These totally different worlds have been my world, a world where I can think about things that the very specific demands of my ministry don't

were able to envision how they would directly benefit from my educational growth. In the years that followed, the congregation coped well with the various phases of the program. In fact, they were very supportive.

In the first part of the program, I needed time away from the congregation for classes. This meant blocking out specific times during the week when I wasn't available to the congregation, although I did miss classes when there was an emergency. Over six semesters, I took 10 three-credit classes.

In the second phase, I studied for comprehensive exams. This involved reading about 100 books for five exams. I liked this part of the program the best. At the end of exams, I had a comprehensive and broad knowledge of system-

calls went unanswered, and no Bible studies were taught unprepared. Since my congregation saw little disruption in their relationship with me, members were very supportive of my doctoral program. It is a resource I tap every day in my ministry.

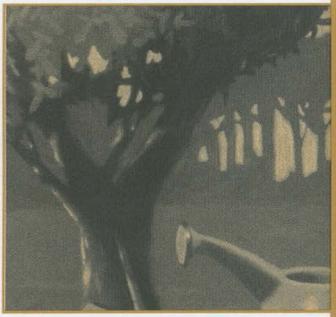
Becoming a Potter

My journey to becoming a potter was far less logical and less planned than my decision to study systematic theology. I was on sabbatical at our home in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, when this call came—and not very obviously at first. During a telephone conversation with my wife, I complained that I had already read all of the books I had brought with me. Her immediate reaction was, “You're in Mexico's art hangout; take an art class!” “I'm not an artist,” I responded. But Phyllis, a painter, wouldn't let me off the hook. “Everyone's an artist,” she said.

I decided to enroll in a pottery wheel class at a local art school. Pottery felt more like construction than art, so I figured I might be able to do it. As I watched my teacher

Shozo Tanida, a Japanese potter, throw a pot, I knew I had made the right choice. Far from being construction, I immediately realized that throwing a pot on the wheel is a sublime spiritual experience. Shozo sat at the wheel wearing a golf cap, with a cigarette hanging out of his mouth and Miles Davis playing in the background. Out of the midst of a ball of clay emerged a perfect Japanese bowl, sides thrown at a sharp angle. When finished with his demonstration, Shozo looked up, exhaled a huge cloud of smoke and said in Spanish, “Al torno” (to the wheel). In our phone conversation later that week, I told my wife that Shozo was my new idol!

A lot of people stop throwing because they can't master centering clay. For many in the U.S., I am convinced that this is a spiritual problem, not a technical one. Imposing our cultural values on throwing, we push the clay to conform to



...as I learned the art of throwing and finishing pots, I learned the art and power of patience. It has transformed my life.

normally allow me to consider. In these worlds, I feel the Spirit moving within me—creating, destroying, re-creating. New parts of my mind and heart come to life, grow, and evolve. My continuing education has been a place where I have felt the biblical promise of re-creation coming to fruition.

How I was able to pursue my various continuing education projects while still serving my congregation was largely a function of communicating with the members of the congregation about how they would gain from my pursuits. They, like me, came to believe that it was good for my soul.

Pursuing a Doctorate

Prior to beginning my Ph.D. program, I discussed my plans with my lay leadership and members. Fortunately, they

atic theology, and I felt a sense of self-empowerment that was exhilarating.

In the final phase of the program, I wrote my dissertation, choosing a subject that informed and helped guide my work as an urban pastor committed to social justice issues—the doctrine of grace in the liberation theology of Juan Luis Segundo. I was blessed with a wise dissertation director who advised me, “John, this is your union card, not a *Summa*.” Adopting that workman-like approach, I devoted several evenings a week to research, reading, and writing.

While working on my Ph.D., I devoted 10 hours to study in an average week. I used study leave prior to comprehensive exams, and to finish my dissertation I used my days off, vacations, and any other available time to do research, organize material, and write. The program took 10 years to complete. During that decade, no hospital calls were missed, no phone

our wishes, rush the clay so we can move on to the next step. But clay can't be pushed or rushed. Clay needs a thrower with strong but relaxed hands. I began to succeed at centering clay when I allowed the clay to center me.

Patience is a spiritual discipline required in ceramics. It is one of the major reasons ceramics has been such a powerful learning experience for me. By nature, I am an impatient person. Prior to studying ceramics, I wanted the world, my congregation, and my own personal life to change immediately. At times, my impatience has been helpful. At other times, it has been destructive and counterproductive.

In ceramics, impatience has only one effect and it is negative. Try to throw a pot too quickly and it collapses. Put a pot in a kiln before it is bone-dry and it explodes. Glaze pots too quickly and the glaze runs and ruins the pot. Only bad things happen to the impatient in ceramics.

So, as I learned the art of throwing and finishing pots, I learned the art and power of patience. It has transformed my life. While I still want injustices to stop immediately, I now realize that only the patient effectively battle injustice. I have come to view Martin Luther King, Jr., as a model of patience. Many of his followers wanted him to rush into this or that strategy. He refused. He worked with what I call an "impatient patience."

Ceramics also taught me the importance of details. Even ceramic pieces that look roughly hewn, such as Japanese folk pottery, are done with excruciating attention to detail. When I was learning to throw tea bowls, Shozo made me throw 100 of them. After about 50 bowls, I realized that he was forcing me to pay more attention to the details of what I was doing.

I now teach the wheel in Mexico. While it consumes part of my vacation time, I want others to discover the joy of throwing. I love watching the faces of my students as they begin to throw something successfully. They are reduced to the same childlike wonder I experience every time I get on a wheel.

As with my doctoral work, learning



Time.

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ceramics required me to set aside time in my week for classes. I was always able to find a once-a-week evening class. I also built a studio in my home. This enables me to throw on my days off and during other free time. It takes a couple of years of dedicated work to become a fairly good potter.

My congregation has been a direct

beneficiary of my pots. Perhaps the greatest benefit they have received is a more patient pastor, but I also give pots to members who have served the church in some way, and auction them off at fund-raisers for mission projects. They also decorate various rooms in the church.

For those pastors who are curious

about how cultivating their creativity might offer a new dimension to their ministry, I offer one caution: There are lots of bad art teachers, so talk with others who have taken classes before selecting one. Where did they learn their art? Who were their best teachers? What did they gain from the experience? Talk to enough people to get a sense of what appeals to you, where you might find quality instruction, and then give it a try.

Getting My MBA

The same advice would apply to virtually any continuing education offering I can think of. Most important, perhaps, is the feeling that an offering is calling to you. At age 54, I thought I was done with major continuing education projects. However, an Executive MBA (EMBA) program at The George Washington University called me back.

I am of the opinion that our seminaries do a great job of teaching us theology and the Bible but a poor job of teaching us the professional skills we need to run the small business that every congregation is. An MBA seemed like a great opportunity to learn systematically what I had been attempting to do intuitively.

Perhaps even more than the skills I would acquire, the “executive” nature of this particular MBA program appealed to me because I knew it would provide me with an opportunity to interact with bright, enthusiastic people—people who lived in a world foreign to me. These programs use several filters to obtain high-quality, highly motivated students. They usually require applicants to have a minimum of 10 years of successful managerial experience. A steep price tag is another intentional filter (I was blessed to receive a scholarship). Because of these filters, the students in my program were a high-achieving group of women and men in their mid-thirties to mid-forties. I was “the old man.”

For 18 months, classes were held from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. on alternating Fridays and Saturdays. In addition, there were three one-week out-of-town residencies and a two-week residency in Asia. Homework in a typical week could

ALL ABOARD! WINNING CONGREGATIONAL SUPPORT FOR YOUR CONTINUING EDUCATION PURSUITS

If your continuing education projects are time-consuming endeavors, you'll need the support and understanding of your congregation to make them work. Here are some suggestions that stem from the actions I've found most effective in cultivating the support I needed for my own continuing education pursuits.

