

# Congregations

LEARNING LEADING CHANGING

FALL 2006

## TRANSITION INTO MINISTRY



### COMPLIMENTS OF THE ALBAN INSTITUTE

This special issue of *Congregations* magazine focuses on the transition into ministry, that time when new clergy are shaped as pastors.

The Alban Institute regularly develops such themed issues of *Congregations*—along with books, special reports, forums, and Web-based resources—to highlight important challenges and opportunities for ministry in the 21st century.

Through the generous funding of Lilly Endowment Inc., we are pleased to make this resource available to a wider audience.

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We're pleased to provide you with this special issue of CONGREGATIONS magazine. This issue's focus is on the transition into parish ministry—those critical first years where the habits, inclinations, dispositions, and understanding of pastoral leadership are first formed.

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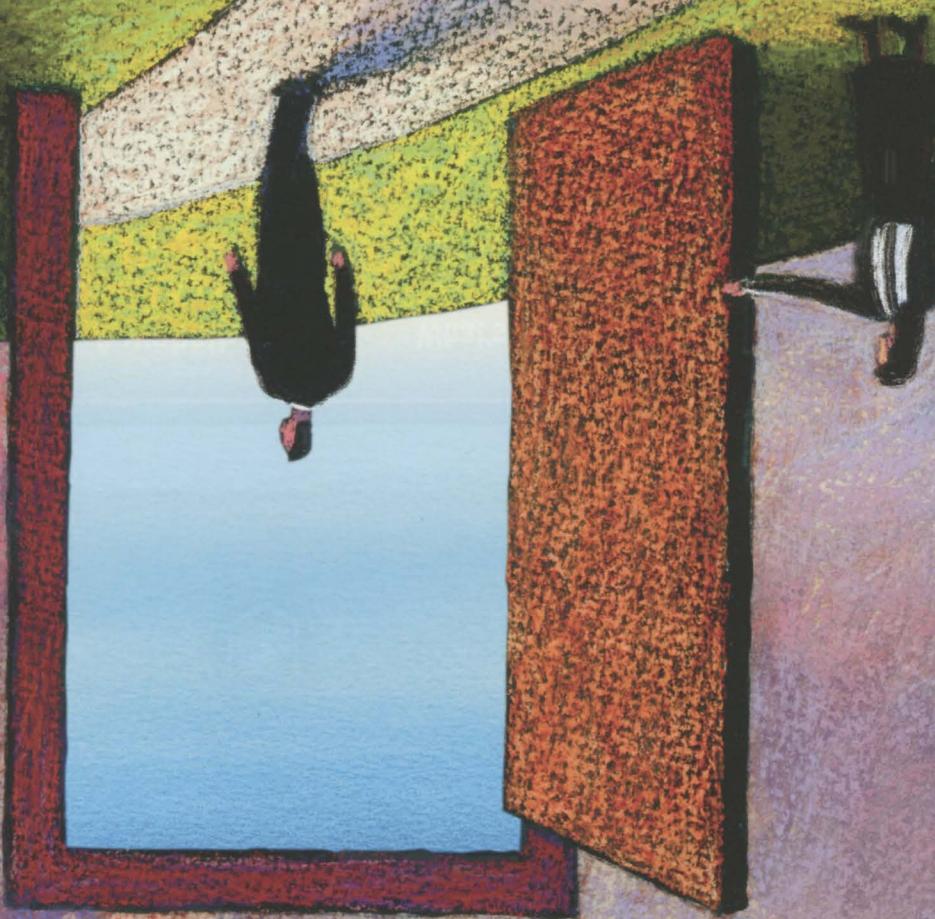
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# Ministry into Transition



Gongregations

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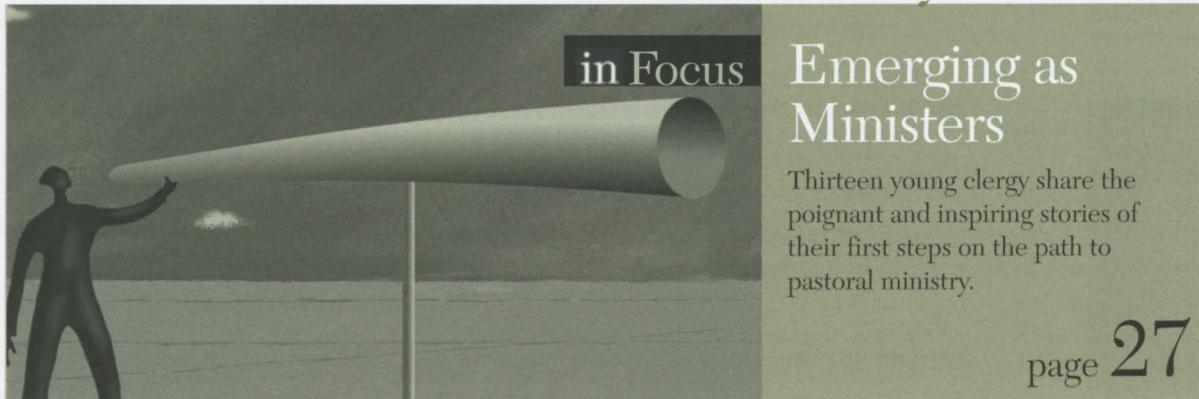
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# Congregations

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FALL 2006

## Transition into Ministry



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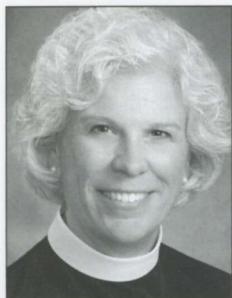
Christina Braudaway-Bauman

**Rev. Christina Braudaway-Bauman** serves as coordinator of the pastoral residency program at the Wellesley Congregational Church and as associate for new clergy development for the Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ (UCC), as part of its Pastoral Excellence Program. An ordained minister in the UCC and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and drawing on nine years of experience as a local church pastor and five years as director of alumni/ae relations and continuing education at Andover Newton Theological School, Rev. Braudaway-Bauman currently works to support new pastors as she oversees mentoring programs for clergy in their first few years of ministry. [Page 42](#)



Kathryn Palen

**Rev. Dr. Lawrence Golemon**, an ordained Presbyterian minister, is a research associate at the Alban Institutes. Dr. Golemon recently served as a research consultant at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and as a member of the foundation's Clergy Education Study team. He is a co-author of the recent book, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* (Jossey-Bass, 2006). [Page 17](#)



Carol Pinkham Oak

**Rev. Kathryn Palen**, former director of consulting for the Alban Institute, is transitioning back to parish ministry. During the past year, she served as a mentor in a program for new clergy sponsored through the Lilly Endowment's Transition into Ministry initiative. An ordained American Baptist minister, she served congregations in Kentucky and Washington, D.C., and a seminary in Indiana before joining the Alban staff. [Page 11](#)



James P. Wind

**Rev. Dr. Carol Pinkham Oak** recently became the rector of St. John's Church in Ellicott City, Maryland. She previously served as associate rector of Christ Church in Alexandria, Virginia, where she oversaw new clergy mentoring as director of the church's Foundations for Spiritual Leadership Program. Dr. Pinkham Oak earned a master of divinity degree from Berkeley Divinity School at Yale University in 1985 and a doctor of ministry degree in leadership development from Seabury Western Seminary in 2003. [Page 20](#)



David Wood

**Rev. Dr. James P. Wind**, an ordained minister of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, is president of the Alban Institute. Prior to coming to Alban in 1995, he was program director of the religion division for the Lilly Endowment, Inc. from 1990 to 1995. From 1985 to 1990, he served as director of research and publications and senior associate of the Park Ridge Center for the Study of Health, Faith, and Ethics in Chicago, Illinois. Dr. Wind is also the author of two books, *The Bible and the University: The Messianic Vision of William Rainey Harper* and *Places of Worship: Exploring Their History*, as well as the co-editor of five others. [Page 5](#)

**Rev. David Wood**, an ordained American Baptist minister, is the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Gardiner, Maine. He also serves on the staff of the Fund for Theological Education and as the coordinator of the Lilly Endowment's Transition into Ministry grants program, which assists recent seminary graduates in making the transition from classroom to the practice of ministry. Rev. Wood is currently working on a book for Brazos Press concerning the essential connection between the practice of friendship and the practice of pastoral leadership. [Page 7](#)

# The Transition into Ministry



## Congregations

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The Alban Institute has long been interested in the transition

new clergy make from seminary to congregational leadership. Some of our earliest research projects focused on this time: "Crossing the Boundary" and "Beyond the Boundary"—spearheaded by long-time Alban consultant Roy Oswald—were influential in helping seminaries, judicatories, and denominations take a more focused role in the transition process.

The Religion division of the Lilly Endowment understands the importance of making a good transition, and for the past several years it has funded a number of projects through its Transition into Ministry program, ranging from placing new clergy in "teaching congregations" as full-time staff to denominational and judicatory programs that regularly gather new clergy to reflect on their pastoral experiences and to learn from each other and from experienced pastors and wise observers of congregations.

This special issue of Congregations is the first of several published reflections we will do on what is being learned in the Transition into Ministry program. While we know it will be of interest to all of those who regularly receive the magazine, it is being made available to a wider audience through the generosity of the Lilly Endowment. We encourage those of you who are new to the magazine to consider becoming a member of the Alban Institute to receive each quarterly issue.

The issue moves from the broad to the specific, from the historical to the current. In the process, we get a good picture of what it is like to become a pastor and of the efforts that are being made to help that experience be a good one. Alban president James Wind and Transition into Ministry program coordinator David Wood—who are preparing together a Special Report on the Transition into Ministry—reflect on both the questions that are being raised and the lessons that are being learned through this experiment. Christina Braudaway-Bauman and Carol Pinkham Oak, leaders of two of the residential programs, share their insights on avoiding the pitfalls of the transition. Kathryn Palen provides very helpful overviews of programmatic efforts to assist new clergy. And Lawrence Golemon, who has spent the past several years studying seminaries and what they do well, helps congregations understand the education their new clergy have received.

As I learned about the Transition into Ministry program, the one thing I wanted to make sure of was that we captured the voices of those who are making this transition into the pastoral life. So I asked a number of program participants to reflect on their experiences as new pastors and to share with us some of their significant learning moments. I am very grateful to the thirteen pastors who shared their struggles and joys with us and you.

Take a young pastor to lunch. Ask him or her to tell you a story. You'll be glad you did.

Blessings,

*Richard Bass*

Director of Publishing

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## TESTIMONIALS

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*"My institutional membership offers me the ability to share excellent resources and links with governing body leaders."*

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# Experimenting with the Transition into Ministry

JAMES P. WIND

In 2001, Duke Divinity School professor Richard Lischer published *Open Secrets: A Spiritual Journey through a Country Church* (Doubleday 2001), capturing in its pages the journey of his transition from a Lutheran seminary to ministry at a small, rural congregation. Widely read over the past five years, this book provided the opportunity for many of us to reflect on a pivotal threshold-crossing moment in our own ministries—how that first entry into ordained ministry had affected the trajectories of our subsequent careers.

The book's opening pages foreshadow the huge challenge that Lischer faced. On an advance scouting trip to Cana Lutheran Church, the soon-to-be pastor searched for

The entry into a first call or ministerial assignment poses unexpected and at times critical vocational challenges to all who cross the threshold. How that transition goes makes all the difference in the world.

a congregation in a town he had never heard of. When he pulled up in front of the church, "I felt something flop in my stomach," Lischer writes. "Then a crushing sense of disappointment. So this is what has been prepared for me." The view through the windshield of the rundown parsonage and the small church building in the middle of nowhere was overwhelming. Lischer could not get out of the car. He sat and looked for some time, then turned around and drove home.

Fortunately, a few weeks later he drove back to the church, got out of the car, and became pastor of the congregation. The rest of his moving book recounts his mistakes and epiphanies throughout his ministry there. Eventually, Lischer would move on to become one of the nation's premier homiletics professors, but the lessons of that first call gave shape to his subsequent journey.

In *Open Secrets*, as he reflected back on his seminary education, Lischer concluded that "eight years of theological education has rendered us [Lischer and his classmates] uncertain of our identity and, like our professors, unemployable in the real world. After years of grooming, we were no longer sure what it meant to be a pastor or if we wanted to be one." Here, Lischer puts his finger on a pivotal set of challenges that face seminary-educated clergy today: the entry into a first call or ministerial assignment poses unexpected and at times critical vocational challenges to all who cross the threshold. How that transition goes makes all the difference in the world.

## An Ongoing Experiment

The long histories of the Christian Church and the Jewish community are full of a stunning variety of experiments to shape new generations of leaders. Monastic communities, medieval and modern universities, and the Lithuanian yeshiva are just a few of the dramatic innovations that have been made over the centuries.

In our time, the experiments continue. From the founding of the first U.S. graduate seminary (Andover in 1808) on, the U.S. Christian and Jewish communities have invested enormous amounts of money and energy in seminaries. Currently, over 250 accredited schools graduate more than 14,000 students each year, half of whom are candidates for ordained ministry. An innovation that moved beyond the old "reading Divinity" model of colonial times, seminaries became specialized

enter their callings by other routes, like apprenticeship and even self-education. In many parts of non-Mainline American Protestantism (evangelical, Pentecostal, and new megachurch movements) the seminary is regarded as counterproductive and new forms of congregation-based leadership formation are taking place.

## 20th-Century Experiments

The advent of the modern university and the ensuing culture of professionalism that grew up in and around it reshaped the threshold into ministry in several ways. First, professional education for ministry increasingly shaped itself around the norms of the research university. Distinct disciplines of research began to appear in biblical, systematic historical, and practical theology. Specialized faculties and distinct guilds of academic work reshaped faculties. As the century unfolded, new disciplines like sociology of religion, clinical pastoral education and the like sought their distinct places in the crowded curriculum. Disciplines like biblical theology and church history developed their own subspecialties like Reformation history, the construction of the canonical collections of Scripture, and ethics. As specialization and professionalization

## The advent of the modern university and the ensuing culture of professionalism that grew up in and around it reshaped the threshold into ministry in several ways.

institutions of higher education that moved students through a constantly evolving and expanding theological encyclopedia of knowledge. But as central as the seminary has become in Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant worlds, we must remember that the experimenting has also taken place outside the walls of seminaries as various ministers

proceeded, many seminary faculties transformed themselves from collections of generalists who knew the world of parish ministry intimately to collections of specialists oriented more toward their specialized worlds of research than to the daily realities of parish life.

Seminaries tried to maintain educational ties with local ministry in several

ways. Catholic and African American schools continued to hire experienced priestly and pastoral practitioners on their faculties as part of their cultures of formation. Evangelical mission and Bible schools emphasized practical courses and peer groups at the heart of their teaching. Mainline Protestant and Jewish seminaries realized the limits of realigning with the academy, so they developed field work sites and supervision—in teaching congregations, urban work, and clinical pastoral education. Although the need for building skills in ministry was universally recognized, the gap between academic courses and the practices of ministry widened.

At the same time there was a general theological discovery of the role of laity in religious and secular leadership. Parish clergy found themselves challenged on two fronts—by the growing authority of professional academic theologians and by lay leaders who demanded a larger role in ministry. In the second half of the 20th century, the world of clergy became, in the eyes of many, more distant from the world of the seminary at the same time that it entered a major leadership renegotiation with the people in the pews.

During the '60s and '70s major ideological cleavages developed in American culture—around issues of economics, social justice, war, civil rights, sexuality, and other issues. These conflicts made parish ministry a tougher reality to work in and widened the gap between seminaries and denominational bureaucracies on the one hand and local congregations on the other.

It should come as no surprise, then, that a growing cohort of practitioners and observers of religious life began to speak with more concern about the gap between the world and the seminary. Independent institutions like the Alban Institute, seminaries (especially their trustees and practical theology departments), and denominations began to name the problem in the 1970s and to experiment widely with ways to bridge the gap. New curricula became almost a constant fact of life in seminaries; new experiments in parish-based education, field work, clinical pastoral education, and contextual education became the

order of the day. Sometimes new seminaries were invented, like Intermet in Washington, D.C., or the reinvented Hartford Seminary in Connecticut. Denominations began to introduce major new programs to deal with the transition—a movement that continues down to the various first-call programs that are underway in most mainline denominations today. But the gap remains. Some think it has grown wider and deeper. Others think it has become more

- ◆ What elements of these experiments hold the most promise for the future of clergy formation and readiness for ministry?
- ◆ What makes someone a good mentor?
- ◆ What does it take to create a peer learning environment that truly makes a vocation-long difference?
- ◆ What difference does it make that these new ministers start out in vital congregations, surrounded with

## A growing cohort of practitioners and observers of religious life began to speak with more concern about the gap between the world and the seminary.

complicated than before. But Lischer's experience of not being prepared for the transition from seminary to parish seems to ring true not just for those of his generation (now in their fifties and sixties) but for those who are negotiating the transition today.

### A New Experiment

The same year that *Open Secrets* hit the bookstores, the Lilly Endowment began a new experiment in transitional residencies for parish clergy, providing grants to congregations for the purpose of establishing two-year residencies where new seminary graduates would rotate through all the practical tasks of parish ministry under the supervision of gifted mentors and in groups of strong peers. After five years of this work, the Endowment invited the Alban Institute to probe these experiments for key discoveries and implications for those responsible for shaping the next generation of American clergy.

Alban has already begun this process, considering such questions as:

- ◆ What is truly different and new in the experiments being undertaken in the Transition into Ministry program?

resources devoted to their flourishing? Compared to many places where ministries begin—small, isolated congregations, declining urban congregations, etc.—what does it mean to start out where one can experience “success” in ministry?

- ◆ These experiments are expensive and would not happen without generous support from an external funder. Are there ways that congregations and denominations can learn how to do this work in more cost-effective yet powerful ways?
- ◆ Are we ready to renegotiate institutional roles in preparing new clergy for congregational ministry?
- ◆ Is there a new way for new kinds of institutions to support some forms of the apprenticeships that excellent ministry requires?
- ◆ Are we coming to a time of paradigm shifting in ministerial formation and education?

At the end of this year the Alban Institute will release a special report on this latest set of experiments, addressing our findings to these and other questions. Other articles in this issue of CONGREGATIONS will give tantalizing glimpses of what we are already discovering. ◆



# A Strong Start

## Transition into Ministry Program Aims at Helping Young Ministers Thrive

DAVID WOOD

**I**n 2001, the Alban Institute published an issue of *CONGREGATIONS* highlighting the significant decline in the number of young people (those in their twenties and thirties) choosing pastoral ministry as their vocation. At the time, this precipitous decline in mainline Protestant denominations was widely known but the subject largely avoided. Since then, discussion of the graying of the pastoral vocation has become a common topic of conversation, and many programs have been initiated to study and address the loss of the younger generation to pastoral ministry.

One such program, announced by Lilly Endowment Inc. in 2000, was the Transition into Ministry Grants Program (TiM). This program was unique in that its focus was not so much on recruiting young clergy as it was on improving the experience of those young people who were entering pastoral life. This effort was born out of the perception that one of the principal deterrents for young people choosing pastoral ministry is the negative experience of those who do. As troubling as the decline in the number of young people attending seminary was, an even more troubling trend was that fewer and fewer of the young people who did graduate from seminary were choosing to become pastors. Add to this the fact that a sizable number of those who did choose pastoral ministry were leaving it within the first five years and we have a

developing cycle of decline on our hands.

Whenever I speak to a room full of young clergy in their initial years of ministry, I ask how many of them know other seminary graduates who have already left local church ministry or who are struggling hard to stay with it. Without fail, almost every hand in the room goes up.

The transition from the formal study of ministry into the actual practice of it has never been easy. The perception now is that making this transition is nothing short of an achievement! The professions of medicine, engineering, and education do not leave this transition to chance; all require significant periods of apprenticeship into the actual practice of being a physician or an engineer or a teacher. While few would dispute the importance of apprenticeship to the process of becoming a pastor, this conviction has not been formalized into the prescribed course of preparation for ministry. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and its requirement that seminarians spend the third year of their four-year theological education in a congregation is the exception. Field education programs provide only a limited, part-time encounter with ministry.

From the beginning, the Transition into Ministry program has been a bold investment based on the assumption that the actual performance of ministry in local congregations is how and where pastors finally become pastors. It is the context of the congregation that integrates classroom learning and vocational sensibilities into a pastoral identity. The kind of learning that takes place when one is immersed in the actual practice of ministry is indispensable to the pedagogy of ministerial preparation. This assumption does not require a negative judgment about the academic quality of theological education. The claim that the learning of ministry is inextricably bound up with the actual practice of ministry is an assumption every theological educator would affirm. What we have lacked is a sustained, somewhat controlled experiment to test this fundamental assumption about ministerial formation. The TiM program is the first

of its kind to test this assumption across denominational lines and in a variety of ecclesial settings.

Since the first TiM projects were funded in 2001, the TiM program has grown to include 18 congregation-based “residency” projects and 10 institution-based “first-call” projects. In the residency-based projects, seminary

what constitutes adequate preparation for ministry and too large a view of what seminaries can accomplish. Among the TiM participants there is a high level of appreciation for their seminary education—in terms of the cognitive competencies and interpretive capacities gained. But when it comes to the question of forming

## The firsthand, sustained, collaborative encounter with congregations sets up the conditions for a sort of congregational intelligence in these young pastors that provides an essential baseline for a fruitful engagement with congregations for years to come.

graduates participate in full-time two-year residencies in local congregations, where they experience a sustained, reflective, and challenging encounter with the full range of ministerial duties and pastoral life. Residents are paid full-time salaries and regarded as full members of the pastoral staff. The remaining 10 programs are based in seminaries, denominational offices, and other church-related organizations and employ a variety of strategies for convening, mentoring, and nurturing young pastors (usually in two- or three-year cycles) who are already ministering in first-call situations.

The traditions represented in the TiM program include the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the African American Episcopal Church, the Christian Reformed Church, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Episcopal Church (U.S.A.), the United Church of Christ, the American Baptist Church (U.S.A.), and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. To date, more than 375 young clergy have participated in the TiM program.

Here are some of our most important findings thus far:

1. **Seminary education is necessary but not sufficient.** We have been suffering from too limited a view of

a “pastoral identity,” the consensus is equally strong that the direct, sustained, reflective encounter with ministry in a congregation is indispensable.

**2. The first years of ministry constitute the final and crucial stage of preparation for ministry.** On the whole, participants do not experience their TiM participation as a delay or postponement of their entrance into ministry but as a capstone experience in their preparation for ministry. Framing these initial years of ministry as the final stage of preparation for ministry establishes a teaching/learning environment in which there is explicit freedom to question, explore, experiment, acknowledge limitations, and fail. As one UCC study concludes, there is increasing evidence that when classroom-based formation is not complemented with congregation-based formation the “very best seminary curriculum is lost or wasted.”

**3. While immersion in congregational life and the pastoral role is crucial to becoming a pastor, immersion alone is not sufficient.** The critical innovation in the TiM program is not immersion. Rather, it is the discovery of the impor-

tance of participation in a “community of competent practice” (a phrase coined by Craig Dykstra, vice president for religion at the Lilly Endowment). This community of competent practice names a relational field constituted by peers in ministry, mentors, and a variety of congregational leaders (lay and ordained). Ministry is experienced at the outset as a collaborative engagement. This relational field becomes the center of gravity for self-understanding, the development of sound judgment, the reading and negotiation of congregational life, and the validation of one’s vocational identity. No finding is more consistent and predictable in the TiM than the importance of peers and friendship to the learning of ministry and to thriving in ministry. I believe this finding contributes more than any other to our understanding of what is necessary for a successful transition into ministry.

#### **4. Young pastors feel marginalized—generationally and culturally—within mainline Protestantism.**

This dynamic of isolation makes the networking of young pastors with each other nothing less than a strategy for vocational survival.

#### **5. Mentoring is less a dyadic relationship than it is a relational dynamic.** Increasingly, we are discovering that mentoring—a practice long regarded as important to the learning of ministry—is less about finding the right match between two individuals and more about establishing the right

conditions (a community of competent practice) within which a matrix of mentorship will thrive.

**6. Congregations can become teaching congregations.** The TiM program creates a set of conditions that invites congregations (especially pastoral and lay leaders) to become more intentional in assuming their role of raising up a new generation of pastors. It takes time, but the impact on the identity of the congregation and its connection to the wider church is substantive. For too long the connection between congregational life and pastoral formation has been cast in negative terms—terms which are often cast from within the seminary context. A common refrain we hear from these new pastors is how their view of the congregation has been significantly reformed in positive ways through their experience in the TiM program. The firsthand, sustained, collaborative encounter with congregations sets up the conditions for a sort of congregational intelligence in these young pastors that provides an essential baseline for a fruitful engagement with congregations for years to come.

**7. Those who do can teach.** For too long, pastors have been minor players in the pedagogy of preparation for ministry. Through the TiM program, pastors are learning how to teach ministry in the thick of congregational life. Furthermore, we are discovering that pastors become better pastors—reflective practitioners—when they are called

upon to teach in the course of their ministries. As one recent Association of Theological Schools (ATS) study on the first five years of ministry concluded, “The seminary is at its best when it works in collaboration with those who are the very practitioners of the work for which the seminary is doing its formation, i.e., pastors. The ideal is that both the student and the theological school view both professor and pastor as playing equally critical roles in the formation of pastoral leadership.”<sup>2</sup>

As these findings suggest, focusing on the first five years of ministry and generating the conditions for a fruitful transition into ministry brings into focus issues that are central to growing the quality of pastoral leadership that go well beyond questions unique to young pastors transitioning into ministry. One of the premises of this program that will be tested in years to come is that a strong start in ministry establishes a trajectory of growth and learning that leads to thriving in ministry over the long haul. Such a development would contribute to the overall quality of pastoral ministry in mainline Protestantism for generations to come. ♦

#### **NOTES**

1. Michael I. N. Dash, Jimmy Dukes, and Gordon T. Smith, “Learning from the First Years: Noteworthy Conclusions from the Parish Experience of Recent Graduates of ATS Schools.” *Theological Education*, Vol. 40, No. 2, (2005), p. 68.
2. Dash et al, p. 73.



*Does your personnel committee have questions concerning the search process for a church musician?*

*Are you searching for salary guidelines for your music ministry position?*

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- *Conflict and Closure: Professional Conduct in Adversity*

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# The First Five Years

## Four Programs Offering Support to New Pastors

KATHRYN PALEN

**T**he first five years of parish ministry set an entire ministry. The habits, the inclinations, the dispositions, the way of understanding vocation is set in those first five years, and it lasts.<sup>1</sup>

That core belief—or a similar variation—is at the heart of four denominational initiatives that focus on new clergy as part of the Lilly Endowment's Transition into Ministry program. While the initiatives vary in format and approach, they share a commitment to helping new clergy learn to develop the disciplines, understandings, and relationships needed for a lifetime of healthy parish ministry.

How the programs are structured, how they have supported their participants, and what they have taught their sponsoring organizations are described in the following pages. As you read these stories of success and hope for a new generation of ministers, consider the following questions offered for reflection:

- ◆ What challenges do you see new pastors facing as they make the transition from seminary to parish ministry?
- ◆ What ways can you imagine that you and others—in denominational bodies, clergy groups, seminary communities, and congregations—could provide new clergy with concrete opportunities for support and development?
- ◆ What are the benefits of having new pastors whose first experiences in parish ministry are healthy, productive, and nurturing? Who is affected by these benefits?
- ◆ How might what is learned through these programs for new pastors be adapted to help others?

### NOTES

1. James Small, coordinator, Office of Theology and Worship for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), from *Company of New Pastors*, dir. Vernon Leat, prod. Blake Richter, DVD, Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2006.

# Bethany Fellowships

## Making the Transition from Seminary to Parish Ministry

The Bethany Fellowships is a program for new pastors within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) who are making the transition from seminary to parish ministry. Each year eight to 10 new fellows join the program and make a four-year commitment to a combination of semiannual retreats, peer support and accountability, and mentoring.

Over time, the Bethany project has gone through an evolutionary process. "We began by thinking that we would place a couple of recent seminary graduates in larger congregations," said Don Schutt, who coordinates the program. "Our denomination does not have that many large churches, and we had some difficulty finding senior pastors who had the time to serve as mentors. After two years, we realized that an in-house residency was not going to work for us." As a result, the decision was made to invite a certain number of new pastors to meet in a larger group twice a year at retreats held in metropolitan areas.

Each retreat begins on a Monday evening with worship. The fellows then share where they are and what they hope for from the retreat. In addition, each fellow shares a prayer request, about which the group then prays.

On Tuesday, the group visits a lively congregation in the area, usually a mainline congregation, but some have been evangelical megachurches or emergent congregations. The fellows learn about the congregation's ministries and programs and hear about staff members' work.

On Tuesday evening, a guest speaker leads a discussion of a topic that relates to a book the fellows read prior to the retreat. "We tend to focus on books that deal with practical skills," Schutt said, "rather than something too intellectually heavy."

The fellows then enter into 24 to 36 hours of silence during which they

are free to pray, read, take walks, or sleep. On Thursday morning, they come out of silence and worship together. Afterwards, they break into small groups to debrief the experiences of the week. Thursday also includes free time and some type of party for the larger group. The retreat closes by noon on Friday.

Five seasoned pastors serve as mentors for the Bethany Fellowships program, both at the retreats and by telephone between these gatherings. Group e-mail and a blog site provide points of connection for the fellows as well, and a site visit by a mentor is arranged for almost every fellow.

One of the critical learnings that has emerged from the Bethany Fellowships, Schutt said, is the power and importance of peer support. "We have learned that the transition from seminary to congregational life is not easy," he said, "and that new pastors need as much support as possible without curtailing their freedom to fail. Working in a congregation tends to be an isolating experience, but this program helps the fellows see that they're in this together."

Program participants have developed a level of camaraderie and a depth of interaction that have surprised program leaders. One fellow described the program as the "most nourishing, prayerful, and supportive group I have ever encountered. Being a pastor is such a lonely vocation that one begins to wonder if anyone else out there could possibly understand what it's like. At the retreats, we realize that we have a whole network of brother and sister pastors who have been in the valleys we find ourselves in, and more importantly, have found their way back to a place of wholeness, health, and even resurrection."

Another fellow said she feels "normal" during the retreats. "How wonderful it is to gather with other new clergy who are walking much the

same path as I am," she commented. "I often feel that the job I do is so utterly different than that of others around me that it is nice to come and be with others—ones to whom I don't have to explain everything—ones who understand immediately."

Another critical learning, said Schutt, has been that new clergy, despite all of their training and background, still have a need for spiritual formation. "We remain committed to including a large block of time for silence and reflection, as well as an opportunity for spiritual direction, during each retreat," he said. "We want to help the fellows understand that prayer is critical for sustaining one's life in a congregation."

The fellows' diversity also has provided opportunities for learning. The 50-50 gender mix, the participation of people of color, and the group's theological diversity provide differences of perspective that are helpful, Schutt said. The opportunity for fellows from Disciples and non-Disciples seminaries to get to know one another also has been positive, he added.

In thinking about the future of the Bethany Fellowships program, Schutt said he and others within the Disciples of Christ believe it is critical to help develop viable, sustained pastors—especially in light of the national trend within the mainline of new clergy dropping out of parish ministry. Schutt said program leaders are grateful to the Lilly Endowment for providing the initial funding for the program and hope to raise private funds so that they can continue it "as a way of sustaining a new generation of pastoral leaders."

# First Parish Project

## Learning to Serve the Small Congregation

The First Parish Project is a national, ecumenical program of colleague support, leadership development, and spiritual growth for clergy serving their first appointment or call in a small-membership congregation. The program is hosted by the Hinton Center, an agency of the United Methodist Church's Southeastern Jurisdiction.

The Hinton Center, located in Hayesville, North Carolina, offers small-membership churches a variety of resources and services. The center also developed the Colleague Covenant Forum, a program providing clergy with the opportunity for fellowship, support, spiritual formation, and renewal.

When Delmer Chilton joined the center as coordinator of spiritual formation ministries, he began to brainstorm with others at Hinton about how they might support young pastors. "My sense was that most young pastors grew up in urban or suburban churches that were program or corporate size," he recalled. "They also did their field education in similar congregations. And most of their interaction had been with people their own age. But 90 percent of first calls are to chaplain- or pastor-size congregations in smaller settings with older members. That can result in culture shock and isolation."

The First Parish Program, which Chilton directs, grew out of those brainstorming conversations. It targets pastors who are under age 35 and serve congregations with an average attendance of no more than 100. It is open to new pastors from all denominations across the country.

Each group within the program includes 20 to 25 participants and meets from Monday through Friday six times during an 18-month period. Although the largest percentage of participants are from the United Church of Christ, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), United Methodist Church, and Evangelical Lutheran Church

in America, other participants represent traditions ranging from Orthodox to Unitarian Universalist to Christian Reformed to Metropolitan Community Church. "We're not here to convert people or to change their theology but to learn about the act of being in ministry," Chilton said.

During each gathering, the group worships together and spends two hours a day in small groups. The group also explores a specific topic—such as the personal life of a minister and spiritual disciplines, family systems theory, pastoral identity and public role, transitioning leadership from corporate to spiritual, congregational involvement in the community, or how to maintain colleague support throughout one's career. "We focus on self-care," Chilton said, "because what you learn about that almost always works and never becomes out of date."

Each small group also participates in a weekly chat room between meetings. Some of the alumni chat rooms are still going.

"We are trying to teach young clergy not to be lone rangers," Chilton explained. "Without peer support, they can crash and burn or make stupid mistakes. One of our participants said, 'I would have quit without this program.' Clergy don't have supervision as other professions do, so there's not that protection."

"At a minimum, we can be a place where pastors can appropriately talk about what's going on in their lives and congregations. We hope that the participants will learn to form their own groups. We try to teach them that wherever they are, they can be intentional and proactive about finding support. If they can't form a group, they can find a spiritual director or go to a pastoral care center for supervision."

In reflecting on the program, Chilton said he is amazed by the quality of the people entering ministry today. "We've

been hearing that the prestige of ministry is down and that there is not the same quality of candidate," he said. "That's not what I'm finding. Today's new pastors are as good, if not better, than those 30 years ago when I entered ministry."

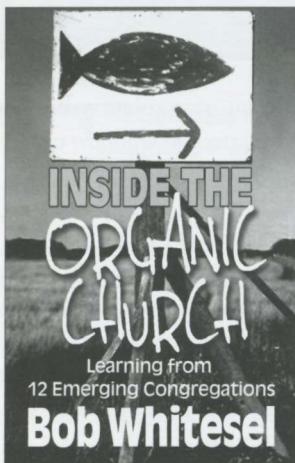
He also expressed amazement at the deep devotion of these young pastors, along with concern about the financial challenges they often face. Many of these pastors, he explained, finish seminary with a debt of \$30,000 to \$40,000. "I have to believe that this debt contributes to the drop-out rate that we're seeing," he said. "These young pastors are facing this debt while also caring for their families. At the same time, it's becoming more and more difficult for small-membership churches to pay what is needed by their pastors."

It concerns him, too, that denominations are making it harder to get through the ordination process than it needs to be. "We are sending a double message when we say we need more young clergy and then make it so difficult to navigate the process—often because of denominational politics," he said. "I hear stories from people who are good pastors but who went to the wrong seminary for their annual conference or are too 'whatever' for their specific synod. We need to be working with and encouraging these young clergy rather than treating them like political volleyballs."

As part of the First Parish Project, Chilton visits each participant's congregation twice. During those visits, members of the congregations often tell him that the program has helped their pastor to be more comfortable and confident. Some congregations share that they have never had a pastor stay so long. Chilton said he tries to help those congregations see themselves as teaching parishes that have a wonderful opportunity to help shape a ministry.

# What Makes a Healthy Congregation?

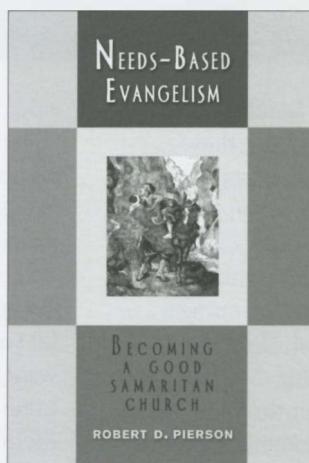
## 4 Helpful New Books That Are Just What the Doctor Ordered



### NEW! Inside the Organic Church

Learning from 12 Emerging Congregations  
by Bob Whitesel

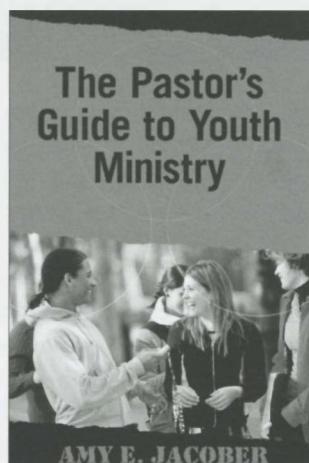
A new generation of churches is emerging, calling new disciples to the way of Jesus by proclaiming the Good News and seeking the transformation of culture. Bob Whitesel, author of *Growth by Accident, Death by Planning* (Abingdon Press), takes us inside congregations that draw upon ancient traditions and modern technologies to create a spiritual community and shows how the practices of the "organic church" can be instructive for all those wishing to reach today's world with the gospel of Christ. Abingdon Press. CA7-0687331161. Paper, \$18.00



### NEW! Needs-Based Evangelism

Becoming a Good Samaritan Church  
by Robert D. Pierson

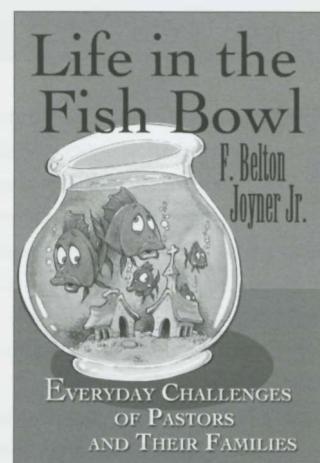
Being a Good Samaritan church begins with the leadership. It requires an absolute commitment to address the needs of people in order to invite them to become disciples of Jesus Christ. In order to compete with and appeal to unchurched people in today's secular and consumer-driven society, the church needs to be entrepreneurial in its method of evangelist outreach. In this book, Rev. Robert Pierson shows how churches can better organize ministry in order to be effective witnesses. By meeting felt needs of people through intentional ministries, the church will grow to be sure; but more importantly it will fulfill its biblical mandate to care for those who are hurting and suffering. Abingdon Press. CA7-0687332486. Paper, \$14.00



### NEW! The Pastor's Guide to Youth Ministry

by Amy E. Jacober

Using prayer as a foundation, this book can help pastors and youth leaders build successful, Christ-centered youth ministries that integrate youth into the total life of the church. Guide young people to be life-long followers of Christ who reach out to others. Demonstrates how to recruit, supervise, and keep volunteers. Abingdon Press. CA7-0687495792. Paper, \$12.00



### NEW! Life in the Fish Bowl

by F. Belton Joyner Jr.

A solid family life will help pastors focus and attentively minister to the needs of their congregation. Pastors often struggle with conflicting expectations. The most painful of these conflicts is between the expectations of their congregations, and the needs of their families. They must, at the same moment, be available to parishioners and carve out private family time. Belton Joyner knows that often the best therapy for pastors caught in this dilemma is to laugh at it. With humorous illustrations and light-hearted straight talk, he helps pastors understand their own family dynamics, the role their families play in the life of the church, and how to be an effective minister of the gospel and a responsible spouse and parent, all at the same time. Abingdon Press. CA7-068733294X. Paper, \$12.00

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*interpretation*

*formation*

*contestation*

*performance*

## What Seminaries Do Well

LAWRENCE GOLEMON



**H**ow often have you heard a new pastor, priest, or rabbi say, "Seminary was fabulous, even life-changing, but it didn't prepare me for what I face in the local congregation"? Lee Shulman, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, discovered that this was a common complaint across the professions. Students in law, engineering, and medicine described some gap between their education and professional practice. Being taught how to "think like a lawyer" through case studies in school, for example, was not enough to develop the intellectual dexterity, competencies, and professional identity required for a new member of the Bar. Seminarians who struggle to bridge the gap between their education and clergy practice face an uphill battle that is familiar to students in other professions.

So, what do seminaries do well? In a recent study of clergy education<sup>1</sup> sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation, we found that effective seminaries begin to cultivate a "pastoral imagination" among new clergy. The "pastoral imagination" is shaped in part by learned subject matter and practical techniques, but it is chiefly an integrative ability to perceive, interpret, and engage the world with theological insight and practical wisdom. The pastoral imagination involves more than learning to "think like" a minister, priest, or rabbi; it also

# Even the best seminaries only develop competent beginners in ministry, who must be honed, shaped, and polished by the pastoral experience in their first congregation or ministry site.

involves beginning to feel and act like a clergyperson through a growing sense of pastoral identity and competency. Forming the pastoral imagination requires a dynamic engagement between acquired *knowledge*, *skills*, and *identity* that William Sullivan has identified as the “three apprenticeships” found in all forms of professional education.<sup>2</sup>

How do seminaries form the pastoral, priestly, or rabbinic imagination? In our study of 18 seminaries from Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish traditions, we found that seminaries typically engage students with four “signature pedagogies”: *interpretation*, *formation*, *contextualization*, and *performance*. Unlike professional schools that focus on a single pedagogy—like case study in law—seminaries intertwine these four teaching practices in the classroom, curriculum, and culture of the school. Seminaries that are intentional about the relationship of the four pedagogies, we discovered, are more effective in helping students integrate the knowledge, skills, and norms of the profession.

Pedagogies of *interpretation* challenge students to engage sacred texts with historical and linguistic skill in order to shape human meaning within a given religious community or setting. Teaching the practice of interpretation involves the development of critical thinking, which is both shaped by and helps reconstruct the school’s religious and intellectual traditions.