- **Pull together some people who might have helpful input on the continuing education project you wish to embark upon and ask for their support. For example, if you want to pursue an MBA, contact some members of your congregation who have MBAs and ask them to accompany you when you introduce the project to the governing board.**
- **Develop a written rationale for the program, identifying why it will benefit you, the congregation, and the denomination. Do a simple cost benefit analysis (for instance, explain what you would gain and what you would have to give up to pursue the program).**
- **Meet with your congregation's Personnel Committee and/or governing board and present your written rationale for the program, including the time you'll need weekly to accomplish your goal and the duration of the program. Explain how the project can be undertaken without taking you away from core commitments at church. Be prepared to identify what you will give up in order to make time for the project.**
- **At a congregational meeting, devote some time to the educational project. Have a lay leader introduce the subject and explain the governing board's support for it. Then make your own presentation on your learning goals. I don't advise asking the congregation to vote on the project, but they need to be informed about it.**
- **Regularly interpret your learnings to the congregation through sermons, the newsletter, and at annual meetings, and offer progress reports regularly to the Personnel Committee and the governing board. Don't try to hide the program. After all, it's not something to be ashamed of. You are proud of it! Besides, everyone knows about your participation in the project, so you can't hide it anyway.**
- **In worship, celebrate your successful completion of the program. You have accomplished something huge and you couldn't have done it without the congregation. That is cause for a party!**

easily run up to 20 hours, so it was basically like having a second full-time job. The EMBA is not for the faint of heart.

A by-product of the program was that I became an incredibly efficient manager of my time. During the program, there was no more sitting at my desk and leafing through the *Christian Century*, no Web-surfing, no attending judicatory meetings that might not be important! If I devoted time to something, it mattered and I was focused. In addition, for 18 months I barely touched a pottery wheel, rarely watched television, and spent greatly

reduced time with my wife. When I was waiting for a doctor's appointment, I had a book with me. If I was on a plane, I was working on accounting problems. Every minute counted.

As exhausting as it was, it was even more invigorating. I was learning important material for use in the parish. For instance, MBA programs stress team learning; by working in teams in my own MBA program I realized how little we use team concepts in the church and changed that pattern. I encountered research that showed that annual



In these worlds, I feel the Spirit moving within me—creating, destroying, re-creating. New parts of my mind and heart come to life, grow, and evolve. My continuing education has been a place where I have felt the biblical promise of re-creation coming to fruition.

employee performance appraisals tend to de-motivate rather than motivate people, so I now urge the lay leaders of my congregation to evaluate the performance of the ministry and how individuals contribute to it rather than focusing on individual performance. I also learned that a congregation without a marketing plan (explicit or implicit) is probably a congregation that is not growing. I developed one for Western. The list of practical applications to ministry goes on and on.

As pastors, we all run small to medium-size businesses, so it's my belief that anytime pastors can gain access to what is being taught in MBA programs, they should jump at the opportunity. An MBA degree gives pastors skills for a lifetime. But the EMBA model is not for everyone. Most people work on their MBA degrees part-time at night rather than during workdays and on the more intensive schedule the EMBA program requires. However, EMBA's offer the advantage of being part of a classroom full of experienced, mature leaders/managers where discussion of a variety of issues is commonplace. In my program, the professor often just sat down and the class took over.

Communication, Contribution, and Calling

Each of my continuing education projects—the EMBA, the pottery, the doctorate—has added a new dimension to my life and ministry, which in turn has

provided my congregation with a pastor more in tune with the power of creativity, more knowledgeable about the doctrines of the church, and more prepared to effectively deal with the leadership, managerial, and financial aspects of ministry. Yet whenever I describe my continuing education projects to other pastors, they always ask, "Didn't your congregation object?" The only honest answer is, "Not to my face." But I don't think there was a whole lot of behind-the-scenes complaining or I would have heard about it. Western isn't that big!

If my congregation did indeed support my continuing education efforts, as I believe they did, it may have had something to do with how I communicated with them about these projects. Rather than trying to hide the amount of time I spent on continuing education, I constantly kept it before the congregation. I wanted my members to know what I was learning,

how it benefited me, and how it benefited them. I mentioned my studies in sermons, in the church newsletter, at annual meetings, during pastoral visits, and anywhere else it seemed appropriate to do so. If I was taking a class on the Trinity, the congregation heard sermons on the Trinity. When I was taking MBA leadership courses, I preached a lot about the leadership styles of major biblical characters. And pottery? There has never been a deeper well of sermon illustrations than art in general and pottery in particular.

Clearly, I believe in the benefits of a variety of continuing education offerings. But I think the habit of taking a continuing education course here or there can fail us. Yes, we meet some good folks and gain some useful information, but are our lives shaped and transformed by such an approach to continuing education? I don't think so.

I strongly encourage my clergy colleagues to look for challenging, substantial educational projects that will push them a bit—projects that push intellectually, push the creative side, or maybe push our approach to leading and managing a congregation. How a continuing education project pushes or stretches us isn't as important as the fact that it does so. And most important, we must ask ourselves whether our continuing education feeds our souls, nourishes our spirits, and renews the heart. If not, we are missing the true gift of continuing education. ♦

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Before selecting a continuing education program, consider the following questions. They can help steer you to a truly meaningful continuing education experience.

1. What needs renewal in my life?
2. What needs renewal in my ministry?
3. What part of me is underdeveloped and needs to grow?
4. Is there a gaping hole in my life/ministry? Can continuing education be used to fill it?



Stopping: The Gift of the Sabbath

LYNNE M. BAAB

My friend Jeff, a writer in an advertising agency, oversees his company's contract with a large relief organization. When an earthquake occurred in Bam, Iran, the relief organization wanted to get out a mailing as soon as possible. Jeff received the assignment on a Friday morning. He was given a deadline of Monday afternoon. He worked all day Friday and Saturday on the project, and by Saturday evening he could see he would likely need to put in two more full days of work in order to make the deadline.

When he went home from work that night, Jeff felt conflicted. For several years he had been observing a Sabbath almost every Sunday, with unexpected and profound blessings. He has discovered that he gets more done during the week if he observes a day of rest. In fact, on those occasions when he goes ahead and works on Sundays because he just can't see how the work would get done otherwise, he feels off balance, scattered, and perpetually behind all week. This odd arithmetic speaks to Jeff of the way God honors even our small acts of obedience.

On that Saturday evening after the Bam earthquake, Jeff decided to keep a Sabbath the next day, despite all the evidence indicating he needed to work on Sunday. He returned to work on Monday wondering what would happen. All day

long he found things falling into place in an amazing way. He met the deadline comfortably, and he went away from work marveling again at the mysterious ways in which God acts.

Growing Observance of the Sabbath

More and more people of all ages are finding joy and fruitfulness in observing a Sabbath. One of my friends, who is nearing retirement after a lifelong career in campus ministry, has just begun to do so. He used to believe people could rest after the work was done. He has finally realized the work is never done. "The Sabbath is God's gracious five p.m. whistle, allowing us to put down our tools even though the work isn't finished," he says.

In my own experience, a surprising number of people in their twenties also observe the Sabbath. Many of them say things like, "The Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments. We keep the other nine. Why wouldn't we keep this one?" At Bethany Presbyterian Church in Seattle, where I recently served as associate pastor, a group of 20-somethings has gathered informally after worship every Sunday for several years, spending long hours just being together. As some of them have gotten married and started families, the group has changed shape, but the commitment to a day of rest from work has remained.

The timing for this increase in Sabbath observance couldn't be better. As our culture spins faster and faster, as a frantic pace becomes the norm, the need for down time is ever more apparent. We are a tired people. Researchers tell us that, on the average, Americans sleep two hours less each night than we did a hundred years ago. Researchers also note that during our waking hours, multi-tasking takes a significant toll, contributing to our stress levels and thus to our exhaustion.

For those of us who tend toward perfectionism or workaholicism, fatigue is a dangerous condition. We tend to cope with uneasy feelings by working harder—our "drug of choice." And, of course, fatigue causes a good number of uneasy feelings. We are lured into a spiral. Working to the point of exhaustion, we feel off balance because of our fatigue, and our knee-jerk coping strategy is to work harder, causing deeper exhaustion. People who study burnout call this pattern "overfunctioning," and anyone who looks closely can see it all around us in workplaces, in churches, and even in homes.