Pedagogies of *formation* guide students into the spiritual practices of a tradition in order to nurture a sense of the holy and shape seminarians in their religious and pastoral identity. Formation can be taught through very intentional means, such as spiritual direction, presiding at prayer and table, or in community worship, but it can

also be shown in the transparency that professors bring to the classroom about their own faith and spiritual commitments in relation to the subject matter.

Pedagogies of *contextualization* develop student awareness of the ways that local settings, cultures, and structures influence religious and clergy practice. Effective contextualization brings about the deeper understanding of contexts, creative encounters with them, and practices of transformation that can change them.

Pedagogies of *performance* develop complex pastoral skills and judgment through reenacting clergy roles and skills for the sake of increased competence and a commitment to set standards of excellence. Performance-practice becomes more intuitive and adaptive as students rehearse a given script or role, as they develop their own style of embodying it for a community, and as the purpose or inherent good of the practice is internalized through the enactment.

At the Carnegie Foundation, we were delighted to see how well exemplary teachers and seminaries integrate the four pedagogies for student learning; in the classroom, across the curriculum, and in the culture of the school. The patterns of integrative teaching and learning, we found, are keys to effective seminary education because they set up the optimal conditions for students to practice and internalize the integration of the knowledge, skills, and identity they will need in clergy practice. From this perspective, the entire school becomes a mentor in the three apprenticeships, so that “being there,” or being immersed in the school’s life, sustains and reinforces the integration of student learning in ways that commuter programs, on-line degrees, and local apprenticeships cannot.<sup>3</sup>

What can churches and synagogues expect from a seminary graduate? And how can they learn from the new pastor’s seminary formation so that he or she continues to grow in pastoral imagination and practice? Here are some implications of the Carnegie study for the local congregation and supporting judicatories as they call and welcome new clergy:

◆ **Not all seminaries are alike.** We identified at least five historic traditions of seminary education in America, each with its own mission, pedagogies, and culture for the formation of clergy. Some seminaries are strictly academic institutions, while others serve ecclesial or denominational needs. Some are Bible or training schools, while others are “movement” seminaries that support a cross-denominational mission. Some are schools of emancipation dedicated to the social uplift of a particular people, while others train leaders in the mission or apostolate of a given religious order. It is important for congregations to research—via the Internet and other means—the seminary of a new candidate or clergyperson so they know more about the education he or she brings. They can also invite new clergy to share how seminary has (and has not) prepared them for clergy practice.

◆ **Seminaries only do so much, but they do it well.** At their best, seminaries shape a pastoral imagination that begins to integrate the intellectual, skills, and identity apprenticeships in a creative way. But this pastoral imagination has not yet been stretched, challenged, or completely internalized by the daily experience of pastoral practice. The gap between seminary learning and the local parish for new clergy, we believe, is less about the lack of relevant knowledge or practical skills—as both are abundant in most seminaries—and more about the lack of “seasoning” required to develop a strong sense of pastoral identity and judgment to utilize seminary knowledge and skills in adaptive ways. Even the best seminaries only develop competent beginners in ministry, who must be honed, shaped, and polished by the pastoral experience in their first congregation or ministry site.

## ◆ Congregations can extend and build upon the four pedagogies.

Congregations can become intentional teachers, mentors, and learners of new seminary graduates in a number of ways. First, they can invite the new clergyperson to stretch his or her *interpretive* practices through teaching, public prayer, preaching, and pastoral care, and to offer thoughtful, collaborative feedback about how such meaning-making can shape the congregation. Second, congregations can support the ongoing *formation* of new clergy in collaborative ways, such as by asking these new pastors to guide members or minister peers into new spiritual practices they have learned, and to adapt them for building up the local faith community. Third, congregations can rely on the *contextualizing* abilities of a new pastor to strengthen connections with local neighborhoods, cultures, and institutions. The new pastor can bring new energy and skills to mission studies, neighborhood plunges, and outreach initiatives that will invigorate both the faith community and the new leader. Finally, to strengthen performance-practice of the new clergy, congregations and their denominations can handpick constructive, thoughtful laity and clergy to form an advisory or mentoring team to help the new pastor polish his or her own style, identity, and sense of competence.

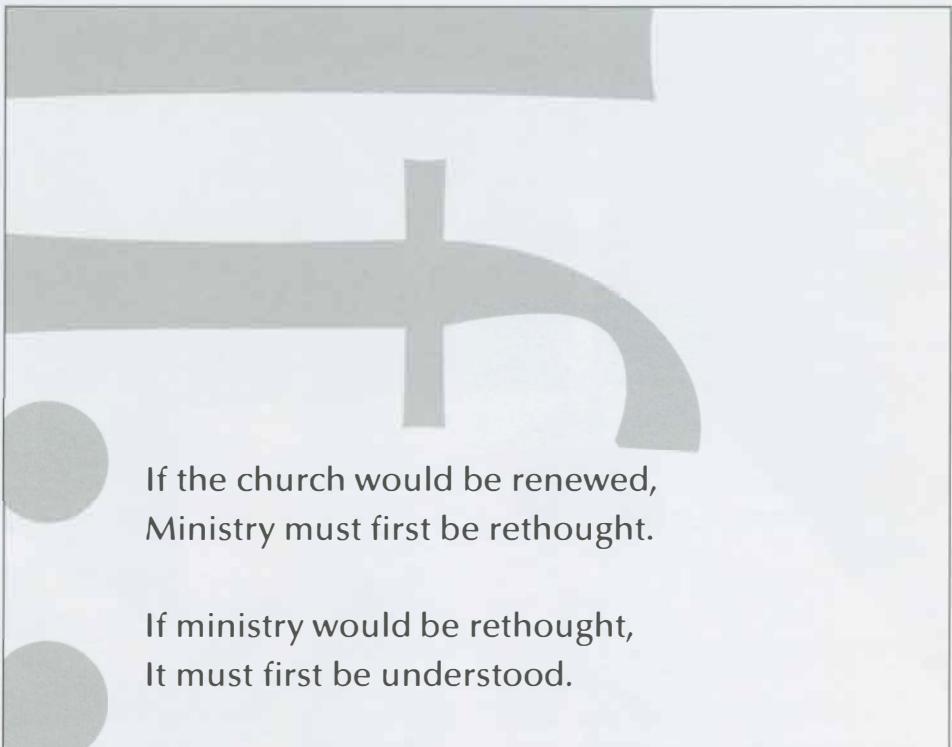
Almost any church or synagogue can become a “teaching congregation” with new clergy in these ways, provided they see it as part of their mission to nurture new pastors, priests, and rabbis beyond their seminary experience, for the sake of the wider church or faith community.

While seminaries do begin the cultivation of a pastoral imagination among new pastors, priests, and rabbis, this ability to integrate knowledge, skills, and identity through effective clergy practice only “gels” in a congregational or ministry context. While seminaries do a lot of things well, they cannot complete this process. How congregations and their judicatories can become more intentional about their teaching role and responsibility in this final stage of forming new clergy is a timely issue for most Christian and Jewish communities.

## NOTES

1. Charles R. Foster, Lisa E. Dahill, Lawrence A. Golemon, and Barbara Wang Tolentino, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006).
2. William Sullivan, *Work and Integrity: The Crisis and Promise of Professionalism in America* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

3. The collective practices, ethos, and culture of a seminary have a profound influence upon seminarians’ professional and religious identity. See Jackson W. Carroll, Barbara G. Wheeler, Daniel O. Aleshire, and Penny Long Marler, *Being There: Culture and Formation in Two Theological Schools* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). ◆



If the church would be renewed,  
Ministry must first be rethought.

If ministry would be rethought,  
It must first be understood.

If ministry would be understood,  
Ministers must learn, in radically new ways...

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# Creating the Conditions for New Pastors' Success

CAROL PINKHAM OAK

**T**wo classmates graduate from seminary. Each has done well academically, and received glowing recommendations from the faculty. Each was affirmed by a field placement parish during the seminary experience. And each performed well amid the challenges of clinical pastoral education. Two classmates, both filled with promise and the potential to be highly effective pastors, transition into their first full-time positions in parish ministry. Fast-forward 35 years. One of these individuals is retiring after a rich and rewarding career in parish ministry. The other is retiring from a secular career, having left parish ministry within a few years following negative experiences in two parishes.

What happened? Why do some seminary graduates committed to the pastoral life successfully navigate the transition into full-time ministry and others don't? Why do some pastors flourish while others do not? Why do some parishes seem to have a knack for producing great, young pastors? It is my conviction that the first two years of full-time parish ministry

are the most critical. And my seven years of experience leading the Foundations for Spiritual Leadership program at Christ Church in Alexandria, Virginia, a pilot program funded by the Lilly Endowment, has taught me many lessons about how we can create the conditions for success for new pastors during these formative years.

We most often associate success in ministry with accumulated years of experience. Success can mean many years of ministry in one congregation, sharing their joys and tragedies and triumphs. It can mean starting a new parish, identifying a mission, and building a new community of faith where previously there was none. It can mean sequential parishes, each larger and more complex than the previous. Success can also mean transforming a struggling congregation into one that is engaged and flourishing, or creating and nurturing a unique and powerful "niche" ministry that is a catalyst for the transformation of individuals and communities. Success might also mean election to a position of enhanced responsibility within a denomination.

What if success in ministry was available to every clergyperson? What if success was created rather than achieved? What if clergy and congregations intentionally planned for success? Success could then be understood as a set of conditions that create life-giving ministry for the clergyperson and the congregation. With this in mind, what if success could be created most especially for new pastors, for those making the transition into what we hope will be a lifetime of ministry?

Creating the conditions for success for new pastors begins with understanding the significance of the initial years of ordained ministry.

The vocational formation of seminary carries over into the first two years of parish ministry. Adaptation and learning, innovation and meeting new challenges, attempting to balance personal and professional considerations all happen at an intense pace. Every ministry experience is new. Amid

embraces the pastoral life as both joyful and demanding, both intellectually stimulating and emotionally intense. Rather than trial and error, this context for vocational formation is both active and reflective, providing an opportunity to celebrate the privilege and responsibility of walking with others in their

## Creating the conditions for success for new pastors begins with understanding the significance of the initial years of ordained ministry.

the intensity associated with this time, the full identity of the pastor as scholar, teacher, shepherd, and spiritual and congregational leader takes shape. The foundations for holy habits and healthy leadership practices for an individual's entire ministry are also put in place. Herein lies the significance of these first two years of ministry.

Traditionally these first years have been viewed as a time of trial and error, a time when new pastors learn what *not* to do by painful mistakes, a time when recently ordained clergy have to figure out on their own how to balance vocational, personal, and family needs. Certainly, positive vocational formation can and does take place in the context of a trial-and-error model. Sadly, more often than not, formation in this context is negative, leaves scars for future years in ministry, and can even lead new clergy to leave ministry. Creating the conditions for success honors the first two years as unique in an individual's ministry, as his or her identity takes shape through positive experiences and a structured learning model that

faith journey and to embrace the challenges of daily ministry.

Creating the conditions for success for new clergy recognizes that two distinct processes of vocational formation take place during these initial years: the integration of academic learning with the daily experience of ministry, and the mastery of basic skills in the practice of ministry.

### From Classroom to Pastorate

The first vocational formation process is to integrate the formal theological training of seminary into the specific context and experience of parish life. One bishop compared these early years of parish ministry to the novitiate for those who take monastic vows. He observed that a monastic cannot really learn what it is like to live in community until he or she lives in community. The same is true for a pastor. A pastor cannot really know what it is like to pastor a congregation until she or he has the experience of shepherding a congregation.

Academic study and the cultivation of rigorous theological reasoning are essential for success in ministry. One cannot preach the entire development of trinitarian theology using the sermons of the early church fathers. However, knowledge of that theological development serves as a powerful resource for a sermon on

## Competence is built over time

by reflecting on experience, receiving effective and informed feedback from caring others, and completing the task to one's own satisfaction.

the Trinity. One cannot preach on a given Sunday a sampler of the types of sermons covered in homiletics. However, with the knowledge of different sermon styles for different purposes, one can choose the most appropriate for a given circumstance or text. With respect to all the disciplines in theological education, strong and vital academic preparation provides an essential foundational resource for the experience-based learning that occurs in ministry.

This experiential learning takes formal academic study and applies it to the practice of ministry through an action-reflection process. This is a new style of learning for many people. It requires setting aside time to reflect on a particular experience, and identifying theological, personal, and other perspectives offered by a mentor. What happened? What could have been done differently? What would you do the next time and why? These are all questions that arise from experience and shape

identity. How did you understand yourself as a pastor in this situation? How did you bring the compassion of Christ to a grieving family, or how did you explain that marriage is a life you create together in God's love? What is your theology of stewardship and what do you think is the theology of the stewardship committee members you are dealing with? These are questions for the new pastor to contemplate. Reflection follows action, which follows reflection. This iterative process aims for integration and begins to shape identity in deep and powerful ways. Experiential learning incorporates academic learning with the daily experience of ministry.

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## Mastering Many "Firsts"

The second vocational formation process is developing the skills for ministry. In the first two years, a new pastor experiences many activities of ministry for the first time: the first wedding, the first wedding rehearsal, the first funeral, the first baptism, the first confirmation class, the first time preaching sequentially and regularly, the first time conducting worship in this particular congregation, the first time balancing full-time ministry with personal and family activities. Often these firsts occur amid the emotional ups and downs that are common in the daily life of a pastor. A parishioner has died and the grieving spouse is on hold, waiting to talk to the pastor. This conversation cannot be scheduled nor can it wait until after the Sunday sermon has been written. Building skills for ministry occurs at a rapid pace in the first two years. Confidence comes when situations or tasks have been handled appropriately. Competence is built over time by reflecting on experience, receiving effective and informed feedback from caring others, and completing the task to one's own satisfaction. As new pastors begin to feel competent in the basic skills of ministry, their confidence grows.

The integration of academic learning with the experience of ministry and the mastery of basic skills for ministry are

key aspects of positive vocational formation for new clergy. Both processes shape pastoral identity in important ways. Moreover, both processes are steep learning curves for newly ordained pastors. Navigating these learning curves effectively requires creating three conditions for success: a safe learning environment, mentoring from experienced clergy, and peer learning.

### The Safety to Learn

Creating a safe learning environment is the first and most important element to help new pastors succeed. All pastors make mistakes. What is crucial is that mistakes not become determinative of a pastor's ministry. Instead of repeating stories of what went wrong, the focus should be on naming and celebrating what went right. Creating a safe learning environment means that mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities, mechanisms are established for

**Creating a safe** learning environment is the first and most important element to help new pastors succeed.

effective feedback, and the congregation views its ministry as one of playing an active role in shaping clergy for ministry. Congregations that offer a safe learning environment can be understood as "teaching congregations." Some teaching congregations have discovered this ministry through their dedication to serving young pastors. Through effort and in some cases intentional learning, these congregations have come to understand what makes ministry life-giving for them and for new clergy.

However, any congregation that welcomes a new pastor can offer a safe learning environment and pattern itself as a teaching congregation. A teaching congregation forms a relationship with

the new pastor with the understanding that the congregation has as much to give to the new pastor as the pastor has to give to them. A teaching congregation appreciates the unique importance of the first two years of ministry in shaping pastoral identity. The relationship between the new pastor and the congregation has different dimensions from the relationship between the congregation and the senior pastor or other more experienced assistants. The relationship between new pastor and congregation is often time-bound, for a period of two or three years;

it is fluent in praise and judicious with criticism; it is open to new ideas; and it provides time and opportunities for learning. Though this relationship has a different dimension, it is equally important that the congregation fully embrace the new pastor as a pastor. An analogy from the practice of medicine is apt. Medical residents treat patients and are appropriately called "doctors." Even though the resident is supervised by a more senior physician, the resident has both the authority and the requisite skill to be fully engaged in the care and treatment of the patient. Both the learning and the care-giving take place in what we call a "teaching hospital."

Similarly, in a teaching congregation, it is understood that the new pastor is learning and therefore needs time for preparation, reflection, and feedback in navigating the steep learning curves described above. Although the new pastor is involved in tending the flock, it is also understood that the new pastor will not be involved in every aspect of the congregation's life all the time. Instead, there will be focused times for concentrating on preaching, or stewardship, or Christian formation, or developing lay leadership. There is a support team formed to meet monthly with the new pastor. The members of this team serve for the duration of the new pastor's tenure, are trained in effective feedback, and serve as advocates and guides. In addition, a teaching congregation ensures that a portion of a more senior pastor's time is set aside for mentoring the new pastor.

### Finding a Mentor

Mentoring is the second form of support that creates the conditions for

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success. While a mentoring relationship cannot be forced, the most effective mentor is an experienced clergyperson who knows the particular context and dynamics of the congregation the new pastor is serving. In a multiple-staff church, more senior clergy can serve as mentors. If the new pastor is a solo pastor, then a previous interim minister or another person familiar with that congregation can serve as a mentor. The important thing is that the integration of academic and experiential learning and the mastery of the basic skills of ministry take place in community, in conversation, in the context of a relationship with someone who has detailed, on-the-ground knowledge of the congregation.

The formative process of mentoring goes beyond a general conversation of how things are going. Instead, the mentor and new pastor review the ministry activities of the last week or month. The mentor helps the new pastor explore key questions about pastoral identity: How did you experience yourself as a pastor in that situation? How did you experience God in that moment? What were the dynamics in the room? What worked and what would you do differently? How did you feel when that comment was made?

The mentor also anticipates the "firsts" with the new pastor. Walking through the first wedding rehearsal reveals details that the new pastor

**Without peers, without conversation with those who are at a similar stage in their journey, ministry can feel isolating.**

needs to know. Preparing for the first funeral, the first baptismal preparation class, the first confirmation class are all opportunities for dialogue and teaching. Preparing for the first time when parish duties interrupt family or personal plans can be an opportunity to explore where to compromise and where to hold firm. Whatever the circumstance, the mentor anticipates the learning curve and offers assistance, guidance, and support. The conversation between mentor and new pastor follows the action-reflection model that forms the deeper levels of pastoral identity. The mentor's role is to help the new pastor gain perspective, which in turn creates positive formation experiences that build success.

### **Learning with Peers**

In addition to support from a more experienced mentor, the third condition for success is peer learning. Again, ministry is based on relationships. Supportive relationships with mentoring clergy and with the teaching congregation are vital.

However, without peers, without conversation with those who are at a similar stage in their journey, ministry can feel isolating. Peers share strategies for navigating the learning curve. Peers add perspective on ministry. They add a dimension of community and of self-understanding in the context of that community. Not every congregation will have more than one new pastor at a time. At a multiple-staff church a cohort of two or three new pastors can create a peer learning group. Across a judiciary or seminary alumni network new pastors can form colleague groups. Facilitated peer colleague groups can be a particularly effective way of providing meaningful connections with others whose experience most closely reflects their own. In the flurry of the first two years of ministry, new pastors will often forgo these groups in favor of the many other things they want to say yes to in ministry. Creating a structure where peer support can occur and designating that time as important to vocational formation often gives the new pastor permission to deeply engage in these groups. Just like mentoring relationships, peer groups cannot be forced. They can, however, be designed to go beyond casual lunch conversations to reflect on deeper questions: What particular gifts does our generation bring to ministry? What do we want to do differently? When we consider our call to ministry, how does it contrast and compare to that of our mentors? Where is there a disconnect between our generation's seminary experience and parish life? How do we creatively bridge that gap? Where are the places of celebration? What do we need to learn?

### **Questions for Reflection**

- 1. Describe the experience of your congregation's most recent newly ordained pastor.**
- 2. Name three ways to create in your congregation a process for experiential learning that integrates academic learning with parish life and builds the basic skills of ministry.**
- 3. How can your congregation be helped to understand that they play an essential role in shaping new pastors?**
- 4. What would a safe learning environment, mentoring, and peer learning look like in your context?**

## All Can Teach

Any congregation can create the conditions that provide the foundations for success and spiritual leadership among new pastors—a safe learning environment, mentoring, and peer learning. Small congregations can call a newly ordained pastor and create a life-giving ministry for all, knowing they will soon

send this pastor forth to serve the wider church. Larger congregations may call one new pastor to assist the senior pastor, knowing that part of their ministry is to serve as a teaching congregation. And the largest congregations may call several new pastors at once to learn from more senior clergypersons, knowing their ministry is to set the standards of leadership and shape these new leaders for the future. Neither

the size of the church nor the number of new pastors called determines the conditions for success. Instead, success can be created by any new pastor in partnership with any community of faith that is committed to the ministry of being a teaching congregation. The realization of this vision is life-giving and life-sustaining both to new pastors and to the congregations they are called to serve. ♦

## *Tell me again: What is worship really all about?*

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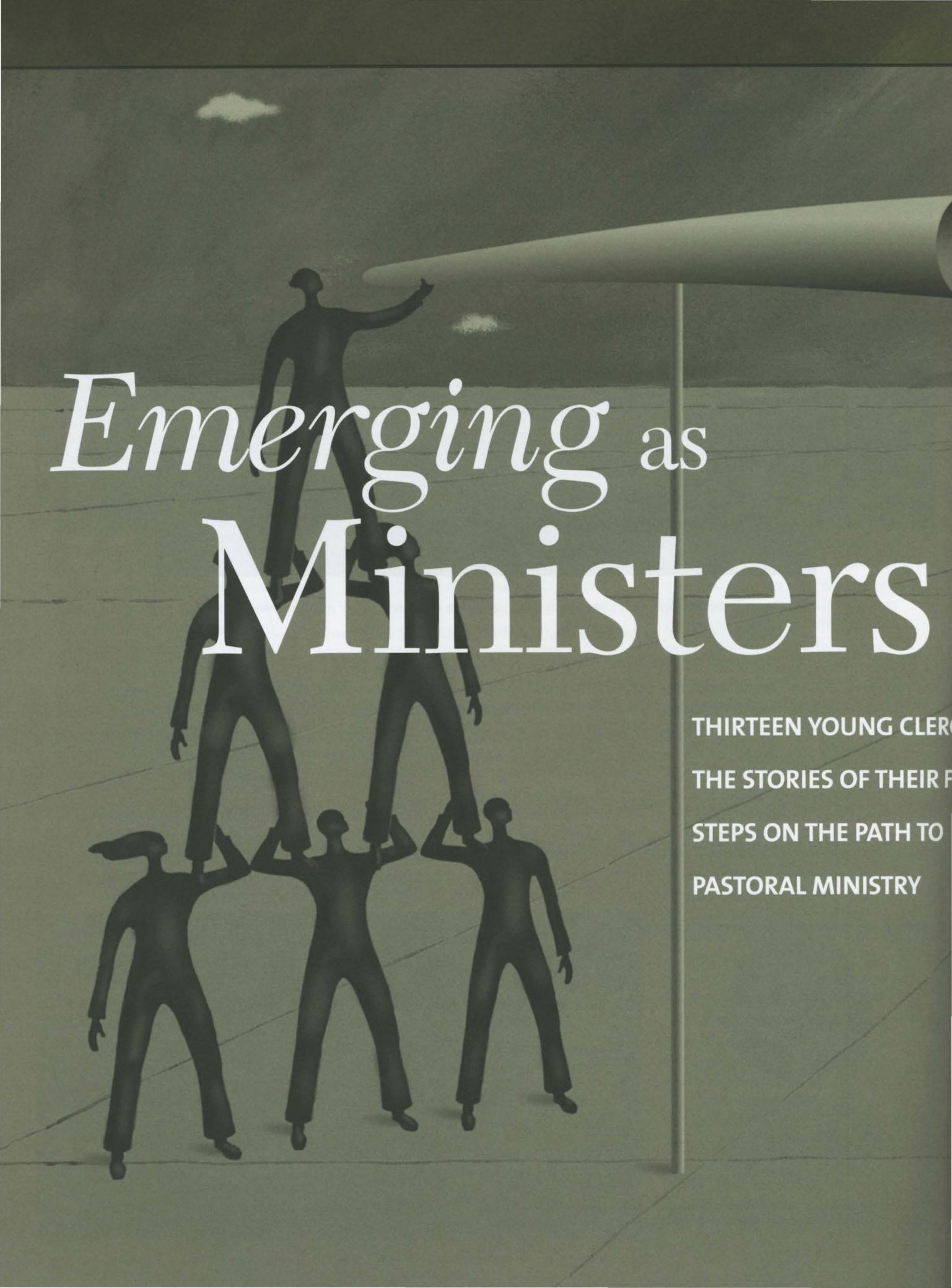
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# *Emerging* as Ministers

THIRTEEN YOUNG CLER

THE STORIES OF THEIR F

STEPS ON THE PATH TO

PASTORAL MINISTRY

As many of the articles in this issue of CONGREGATIONS remind us, the path to pastoral ministry is often an uphill one, and many young clergy choose to leave within the first few years of their ministry. But hope is on the horizon. In recent years, the Lilly Endowment-funded Transition into Ministry (TiM) program has provided nearly 400 young clergy with unique opportunities to learn “on the job” while they are still seminarians—with encouraging results.

In the following pages you’ll find the stories of 13 young pastors—all participants in the TiM program—who are finding their way through those first challenging weeks, months, and years of ministry, those first baptisms, funerals, pastoral visits, and budget meetings, with the wisdom of experienced mentors, the support of the congregations that have invited them into their midst, and the sympathy, enthusiasm, and friendship of peers on their own steep paths to pastoral ministry.

In these stories,  
you’ll read of doubt,  
confusion,  
and struggle—  
even pain.

In these stories you’ll read of the doubt, confusion, and struggle—even pain—some of these young clergy have faced on their journeys thus far. You’ll also hear of moments of grace, insight, and inspiration, of a growth in confidence, and of an evolving love these young pastors are developing for their congregations, themselves, and their chosen path.

These are honest stories, courageously told, and they provide a window into these young people’s lives as they move through the process of becoming pastors—of discovering and forming their pastoral identity. Just as birds must break through the eggs that contain them if they are to build the strength they need to live, these young clergy are facing the challenging early days of their ministry head-on and, in the process, are growing stronger and wiser. In essence, they are becoming pastors, and we are privileged to witness their transformation.

# A Way to Flourish

SARAH GRIFFITH



**J**ust showing up to class in seminary was intimidating because of the plethora of bright, overachieving, and God-fearing students. I knew students who not only completed this week's assigned reading but also were a week ahead of schedule. Then there were those who spoke four different languages in addition to knowing how to read and write two other dead languages. Did I mention the student who played the bagpipes, was elected class president, and won the preaching award?

Some of the best and brightest would graduate and go on to doctoral studies, some off to travel the globe in search of adventure, and some into the local churches. There was an unspoken, unhealthy bias that the most talented among us would continue in academics, and that the less capable would enter into parish ministry.

So, for those of us who wanted to work in the churches, we brought with us a sense of inadequacy and fear. We were afraid of leaving the cocoon of seminary. We were unsure of what the church would think of us and our newly formulated ideas about God.

Personally, I was terrified about church ministry. I was intimidated about taking on the great responsibility of leadership. Wouldn't it be easier to do something else? If the churches are dying, perhaps that's not where I should go with my gifts and talents. I didn't spend the past four years earning dual master's degrees in divinity and social work just to join a losing team, a church in decline, and an organization of little social significance.

Reluctant to jump into the mess of church without a life preserver, I instead chose to enter with caution and with protection. I took the leap into church life through a project called the Transition into Ministry (TiM) Program by joining on staff as minister for outreach at Plymouth

Congregational Church, which participated in the program. For two years, as a resident minister, I was fully exposed to ministry yet protected from the full brunt of it. I had intentional companions on this part of the journey, mentors to guide and coach me along the way.

But I was so afraid of failing in ministry that, along with Plymouth's TiM program, I joined the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) TiM program as well. It draws new clergy together twice a year for a weeklong retreat, where we worship, pray, enter into 36 hours of silence, talk about healthy practices in ministry, and visit a local congregation that represents a good role model for spiritually vital ministry. In this group I have 30 clergy colleagues whom I consider to be my friends and teachers. Looking at my situation out of seminary, I had a foolproof approach to successful ministry. As a participant in two different TiM programs, I was determined not to fail!

During this first year out of seminary and my first year serving in the church, I kept in touch with one friend who was also beginning church ministry. Unlike my strategy to get as much support as possible, she, like most new ministers, did not have a plan for survival. She quickly began to experience hazardous conditions, unsafe boundary violations, and rapid exposure to the diseases of the church. She lacked significant support from clergy colleagues, she felt overwhelmed and isolated. Her situation-induced depression consumed her, and the work became unbearable. Phone conversations revealed a person in a spiritual, mental, and physical crisis. Highly talented, outgoing, charismatic, and a gifted preacher, she was quickly fading.

I wished that she could have been part of at least one Transition into Ministry program and experienced all it had taught me: to take time for my own spiritual development; to create a balanced

workweek with significant time for rest, relaxation, and recreation; to set firm boundaries; how to refer out; and how to ask for help. Through this program I also began to appreciate the power of deep, sustaining friendship in my life.

My friend left ministry altogether after one year of serving the church. She feels spiritually deflated and torn up by the people who abused her. Unfortunately, new ministers are vulnerable to the manipulative forces that make our churches unhealthy places. People who are hurting express their pain through destructive behaviors, and are often power-hungry, controlling, irrational, and volatile.

I believe the church lost a good one—and that my friend's fate would have been drastically different if she had been part of the TiM program. It saved my ministry and has given me the tools I need to stay connected to my source of life, renewal, and spiritual vitality.

This fall I'm getting married and know that as a pastor with a family I will face new challenges and pressures. Yet now I have several people I can call to ask for support, to cheer me up, and to inspire me to continue. I'm not afraid of the church anymore. I know the church doesn't want to kill its pastors. It wants to see us flourish. That is good news for us as pastors, and good news for the church.

**Rev. Sarah Griffith** moved from Minnesota to Florida to become the senior minister of the United Church of Christ (Congregational and Disciples) in New Smyrna Beach just as Hurricane Katrina overwhelmed the Gulf Coast region in August of 2005. She is also in her fourth year of the Bethany Fellows, a Disciples of Christ denomination-based program. She previously served as a clergy resident in Minneapolis as minister for outreach at Plymouth Congregational Church.

# An Underwhelming Welcome

BRIAN DIXON

**T**hree years ago, with my furniture already en route and with Celine Dion belting “I drove all night” on my car stereo, I headed west, from Atlanta to San Francisco, to become the pastor of my first church. I had been searching for a parish to serve for four years—four years that had included a wide continuum of emotions ranging from times of great hope to moments of intense despair. But now I was filled with excitement about the move to this new energetic city, with gratitude to have been called by this tiny California congregation, and with great expectations of what awaited my arrival. After all, when I was a child we always showered our new pastor with gifts and a huge reception. Often the pastor arrived at his new home to find the kitchen cabinets filled through a “pounding,” in which the whole church had generously donated more bags of flour and spices than a family, let alone an individual, could use. On that Saturday of my arrival, I waited for the gifts of welcome to pour in. And I waited. And anticipated. And waited.

What I would learn late that day from Monty, a member of the congregation as well as the search committee that had recommended my hiring, is that Chris, the person who would have been the one-man welcoming committee, was in the middle of a crisis. Chris and his partner had given birth, three months prematurely, to a set of twins. These new parents were spending all of their time in a neonatal intensive care unit in a hospital an hour and a half away from their home. Understandably, welcoming was not foremost in Chris’s mind. Monty was scheduled to preach on the next day—a breather for the new pastor as he got situated in his new digs—so, presumably, he would also know the

ropes of the church and would be well-situated to pull off my welcoming party. I agreed to meet Monty after worship the next day and get the grand tour. I imagined worship would be a joyous tear-filled event in which I finally was living out my vocation.

As is the case with many small congregations, this little church shares space with another congregation. We worship in the fellowship hall/gym, and I have an office that looks out over the gym. During the call process, I had never seen the office nor had a tour of the building, but now I was finally going to see my new religious home.

Monty began our tour with, “Now, do you have keys to the building?” In my snarkiest voice, I said, “Yes, I used my Jedi powers to summon them from their resting place.” (Okay, it was just to myself.) Out loud I simply said meekly, “No.” He gave me his keys, but informed me that they wouldn’t actually let me into the building, the locks having been changed due to recent break-ins. He said that the office manager of the congregation with which we shared space should be able to give me a key, but he couldn’t tell me the office manager’s name, hours, or phone number.

I asked if he could show me my office. I followed behind him up the stairs as he told me that I had two options: a small room and a larger room. What he should have said was: a small closet or a larger closet. Both of

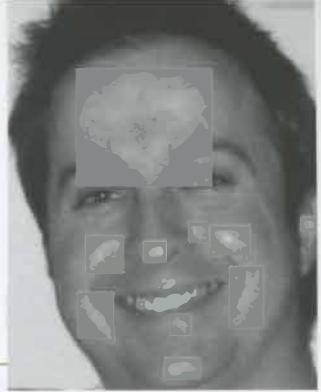
the rooms had become storage areas, neither of them with much room in which to move. The larger office, the one I ended up choosing, seemed to be, honestly, the place where old office furniture and equipment went to die. Monty also told me that a severe leak in the ceiling meant that neither the computer nor the phone worked. Before I moved I gave away my old computer believing I would be able to use the church’s computer until I could buy a new one. This new bit of information left me feeling, in our electronically connected world, isolated even more so than I might have felt in any other new place or new church.

The tour ended, and I was sure that this was when the magical moment of overwhelming hospitality would happen—the entire congregation would gather for a lunch in celebration of my arrival. I walked with Monty, expectantly, out to the front steps of the building. The air tingled as he turned to me and said, “Well, I’m glad you are here.” And not-so-joyous tears filled my eyes as he walked away.

I was left there, standing alone on the steps. There would be no great welcome, no reception, no celebratory lunch. I felt isolated. I felt discouraged. I felt disappointed. A pounding of a very different sort.

**Rev. Brian Dixon** is currently serving as pastor of Dolores Street Baptist Church in San Francisco, California. He received his master of divinity degree in 1999 from Emory University’s Candler School of Theology. He has spent the last two years participating in the First Parish Project, a Lilly Endowment-supported Transition into Ministry program.

I waited for the gifts of welcome to pour in. And I waited. And anticipated. And waited.



# Ministry in the Love Between Us

MARAJOY COOPER NORDEN

I approached room 2266 in the cancer center with confidence. It was my first "official" hospital visit since I had been ordained as Minister of Word and Sacrament. Mary was recovering from a successful surgery, and I already knew her quite well. I had sat at this 88-year-old lady's table over tea and cookies several times, listened to the wonderful stories of her life, looked at the pictures of old and new family members neatly tacked on her bulletin board. I had often prayed for her and with her—for her cancer, for the church, for her daughter who had left the faith—and I looked forward to seeing her and felt confident in my ability to minister to her.

When I came around the corner to room 2266, the door was open and Mary was there in the bed looking older than the last time I saw her. Older, but also beaming. Her daughters, including the one who left the church (oh, boy!—a chance to minister to her!), surrounded her bed and they were talking and laughing. I introduced myself to them and we made pleasant small talk for a few minutes. Then, suddenly realizing I was the pastor and thinking I had better do something, I suggested that I lead us all in prayer. So we joined hands around Mary's bed and bowed our heads.

I don't remember what I said in that prayer. But I do remember what happened after I said "amen" and opened my eyes. One of Mary's daughters immediately began to pray out loud, thanking God for all the blessings they experience, and for the doctors and for Mary and then for me. And then, to my surprise, the daughter who had left the faith began to pray. She thanked God for working in their lives and for watching over Mary. And Mary began, "The Lord is my shepherd." The daughters immediately joined in: "He maketh me to lie

I'm learning through my relationship with Mary that... I cannot minister without myself. Ministry does not happen when I stand before Mary as a blank slate.

down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside still waters..." I stumbled along with them, acutely aware that I did not have Psalm 23 memorized as well as Mary and her daughters. By the time we came to "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever," tears were streaming down my face. I was moved by the prayers of these three women, moved by the depth of meaning of Psalm 23 in this hospital room, moved by the fact that I received more ministering that day through Mary and her daughters (even from the daughter who left the faith!) than I gave to them.

Mary recovered well and returned home, and I've sat at Mary's table over tea and cookies several times since that day. I'm finding that the longer I know Mary, the more I receive much more ministering in our visits than I give. It's led me to consider what it means to be a minister to Mary. I used to think ministering required crystal-clear boundaries: I listen, I create space for God, I apply my knowledge and expertise to meet needs through the grace of Jesus Christ. But I don't talk about myself, I don't share my thoughts or feelings (except as they pertain to what the other person is going through). I keep myself out of it. However, I'm learning through my relationship with Mary that it's not nearly so simple or clear-cut. I cannot minister without myself. Ministry does not happen when I stand before Mary as a blank slate (which is a good thing, because I've tried to do this and failed!).



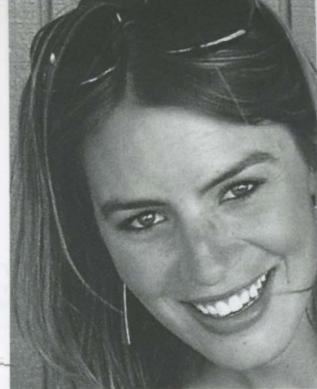
Ministry happens when I let all of myself—including my emotions, fears, and wonderings—interact with all of Mary's self in whatever state we find ourselves.

So I'm growing to love Mary. And I'm discovering that this love is where ministry happens. It doesn't happen through my theological expertise or my listening skills or my faith (though these things are certainly valuable). Ministry happens in the love that develops between us. It's not my ministry to Mary, or Mary's ministry to me, but the Holy Spirit's ministry to both of us! So of course I'm going to walk away from a visit with Mary feeling encouraged. I'm so glad that Mary has given this new minister a clear sense that it's not *my* ministry but God's ministry in and through all of us together! What a privilege to be included in it (and a relief that it's not all about me).

**Rev. MaraJoy Cooper Norden** is ordained in the Reformed Church in America and is currently installed as a clergy resident at Church of the Servant in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She previously worked in urban outreach and women's ministry at Servant's Community Church, and in substance abuse counseling and crisis intervention at Arbor Circle, both also in Grand Rapids.

# A Sense of Belonging

NICOLE M. LAMARCHE



I have been here in my first call for just three weeks and feel almost unable to articulate what it is that I am actually experiencing. It is as if I have been plopped on stage in a play that has been going since the late 1700s. I know a few of the key players, but for the most part the cast is unfamiliar. Despite my lack of knowledge of the script or familiarity with the cast, I am expected to debut in a starring role with excellence and ease. I want rave reviews—five stars—and then some good talk around the water cooler. But I want all of that while knowing that my role is not about me; it is about the cast and how we “play” in the world around us.

I am expected to have answers, too. And not just answers but *divine* answers, answers worthy of four years in seminary and two master’s degrees, answers that confirmed the congregation’s decision to hire a newbie.

Perhaps the most stressful part about all this drama is learning my role and claiming it—learning the unspoken, unwritten rules, like not using tape to hang things on the walls of my newly painted office or remembering to tell the church administrator when I step out for coffee or a run to the post office. Or understanding that the “usual suspects” of church drama sometimes just want to be heard. There are so many rules, most of which don’t matter in the grand scheme of things, but they matter to the people I have been called to love. It is their way of ordering this small corner of the world, their way of keeping children safe and feeling secure them-

selves. Knowing the rules will mean that I am a part of the family, and it may take me a while.

These were my thoughts in August 2005, after I had just arrived as the pastoral resident at Wellesley Congregational Church. Seven months later, I still had doubts about my place in my new family, doubts that became clear to me during an encounter with one of the church’s members. Sue and I were standing in the kitchen together the way we did every Friday morning before Bible study. I made the coffee and, if it was her turn to bring treats, she heated them up in the oven. She always looked perfect and I wondered what she thought of me. I tried to look professional, but sometimes I just had to wear my wild earrings or gold shoes. I decided it was my way of being fully me. It was all I could do to let the congregation know that I wasn’t one of them. I figured they knew already. I wondered if they could read the advertisement I carried in my head: Young minister: feminist theologically and sometimes otherwise, from rural America, didn’t attend a small liberal arts college in New England.

Call is funny, I guess. I was absolutely sure I was called here, but not sure I belonged. At this point, though, I was confident that Sue saw me as one of her pastoral leaders. Then, as we were making small talk in the kitchen, she dropped a bomb: she called me “hon.” In that moment I was instantly transported back to high school insecurity. Where did all of my pastoral authority go? How could it vanish so quickly?

I wanted to ask Sue if she would call the senior minister “hon.” Gratefully, I didn’t. “Hon.” It was a word I hadn’t heard since waitressing. It was a word that could shrink me in an instant, a word I took to mean that I wasn’t her pastor. I was just a young woman making coffee with her just as we did every Friday.

About four months later, our entire Bible study group was gathered at Sue’s home. We were grateful to be together and grateful to have walked together on a 34-week journey of faith and reflection. I was visiting with Sue in the kitchen while she worked to prepare our last supper together. I still wondered what she thought of me. Then she looked up from the dishwasher and told me how close she felt to me—how she felt that I was her pastor—and how much she appreciated me walking with her on her faith journey this last year. I understood then that she had called me “hon” because she loved me. She had called me “hon” not to let me know I hadn’t yet made it to pastoral status but to welcome me to it. It was as if, in that moment, she had said, “It doesn’t matter how far apart our worlds are, welcome home.” I wasn’t ready to hear it that Friday morning so many months before. Maybe I hadn’t yet believed it. But that day at our retreat, I heard it. I finally heard it. Yes, I am a pastor. I have been blessed with pastoral authority, finally!

**Rev. Nicole M. Lamarche** is passionate about education issues and is actively engaged in theology that empowers transformation in the church and the wider world. Following graduation from the Pacific School of Religion with her master of divinity degree and a master of arts in theology, she began a pastoral residency at Wellesley Congregational Church.