Overfunctioning has dangerous implications for people of faith. We believe in God's grace. We believe, as author Philip Yancey says, that nothing we can do will make God love us less, and nothing we can do will make God love us more. Unfortunately, overfunctioning undercuts grace in an experiential way that impacts our hearts. When we overfunction, our conscious minds continue to affirm that living by grace is important, but we are acting as if our actions are utterly significant and vitally important. In many ways, our actions shape our hearts more than our conscious thoughts do, and our hearts begin to creep toward the unhealthy belief that we can earn God's approval by what we do.

The Hebrew word for Sabbath simply

means "stop, cease, desist." We need

to ask ourselves what we need to

cease from in order to make some

space for God.

At the end of his space novel *Perelandra*, C. S. Lewis creates a long ceremony where the angels who rule the various planets give speeches about the paradoxes of the world God has made. One angel reflects on the fact that each of us is truly necessary because God's love is like a great river, which needs a riverbed to flow in. Another adds that each of us is truly superfluous because God "has no need at all of anything that is made." God's love comes to us as "plain bounty."¹

A weekly rhythm of six days of work and one day of rest affirms this paradox that Lewis describes. During the six days of work, we acknowledge by our actions that we are called to be God's hands and feet in the world, that God's love does need a riverbed to flow in, and that our work is indeed vitally important and significant. On the one day of rest, we live out the equally important reality that we are superfluous. God has no need at all of anything we can do or say or create or imagine. On that day, we live in the joy of knowing we are beloved because God's love comes to us as plain bounty.

One of my colleagues, who has observed a Sabbath for more than 30 years, says that on the Sabbath she is no longer identified with any of the roles she fulfills in her working life. On the Sabbath, she is simply a beloved child of God. She reflects that it was only after several years of Sabbath observance that she learned how to step aside from those roles as she began her Sabbath, but now it is like changing into comfortable clothes.

When we overfunction, when we work continuously without a rhythm of work and rest, we are acting as if only half of C. S. Lewis's paradox is true. We take ourselves too seriously. We move dangerously close to idolatry.

What Does the Sabbath Look Like?

The Sabbath has impressed grace on my heart more than anything else in my life. I have observed a Sabbath for 25 years, ever since my husband Dave and I spent 18 months living in Tel Aviv, Israel. Our experience of the Sabbath there involved a day with many fewer options: no shopping, no movies, no meals in restaurants. We didn't have a car, so the absence of buses had a significant impact on us and slowed us down incredibly.

A day centered around stopping gives us time and space...to pay attention to where we have resisted God's hand in our lives.

We returned to the U.S. determined to bring some of the slow pace of the Sabbath into our lives here. The specifics of what a Sabbath looks like have changed with each life stage, but the common, overarching principle is to cease working. Of course, work includes far more than just paid work. Balancing the checkbook, mowing the lawn, doing laundry, and shopping for groceries also feel like work to me. The Hebrew word for Sabbath simply means “stop, cease, desist.” We need to ask ourselves what we need to cease from in order to make some space for God.

The many excellent books on Sabbath-keeping suggest a variety of possible ways to draw near to God on one's day of rest. I have heard people talk about their joy on the Sabbath as they walk in nature, pray thankfulness prayers, practice mindfulness, or spend time with children.

It's important to recognize that setting high goals for drawing near to God on the Sabbath has an inherent danger of continuing a pattern of overfunctioning. What we need most in our frantic culture is to stop our activity. As we learn to stop in a weekly rhythm, over and over, week after week, and year after year, our hearts will absorb something about God's grace that cannot be learned from careful Bible studies, excellent sermons, or insightful discussions.

The Benefits of Stopping

A day centered around stopping gives us time and space to see our lives more clearly, to notice where God has been present in the previous week, to pay attention to where we have resisted God's hand in our lives. On every single Sabbath, we might not have profound insights about God's presence in our lives, but without taking time to stop and notice where God is working, we will see a whole lot fewer of the miracles that surround us.

Sometimes on my Sabbath I sit in our living room and look at the trees through the window. They are amazingly beautiful in their different seasons. As I sit there, I realize that all week long I have rushed in and out of the room without noticing any of those trees.

The trees speak to me of a deep truth. It is right and good that I work hard six days of the week, striving toward the goals that God has laid on my heart. As I work hard, I miss some of the beauty that surrounds me, so it is also right and good that I spend

one day each week resting with joy in the goodness of God, my creator and redeemer. On that day I can enjoy the miraculous beauty of the world and I can cultivate thankfulness.

In one Jewish tradition, prayers of intercession are forbidden on the Sabbath because even intercession is too much work for the Sabbath day. Because the Sabbath encourages us to cease striving, to let go of the tasks and goals that fill our minds six days of the week, we have the space to look around us at the beauty of the world God made. We have the space to notice the things we want to be thankful for.

My heart grieves when people tell me why they cannot possibly keep a Sabbath. I long to help people understand the theological danger of continuous productivity. When we are constantly working at something, our hearts begin to believe we are too significant. God is no longer at the center of human life. Our own activities move into center place, and we become idolaters.

Rick Warren's best-selling book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, begins with the profound truth that life is simply not about us. The book's popularity attests to a deep ache for purpose and meaning in the midst of the frantic pace of our lives today. We long to understand our place in the universe, to know who we are in the light of God's love. Over time, the Sabbath helps us live in the truth of who God is and who we are. The Sabbath teaches us grace. It helps us stop racing around as if we are the center of the universe. ♦

NOTES

C.S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), 217.

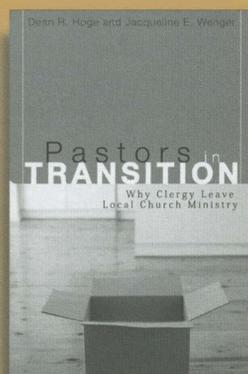
When we are constantly working at something, our hearts begin to believe we are too significant. God is no longer at the center of human life.

Our own activities move into center place, and we become idolaters.

Pastors in Transition

WHY CLERGY LEAVE LOCAL
CHURCH MINISTRY

Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger
William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company
Grand Rapids, MI, 2005



review book *Pastors in Transition* provided me with more than an interesting picture of empirically-based discoveries and derived learnings from an important survey of 900 American clergy. Many of the stories of those interviewed resonated personally and profoundly for me.

Pastors in Transition authors Dean Hoge and Jacqueline Wenger, the researchers who conducted this survey, sought reasons why former pastors left local church ministry. Building on the suggestions of departing clergy, the investigators wrote this book in an effort to avert future losses of the many able pastors who are no longer engaged in parish ministry, and to advise church judicatories and congregations about providing better transitional support.

Clergy participating in the survey were from the Assemblies of God, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the United Methodist Church.

In my view, the researchers made two strategic errors while conducting this otherwise splendid survey. The first was their assumption that pastors who departed local congregational ministry had actually left their vocation. The second was that they sent many of the surveys to former pastors through denominational offices. Many of the recipients, already disenchanted with their ecclesiastical leaders for perceived poor treatment, refused to respond to the survey questions.

Nevertheless, the authors delineate and helpfully describe seven main motivations for clergy departures: Up to 35 percent desired to serve in another form of ministry such as teaching, counseling, or chaplaincy. Twenty-seven percent had conflict with their congregations. For various stress-related reasons, 12 percent were burnt out and discouraged and left their ministries as a result. Ten percent left due to conflict with denominational leadership. Sexual misconduct forced six percent to resign. Five percent terminated because of divorce or marital problems even though most mainline denominations accept clergy divorce. Four percent needed to leave in order to care for children or other family members.

The authors recommend that seminaries do more to prepare students for the practical aspects of ministry. They suggest that denominations need to improve their call procedures and that judicatories should provide special care for pastors, especially when they are experiencing difficulties. In addition, support from extra-denominational sources ought to be provided where necessary. Congregations, the authors contend, need to be better prepared to articulate their genuine goals when they are involved in a pastoral search, and they should be more realistic about their expectations of the ministers they call to serve them. Congregations would also do well, the authors say, to be more sensitive in providing relief from workloads when pastors are going through difficult times.

In spite of the distance and resolution I have achieved after that difficult period of endings, between-times, and new vocational beginnings in my own life, I can identify with the problems and many of the authentic, generally constructive suggestions for improvement noted here. As in a marital divorce, clergy who struggle with an undesired pastoral exit can find it to be one of life's most difficult experiences. At the same time, it can also be one of the most liberating.

Here are some particularly revealing comments from a few pastors who were forced to navigate the rigors of a difficult pastoral transition:

- ◆ "I would consider returning to active local church ministry but would need assurance that I was genuinely wanted and could make a difference."
- ◆ "I learned I could be a practicing Christian without being a member of (my former denominational body). That was a big step for me."
- ◆ "I did not leave local church ministry. I entered a different ministry."
- ◆ "My sense of call has not gone away. But it has shifted."

DR. WAYNE A. HOLST

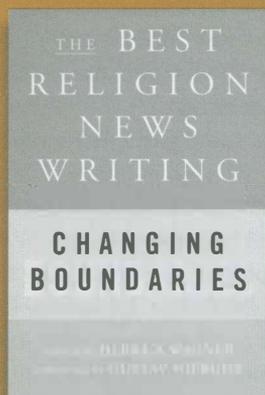
St. David's United Church
Calgary, Alberta

The Best Religion News Writing

CHANGING BOUNDARIES

Debra A. Wagner, ed.

New York: Seabury Books, 2005



review book

Changing Boundaries is a collection of the best religion news writing from 2003, as chosen by Associated Church Press (ACP), the oldest religious press association in North America. The book includes 23 award-winning journalistic works, divided into three distinct categories: Boundaries of War, Sexual Boundaries, and The Ultimate Boundary (death). The pieces come from Presbyterian News Service, *United Methodist Reporter*, *U.S. Catholic*, Episcopal News Service, *Baptist Peacemaker*, and the Alban Institute's *Congregations*, among others. The contents are as diverse as the authors and institutions out of which they come and include hard news, editorial, testimonial, and memoir.

Changing Boundaries is part of a new series called *The Best Religion News Writing*, the title of which immediately raises two questions: What makes it “the best” writing, and makes it “religion news” writing?

What I believe makes this collection the best writing is the quality of presentation and not necessarily the topic or position a particular writer may take. Some of the pieces will surely strike a deep chord within the reader, while others may seem almost frivolous.

They are all, however, written by professionals who exhibit faithfulness to their craft.

All three sections of the book contain writings that address big picture topics, as well as specific issues. Because I was reading the book as the Terri Schiavo case was playing itself out in the national media, the third section of the book (on death) seemed at times almost quaint. But even here there was one exception: Thomas Lynch's “Good Grief: An Undertaker's Reflections.” In his piece, Lynch implores Christians to embrace not just “good deaths,” but also “good funerals.” He protests against the trend of memorial services that do not display the body and downplay its importance, with the corpse seen as just a shell. “A funeral without the dead body,” writes Lynch, “has the religious significance of the Book of Job without the sores and boils, Exodus without the stench of frogs, Calvary without a cross, or the cross without the broken, breathless, precious body hanging there, all suffering and salvation. It is Easter without the resurrected body.”

What makes the writing “religion news” is more than the mere fact that the pieces appeared in the religious press. These are thoughtful, even prayerful, writings that struggle with important questions while reflecting upon, describing, and supporting the Christian community and the Christian life of faith as it is lived out within the world.

One prominent problem with news writing, of course, is that news very quickly grows old and loses its significance, and there is a potential for some of the writing here to fall to that fate. At the same time, however, there are other pieces that provide useful information that goes beyond simple news reporting. For example, Katie Day's “Can Congregations Talk about War?” explains how to deal with current issues, such as war, by generating genuine and thoughtful dialogue within the community—ideas that can be applied to many contentious issues. Other writings, such as Tad Mitsui's “War's Victims Are on All Sides,” offer heartfelt reflections for contemplation and action.

The book presents a good cross-section of the best writing from Christian news sources. Every reader should find at least a few pieces that provide insight and food for thought on what can be weighty topics.

DAVID VENZKE

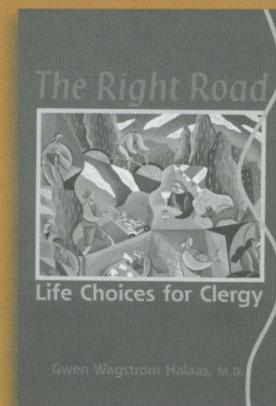
Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church
Petersburg, Michigan

The Right Road

LIFE CHOICES FOR CLERGY

Gwen Wagstrom Halaas

Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004



review book

One could hardly find a better qualified person to write

about clergy health than Gwen Wagstrom Halaas. Not only is she a medical doctor and professor of medicine, she serves as director of ministerial health and wellness for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. She is also married to a Lutheran pastor and related to several pastors to boot.

Furthermore, one could hardly hope for a more urgent or relevant topic for clergy today. This book falls under the category of “self care.” One thing is clear: Clergy are not doing so well in this arena. While religion often contributes positively to people's health, religious leaders do not necessarily fare so well. Various studies that Halaas cites indicate that many clergy have serious problems at work, with depression, and in their families. Clergy have a higher level of obesity than the general population and, not surprisingly, higher rates of high blood pressure and

heart disease. ● One striking statistic is that, in the 1950s, Protestant clergy lived longer than other males, even other professionals. By the 1990s, however, being a pastor meant being counted among the 10 most likely professions to suffer heart disease.

Halaas notes that this is all in the context of a culture that is less and less healthy: "We avoid activity, eat too much 'fast' or processed food, work too many hours, and are isolated from our families and friends." That being said, is it too much to ask that clergy might live and model good and abundant lives? If we cannot count on leaders to be healthy and act in healthy ways, what hope is there? As Halaas rightly notes, healthy living is crucial to healthy leadership and helps create, form, and sustain healthy communities.

Halaas has a wholistic understanding of health that includes well-being in the following areas: social/interpersonal relations, the intellect, the emotions, the physical body, and one's vocation. Thus, she proceeds to enumerate what good health would mean in all these dimensions. That may be a little ambitious in 98 pages of text. At times, Halaas bombards us with too much information and too many statistics. At other times, she lists so many suggestions for things to do that the reader is exhausted by reading them. The author's writing style, which often features long, involved, and complex sentences, is another weakness of this book. However, she does offer valuable counsel and resources on healthy bodies, minds, relationships, intellects, and vocations. Halaas makes a valiant attempt at getting the reader to take these important matters seriously. While I quibble with how she organized and presented her material, *The Right Road* is nevertheless a worthwhile beginning to the vital question of how and why good leaders need to lead a good life.

REV. DR. ARTHUR PAUL BOERS

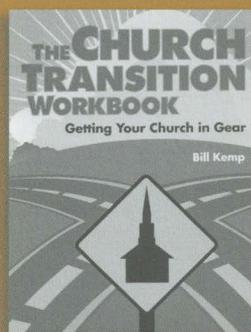
Author of *Never Call Them Jerks: Healthy Responses to Difficult Behavior* (Alban Institute, 1999)

The Church Transition Workbook

GETTING YOUR CHURCH IN GEAR

Bill Kemp

Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2004



review book

With more than two dozen years of service as a United Methodist pastor and interim minister, Bill Kemp is well qualified to address the complex issue of congregational change. "Every church is in a state of change," he writes in *The Church Transition Workbook*. Nearly all of us who have been engaged in congregational leadership can identify with the truth of that claim.

The author's stated desire is to provide a workbook for those congregations that "feel run over by change." He observes that most resources on this subject are tailored exclusively for clergy, as if they can make things happen by themselves. Kemp has developed this workbook to be used by all congregational leaders, including the lay leadership, as a shared resource.

The key concept upon which this text is based is that "critical changes in the local church happen best when they are accommodated within a declared period of transition." With this understanding in view, Kemp outlines a four-step transition process intended to unfold over a period of one to two years. This notion of entering into a defined period of transition is an alien concept to those of us who are

steeped in a culture of immediacy. However, many churches would benefit from gaining the courage to commit to precisely such a period.