Perhaps the most stressful part about all this drama is learning my role and claiming it.

# Surviving Liturgical Limbo

J. ANDREW DAUGHERTY

“**H**as anyone seen the guest preacher?” asked Dr. Bright, our associate pastor.

“No, but I’m sure he will arrive any minute now,” I offered with blind assurance. “After all, it’s only 8:10 a.m. He has 20 minutes.”

“Yes, but it’s just not like him to not be early. Maybe I’ll go call him and make sure,” Dr. Bright said. “And by the way, if he happens not to show up, you will be our preacher *du jour*,” he quipped with a wink and a half smile.

And there it was. The seasoned veteran of pastoral ministry suggested the rookie pastor provide an impromptu sermon in a moment of liturgical limbo. Could I expect the Spirit winds to blow and inspire instant clarity about what to say or do? Would I dare attempt a homiletic high-wire act in such a lofty place as behind the pulpit? What did “impromptu” mean, anyway? I figured much preparation went into being spontaneous. Maybe to “be instant in season and out of season” was Paul’s way of saying to Timothy, “Just in case, keep a sermon manuscript in your pocket at all times.”

So, with my mental wheels spinning, I managed to finally respond, “Not to worry. I am ready.”

With that tepid reply, I strolled down the hallway to my second-floor cubicle office we residents call “The Shire,” a wordplay on the mispronunciation of Wilshire Baptist Church and the northwest region of J.R.R. Tolkien’s fictional kingdom of Middle-Earth.

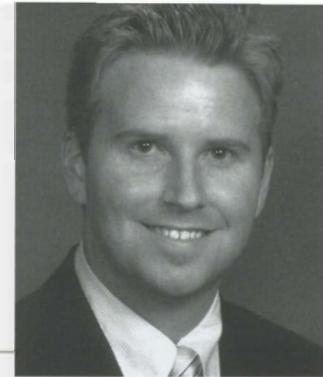
Though absent such imagined beings as hobbits, the Shire is a sacred office space where a community of resident colleagues inspires pastoral imagination. Only two months before, we had co-created a Resident Vespers service convened one Sunday night per month and composed of prayer, silence, a

homily, and Communion. Dr. Mason, the director of the Wilshire residency program, suggested vespers services would provide extra occasions for residents to preach and practice liturgical leadership. Thanks be to God, because I went to my computer, opened up my sermon files, and printed out the sermon I had preached at vespers only seven days before. I tucked it in my Bible and headed for the chancel—just in case.

About 10 minutes into the early Sunday worship service, our guest preacher was still missing. As I stood and greeted the few hundred worshipers, I informed them of the news. Given that the proclamation of the Word is perhaps the most prominent liturgical element of our free worship tradition, I assured them that in classic Quaker fashion, if he finally did not arrive, the Spirit would surely move somebody to say something and that the Word would be proclaimed. Measured laughter swept across the room, and I breathed a sigh of relief that we were all in the moment together.

Sure enough, as I sat back down, Dr. Bright motioned to me from the side of the chancel. He quietly pointed and mouthed, “You are the preacher today.” Apparently, the guest preacher had been informed that he was to preach only the 11:00 a.m. service. But at least there was no more indecision. I knew what I needed to do.

When I stood to deliver the sermon, the first word that fell out of my mouth was, “Well.” It lingered in the room a bit as if to remind us all that worship and ministry is as much the Spirit’s improvisation as it is our human preparation. Again, the congregation graciously laughed, and I started into a sermon that maybe only a few had heard (and maybe even fewer remembered) from the week before.



That summer Sunday morning was formative to my development of pastoral confidence and liturgical competence. It reflects a confluence of residency experiences that will motivate my pastoral leadership into the future; an older, wiser minister trusting my pastoral intuition in a vulnerable moment; the vision of a senior pastor to communicate the affect of liturgical leadership in the shaping of congregations, the nurture of collegial relationships, and the gift of congregational hospitality. Together these practices stir my courage to lead and serve Christ’s church.

Today, hanging over my head in my home office is a cross-stitch that reads “St. Andrew of Wilshire,” a dubious distinction to be sure. A real saint at Wilshire designed it after the Sunday I preached that “impromptu” sermon and after Dr. Bright slightly embellished the whole experience by humorously announcing to the congregation my sainthood. The cross-stitch reminds me of the hands that made it and of all the hands laid on my head ordaining me into Christian ministry. It is a reminder that I am never alone, and we are all in season and out of season together.

**Rev. J. Andrew Daugherty** currently serves as pastor of Christ Church, a Baptist community now forming in Rockwall, Texas. After earning a master of divinity degree from Wake Forest Divinity School in 2003, he joined the staff of the Baptist Joint Committee in Washington, D.C., where he assisted the general counsel with legal research and work with religious liberty coalitions. From 2004 to 2006 he served as a pastoral resident at Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas.

# An Anatomy Lesson: Discovering Where My Heart Is

CHRISTINA GRACE KUKUK



**W**hen I was in the ninth grade, a cousin of mine pointed a handgun to his chest and fired in an unsuccessful attempt at suicide. The family joke at the time went like this: "If he'd 'a known which side his heart was on, he might 'a done some damage." Crass, I know, but it was rural Ohio. Making light of such a sad, desperate act was the best coping mechanism we knew, tried and true if not altogether healthy. And the irony of the joke was that we were all quite grateful for his ignorance of this particular aspect of human anatomy.

My first congregation would not have appreciated this joke. They would not have understood our family burn barrel or the life I lived for my first 11 years "out in the county," on a hill between a cornfield/flood zone and the reservoir. I was convinced my first congregation and I could not have been more different.

So imagine my surprise when in my ninth month of ministry I realized that this strange and utterly different people had taught me, in a manner of speaking, "which side my heart was on." And that realization caught me entirely by surprise.

The first time it happened was Confirmation Sunday. I took a little bowl of water from the baptismal font, looked each youth in the eye, and spoke a blessing particular to each one, as I had gotten to know them. Then I dipped my finger in the water and traced a cross on each forehead. The congregation responded with, "Blessed are you, Lucia." And so on. Whether these seven eighth- to tenth-graders joined the church or not, and wherever their faith journey took them, we would love them. That is what the liturgy I worked so hard to design was meant to communicate. What I had not counted on was

how intimate the actions I had planned would feel in the moment. No one else could tell, but I almost didn't get the last blessing out for the tears that threatened to break loose.

Like a quick, sharp sucker punch, something in worship that morning knocked me back on my heels. Not long afterward, as my colleague and mentor Eric Nelson, principal minister at the church, maneuvered his little blue Volkswagen back to our offices, the sucker punch shaped itself into words. "I realized... I love these people," I said. "Even the annoying ones."

Our street came and went, but Eric shifted gears and kept driving. "This is important," he said.

Eric is a master of understatement.

It might help to clarify something he already knew about me: I am not a touchy-feely chick. In all my 27 years, I had never been accused of being emotionally effusive, gushy, or mushy. Instead, you might hear adjectives like "thoughtful" or "reserved." My grade school report cards always noted "works well on own," and personality profiles reliably produced phrases like "hard to get to know." The truth is that in ministry a little emotional distance can be an asset. Add to that the differences of class and faith experience, and I believed my first ordained call would be a perfectly neutral position from which to learn best practices in ministry.

Not to belabor the point, but this congregation often felt like an alien people to me. Roughly 67 percent of the regular attendees held graduate degrees of some sort. Ordained ministers numbered no fewer than 10, sometimes more. In contrast, neither of my parents had completed a bachelor's degree, and my siblings and I were the first among our many cousins to try college before pregnancy or marriage. Starker still

were the differences in faith experiences and language about faith, differences not entirely unrelated to class identity.

And yet here I was noticing within, and yet coming from somewhere beyond me, a genuine love for a people I found strange and hard to understand. Risking cliché, I could only call this love Christ-like. From my journal that week: "I feel the weight of a tremendous care and concern, and it unmoves me. It feels so risky. Almost makes me wish this residency program was less than two years. It is now just enough time to really begin to love a people and then have to leave. Can I go through the hard, stubborn, risk-taking work of having to carefully, persistently—relying on grace by grace—grow relationships like these again?"

Sometimes it is better not to know which side your heart is on. It's like the lover who knows just where the chinks in your armor are, or the sibling who knows that drawing a comparison between you and your deadbeat father will knock you down as completely as jabbing the back of your locked knees. To love is to become vulnerable to loss and betrayal.

It was the possibility for betrayal, or at least the feeling of betrayal, that Eric then took the opportunity to talk about.

To some extent, our family joke was true: knowing which side your heart is on does make it possible to do some damage.

**Rev. Christina Grace Kukuk** is associate minister at First Congregational Church of Minnesota, United Church of Christ, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where she is completing the second year of a pastoral residency program, a partnership between First and Plymouth Congregational Churches.

# A Little Child Shall Lead Them

A. IONA SMITH NZE

**G**od always answers my prayers, but experience has taught me I cannot rush the answer even when I am in a hurry. "Do you need help, ma'am?" I heard a child behind me ask as I struggled to pull the security gate down at the front of my office building. It was the end of the day and I was anxious to get home before dark for a change. I planned to gently decline the child's offer, but I turned to find five smiling sets of eyes ranging from hazel to dark brown resting on my face. All of the children were under 10, I guessed, and they were waiting for me to say yes.

"Yes, I do need your help," I said, and within seconds Isaiah, the tallest of the three boys, had climbed high enough to pull the gate down all by himself. Meanwhile, his cousin Steven had successfully manipulated the pull shank and the gate was coming down fast on Isaiah. The crash was averted and I offered each child a share in locking up. Suddenly, getting home wasn't so important.

Pleased with our work, we walked toward the church. As we walked, I learned the others' names: the baby boy, Dana, and two girls, Na-Na and Ki-Ki. In front of the church, the children asked almost in unison if they could come in and pray at the altar for their cousin, a recent casualty of homicide, and other relatives who were also dead. Their request stopped me in my tracks and I thought of Isaiah 11:6, where the scripture tells us "a little child shall lead them."

We entered the sanctuary in reverence, knelt at the altar, and prayed our individual prayers of hope, want, and thanksgiving. The children's prayers were so earnest and forthright, so sincere and innocent. What

an amazing way for God to answer my prayer! Hours before meeting the children, disturbed by the sirens of multiple ambulances, I had stopped to pray and had asked God for a sign of hope in this wilderness of rising homicide rates in our city, local and international unrest, and escalating security threats. And here I was now, praying for world peace along with five faithful children, praying to end all the hurt and disappointment we witness daily.

A few weeks earlier, a youth I did not know was murdered. I saw the red and blue flashing lights on my way home from Bible study. As I drove past the crime scene, where police officers were combing the sidewalks for clues, I found myself with a desire to do something, and turned the car back toward the scene. I imagined I would stop and identify myself as an ordained minister to the officer in charge. I do this often when I see accidents. Maybe I would speak with the family and offer prayer for their loved ones. I went back, but could not get out of the car. Instead, I drove home to the safety of my own place. Troubled by this latest incident and my reaction to it, I prayed.

As a child, my favorite prayer came at bedtime. My favorite part was the beginning: "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray to the Lord my soul to keep." I have been serious about God keeping my soul since I was a girl. As an adult, a minister and soon-to-be pastor, the awesome responsibility of praying for other souls does not escape me.

Meeting the children by chance a few weeks after the murder of that youth was an answer to my prayer. They were a sign of hope in the wilderness of urban despair—bright spots in my day that defied the author of death and destruction.

Their parents later gave permission for them to participate in weekly Bible study with me. Touched by the witness of the children, members of Charles Street's Adult Bible Study, which I co-teach, asked that we include them in our meeting until school began. Na-Na, Ki-Ki, Steve, Isaiah, and Dana came to pray with me everyday that week at the altar, and the experience restored my soul.

The call to ministry is, for me, a gift that peaks and dips along a continuum—strenuous at one end and amazing at the other. I imagined ministry would be idyllic, a testament to those who have gone before me. They made the load look easy to carry and the burden light. On my worst days I feel estranged from the great pastoral attributes of patience, loving kindness, and compassion, and find instead a kindred spirit in weariness. On better days I am ready to take on the world, inspired by the Word of God, and full of creativity, imagination, and joy for the people of God. Yes, my good days outweigh my bad days, but I have come to understand that the high points and the low are par for the course in this ministry we are called to. Yet, in the few extra minutes it cost me, five little children embodied God's answer. This is my breakthrough.

**Rev. A. Iona Smith Nze**, an itinerant elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, serves as a pastoral resident at Boston's Historic Charles St. A.M.E. Church. She is also a 2006 pastor scholar at Boston University and founder of Heirlooms and Legacies, a custom rites of passage company. Iona has been featured on "Sundays with Liz" on CBS.





# A Confidence Born of Support

TIMOTHY J. LUOMA

**I**t was a Sunday afternoon and I sat at my desk, crestfallen. I had finally managed to get a copy of what was to be the proposed budget for the upcoming year, and as I compared it to the current budget I discovered deep cuts in critical areas: cuts in staff, cuts in compensation, and reduction or elimination of the funding for each and every program that connected the church to anything outside of its walls. Overall, the cuts amounted to \$50,000.

I recognized this as a pivotal moment both for the congregation and for my ministry, but I didn't know where it would lead. Was this a vote of "no confidence" in me? Should I get my personal information form in order and start looking for a new church? Or did I just need to accept this as the best we could hope for in a small, extremely rural church setting?

Failure seemed inescapable. Except I wasn't the same person—or the same pastor—I had been three years earlier, when I first arrived here. I knew myself better, I knew my options better, and I knew my people better. There was a strange kind of confidence brewing inside of me, a daring and hopeful twist to the anxiety. "If I fail," I thought to myself, "I want to fail because of what I did, not because of what I *didn't do*."

That confidence came about because of the First Parish Project (FPP), a program designed to provide support to those serving their first pastorates. I had gone to my first FPP meeting about four months after I arrived at this church. I attended six week-long sessions over the next 18 months. FPP gave me a few important reminders, some new resources, and a bit more information, but most importantly it gave me something I had never really known before: colleagues. Five people

I had never met before FPP became good friends, confidants, advisors, and fellow travelers on the too often lonely road of parish ministry.

Moreover, I had new resources beyond that small group. I now knew someone who had been working with smaller churches for years. Clay Smith, the director of Hinton Rural Life Center (which had hosted FPP), had spoken to us about a different model of stewardship. I called Clay and we talked about the possibility of him coming to the church to explain that different stewardship model to the congregation.

When the Session met a few days later, I stepped up. I recommended that they not vote on the proposed budget and that they decide to change the fiscal year start date to July 1 to give themselves time to do a proper stewardship campaign before creating the budget. I accepted responsibility for any previous failure on my part to fulfill my obligations as pastor/leader and promised to do my best to make up for that, starting right then at that meeting. No blame was placed on the Budget Committee for the budget they had presented. It was, I said, a gift, a wake-up call. And it had woken me up.

The Session knew about my experiences with FPP; they had given me permission to be involved with it. Here was an opportunity for them to benefit from it directly. They took it. One Elder made a motion to table the current budget proposal. Another proposed that we invite Clay Smith. Yet another offered to call a friend who owned a local hotel about possibly donating a room for his visit.

Clay visited in January. He gave a workshop and preached on Sunday morning, both of which were well received. The Session adopted the new plan. The Stewardship Committee put

in long and dedicated effort to implement the plan, to publicize it, support it, and make it succeed. The church owned the process. Other than that first initial push, I have had little direct involvement with the process; the leaders in the church stepped forward, utilizing me as a resource whenever needed.

Even before our Stewardship Dedication Sunday, I noticed remarkable changes. Session meetings no longer seemed to take place under a cloud. Discussions were easier, new ideas seemed to generate spontaneously from our conversations. We left feeling better—and earlier!

Stewardship Dedication arrived, and we were all a bit nervous. The work had been done, but did people understand the new model? Would they buy into it as we had? Our numbers indicated that they did. We went from 43 pledges to well over 60 (more than a 26 percent increase), and dollars pledged increased by well over 35 percent. The overall budget increased almost 20 percent.

It would be almost impossible to overstate the importance of FPP in this process. Not only did it help me to be willing to take risks and to refuse to give up too easily, but it also provided me both with personal and professional support—colleagues and someone knowledgeable to turn to for help. The end result was a dramatic impact on the congregation I serve. Who knows where it will go from there?

**Rev. Timothy J. "TJ" Luoma** is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). He is currently the pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Gallipolis, Ohio. Previously he served as associate pastor at First Presbyterian Church of Gainesville, Florida. He was a member of the inaugural group of the First Parish Project.

# A Motley Mess and Mercy

NIKKI BAILEY

**P**astoring can be a motley mess full of challenges and trials—and mercy. It's overwhelming. It's hard. And there's help.

I was supposed to preach last week. I didn't. I couldn't. I'd known about it for quite a while, but as the date approached I...just...couldn't...do...it. There were no words, no verses, no prayers. Nothing. Nothing came. I couldn't preach.

As the weeks went by and I thought about my sermon, I tried to wipe clean the mad muddle in my mind. I'd been—I am—having a hard time with things lately. There are so many expectations and I am not certain of my ability to meet them. Preacher, teacher, counselor... a list too long and I wonder if I can or want to do it. I wonder if I've made a mistake or, impossibly, if God has. Maybe I think too much, but it's hard to write sermons in the midst of mayhem.

And then there are other things. Private things. The nonvocational, secular, non-stop, unsolvable stuff that isn't supposed to affect pastors but does anyway. Things that I can't tell the folks at church because they should be coming to *me* about their problems, not the other way around. Things that aren't my work but affect my work nevertheless. My ability to be present, to pay attention, "to do justice, to love mercy, to walk humbly with God," and yes, to preach, are affected by the personal trials I don't think I'm supposed to share with the church. They can't know that "my soul is cast down within me," can they?

And they definitely shouldn't know that I couldn't preach. That the Holy Spirit hadn't spoken. That I hadn't heard what was spoken... or whatever happened. Whatever happened, what-

ever is happening, it is too "nonpastoral" to share. So I did what all good, responsible pastors in a pickle do: I found a replacement.

Mercifully, Rev. S agreed to preach in my stead. I was so relieved. Thank God that was taken care of! But it wasn't. The day before the sermon, 22 hours before it was supposed to be preached, Rev. S called in sick. I was so angry! I didn't care that he was sick. I didn't even believe that he was sick. (As I said, loving mercy is not my strong suit right now.) I called him up and begged him to come to church the next day. I'm a relatively new preacher and certainly couldn't write a sermon with only *one day* of preparation. After some hemming and hawing and coughing, Rev. S agreed to drag himself out of bed and come to church the next day to help me out. To love mercy.

Rev. S slept instead of coming to morning worship because the sermon he was preaching for me was for an afternoon service. When our senior pastor asked why Rev. S—a generally reliable gent—was absent from morning worship, I explained that he was sick but was coming in that afternoon to take over for me. Pastor asked, "Does it make sense to you that he should come in if he's sick?"

Duh.

I was panicking again. "No, no, no, no, no! I can't come up with a sermon in two hours! Oh my God!"

Our senior pastor is a very intuitive person and, actually, a person in whom I've confided much. I suppose he understood why I needed a pinch hitter for my afternoon preaching engagement. But he'd let Rev. S off the hook. Who would do it now? (A word of advice: If you ever find yourself facing a row of coworkers giving you a look that says, "If he picks me, prepare for a beat down,"

the best thing to do is look at the floor.) Pastor said, "Should I preach the afternoon sermon myself?" D'OH!!!! At that moment I knew I should have stepped up and preached the sermon even if it meant rambling for 10 minutes about the 23rd Psalm: "The Lord is a shepherd and there's no need to want 'cuz there are green pastures and cups running over and... stuff." But I didn't step up. I stared at the floor. No mercy.

Minister P, my cohort in the Transition into Ministry program, stepped forward. "I'll do it," he said. "There's no need for you to come back for the service, Pastor. I'll preach it." ALRIGHT SAM!!!!

I went to worship that afternoon and heard the best darn sermon I'd ever heard (because I didn't have to preach it).

The thing is, all of this should be easier, but it's not. I'm having a hard time in life right now, so that makes what is already a difficult job seem almost impossible. The expectations of pastoral ministry are enormous and preaching is only one aspect of it. How do I pastor from the heart when my heart is heavy, and loving mercy is—at least for now—beyond me? Pastoring is a motley mess and I am not sure I can do it. But I am thankful for colleagues who know the meaning of mercy even when I forget.

**Rev. Nicole Bailey** is a pastor in residence at the Concord Baptist Church of Christ in Brooklyn, New York. Prior to serving at Concord, she combined her background in television production with her seminary education to develop a media production and literacy ministry focused on the use of technology for spiritual growth and social change. She is a graduate of Union Theological Seminary.