In presenting the steps of his transition process, the author employs the automotive imagery of "getting in gear" as a unifying metaphor. Step one, "park," entails a period devoted to gaining a clear understanding of the church's present condition. Kemp surveys several critical issues that the church may need to explore during this stage. In step two, the church shifts into "reverse," examining its history and tradition. Kemp encourages congregations to celebrate the positive aspects of their collective stories and to seek healing of dysfunctional patterns. He provides creative ideas for re-telling old stories and for appropriating this renewed sense of history. Step three involves a shift into "neutral." Before a congregation moves forward, it must examine the road ahead for potential obstacles. Kemp offers clear categories for evaluating the weaknesses and roadblocks at work within a church's life and for identifying what may need to be left behind as the church moves forward. The fourth step is "drive," in which the church actually begins to implement change. The author presents a realistic portrait of some of the challenges and potential pitfalls to which churches must be attentive during this stage.

The material drawn together within this workbook is practical, accessible, and honest. Each chapter concludes with poignant, probing discussion questions. The author also provides an abundance of practical exercises that support the objectives of each step in the transition process. He addresses a range of difficult issues in a manner that reflects both a realistic awareness of what is going on in many faith communities and a genuine sensitivity to their struggles. His counsel reveals his firm confidence that God can be at work in the midst of change.

Even those who are reluctant to accept the concept of a defined period of transition will find this workbook to be a storehouse of practical wisdom. This is not the only resource of its kind. In its own right, however, it certainly is worthy of use by congregations seeking assistance during times of transition.

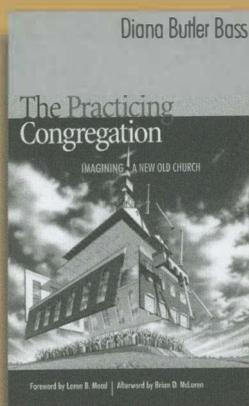
REV. CORY L. SEIBEL

North American Baptist Seminary
Sioux Falls, South Dakota

The Practicing Congregation

IMAGINING A NEW OLD CHURCH

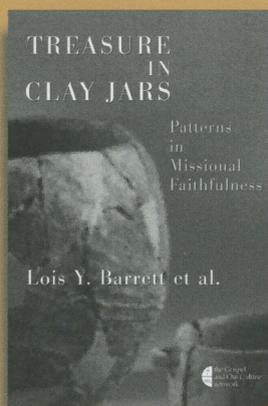
Diana Butler Bass



Treasure in Clay Jars

PATTERNS IN MISSIONAL FAITHFULNESS

Lois Y. Barrett, Darrell L. Guder,
Walter C. Hobbs, George R. Hunsberger,
Linford L. Stutzman, Jeff Van Kooten, and
Dale A. Ziemer



public school in ninth grade. The first fifteen minutes of my first day—home-room devotions—filled me with anxiety about identity and practice. Would I betray my faith tradition if I took my turn reading from the King James Bible on the teacher's desk, or if I recited the extra words I heard appended to the familiar bulk of the "Our Father"? I was immediately forced to locate myself within a civic culture where Protestantism was still (for a last brief moment) the unquestioned norm.

My graduation from parochial school in 1962 marked the final moment when those distinctive faith practices of my childhood would be passed on without question inside the Church itself. The twin engines of ecumenism and liturgical renewal reached full throttle during Vatican II. I returned home from college in the late 1960s to find the liturgy celebrated in English and my mother complaining about the intrusion of participatory worship into her personal devotions during mass.

Protestant churches had their own version of this story. My first experience of the Episcopal Church in 1969 involved almost no contact with the hallowed *Book of Common Prayer*. The progressive parish on my college campus used an alternative liturgy on Sunday mornings—still very traditional in tone, but recovering a much older sequence of liturgical action. This parish's worship practices smoothed my transition to the Episcopal Church, since the "new liturgy" bore a closer resemblance to the Catholic mass than its counterpart in the *1928 Prayer Book*.

These memories frame my view of a pivotal decade for Christian practice in North America. Long-running currents of liturgical, theological, and ethical renewal had finally broken the surface of church life during the 1960s, displacing established customs and unquestioned assumptions about the identity, purpose, and shape of faith communities. What the proponents of renewal could not have imagined fully was the larger tide sweeping through our culture—a surge of individualism and consumerism driven steadily higher

Arriving Where We Started: Contemporary Reconstruction of Shared Faith Practice

review book

"The end of all our exploring," wrote T.S. Eliot, "will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time." Eliot's words serve as an appropriate epigram for this discussion of two recent books presenting research findings about the relationship between congregational vitality and the recovery of shared spiritual practices. Each work describes a small but important trend in congregational life—the selective reappropriation of long-abandoned traditions as a basis for ministry in the 21st-century context. Since both books call for imaginative reconsideration of our spiritual past, I will use a bit of personal history to set the stage for a discussion of concepts and findings.

I grew up in a faith community with distinctive practices that shaped my spiritual consciousness. In the years before Vatican II, Roman Catholic children were taught many personal and communal disciplines, including Saturday confession, Sunday mass (in Latin), and abstinence from meat on Fridays. We prayed the rosary, built "May shrines" around statues of Mary, dropped pennies into cardboard boxes to "save pagan babies," and prayed for "vocations"—the call to join a religious order or to become a priest.

Such practices shaped young Catholics' spiritual imagination and moral sensibility. Just as important, they distinguished the Catholic community from the rest of the environment, especially Protestantism. I can clearly remember crossing the cultural boundary from parochial to

by new marketing technologies. The principled renewal of practice was largely swallowed up in a far bigger wave of worldwide detraditioning—defined by British sociologist Paul Heelas as a “decline in belief in pre-given or natural orders of things.”

Now, however, we appear to have moved full circle in our attitudes toward tradition. *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church* by Diana Butler Bass and *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness* by Lois Y. Barrett *et al.* both make a passionate case for reconnecting Christian congregations with ancient and invigorating practices of faith. Neither book indulges in nostalgia for some previous era; each recognizes the

Diana Butler Bass describes patterns emerging from the study of 50 congregations from a range of mainline traditions and social contexts; 10 of these local churches were selected for more intensive ethnographic research. Stepping away from hackneyed assumptions, such as the notion that conservative theology makes churches grow, Bass examines centrist and left-leaning congregations that have experienced renewal by reappropriating particular Christian practices. Each of these congregations has found its own way to live the Gospel—visibly and communally—within a specific context.

According to Bass, these “practicing congregations” reveal a new current in American religious and cultural life,

This difference between established and intentional religious practice is central to the argument of the book. Before the mid-1960s, Bass says, “American Protestantism was about family tradition, local community, and God’s comfortable familiarity.” It was a routinized kind of faith involved in blessing the social order, comforting people in times of crisis, and training children in the customs of faith.

For congregations located in tightly knit communities, established churchgoing “worked.” In both the church-on-the-green of New England towns and the immigrant-based urban congregation, members “received certain beliefs and practices from earlier generations with few questions, and expected these patterns to continue indefinitely.” Because this style was determined more by sociology than by theology, established churchgoing was the norm across different Protestant denominations, liberal and conservative. (It was also the norm, I would observe, within the Roman Catholicism of my childhood.) To challenge or break the received pattern would have seemed, according to Bass, like “family disloyalty.”

In contrast to this automatic presumption of continuity, intentional churchgoing involves the conscious choice of a particular path by people embarked on a spiritual journey. While religious individualism and invention are not new to the American landscape, Bass asserts that the yearning for a reflective, consciously chosen *corporate* pilgrimage of faith is a remarkable new departure, to which she applies the term *re-traditioning*.

While Bass recognizes that the recovery of tradition may be viewed by some as “religious fundamentalism, sectarian isolationism, or resistance to all forms of change,” she sees on the Protestant mainline signs of a more fluid and reflexive encounter with the past: a “willingness to change through engagement with tradition and an equal willingness to change the tradition through engagement.” These “practicing

continued on page 36

People these days practice healing prayer, hospitality, silence, discernment, stewardship, and peacemaking; they attend retreats, quiet days, spirituality workshops, and Bible studies. These practices happen purposefully, intentionally chosen by a new generation of churchgoers who share and teach them in community.

profound changes that have occurred since 1950, including the demise of “Christendom” as a viable assumptive framework. From different theological starting points and in divergent styles, these two books present an inspiring and remarkably similar vision for congregational renewal.