# In Sure and Certain Hope

LESLIE CHADWICK



The two sisters and their uncle sat side by side in their chairs, crowded in my small windowless office. Rain beat on the roof. My guests looked at me instead of at each other. I was relieved that they seemed unaware of their surroundings. They would not be tempted to read my ordination certificate on the wall behind them. It revealed that tomorrow, the day of the funeral, was also the one-month anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood.

My parish had 10 priests, including Lilly-sponsored clergy residents, but no one else was available to take on a funeral when the call came. I dialed the out-of-town number on the memo sheet given to me, and the older sister answered. She and her family were not members of our church. They wanted to have her mother's funeral at our church, where her mother had been married 50 years ago. For the final months of her life, her mother had lived in a suburb nearby. The family would not be in town until the day before the funeral, but I could talk with the local funeral home about the arrangements.

I had spent two days finalizing the logistics, and now the family was here. The older sister had come in out of the rain while the others were parking. She told me hurriedly that neither she nor her sister had seen their uncle in years. They had just picked him up from the airport and he would be joining us for the meeting. After an opening prayer, I asked the sisters to tell me stories about their mother. The uncle listened to the sisters with as much interest as I did.

The stories began gently, but a theme of sadness emerged as the sisters recalled other deaths that had affected their mother. Memories of loss, isolation, and grief were woven into the

stories. In the silence that followed, the uncle said, "I wasn't there for you. I didn't know everything that was going on, but you had to go through it by yourselves. I'm sorry I wasn't there." As I passed a box of tissues to the older sister, I was aware of the tremendous privilege of being present in that moment. We prayed in thanksgiving for the gift of reconciliation and new life in relationships and chose the readings for the service together.

It was nearly six in the evening when I finished the bulletins and realized that I still had to write a homily. At the time, sermons took me 10 to 12 hours to write. I did not have that kind of time. An older clergy resident poked his head in the door. "There's only one thing to preach," he said with a smile. "Resurrection?" I asked. He nodded. I also recalled my bishop telling me once to be honest in funeral sermons: "Do not pretend that someone was perfect when there are broken relationships." Finally, on my way out the door, I told my supervisor about the meeting. She said, "This family needs a blessing. Give them a blessing." The sermon came to me on the drive home and I wrote it in less than two hours.

I was aware throughout the service the next day that the family needed my presence more than my perfection. They were not interested in my qualifications. I pronounced God's blessing on them, and they received the blessing. At the end of the Committal, I picked up a fistful of earth and said, "In sure and certain hope of the resurrection, we commend to Almighty God our sister and we commit her body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. The Lord bless her and keep her, the Lord make his face to shine upon her and be gracious to her, the Lord lift up his countenance upon her and give

her peace."<sup>1</sup> As I released the earth, a gust of wind left over from the storm scattered a fine layer of dust all over the family, me, and the coffin. The same wind blew the clouds open, and for the first time in two days the sun came out.

After the service, people murmured about the dramatic timing of the weather. A middle-aged man from the congregation approached me and, as if seeing how young I was for the first time, asked, "You aren't the rector of this church, are you?" I smiled and told him, "No." Somehow the family's knowing so little about me before and during the service had not mattered. Being present had mattered. Recognizing God's presence in our midst had mattered. I recalled these words of a mentor: "In funerals, do for the family members what they cannot do for themselves, and then let them do for each other what you cannot do for them." I watched the family grouping together and reconnecting. I said my goodbyes and lifted my vestments to walk back up the hill toward my car.

## NOTES

1. "Burial I," *Book of Common Prayer* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), p. 485.

**Rev. Leslie Chadwick** is the associate rector at St. Timothy's Episcopal Church in Herndon, Virginia. After graduating from Virginia Theological Seminary in 2004, she entered Foundations for Spiritual Leadership, a Lilly Endowment-sponsored Transition into Ministry program. Through that program, she served as a clergy resident for two years at Christ Church in Alexandria, Virginia.

# Ministering as Myself

DAVID KING

**P**erched on the edge of my seat, I tried to hide any twinges of nervousness with a smile as members of the ordination council filed in to meet me in the formal confines of the pastor's study. The council was composed of dear friends: pastors, deacons, and committed lay members of our congregation, who I knew were all rooting for me. Nevertheless, I could not ignore the sense of gravitas I felt in that moment for which I had prepared for so many years.

Soon after the brief introductory remarks and requisite small talk, the questions began—questions asking me to articulate my calling, to discuss particular points of theology, or to express my views on specific practices of ministry. I answered each one carefully, and as the questions continued, I grew more and more at ease with the conversation and my ability to respond to the council's satisfaction. That is, until our senior pastor, George, my mentor for almost two years, asked a question for which I was not so well prepared.

"How will your ministry look different than mine? What will you do differently as a minister?" he asked.

At first, the question took me by surprise. I had entered this residency program right out of seminary to experience how ministry is done right in a healthy congregation, to apprentice myself under a successful senior pastor, and to model my practices of ministry accordingly.

During the past two years, I had reflected long and hard about what it meant to be a pastor. What is the minister's role at the bedside, in the pulpit, behind the Lord's table? These were questions the council had already asked, and I had answered. But George's question was asking me to dig deeper. His

**H**is question was not, "What does it mean to be a pastor?" He was asking, "What does it mean for *me* to be a pastor?" How have I uniquely embodied this calling, and what have I learned about myself?

question was not, "What does it mean to be a pastor?" He was asking, "What does it mean for *me* to be a pastor?" How have I uniquely embodied this calling, and what have I learned about myself?

Once I realized what George was asking, the question made perfect sense. The residency program had prepared me to consider these questions from the very beginning. Many times I was the minister left for people to call on, to make hospital rounds, or to engage in pastoral conversations. Of course, I was not left to process those experiences entirely on my own. My colleagues and mentors came alongside to reflect, to offer affirmation, and to make suggestions as I discovered my own style and unique gifts.

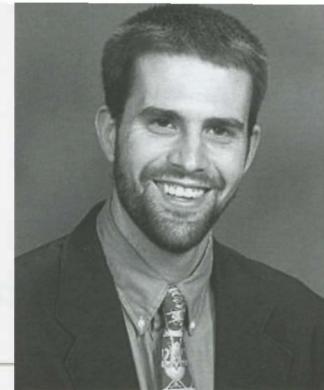
As much as I may have wanted to emulate my mentor, I couldn't completely. We were different people with different gifts and abilities. I found, however, at that moment, that I was well-equipped to answer his question, and I was keenly aware of the gift of proper mentoring. As a mentor, George was not interested in producing a mass of carbon-copy preachers. He understood that mentors are, instead, shapers and refiners of each individual's gifts—of the inherent statue contained within the marble.

As the council concluded, I left the study empowered with a tremendous sense of freedom. Whether I had been consciously aware of it or not, these past two years had shaped me to be

the distinctive minister that I am called to be. I left thankful that I had people around me eager to help me discover that minister. And I left resolute to remain true to my gifts.

The same tone rang true again a few weeks later at my service of ordination. As I addressed the congregation, I caught the eyes of those to whom I had ministered. Their eyes matched the words they whispered over me as they laid their hands on my head. "Thank you for your words in your last sermon. They really touched me." "I will always remember when you came to see Dad in the hospital the day before he died." Each person's words reminded me that ministry is not a subject that you can master. Instead, it is about interacting as yourself with your gifts in distinct settings and in individual lives. It is remembering the call to which you have submitted your life. It is trusting that who you are as a minister will always be enough.

**Rev. David King** recently completed a two-year pastoral residency program at Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas. A native of Anniston, Alabama, he earned a bachelor of arts in history from Samford University in 2001 and a master of divinity degree from Duke Divinity School in 2004. He is beginning the Ph.D. program in religion at Emory University this fall.



# Walking with God through Difficulty

JENNIFER E. BARRETT



“I need to speak to a pastor,” she said. I was more than a little surprised by this request. I had only been serving the congregation for a few months when the call came in and frankly, as a member of a large pastoral staff with three of those pastors having been at the church for much longer than I had, I usually wasn’t the first choice for folks who needed to speak with a pastor. As I listened to Heidi’s concerns, however, it became clear as to why she had chosen to speak with me. One of my ministerial responsibilities at the church involves working with a prison ministry program. Our congregation has three small groups, each of which sponsors an inmate in order to mentor him or her through a prison education program run by a local university. Two of these groups were working closely with a pastor when Heidi called, but Heidi’s group had decided to step out on their own and work without pastoral guidance. As we talked, it became clear that this decision had not turned out well.

Heidi’s group was in disarray. They had given up meeting on a regular basis, and clear communication was even further compromised by the group’s tendency to pick and choose which group members would receive information about inmate visits and updates. In addition, some people in the group had developed quite personal relationships with their sponsored inmate, Diego, while others were uncomfortable with this and wanted to return to a relationship with him based on academic mentorship. After Heidi shared her concerns and frustrations with me, she asked if I would be willing to meet with the group. Keep in mind that the rest of the group had no idea that Heidi had called me, and I was only hearing one side of a five-sided story, but that did not

seem to stop me. I agreed to step in and meet with the group in order to see if I could help put them back on track.

After I hung up the phone, I got the sinking feeling that I was in way over my head. I wondered how the rest of the group would react to my request for a meeting. Would they see me as an objective, pastoral presence, or would they think I was taking Heidi’s side? How could I effectively intervene with this group of folks, most of whom were old enough to be my parents? Would they look to me as someone who could help them, or would they run right over me?

With these fears in mind, I spent a significant amount of time preparing for our first meeting. I drew on the experience and advice of my pastoral colleagues, developing a plan as to how I would frame our discussion and how I might establish a safe space in which the group members could share with each other. I also worked on a contingency plan in case everything went awry! Most of all, I prayed that God could work through me to pull this group back together and help re-focus their energy on their ministry with Diego instead of on their conflict with each other.

So how did that first meeting go? The group members shared openly and honestly with each other, expressing disappointment, frustration, and even outright anger. At the end of our time together, it was unclear as to whether the group would continue as a whole. They did agree to meet again, however, in order to continue their conversa-

tion and discern whether they might be able to put the pieces of the group back together again.

And so the hard work continued. I worked with the group for six months as they went through a covenanting process in which they communicated openly and honestly about what they expected from each other and from their participation in the prison ministry program. The tension within the group slowly began to dissipate, and they began to laugh again. They remembered why they wanted to be involved with the program, and the group remained intact.

Looking back on the experience, I realize that it was such a gift to journey with this group through the challenges of establishing a healthy small group ministry. The Spirit was so tangible in this work and in our time together. God opened each heart and allowed for healing to occur, and God’s presence encouraged reconciliation and renewal among group members. It was truly amazing to see the Spirit at work in these ways and to know that God did indeed work through me as I shepherded the group along the way. Even though I had jumped right into the deep end, God kept my head above water.

**Rev. Jennifer E. Barrett** is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ currently serving as a pastoral resident at Wellesley Congregational Church (UCC) in Wellesley, Massachusetts. She received her master of divinity degree from Harvard Divinity School.

**Most of all,** I prayed that God could work through me to pull this group back together and help re-focus their energy on their ministry...

# Finding Beauty in the Ashes

HEIDI SCHWERDTFEEGER

**F**or me, Christmas has always been a season of anticipation, joy, and love. Every year I look forward to this reminder of God's tangible gift of love seen in the sharing of God's Word and the gathering of God's children on Christmas Eve. Little did I know that in my first Christmas season as an ordained pastor I would come to understand the message of God's love in a whole new way.

It was around midnight on December 23rd when my fire pager went off. (In addition to my work as one of the pastors of Trinity Lutheran Church in Moorhead, Minnesota, I served as chaplain to the town's Fire and Police Departments as well as the Police Department of nearby Fargo, North Dakota.) I listened as the dispatcher's all-call-back call came in and as the voices of my firefighters, who were already at the scene of the fire, began to come through. Several units of an apartment complex were on fire and the situation was serious. I dressed quickly for the 11-below temperatures (not including the Great Plain's wind chill) and headed out to the scene. Upon arriving I recognized the complex as one owned and run by one of Trinity's church families.

A call was sent out from the Moorhead firefighters' command center for backup from the Fargo Fire Department. Flames were working their way between the floors and there was fear for the safety of the firefighters, as a floor could give way. A lateral vent was put in to draw the fire up and out. I watched as the firefighters moved together in a way born out of trust, friendship, and years of teamwork. They would enter the building drawing fire hoses, spraying water into flames only to watch it quickly turn to layers of ice. As

they walked out of the building, I was reminded of the Tin Man in the Wizard of Oz. These once dry and limber firefighters were now frozen. Their arms, legs, and faces were covered with ice, and each robotic step they took seemed to require great effort.

I spent time with these firefighters as they emerged from the building, listening to their stories of the flames, encouraging this tired and hardworking crew, and praying for their safety and the safety of the now-displaced residents of the burning building.

I also located my parishioners and spoke with them about the displaced residents. Thankfully, most of them were out of town and the few that were home were being moved to a nearby hotel. I prayed with my parishioners and offered my support for their tenants, to whom I would later offer ministry. This was a tragic time for the owners of the complex. Being faithful Christians in the congregation and community, their hearts went out to their tenants. They felt deep sadness for them on this normally joyful morning. There was particular sadness for one family, who had a five-year-old boy. His presents and the family Christmas tree were lost in the fire. The child was devastated.

After moving among the firefighters, residents, and parishioners, I also spent some time with the police officers who were on the scene. In their warm, heated cruisers we shared the sadness of the situation and discussed the true meaning of Christmas and the joy and love of the season. The little boy's sadness tugged at our heartstrings, so at three o'clock in the morning two of the police officers took it upon themselves to head to the local 24-hour Wal-Mart. They returned with presents to replace the ones destroyed by the fire so that

this child would wake up with gifts on Christmas morning.

In the morning, after the fire was put out, I went home to get a few hours of sleep before returning to my parish to begin our rigorous Christmas Eve worship schedule. This year Christmas Eve had a different feel. I had just spent a night watching amazing individuals reveal God's love by working through the night and into the morning light, giving their time, strength, energy, money, and hearts to save lives, homes, and animals, and restoring some semblance of the blessing and joy of Christmas to a little boy. I had watched my three parishes (Trinity, fire, and police) merge together—God's children united in sadness and tragedy, stepping through the ashes to create beauty.

The Christmas message was different for me that night. I had just lived a modern-day version of the meaning of Christmas—the gift of God's love. That year I received a gift of understanding. I will never again experience a Christmas Eve where I am not aware of the tragedy and sadness that life can bring without also being aware of the amazing presence of grace and love in the world. It was a truly sacred thing to watch God's incarnate love lived out on this holy day.

**Rev. Heidi Schwerdtfeger** served her first two years in ministry as part of the Lilly Endowment-sponsored Transition into Ministry program at Trinity Lutheran Church in Moorhead, Minnesota. As a pastor, she had the opportunity to share her gifts not only at Trinity Lutheran Church but also as chaplain to the Moorhead, Minnesota Fire and Police Departments and the Fargo, North Dakota Police Department.

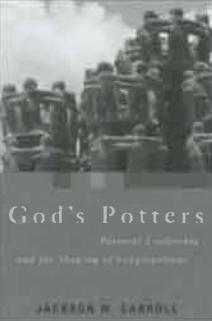


This Incomplete One



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of a YOUNG PERSON

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Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations

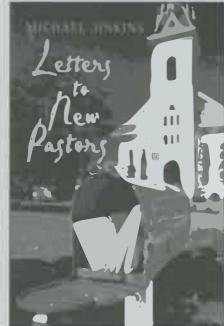
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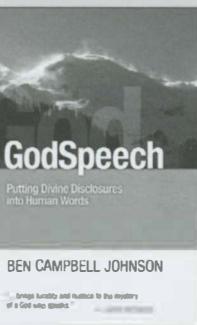
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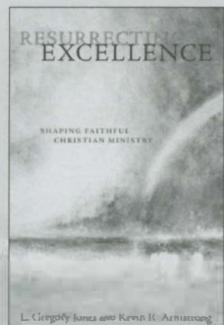


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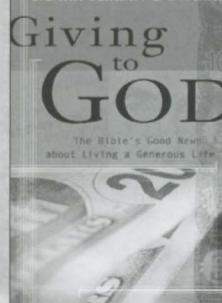
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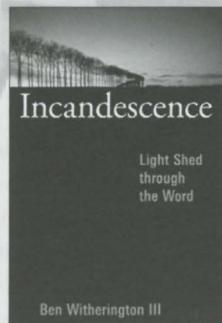
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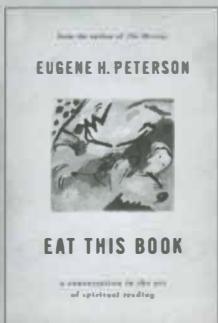
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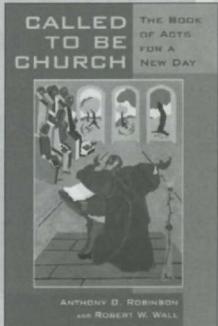


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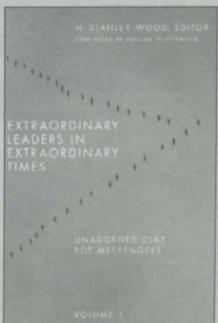


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# Dimensions of Pastoral Authority

## What It Means to Become a Congregation's Pastor

CHRISTINA BRAUDAWAY-BAUMAN

**A**fter intense years of study and sacrifice, he turned in his last seminary papers. The master of divinity diploma is framed, ready for hanging. Behind him also are the yearly meetings with the denominational committee whose interrogations earnestly and prayerfully sought to discern his fitness for ordained ministry. After all the affirmative votes were counted, a worship service was held in which he made promises so large they could only truthfully be answered, "I will, with the help of God." Hands heavy with hope were laid upon his head and a stole was placed around his shoulders. Now called to serve his first congregation, his mail begins to arrive with the title "Rev" on the address label. The word "pastor" is printed beside his name on the church's signboard outside on the street corner and in the Sunday morning bulletin. He climbs the worn steps to the pulpit on his first Sunday and breathes a sigh of relief, believing he has, finally, fully arrived. In his first small attempt to begin to make a mark on this congregation's life, he had replaced the ink sketch of the church's building on

the front cover of the worship bulletin with a graphic that illustrated his sermon topic. Immediately following the service, as he shakes hands with the members of his new church, more than one asks with concern what other changes he plans to make. Deflated and baffled, the new pastor wonders what, if anything, he has done wrong, and what this might mean for his future in ministry with this congregation.

This illustration is not an isolated incident. My experience in the past three years working with nearly 80 new clergy—both as the coordinator of a pastoral residency program at the Wellesley Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, and as the associate for new clergy development for the Massachusetts Conference, UCC—has revealed that nearly all new pastors have some more or less dramatic version of this story to tell from their first encounters with their congregations. Only recently, however, as first-call pastors have come together in small groups designed for their reflection and support, have they begun to recognize this experience as common and to see in it an opportunity to gain a clearer understanding of what it means to become a congregation's pastor. The conversation often settles on exploring the meaning of "pastoral authority." We have come to see that pastoral authority is not just one thing. It has several dimensions, which I have come to name as granted, earned, claimed, borrowed, and shared.

## Pastoral Authority as Granted

There are some denominations, and certainly there are congregations, in which the authority of the pastor is more naturally assumed—where, for example, the congregation grants a pastor permission to make changes or decisions on his or her own. The truth, which remains largely unspoken, however, in seminary classrooms, in the process toward ordination, and by local church search committees (even by those who claim they are looking for strong pastoral leadership), is that in most places very little

authority is simply granted to pastors new to a congregation.

There may be many reasons why a congregation would feel hesitant to immediately grant such authority. Much has been written already about how the status of the church has shifted in our current culture. The church, after all, does not hold the same honored place in civic life that it did even a generation ago. It follows that the pastor does not either. Though the church building may still sit on the center of the town green, the church and its pastor now rarely reside at the center of influence in a community's life.

I am convinced that gender, age, and a congregation's history also play a role. Although the number of ordained women has increased exponentially in recent years, it is still true, though thankfully not everywhere, that congregations are often slower to grant female pastors authority. Young pastors are also often granted less authority than second-career clergy, though their number of years in ministry may be similar. Congregations who have had a healthy relationship with a previous pastor may be willing to grant authority more easily. Churches that have suffered a breach of trust in relation to a former pastor will naturally grant a new pastor less authority.

One of the most important factors in how much authority a congregation grants is theological. One of the central tenets of the faith and polity in churches of the Reformed tradition is the "priesthood of all believers." Our fundamental commitment to this Protestant doctrine makes us wary of an understanding of ordination that marks a distinction in status or substance, elevating someone above others. Each congregation is a priesthood of believers, which has a life that is more than a mere collection of individuals. It has a history of defining moments, traditions it holds as sacred, aspirations it yearns to achieve, practices that reach to the core of its identity, and a faith that may be expressed in its own peculiar way. "The priesthood of all believers" does not mean that the congregation will

not recognize the calling and priesthood of the pastor, but the role of the pastor needs to be defined in relation to the particularity of the congregation he or she has been called to serve. Congregational consultant and author Roy Oswald has repeatedly advised any pastor new to a congregation to begin by becoming a historian of a congregation's life and to take time to discover its norms and values before jumping in to making changes.<sup>1</sup> In response to the concern raised when he changed the bulletin cover on his first Sunday, John Hamilton, the new pastor of First Congregational Church, UCC in Norwood, Massachusetts, did two things. He immersed himself in reading the archives of his new church, and reflected back to the congregation in sermons and meetings what he was learning. He also established the practice of inviting church members one by one to have coffee with him at a local café. Following a predecessor who had served this church for more than 30 years, John understood how important it was for him to get to know as fully as possible the congregation who had called him.