Unexpected Vigor

The Practicing Congregation is a mid-course report from a three-year study of vitality in mainline Protestant churches, the Project on Congregations of Intentional Practice, located at Virginia Theological Seminary. Project director

a trend in which “religious communities focus on meaning-making by gathering up the past and re-presenting it through both story and action in ways that help people connect with God, one another, and the world outside the church buildings.”

It seems to me that virtually all congregations help people to “make meaning,” at least to some extent. Perhaps the word “focus” offers a key to understanding this new type of church. Practicing congregations are *intentional* about making meaning *in a particular way* that may be distinguished from “established churchgoing.”

Arriving Where We Started

continued from page 35

congregations" see themselves as active participants in a process of "reaching back to the past, identifying practices that were an important part of that past, and bringing them to the present, where they can reshape contemporary life." In response to the fragmentation of modern life, these communities are forging "sacred space for the formation of identity and meaning, [for] the construction of 'pockets' of connectedness to the long history of Christian witness and practice in a disconnected world."

Bass provides several illustrations of fluid re-traditioning, including the story of a downtown Episcopal parish in Washington, D.C., where churchgoers used to meet Washington's political elite and genteel aristocrats. Though the congregation nearly died a dozen years ago, it thrives today as a diverse and vital congregation where...

...[t]he privatized piety of old-style Protestant liberalism has been supplanted by a new sense of spiritual vitality and expressive faith. People these days practice healing prayer, hospitality, silence, discernment, stewardship, and peace-making; they attend retreats, quiet days, spirituality workshops, and Bible studies. These practices happen purposefully, intentionally chosen by a new generation of churchgoers who share and teach them in community.

This parish, Bass asserts, is not an isolated case. Rather, it illustrates an unnoticed current of renewal among mainline Protestants—a story that has gone unreported in the press because it does not fit into the "left-versus-right" grid that Bass refers to as the "FOX News Channel view of the world."

Patterns in Practice

Though quite different in tone, *Treasure in Clay Jars* shares core concerns with *The Practicing Congregation*, including a desire to move beyond oversimplified categories. The authors note that the

continued on page 38



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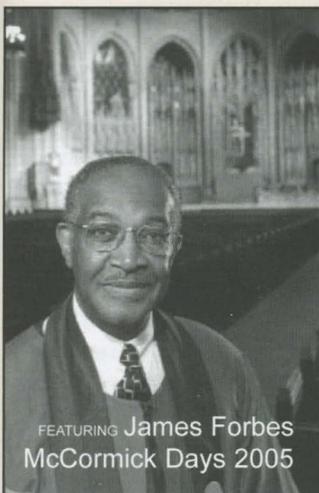
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Arriving Where We Started

continued from page 33

traditional distinction between “believers’ churches and the inclusive churches of the dominant Western tradition” no longer tells us much about congregations’ religious vitality. “One can look at the entire spectrum of megachurches in North America,” the authors contend, “and find a market-oriented understanding of the gospel: meeting needs, providing support, affirming individual salvation, and engaging in missions as one program among many. Neither size, nor success, nor vitality by any number of measurements is necessarily a guarantor that a congregation is confronting and responding to missional vocation.”

Eschewing easy measures of faithfulness (such as doctrinal purity or numerical growth), the authors have set out to illustrate through missional congregations’ stories a bracing vision of renewed congregational practice.

Based on the work of the Gospel and Our Culture network, *Treasure in Clay Jars* builds on a previous volume called *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* by Darrell Guder *et al.* An interdisciplinary team translated the theology of *Missional Church* into a set of “indicators” that might help them find congregations where this vision is reflected in local practice. Having assembled a large list of candidates, the team selected nine congregations for an intensive three- or four-day visit by a pair of investigators. In each case, one team member was deeply familiar with the church’s denominational tradition. The study sample included Mennonite, Presbyterian, Baptist, Reformed, Pentecostal, Methodist, Roman Catholic, and Evangelical congregations.

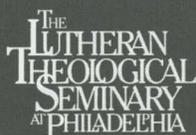
This research has borne two kinds of results. First, interaction with the congregations caused the team to rework the initial indicators into eight “patterns of the missional church,” which include:

- ◆ missional vocation
- ◆ biblical formation and discipleship
- ◆ taking risks as a contrast community
- ◆ practices that demonstrate God's intent for the world
- ◆ worship as public witness
- ◆ dependence on the Holy Spirit
- ◆ pointing toward the reign of God
- ◆ missional authority

The other result of this research is a rich and varied set of stories about congregations remarkable for their clarity, intensity, and transformative engagement with the surrounding context. We are introduced briefly to the selected congregations at the beginning of the book, then find their story lines interwoven throughout the succeeding chapters.

The chapter on discernment of "missional vocation," for example, gives us a glimpse of the various congregations seeking and following their distinctive call. A Mennonite congregation in the wealthy community of Boulder, Colorado, for instance, pursues a vocation to "enact and contribute" to peace. As small groups discern their own part in that call, the church has been able to initiate a victim-offender reconciliation program, send peacemaking teams to the West Bank, and buffer hostility between police and rioting students on a nearby campus. Hearing a different call in an entirely different context, a Roman Catholic parish in Brooklyn seeks to be "present with Christ in the Eucharist and present with the poorest of the poor." Their long-time priest enters into personal retreat on Thursdays and Fridays, then gathers leaders for contemplative prayer on Saturday mornings. (These leaders convene the parish's "fraternities"—small groups that meet regularly for prayer, study of lectionary texts, and "review of life" in light of the Gospel.) Parish ministries reach out to the homeless, immigrants, and people dying from AIDS.

continued on page 40



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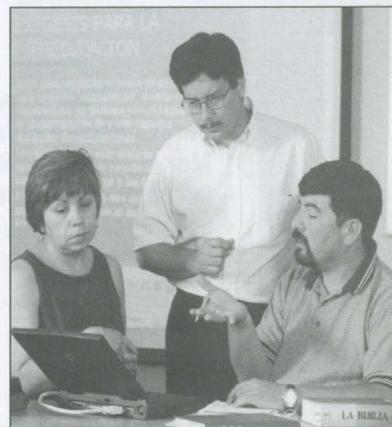
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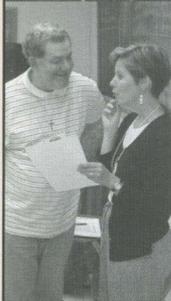


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Arriving Where We Started

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The reader's virtual pilgrimage to these nine congregations is a frame-bending experience, at once hopeful, surprising, challenging, and occasionally disturbing. The most powerful feature of the journey is the particularity of each story, the way each congregation interacts with its own theological tradition and its specific social context to build a shared way of life that is distinctively Christian. "Faith community" does not sound like a euphemism when it is applied to these congregations.

The Argument of Discipleship

The Practicing Congregation and Treasure in Clay Jars share a key perspective on church vitality: that successful programs are not enough, whether they arise from the routinized churchgoing of the 1950s or the latest research on consumer preferences. Vitality requires a congregation to stand in the breach between its faith tradition and its cultural context to ask: What does it mean to be faithful, here and now? Barrett and her co-authors say of the churches in their study:

They have probed their traditions to discover untapped resources. They have drawn on their tradition, recovered it, and enhanced it. And they have also differentiated themselves from it at fundamental points, critiquing it and changing it.

This comment resonates deeply with Bass's reflection (credited to theologian Kathryn Tanner) that Christian faith is, in itself, an "ongoing argument about true discipleship"—or, one might say, a never-ending process of *re-traditioning*.