By contrast, however, many new clergy are so eager to use and prove their gifts that it is often only after they have made missteps in leadership—and perhaps even alienated their first congregation—that they realize their actions could be perceived as less than respectful. When a new pastor revamped the church school after hearing dissatisfaction with the former curriculum but without discovering what parents and children had appreciated about the old way of doing things, she later recognized that it was difficult for members who had poured their energies into the former program not to feel criticized by the dramatic change. This was true even though it was a successful shift by any other account. When another new pastor began his ministry by rearranging the parts of the worship service into an order his seminary had taught was more theologically sound (without first engaging the congregation in conversation), committed members of

# The pastor's role

is continually to bring God into the room, to bring the resources of the Christian faith to bear on the congregation's life, and to help the congregation listen for God's guidance.

the church no longer felt that worship was in their voice. For them, it was no longer "liturgy," the work of the people, and some long-time members began to leave.

## Pastoral Authority as Earned

Another word for pastoral authority is trust. Very little of a congregation's trust is simply granted. Mostly it is earned. As a pastor consistently—day to day, Sunday to Sunday—leads worship faithfully, offers care compassionately, affirms the gifts of others, equips members for ministry, and assists the congregation in making wise and faithful decisions, she earns their confidence. Pastoral authority that is granted focuses on the pastoral office; pastoral authority that is earned has more to do with one's character, with the congregation's observations of the pastor's behavior, and with relationships—not only the pastor's relationships with individuals but also his or her relationship with the congregation as a whole.

It takes time to build trust, lots of time. Even after many years of serving the same church, this trust, which is essential for a congregation and pastor to accomplish anything together, can rarely be merely assumed. The work of building rapport and nurturing relationships, of considering who else needs to be involved in the conversation and in making decisions goes on continuously. Attentive pastors quickly learn that patience is an important pastoral virtue.

So is love. When a congregation knows that their pastor loves and respects them, trust grows. After serving for a year as a pastoral resident at the Wellesley Congregational Church, Nicole Lamarche remarked that one of

the things she knows now that she didn't know when she started ministry is that "first and foremost my job is to love the congregation that has been given to my care. All of the other pieces of ministry are almost meaningless without this. Certainly my call to be prophetic will fall on deaf ears without the love."

The pervasiveness of conflict in church life comes as a surprise to many new clergy. Over time, wise pastors come to see conflict not only as inevitable but also as a potentially creative dynamic. Members of the congregation watch how a pastor interacts with viewpoints different from her own and how she copes with emotionally charged situations. Whether she reacts defensively in anger or calmly and thoughtfully can mean the

the congregation, even those who are the hardest to love, is an important part of pastoral identity. It is also a powerful Christian witness.

## Pastoral Authority as Claimed

Recognizing the difference between a decision that a pastor has the authority to make and one that the congregation needs to consider is a skill that comes with experience, sometimes after many trials and errors. Often it depends on the style and practice of a particular congregation. There are times, however, when a pastor needs to step in and claim the authority of the office to which she has been called.

When a premarital couple becomes mired in the details of creating a show as a bride and groom, it is the pastor's role to step in and recover the wedding as a worship service, an expression of covenant commitment and God's own faithfulness to us. When a bereaved family becomes overwhelmed by trying to incorporate into a service all the people who have something to say about their lost loved one,

## Pastors hold the safety and well-being of the church and its members and are called to make themselves into safe harbors, worthy of the confidence others place in them.

difference between resolving a conflict and causing it to escalate. When arguments erupt, it is incumbent on the pastor to be one of the people in the room exhibiting the least anxiety. Staying centered and connected even when tempers flare contributes enormously to helping gather the trust of a congregation.

Emotional maturity is an essential pastoral quality, not only for engaging in conflict but also in every interaction a pastor has with his congregation. Every pastor loses some battles. Losing them with grace sets a tone for the whole congregation. Loving every member of

it is the pastor's role to claim the funeral as first and foremost an assurance of the promises of God. When a congregation is lost in conflict, with members focused on trying to convert one another to their own points of view, it is the pastor's role to guide the church into a process in which members can instead discern God's point of view together.

Sometimes claiming such authority calls for courage. For months, one congregation wrestled mightily over whether or not to become open and affirming of gay and lesbian people. Members who normally got along rela-

tively well were locked in heated debate and became very upset with one another. Insults were exchanged and people lost their ability to listen to one another. In all this time, the church's pastor never told the congregation where his own faith called him to stand. He was concerned that if he did so it would sway the congregation one way or another, and some would criticize him. The problem is that they were already divided and there was no one who was providing direction. Although the pastor was earnestly trying to be respectful by serving as a disinterested peacemaker, I believe he neglected to claim the authority that was his call to claim and that his church needed him to claim. The congregation flailed around in the dark, while the person holding the flashlight—the person charged with the responsibility to help them interpret the Gospel and to listen prayerfully for the leading of the Holy Spirit—neglected to turn the flashlight on.

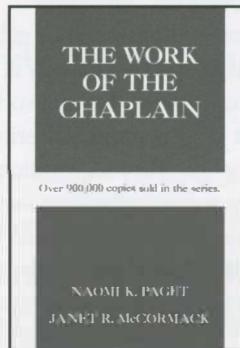
Congregations do rely on their pastors to set a loving tone, to discern the right questions, to offer a thoughtful perspective, and to shed a glimmer of light in the midst of confusion. This does not mean that the pastor always knows what to say or do. But every pastor needs to claim from within him- or herself the authority that comes from a clear sense of calling to ministry in and on behalf of the church. While it is a call to lead, it is not a call to have all the answers. Sometimes stating loud enough for everyone to hear that the way is not yet clear is a deeply faithful answer. There are occasions when saying "we need to pray about this" is even more so. And when a pastor thinks she might have the answer, or is sure she does, this is the time when she needs to be especially attentive to which kind of authority she is speaking from and how she is being heard. Is she merely offering her own opinion? Is she amplifying voices in the congregation who may not otherwise be heard? Is she allowing room for other perspectives that may be just as faithful as her own? Most importantly, the pastor's role is continually to bring God into the room, to bring the resources of the Christian faith to bear on the congregation's life, and to help the congregation listen for God's guidance.

## Pastoral Authority as Borrowed

The greatest source of pastoral authority, then, is not granted by a particular congregation or earned by personal integrity. It is borrowed from the Christian tradition, from the church, from the Gospel, and from Jesus himself. In fact, it is safe to say that all

other forms of pastoral authority are derivations of this one.

John Thomas, the general minister and president of the United Church of Christ, puts it this way: Understanding that ordination "is the authority conferred by the church to represent the ministry of the whole people of God... reminds us that ministry in

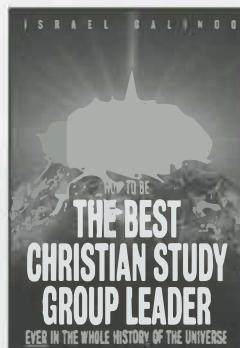


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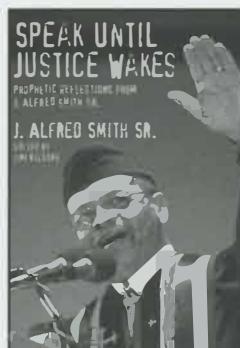
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general and ordination in particular belong to the church and not to the individual.” Pastoral authority is a “conferred authority that is, in a sense, ‘on loan’ to the individual.”<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the power of borrowed authority is exhibited most clearly when there is a death in the congregation or the community. At such a time people look to the pastor to be the one to offer some good news. It is not the preacher’s eloquent words, however, that mean the most to them. It is the Word that comes from God, the Word that carries God’s presence and comfort in grief, and God’s promise of eternal life. By this borrowed or representative authority, pastors are invited to be the ones to bless others at funerals and bedsides, at baptisms and weddings, and to stand in the pulpit Sunday after Sunday serving as a point of intersection between our human longing for God and God’s desires for our lives.

While carrying such authority is itself a blessing and an awesome responsibility, it can also sometimes feel like a burden. As one new pastor realized after one of her first encounters with a member of her congregation, “clergy can be a lightning rod for a lot of things.” The day after she had invited her congregation in prayer to come before God “holding the *New York Times* in one hand and the Bible in the other, fully aware of all the troubles and burdens in the world,” she received an irate e-mail message from an angry parishioner who took her *Times* reference to be an endorsement of the newspaper’s editorial viewpoint. In reflecting on this experience with her peer support group of other new clergy, she came to see that “people project onto you all kinds of things simply because you are a pastor.” All pastors receive many kinds of criticism and praise. Only some of either actually have anything to do with them.

Most pastors would do well to remember that their ordination is not their possession. It is an authority that the church has loaned to them as a trust to be held with reverence and great humility. Because pastors are permitted, by virtue of their role, very privileged access into people’s lives, their intentions must be honorable, their speech and

actions respectful. Pastors hold the safety and well-being of the church and its members and are called to make themselves into safe harbors, worthy of the confidence others place in them.

## Pastoral Authority as Shared

The final form of pastoral authority brings us back to where we began, with the priesthood of all believers. No matter how remarkable or well-rounded the gifts of a particular pastor may be, ministry is always a communal project. It is the work of the people, not just the pastor. Offering care to the members of the congregation, for example, is not simply something the pastor is called to do. Rather, the role of the pastor is to care for the whole congregation in ways that enable all the members to recognize that caring for one another is their common calling. Similarly, it is not the pastor’s work to set the agenda or to determine the vision for the congregation. Instead, it is the pastor’s role to work with the congregation to create an environment

in which members can together discern God’s vision for them and take the risks to which God is calling them. Our apprehension of God’s work in the world is made richer when there is room for the experiences of all the gathered to find expression. God’s realm comes closer when the gifts of all the faithful are acknowledged and nurtured and used.

Ultimately, ministry is a gift that God shares with us. The church is given its calling and its tasks by God, who boldly places faith in us. Ministry is our response to God’s extravagant grace. Excellent ministry, then, is less about anything we ourselves might accomplish on our own and more about what God is able to do through us as pastors and congregations together.

## NOTES

1. Roy Oswald, James Heath, and Ann Heath, *Beginning Ministry Together: The Alban Handbook for Clergy Transitions* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2003), p. 64.
2. John H. Thomas, “Something More: Authorized to Represent,” presented at the Ministries Issues Convocation, March 7, 2002.

## Questions for Reflection

1. How do the different dimensions of authority operate in your congregation? For instance, how can you, as a pastor, know when you have “earned” authority from the congregation? Or, in what ways do you “share” authority in your setting?
2. As members of a congregation, how do you honor and validate the authority that your local church and the wider church have conferred on your pastor, and, at the same time, claim your mutual role as a priesthood of all believers?
3. If you are members of a congregation that has called a pastor who is new to ordained ministry, how might your church’s role be different than if you called a seasoned pastor? What is your role in helping to establish a relationship of trust and of being formed together in ministry? If you are a pastor new to a congregation, what can you do to build the trust of a congregation?
4. What implications does understanding ordination as an authority which is “on loan” to you as pastor have on your relationship with your local congregation? With the wider church?
5. The author identified several virtues that are essential to effective pastoral ministry: love, patience, emotional maturity, courage, and humility. Are there others you would name as essential for yourself in your context of ministry? As a pastor? As a lay leader within a congregation?

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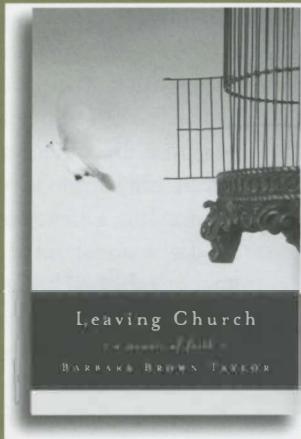
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## Leaving Church

A MEMOIR OF FAITH

Barbara Brown Taylor,  
San Francisco:  
Harper San Francisco, 2006



### review book

To review Barbara Brown Taylor's *Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith* is a little like being asked to critique a poet's spiritual journal. In exquisite prose, this book breathes as a kind of lyrical confession, an intimate tracing of the inner life that leaves the reader humbled from beginning to end. In many ways it is a profoundly simple book: a clerical spiritual memoir. But Taylor shies away from being overly autobiographical in the traditional sense of that term. Rather, she refers to herself as a "witness" to God's work of vocation in her soul, and her book testifies to the "central revelation" of her life: "that the call to serve God is first and last the call to be fully human."

Taylor, an Episcopal priest, noted preacher, and prolific author, begins by unpacking this testimony in a conventional way: her call to ministry as a young woman, her experience of attending seminary, a specific call to ordained priesthood in the Episcopal Church, and eventually finding her way to serve her dreamed-for

church, Grace-Calvary, in the north Georgia mountains. She relates stories of a decade of her life in that congregation, the funny-sad sort of stories that all pastors know, of unexpected graces and everyday holiness.

If Taylor had only written a *clerical* memoir, the Grace-Calvary section of the book, entitled "Finding," would stand as a mini-classic in the genre—she is a successful woman priest (no mean feat in itself) at a delightfully quirky country church. At this point, however, the narrative veers in a surprising direction. From outward appearances all is well at Grace-Calvary, but Taylor does not dwell on that success as do many clergy autobiographies. Rather, she relates the shortfall between the outer life of ministry and the inner life of her own soul. The genre shifts from traditional clergy memoir to something far deeper and much more rewarding: a clerical *spiritual* memoir—the recounting of God's work in the minister's soul, a work of, as Taylor puts it, the "loss" that Jesus calls us to in order to find life. As the years at Grace-Calvary tick by, Taylor begins to lose the glittering image of her own priesthood.

*Behind my heroic image of myself I saw my tiresome perfectionism, my resentment of those who did not try as hard as I did, and my huge appetite for approval.... Above all, I saw that my desire to draw as near to God as I could had backfired on me somehow. Drawn to care for hurt things, I had ended up with compassion fatigue. Drawn to a life of servanthood, I had ended up a service provider. Drawn to marry the Divine Presence, I had ended up estranged.... I wondered if I had devoted myself to an illusion.*

And then, this startling confession: "It is difficult to say what went wrong between the Church and me."

Readers expecting an easy resolution to this spiritual struggle will be disappointed. The book's next section, "Losing," relates Taylor's life beyond the

church as a journey of joining humanity, a journey that for her is only beginning. Taylor resigns her congregation and takes a teaching position in the religious studies department of a local college. She ruminates on not attending church on Sunday morning, or attending a congregation of which she is not pastor. She reflects on losing "power" in a church, losing Christian language, losing a title (going from "Reverend Taylor" to plain "Mrs. Taylor"), losing "my congregational base, my liturgical language, my exquisite vestments, my clerical distinction." Although she felt compelled to choose all this loss, this new path reverberates with spiritual pain. As she puts away the accouterments of ordination, however, Taylor finds that her essential vocation remains the same. "There was no mastering of divinity," she concludes. "My vocation was to love God and my neighbor, and that was something I could do anywhere, with anyone, with or without a collar. My priesthood was not what I did but who I was."

Barbara Brown Taylor would be the first to admit that the title of her book, *Leaving Church*, is a wee bit deceptive. Yes, she left a congregation, a building, a position, a denominational structure, and a particular career path. Yet, in the end, she finds the church-in-the-world, the human community called by God's love to enact mercy and justice everywhere and through all of life. The church exists for the sake of humanity, not human beings for the sake of institutional church (a sad confusion that church people seem to accept). Her priesthood has not ended. Rather, the focus of priesthood has shifted away from institutional church toward God's human "church." And the practice of ministry now exercises itself in teaching, relating to creation, observing Sabbath, looking for God in all people, and in the imitation of Christ.

There is no mistaking the larger implications of Taylor's narrative. Whether or not she intended it to be the case, as a priest of the church she becomes a sort of metaphor for the whole of the institutional church. It is

not only her priesthood at stake; the ministry of the Christian church as a whole cries out for a renewed sense of vocation—its love, its authenticity, its practices, its place in God's economy. Thus, the final shift in the book subtly takes us from the personal and particular of one priest in rural Georgia to universal and human questions of vocation, mission, spirituality, and justice. Where is the Divine Presence to be found? How can that Presence reshape my life and the life of the world? What does this all mean? How can we "keep faith" in this world? Taylor has no answers. "We may be in for a long wait before the Holy Spirit shows us a new way to be the church together," she yearns. We live in a "meantime." And it is in that meantime that ministry is practiced.

Because I am not ordained I have no idea how members of the clergy might react to Taylor's book. A few, I suspect, will be angry with her. But many more, I

I have no idea how members of the clergy might react to Taylor's book. A few, I suspect, will be angry with her. But many more, I equally suspect, will be relieved to read her honest account of the spirituality of clerical life.

equally suspect, will be relieved to read her honest account of the spirituality of clerical life. Some will puzzle over her choice; some will rejoice in her conclusions. The book will also lead some to believe that she has "rejected" the faith and to worry that she is no longer a Christian. Other readers (this one included) will recognize that Taylor has gently and lovingly outlined the vision of an emerging kind of Christian faith, one that is hospitable and theologically deep, mystical and activist, holistic and holy. As a "lay" Episcopalian, I rejoice that a "priest" (to use distinctions that I do not

even believe work anymore) in my own church is walking on and writing about this path, the barely named reality, a new-yet-old Christian way of life that is birthing in our midst.

And, beyond that, I do know that a review of *Leaving Church* is being published in a

magazine whose theme is, oddly enough, "transition into ministry." Although it may well be said by other reviewers, the point cannot be made too many times: *Leaving Church* should be required reading for anyone thinking of entering seminary (and certainly of everyone ready to graduate!). If all the clergy truly understood the spirituality and theology Taylor so elegantly describes through her own experience, the institutions of Christianity might find renewed life and new passion for God's dream for humankind. And, for all who take and read this book, we do well to remember that we are all priests of and to humanity. As Taylor reminds us, there is truly no distinction between those of us who wear collars to work and those who do not.

**DIANA BUTLER BASS** is the author of *Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church is Transforming the Faith* (Harper, 2006) and *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church* (Alban Institute, 2004). She lives in Alexandria, Virginia.

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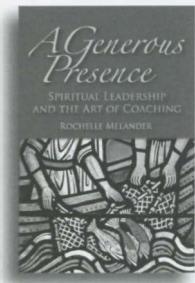
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# New & Noteworthy



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ROCHELLE MELANDER

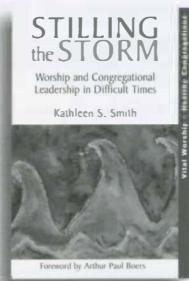
AL315; \$22.00

*A Generous Presence* is a collection of story-driven essays about the philosophy, tools, and work of coaching that is designed to support all spiritual leaders in deepening and enriching their personal and professional relationships. By practicing the coaching tools Rochelle Melander offers, spiritual leaders will be better equipped to guide those they work with toward accepting the past, creating a life vision, and setting goals for the future. Additionally, the tools provided in this book will help leaders understand themselves and enable them to strengthen their definitions for healthy living, raise their awareness about their own life and relationship skills, and improve their skills in relating to individuals and groups.

## Stilling the Storm: Worship and Congregational Leadership in Difficult Times

KATHLEEN S. SMITH

AL317; \$18.00

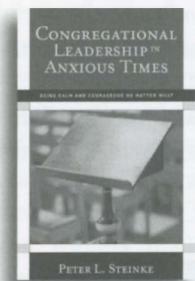


Teacher and consultant Kathleen Smith looks at three main types of difficulty congregations can face—times of crisis, transition, and conflict—and considers their implications for worship. Drawing on systems theory, she explains the congregational dynamics that accompany such times and reviews basic principles of worship and the way the unique moments and regular habits of worship shape the congregation. For each type of difficulty, Smith suggests important themes for congregations and their worship planners and explores the wide range of liturgical resources and how those resources can best be shaped to fit the specific difficulty each congregation is experiencing.

## Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What

PETER L. STEINKE

AL318; \$18.00

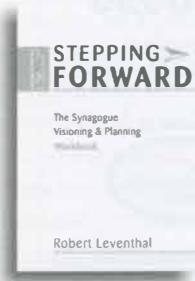


This long-awaited volume by internationally respected consultant and Alban best-selling author Peter Steinke will both enlighten and embolden leaders. With anxiety intensifying and penetrating more and more areas of our lives, leaders cannot be as anxious as the people they serve. Because they have more influence than any other group over the path a congregation takes, leaders must have a command of their own anxiety and must not let other people's anxiety contaminate them. Steinke inspires courage in leaders to maintain the course, unearth secrets, resist sabotage, withstand fury, and overcome timidity or doubts. His insights, illustrations, and provocations will carry leaders through rough times, provide clarity during confusing times, and uplift them in joyous times.