I would love to see the authors of both books and some representatives from both groups of congregations gathered in the same room. On one hand, I would expect hearty agreement about “practice” as the pivotal point of congregational renewal. On the other hand, I would expect considerable tension if the discussion turned to the nature of scriptural authority. That, after all, is a salient feature of the ongoing argument about true discipleship in our 21st-century context. But I would bet on the ability of this imaginary group to “practice” together—to engage in hospitality and prayer, in spiritual discernment and biblical reflection. In my own Anglican Communion, deeply divided over the interpretation of scripture in relation to homosexuality, it has been, of all things, a shared practice of Bible study that has helped transform the atmosphere among the presiding bishops from all parts of the world. In a document submitted to the Eames Commission in June 2004¹, David F. Ford, Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University and the author of numerous books, commented on the power of such practice: “I am convinced that scripture, which is so much part of our problems, also offers the main way through them. There are wiser ways of understanding and applying our scripture than many of those which often dominate the controversies of our Communion.” I suspect that the congregations described in both *The Practicing Congregation* and *Treasure in Clay Jars* know and practice these “wise ways.”

NOTES

1. “Learning from Lambeth 1998 and Primates’ Meetings 2000–2003”



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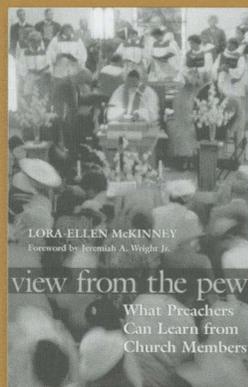
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View from the Pew

WHAT PREACHERS CAN LEARN FROM
CHURCH MEMBERS

Lora-Ellen McKinney

Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2004



A central issue of *View from the Pew* is the temptation of preachers to put themselves and their personalities, rather than Christ, at the center of the sermon. In order to help preachers resist this temptation, McKinney encourages them to do several things. The first thing she stresses is good preparation, including a seminary education. The goal of this preparation is to connect the head and the heart during the sermon as well as to teach the scriptures. McKinney also cautions against overly long sermons and warns against the temptation to use the sermon as a place for the pastor to vent his or her anger at the congregation. In this regard, McKinney calls on preachers to work out their issues in therapy, not in the sermon. She also highlights the importance of good pastoral work throughout the week, as well as the usefulness of having a mentor.

This is a brief, accessible book divided into 10 chapters. At the end of each chapter are sections entitled “Thoughts from the Pulpit” and “Thoughts from the Pew,” which sum up the essence of the chapter. This is a useful book for Protestant African-American ministers, though others will also find it helpful, and many will want to see how issues in this community relate to their own situations.

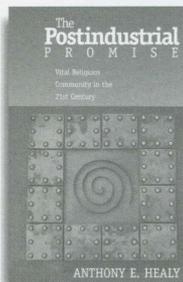
REV. GERALD A. “RUSTY” BUTLER
Eureka Presbyterian Church
Eureka, Illinois

review book In preparation for writing this book, Lora-Ellen McKinney, the very well-educated daughter of a minister, interviewed numerous congregants from the Protestant African-American Church. The goal of both those interviews and the book presenting what McKinney learned from them, is to improve the effectiveness of preachers.



New & Noteworthy

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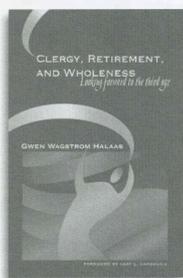


The Postindustrial Promise: Vital Religious Community in the 21st Century

ANTHONY E. HEALY

AL 277; \$18.00

Contrary to the stories of decline that have come to characterize news on congregations in America, demographer Anthony E. Healy finds that in this time of postindustrial transformation, congregations have become important and vital places for people to put down religious roots and reconnect with the stories and traditions of previous generations. This book will help religious leaders develop responsive and viable places of ministry, mission, and program in this time of change.

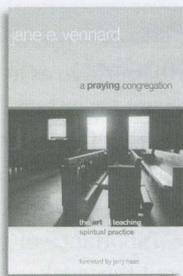


Clergy, Retirement, and Wholeness: Looking Forward to the Third Age

GWEN HAGSTROM HALAAS

AL290; \$18.00

Retiring well is everyone's goal, but accomplishing this end requires planning and effort. Family physician Gwen Halaas recognizes the challenges professional caregivers such as clergy experience as they try to practice good self-care, particularly as they approach the significant changes inherent in retirement. Halaas offers sympathetic but pointed guidance for developing and maintaining holistic wellness as we both anticipate and live into our retirement years. Readers will find this book informative, inspirational, and encouraging.

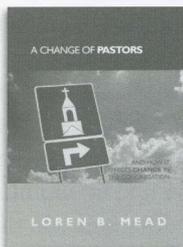


A Praying Congregation: The Art of Teaching Spiritual Practice

JANE E. VENNARD

AL303; \$17.00

How do you teach somebody to pray? How do you help deepen the spiritual life of a congregation? Jane E. Vennard addresses these questions with the important point that those who want to deepen the spiritual life of their congregation must first engage in spiritual practice themselves. This book offers congregational leaders and others advice on how to deepen their own prayer lives as well as accessible lesson plans that make it easy to share these insights with others. By confronting some of the most difficult questions about prayer, Vennard shows how one can build a relationship with God through prayer, and offers effective instruction on how one can help others do the same.



A Change of Pastors...and How It Affects Change in the Congregation Revised Edition of *Critical Moment of Ministry: A Change of Pastors*

LOREN B. MEAD

AL299; \$13.00

Twenty years after *Critical Moment of Ministry* was first published, Alban Institute founder Loren Mead returns to his groundbreaking work on one of the most important times in a congregation's life—the time between one pastor's leaving and another's arrival. In this revised edition, Mead draws from the wisdom he has gained from 35 years of studying congregations to share how churches can take full advantage of this "extraordinary pregnant moment" during which incredible congregational change can happen.

So You're on the Search Committee

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AL 306; \$7.00

Also newly revised is this Alban classic focusing on the experience of pastoral search committees and the unique role the laity in most denominations play in this crucial process. The authors share insightful reflections on the deeper issues search committees will find themselves wrestling with, as well as warnings about obstacles they may encounter in the process.

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RESOURCES ON LIFELONG LEARNING FROM THE CONGREGATIONAL RESOURCE GUIDE

Block, Peter. **The Answer to How Is Yes: Acting on What Matters** (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2001). *The Answer to How Is Yes* compels us to attend to those ideals and commitments that truly matter—both in our individual lives and in our institutions and communities. This book is for persons who are open to a renewed perspective as they reassess personal vocation and mission.

Clayton, Paul. **Letters to Lee: Mentoring the New Minister** (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1999). The secret to pastoral freshness is broad-based lifelong learning and willingness to maintain a growing edge. Constructed as a series of advisory letters to a novice in his first congregation, *Letters to Lee* offers sage advice—both to those in the early months of professional ministry and to more seasoned pastors.

Faith and Wisdom: Life Long Learning Opportunities for People of Faith (www.faithandwisdom.org). A cooperative project of seven North American denominations, this Web site provides clergy and lay leaders with information on learning opportunities from colleges, learning centers, retreat centers, and parachurch organizations. Web site visitors may search for a learning event through any combination of these factors: date, audience, sponsoring agency, learning method, topic, and denominational affiliation.

Farris, Laurence. **Ten Commandments for Pastors New to a Congregation** (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003). In this small but thorough book, Farris outlines 10 guidelines to help set the tone of ministry for pastors new to a congregation. Though written primarily for pastors entering a new church, this text provides useful advice for all pastors in the areas of professional focus, role identity, pastoral care, and self-care.

Oswald, Roy. **Crossing the Boundary between Seminary and Parish** (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1980, 2002). Through this report, new pastors will discover that they are not alone in their experiences; those with seminarian interns will gain insight

into how to make the experience more beneficial; and judicatory and denominational executives will find a starting point for their training and fieldwork program evaluations. Available as a download from www.alban.org.

Palmer, Parker. **To Know as We are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey** (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993). Parker Palmer argues that we have separated education from the spiritual realm, with education focused on tangible realities and spirituality focused on the intangible. Such separation creates a cultural illness that blocks healing, hope, and wholeness, he contends. Palmer offers spiritual disciplines that can move teaching into its spiritual core.

Parker, Ronald. **Do I Belong in Seminary?** (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1998). Ronald Parker demonstrates that there are different kinds of “calls”—including but not limited to the call to the pastorate—and that seminary may be the answer for many of them. In addition to exploring the discernment process, this book explains how to learn about seminaries and how to select the most appropriate one.

Reber, Robert Eldred and D. Bruce Roberts, Eds. **A Lifelong Call to Learn: Approaches to Continuing Education for Church Leaders** (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001). Recognizing that clergy and other leaders often gain valuable wisdom *after* seminary, this essay collection emphasizes the importance of congregationally based continuing education and explores possibilities for creating intentional learning communities. Topics include clergy peer groups, clergy/lay theological studies, and multicultural contexts for continuing education.

SACEM: The Society for the Advancement of Continuing Education for Ministry (www.sacem.com). SACEM seeks to share information and foster excellence in developing continuing education for ministry. Although aimed primarily at continuing education providers, the organization also assists congregational leaders by providing—through its Web site—information on lifelong learning centers, opportunities, locations, and resources.

www.congregationalresources.org

Is it Wise to Hire Members?

Q: I am on the personnel committee of my church. We expect to fill two staff positions soon, and wonder what our policy should be about accepting applications from members of the congregation.

A: When hiring staff, congregation leaders often ask this question. Hiring members has both advantages and disadvantages. The advantages are that members are apt to be familiar with the congregation, committed to its mission, and used to working hard without pay. The drawbacks are that a former lay leader may have difficulty accepting supervision, and a minister or board that tries to fire a member may wind up in hot soup with the member's friends and family. After experiencing such problems, some congregations resolve "never again" to hire a member for a staff role. But what if the best candidate is a member? Perhaps the safest policy is to exclude members from "support" positions but to allow them to apply for "program" positions, where the advantage of a candidate in sympathy with the congregation's unique style and theology is likely to be most important.

Keep in mind that congregation members who join the paid staff can expect important changes in their relationship to the church, so it may be helpful to share the following document with member applicants:

Becoming Staff

As a congregation member thinking about joining the paid staff, please consider the following expectations. Please raise any doubts or questions at your interview.

1. A staff member is both a leader and an employee. Unlike a committee

chair or board member, a paid staff member works for the congregation and must follow established policies and accept supervision. Staff members should not also hold lay leadership positions in the congregation. Your spouse, if he or she belongs to this congregation, needs to avoid voting on matters that affect you personally. You will advocate for your program area as part of the congregation's larger mission, not necessarily for what you personally prefer.

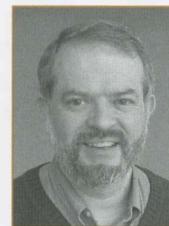
2. A staff member belongs to the staff team. Especially in small congregations, this may seem a little odd. Doesn't the sexton work for the Building Committee, and the musicians for the choir? Every staff member has a natural constituency, but must support unity within the staff as well. No one should accept a paid job who does not expect to balance loyalty to one's "department" with a positive relationship to the whole staff team.

3. A staff member may need to find another pastor. Your pastor is still your pastor for weddings, funerals, and other public functions. For the more private, pastoral aspects of ministry there are some limits. The minister's first role is to lead the team. This means articulating the mission and goals of the congregation to you, seeing that you have the support you need to do your job, and giving you frank feedback about how you are doing. These roles may not be compatible with intense pastoral care or counseling, in which case you may

have to look elsewhere for the ministry you need.

4. A staff member may need to find a new peer group. Your enjoyment of your peer group in the church may be part of what moved you to apply for a staff job. For a time, the satisfactions of group membership continue, but eventually you will be more a leader than a peer. As a staff member, you cannot be casually available to anyone who wants to chat. In time, your relationship with fellow members will shift, and you will find that to feel truly relaxed and "off work" you need to find friends who are not part of your congregation.

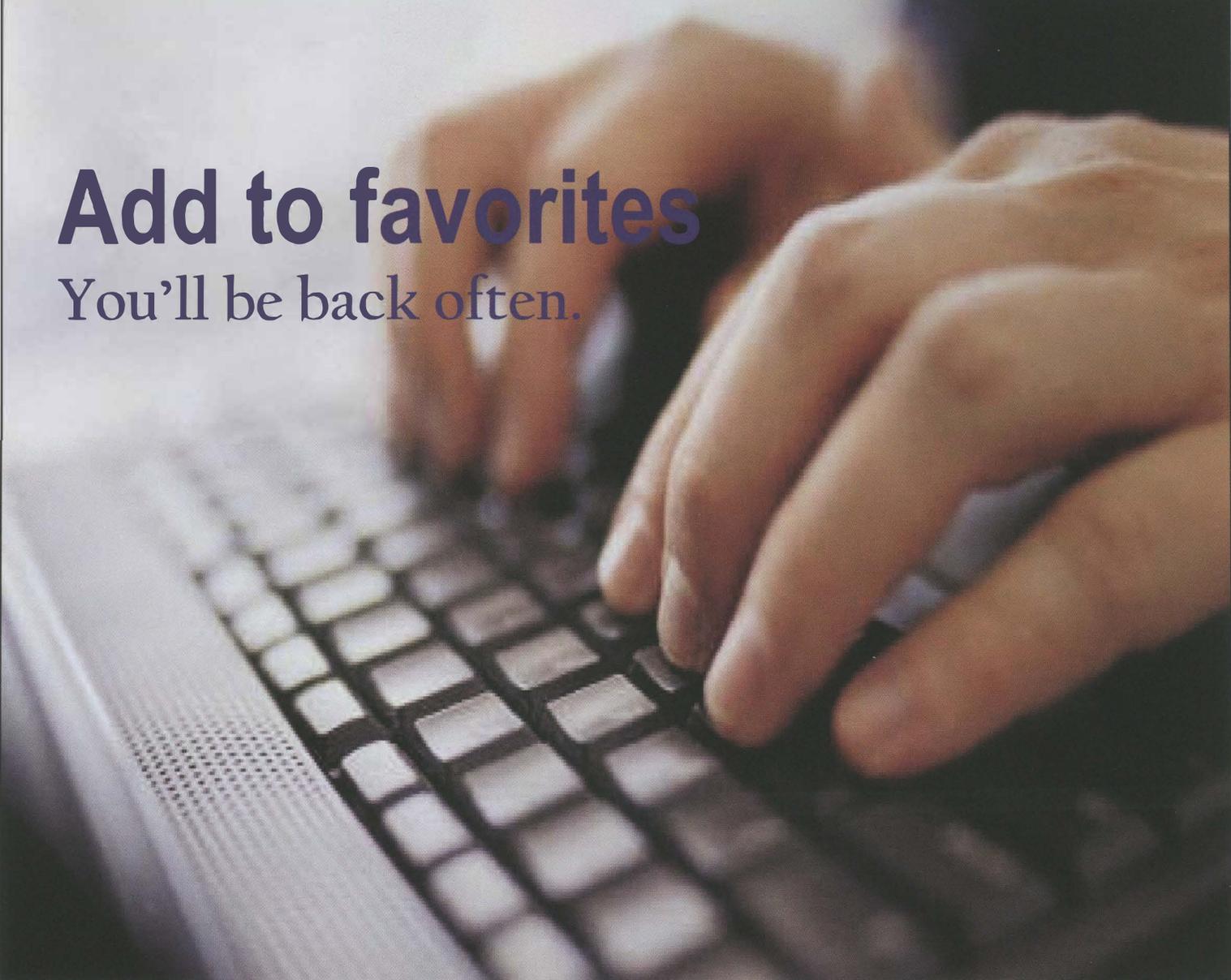
As a member of the congregation, you bring unique experience, knowledge, and enthusiasm to the paid staff. If you say "yes" to a staff position, you will join thousands of others who have moved from lay membership to professional service. Best wishes!



Rev. Dan Hotchkiss is a Unitarian Universalist minister and an Alban Institute senior consultant who speaks, writes, and consults widely on clergy transition, conflict management, fundraising, and financial and strategic planning. He is also the author of *Ministry and Money: A Guide for Clergy and Their Friends* (Alban Institute, 2002).

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