## Stepping Forward: The Synagogue Visioning and Planning Workbook

ROBERT LEVENTHAL

AL319; \$25.00



Drawing on his extensive and fruitful consulting work in diverse synagogue contexts, Robert Leventhal presents his Synagogue Visioning and Planning (SVP) model to a wider audience for the first time. He invites not just rabbis and council presidents but the many "reluctant leaders" who have much to offer to "jump in" to SVP. This innovative model combines organizational leadership principles and core Jewish values to recruit, focus, and energize stakeholders in the congregation and the community so that work can be shared and productive. *Stepping Forward* can be used as a manual on its own because in plain language it lays out the SVP model and supports it with case studies, workshops, and a tool kit. It will also serve as a decision making tool for leaders who want to consider bringing Leventhal in to guide them through the SVP process, with hope and heart.

## RESOURCES ON TRANSITION INTO MINISTRY FROM THE CONGREGATIONAL RESOURCE GUIDE



Clayton, Paul C. **Letters to Lee** (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1999). Constructed as a series of advisory letters to a novice in his first congregation, *Letters to Lee* addresses many practical concerns encountered during the early months of professional ministry. Themes such as empowering the laity, long-term congregational reform, and growing with others as whole persons are characteristic of this concise volume.

Dawn, Marva J. **The Sense of the Call: A Sabbath Way of Life for Those Who Serve God, the Church, and the World** (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006). Marva Dawn believes that a Sabbath way of life is essential for everyone, but especially for those with a vocational call to the ministry. Such a way of life involves resting, ceasing, feasting, and embracing. Dawn draws on scripture, spiritual disciplines, and the voices of others to fully picture the Sabbath way.

Farris, Lawrence W. **Ten Commandments for Pastors New to a Congregation** (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006). In this small but thorough book, Lawrence Farris outlines 10 guidelines for starting off well as a pastor new to a congregation. Although it is written primarily for pastors entering a new church, this text offers useful advice for all pastors in the areas of professional focus, role identity, pastoral care, and self-care.

Geoffrion, Timothy C. **The Spirit-Led Leader: Nine Leadership Practices and Soul Principles** (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2005). This book addresses spiritual life and leadership for those who care as deeply about who they are and how they lead as they care about what they accomplish. Timothy Geoffrion creates a vision for spiritual leadership as partly an art, partly a result of careful planning, and always a working of the grace of God.

Jinkins, Michael. **Letters to New Pastors** (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006). In the spirit of C.S. Lewis's *Letters to Malcolm*, this book provides guidance and insight to pastors entering

ministry from various paths. Both first-career and second-career pastors are addressed. Throughout the book, Jinkins maintains that "only the call of God sustains us in ministry when the going gets roughest."

Lischer, Richard. **Open Secrets: A Spiritual Journey through a Country Church** (New York: Doubleday, 2001). Richard Lischer paints a touching and grace-filled portrait of his beginning years in parish ministry. Fresh out of divinity school, Lischer finds himself assigned to a small congregation in an economically depressed Illinois farming community. He soon realizes how ill-prepared he is. But through his experiences he learns about himself, his congregation, and God.

Oswald, Roy. **Crossing the Boundary between Seminary and Parish** (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1980, 2002). During the first three years of their first parish, pastors frequently discover culture shock, finding themselves confronted with issues and concerns for which they were not prepared by their seminary education. This report will help new pastors realize they are not alone. It also offers guidance for pastors and denominational executives. Available for download from [www.alban.org](http://www.alban.org).

Sisk, Ronald. **The Competent Pastor: Skills and Self-Knowledge for Serving Well** (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2005). What does it mean to say that a pastor is competent? How does a competent pastor function? This book will help pastors, seminarians, and others answer these questions. Competence, defined as "the ability to do what needs to be done," requires ministers to understand themselves and others and to keep a realistic perspective on their lives.

Taylor, Barbara Brown. **The Preaching Life** (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1993). Renowned preacher Barbara Brown Taylor explores preaching as a threefold arrangement: the congregation authorizes the preacher to speak God's Word, the preacher listens for God's Word, and God conveys that Word through the preacher to the congregation. New preachers particularly will appreciate the 13 exemplary sermons Taylor includes in the second part of the book.

# The Shortage of Capable Clergy: Root Causes

**Q:** We keep hearing that there is a growing shortage of capable clergy. Why are so many clergy burning out, dropping out, retiring as soon as possible, or shifting to doing interim ministry? And why aren't more bright young people coming into the ministry?

**A:** Clergy are burning out and/or dropping out for several reasons. Over the years, most mainline Protestant traditions have drifted into a model of congregational life that it is overly clergy centered and clergy dependent to the point where, for some people, the success of the congregation depends entirely on the clergy. That is a heavy burden for clergy to carry.

In addition, in our consumer-minded society, many people believe it is the task of the pastor is to keep everybody happy all of the time. Rabbi Edwin Friedman said the typical Protestant congregation consists of an overfunctioning pastor surrounded by infantilized laity. This is a perfect recipe for burnout. Small wonder that young adults are not attracted to such a ministry.

Actually, there are many young adults going into the ministry, but many of them are not coming into the traditional mainline denominations. Instead, many young clergy are starting independent "emerging congregations" to serve the 20 to 35 age group. They believe that being connected to existing traditional denominations would inhibit and perhaps even undermine their ministry because the traditional denominations reflect a modern worldview whereas the emerging generation reflects a postmodern worldview. *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Post Modern Cultures* by Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger (Baker Books, 2005) describes some 50 "emerging congregations" in the United States and Great Britain that have been started within the past 20

years, mostly by pastors under 35 for young adults under 35.

In most of the mainline congregations I work with, I find that the least represented generation is the 20 to 35 age group. Older members who are in charge have difficulty understanding and/or communicating with the emerging generation. They want them to come to church, but they want them to accept things as they are and not try to change them. The younger generation has different priorities and thus concludes that there is no room for them in established congregations.

The Christian church is always potentially one generation away from extinction and for many congregations this is a real possibility. Postmodern young adults are more concerned about relationships than ideology and they care more about authenticity than success. They don't see much resemblance between life in our established congregations and the actual teachings of Jesus.

Another dimension of the problem relates to the process used to prepare and credential candidates for the ministry. Seminaries are engulfed in the academic model and they do a fine job of teaching Bible, theology, church history, polity, and ethics. They don't, however, teach much about *leadership!* Many seminary faculty are academics who have never had to exercise leadership. Years ago, Daniel Goleman did research documenting that IQ, which is a fixed figure, emotional intelligence is something that can be developed. Unfortunately, our seminaries are not geared to help candidates for the ministry develop their emotional intelligence. The result is that we produce clergy who are often very smart and can preach good sermons but lack the competencies (emotional intelligence) to be fruitful leaders.

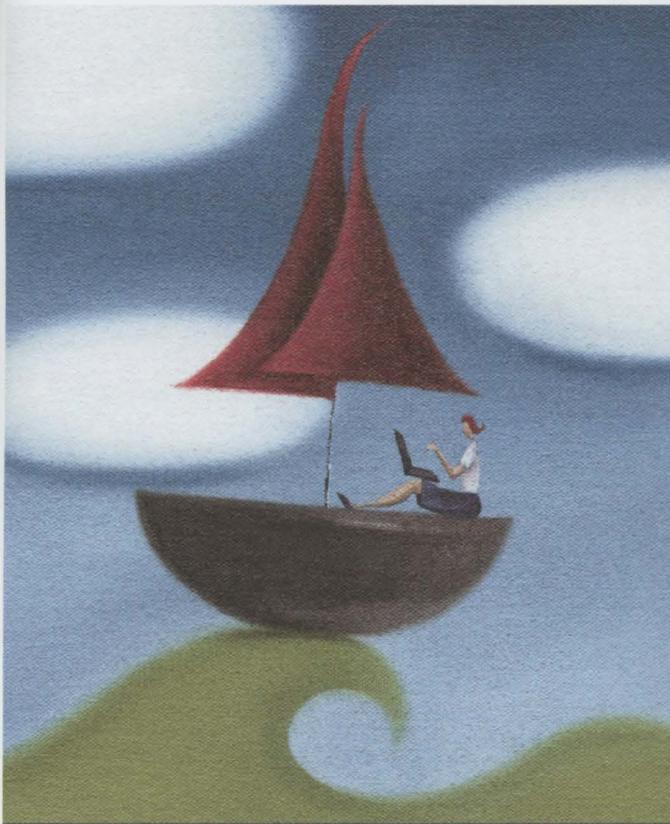
To make matters worse, we have inherited a hierarchical model of pastoral leadership that tends to create dependency. Traditional leaders add followers to a congregation. Empowering leaders multiply leaders in a congregation. True leadership is a catalytic rather than a controlling function, but many clergy have not learned the art of empowerment. Too often our congregations are in the membership business instead of being in the disciple making business.

Is it too late to change? Not necessarily! How willing are we to be changed? If we are unwilling to be changed our congregations will remain the same. But we need not worry. If our congregations cannot reach and serve the emerging generation, God will raise up emerging congregations that will. The central concern is not to preserve our institutions but to seek the Kingdom.



**Edward A. White** is a senior consultant and seminar leader for the Alban Institute, with expertise in leadership development, strategic planning, and conflict management.

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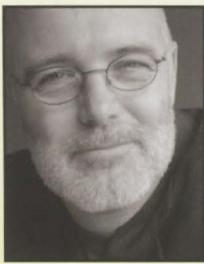
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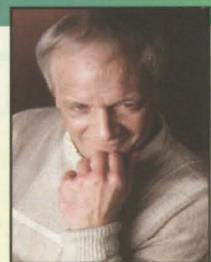


**Brian McLaren**  
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in higher education, he left academics to become founding pastor of Cedar Ridge Community Church in the Baltimore-Washington D.C. area. He is the author of *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix* and *A Generous Orthodoxy*.

### **Ken Medema**

will lead worship at the 2006 Leadership Conference. He is a musician, composer, and performer. He describes himself as a storyteller, teacher, and facilitator. Ken was a music therapist when he began to write and perform his own songs. He began his career as a full-time performer and recording artist in 1973.



### **Diana Butler Bass**

is one of the leading observers of American spirituality and religion and a popular writer and speaker on religious issues and concerns. She is best known for groundbreaking work for renewal and change in mainline Protestant churches. Her new book, *Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church Is Transforming the Faith*, is set for release in September 2006.

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Single: \$325 - Double: \$230 - Commuter: \$95



In this seminar, participants will explore how to transform conflict by understanding the importance and power of dialogue. You will learn about the theories of dialogue; the use of story and metaphor; methods and techniques for large- and small-group dialogue and deliberation; and how different types of dialogue methods fit with Speed Leas' levels of conflict.

February 6-8, 2007

## FINISHING STRONG, ENDING WELL

*Faithfully Completing a Ministry Career*

LED BY LARRY PEERS



Marywood Center for Spirituality

Jacksonville, FL

Member Tuition: \$350 - Non-member Tuition: \$400

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The five to seven years prior to retirement can be among the most productive and creative years of ministry. What does it take for this to happen? You will explore what we know about this developmental stage of life and its implications for ministry; patterns of ministry that may need to be re-examined and renegotiated; mapping of "legacy-leaving" issues; role, identity, and personal vision for this time of ministry; naming the personal and spiritual resources needed for finishing strong; and envisioning the "third age" as the next stage of growth and meaning.

January 29-31, 2007

## STEPPING UP

*Staffing and Supervising a Multi-Staff Team*

LED BY SUSAN BEAUMONT



Marywood Center for Spirituality

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Single: \$265 - Double: \$195 - Commuter: \$110

Just when you thought you had mastered the basics of leading a congregational system, a new ministry opportunity presents itself. Suddenly you are supervising the work of a multi-staff team and find yourself facing new demands and expectations. This seminar is designed for the staff leader who has stepped into multi-staff leadership for the first time or the long-tenured pastor who wants to revisit the basics of supervision.

March 5-7, 2007

## LEADING CHANGE IN THE CONGREGATION

LED BY GIL RENDLE



Simpsonwood Conference Center

Norcross, GA

Member Tuition: \$350 - Non-member Tuition: \$400

Single: \$325 - Double: \$230 - Commuter: \$95

Change is an inevitable part of congregational life. Participants in this seminar will learn to understand their role in leading change – through examining the fundamental shifts in change theory; recognizing natural resistance to change and the ways in which congregations structure themselves for stability; practicing techniques in presenting and negotiating issues of change; and developing strategies for leading change while integrating differing viewpoints.

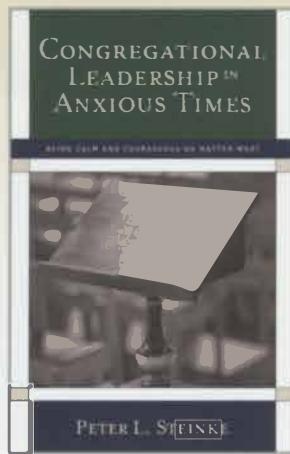
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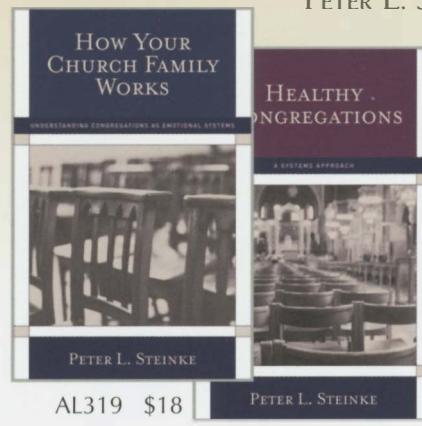
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# Company of New Pastors

## Fostering Excellence among New Presbyterian Pastors

The Company of New Pastors is a vocational formation program designed to foster excellence in new pastors within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) by deepening and sustaining the cultivation of their theological vocation.

The initiative grew out of a commitment by the denomination's Office of Theology and Worship to help pastors be agile, imaginative people of substance in faith and life, explained Sheldon Sorge, director of the program. The hope, he added, was that a pastor's renewed passion and love for God, the church, and the world would affect the entire congregation.

Participants enter the Company of New Pastors program at the midpoint of their seminary experience and continue for four years after seminary graduation. The program has an ongoing nature so that participants can develop relationships that allow deep conversation and engagement.

Since its inception, the program has involved 300 people—250 new pastors and 50 mentors. The program currently includes students at eight Presbyterian seminaries. (Two additional Presbyterian seminaries are ready to join the initiative, and conversations are taking place with several non-Presbyterian seminaries.) Seminary faculty members who are ordained pastors convene their “companies” on a monthly basis to share in prayer and theological study of the Presbyterian ordination vows. All seminarian groups meet together in the fall for a national consultation at the denomination’s national headquarters.

Upon graduation, the participants are reconfigured into regional groups, which are convened and led by pairs of experienced pastors. The curriculum for the four years beyond seminary focuses on the “theological underpinnings of the

Lord’s Day service,” Sorge said. Attention is paid to significant theological works, as well as to preaching and worship leadership. Most participants, according to Sorge, say the program has had a dramatic effect on their preaching and worship leadership.

Another participant explained that “finding space and opportunity to sharpen my own theological understandings and sharpen my own sense of theological vocation is a great blessing—not only for me, but I hope it empowers and enables me to go back to the parish and allow the people there to understand the world around them in terms of the language of faith.”

Between gatherings, participants follow daily disciplines, including scripture reading, prayer, and study of the church’s confessional resources. “The disciplines that I learned inform me daily,” said a former participant. “I think my ministry would be completely different if it were not for these disciplines.”

Initial research on the program, according to Sorge, shows that its participants are staying longer in their first calls. After the first call, new pastors often are left on their own, he said. In order for there to be ongoing discernment and renegotiating of the call, he added, people need to talk—as they are able to do in the program’s “companies.”

“Our program also helps those new pastors who go in starry-eyed and then have problems arise,” Sorge said. “The group provides friends who can help you discern whether it’s a toxic call and staying too long will kill you or whether you need to hang in there, work your way through whatever it is, and not run from it.”

One of the surprising learnings from the program has been the unexpected sense of renewal among the mentors. “We selected people who embodied the graces of fruitful, faithful ministry and have been about it for awhile,” Sorge said. “So we

were stunned to discover that they have found the program to be revolutionary for themselves. They report that it has made a huge difference in their own ministries.”

The program, he noted, also has been significant for the large group of people who have graduated from seminary but are not ready to be called to pastoral ministry—whether because a spouse cannot relocate or the candidate has not passed the ordination exams or completed the ordination requirements. It takes nine months after seminary graduation for half of the people who want a pastoral call with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to receive a call, Sorge said.

“This is a critical period,” he said. “How do you keep the call alive when you feel that you’ve been left on the bus or that you’re viewed as damaged goods? This program has become a significant way of helping people hold to their call. Some of our best pastors have come from this pool of people. This makes our program distinctive since most first-call programs are for people who already have a call. In our polity, the passage from candidacy to first call can be a lonely passage. Our program provides a community to help people work through it.”

Members of the congregations the participants serve have provided strong affirmation of these new pastors, Sorge noted. They report that they perceive the participants to be good or very good pastors and positive representatives of the denomination. They also have described the new pastors as being open to concerns and new ideas, and remarkably able to affirm diverse groups of people.

Sorge said the denomination is working on a funding plan that will enable this program to continue beyond the life of the current Lilly grant.

# Residency in Ministry

## The Power of Pastoral and Congregational Mentoring

**T**he Residency in Ministry program, now concluded, was an initiative of the North Indiana Conference of the United Methodist Church. The program placed new clergy in "mentoring churches" within the conference for a two-year residency.

Charles Johnson, the program's director, said the program design team had decided that the mentoring churches should be large enough to have multiple staff. The senior minister would serve as a mentor for the resident, and a group of lay people from the congregation would form a mentoring group. The conference would provide salary support for the resident, and the congregation would provide housing, office space, continuing education, and benefits.

A new seminary graduate, recruited for the program because of promise, would then be matched with one of the mentoring churches and would serve there as a resident for two years. The resident would be free of a specific portfolio of responsibility so that he or she would have an opportunity to become familiar with the full gamut of pastoral functions.

Johnson met with the residents in a monthly covenant group experience that included Bible study, outside resource people, and spiritual sharing. During these group times, the residents "let their hair down" about their problems and what they were learning, Johnson recalled. As a result, they developed strong relationships.

During the program's six-year life, 10 residents were placed in nine congregations. "We saw it as an experimental program that would help us learn about how new pastors can get a good start for a lifetime of service," Johnson said. "We came to the conclusion that we had done that learning, so we are not going to continue the program."

The learning has included feed-back from participants in the program.

Several of the residents bonded so well with the congregations where they served as residents that they stayed on as associates. Others moved on to new appointments.

One resident who was appointed to a congregation that was planning a building expansion said, "I felt so comfortable in that setting. My mentor and I had worked all of it through, so I had the right skills." Another's appointment was to a conflicted congregation. "The program prepared me for this situation," the resident later reported. "I would have failed otherwise."

The program also helped the conference learn the importance of identifying and affirming congregations that pride themselves on their ability to "train" young pastors, Johnson said. As a result of the program, the conference's district superintendents have been asked to give serious attention to identifying these types of churches.

"Our denominational system of appointments can engender resentment," Johnson explained. "Sometimes congregations become adversarial to their pastors because they don't know how to be adversarial to the conference. When we put brand new people into those situations, they ask themselves what they did wrong and question their ability. If they can get a start in a place that is supportive and mentoring, then they are safe to make the normal mistakes of a new pastor."

The program also resulted in learning about the importance of mentoring for new clergy. Johnson said the conference's Board of Ordained Ministry has a process in place for bringing new persons into ordination. The process, which lasts three to four years, includes a mentoring piece, a covenant group piece, and a writing piece.

"Doing mentoring well will make some people lifelong pastors," Johnson

said. "The mentoring relationship has to be between people who are close geographically—not 200 miles apart. We hope to begin to put a mentoring process in place that's more effective and to work more intentionally with covenant groups. By doing that, we will let young pastors know that we really want them in ministry and want to help hone the innate skills they have for a lifetime of service."

Johnson noted that the program also allowed the conference to do some things outside the box of United Methodist polity. The bishop and cabinet agreed to allow the program's leadership team to identify the candidates for the residency program and then to bring them together with the participating senior pastors and congregational mentoring teams for a day-long discernment process. The bishop and cabinet then approved the assignments recommended by the team out of the discernment process. "It was a tremendous gift to our program to be able to try a cutting-edge approach to staffing," he remarked.

Johnson also recalled that early in the program's development, the developers received questions from other United Methodist conferences. Johnson then learned that other conferences were beginning to call their probationary process for ordination candidates a "residency in ministry."

"They were using the terminology, but not the process," he said. "I hope that we can help redefine the probationary process and change it so that it truly becomes a residency in ministry—not just another name for the same old process."