



minister

A journal of the American Baptist Ministers Council Speaking to the Practice of Ministry
Vol. XXIX, No. 1 - Winter, 2006
Published Periodically at Valley Forge, PA

Home is Where....

By Debbie Kamm



It is the quintessential early January day in up-state New York as I write this: the gray skies are as sullen as a three year old; the wind, bordering on ferocious, sends the latest delivery of snow from on high swirling; the birds linger at the feeder just outside my window, feathers fluffed up to ward off the bite in the razor sharp air.

The holidays have come and gone – the Christmas Eve candlelight service now a shining memory tucked away for those times when darkness seems unceasing, the New Year welcomed in, with hopes and prayers that this year, the peace of which the angels sang might come to pass. And even though the holidays are over, one can still hear folk talking about how marvelous it was to be home – wherever that home might have been.

The very word “home” paints a nostalgic picture of a yearning for a specific place – who doesn’t want to be home and experience all “home” means, especially during the holidays? To be surrounded by those we love and who love us – to feel the innate comfort of knowing where every piece of furniture is – the places in the floor where the boards creak – of being able to walk through the house in total darkness and not trip - the inexplicable sense of being embraced by the familiar... of being home.

And yet for many in ministry, “home” is often not all that permanent. Clergy tend to be a migratory species – sometimes not by choice and frequently out of necessity. We find ourselves but the most current residents in houses with a long history, and there is a certain delightful challenge in creating one’s own sense of identity in what may prove to be but a temporary setting. We hang pictures and plant gardens – but we know we might not be here for long. We recognize that we truly are “just passing through.”

But there are times when one really and truly is a “settled pastor” – when where we live is more than temporary housing – when we find ourselves really and truly at home. This edition of *Minister* includes marvelous stories from our colleagues who have found themselves at home in their own homes, and one story encourages us to be about the work of interior housecleaning. And perhaps most marvelous and mysterious of all – each story bears witness to the ways in which the Holy Spirit continues to be at work in our lives – beckoning us to our hearts’ true home – to the Great Heart of God...

Yes, Advent and Christmas and soon Epiphany will be part of the past - but it is my hope these stories, as varied as our experiences and yet grounded in the commonality of our Call to love and serve, bring you delight regardless of the season. Above all, may you wonder your ways through these days – and may you hear angels singing that sweet, sweet song echoing through the corridors of Eternity - “Peace on earth, good will to all.”

*Debbie Kamm is a second generation American Baptist minister who has served churches in New York State and Vermont. She currently resides in Clifton Springs, New York, and is engaged in the ministry of caring for her father full-time. She is currently serving as Interim Pastor at Reed Corners Federated Church in Canandaigua, NY and is Editor of **Minister**.*

A Clean Sweep

By Cal Lord



I have spent the last few days cleaning out stuff I have accumulated in the office at church. It hasn't been easy. It is amazing how quickly things build up and get out of control. I had stacks on top of stacks on my desk. There were piles of old photographs, magazines, and books I had planned to go through. As I was excavating the area behind my desk, I found a few things I thought had been lost forever. I felt a bit like Indiana Jones when I came up with a picture of five of my friends from high school! That was the rewarding side of my end of the year adventure.

I am not going to talk about the dark side. I didn't know there could be layers of dust marking the different eras of twenty years of ministry. I'm kidding, of course, but when I went through the papers and memorabilia I have collected over the last few years, I was astonished at how much there was. I took several bags of trash out to the curb before I was done. As we approach New Year's Day, I hope to make a fresh start.

As I was sitting in the middle of the floor going through the mess, it struck me our lives often get just as cluttered over time. We let little things build up and never deal with them. We develop habits that take root and begin to control what we do. We inherit attitudes that shape and color what we think and how we interact with others. We fall prey to self destructive tendencies that go unchecked. The truth is that if we dealt with these things when they arose, we could overcome any one of them. But we let them build up and take root in our lives. How many people thought a simple trip to the Casino would be fun and ended up becoming a slave to the slots? How many people started out enjoying a social drink with friends only to become chained to a bottle? How many people thought a little harmless flirtation at work would come crashing down on their home and family life and end up in divorce court?

I know a lot of people who have let things build up in their lives and feel that it is too late to do

anything about it. They have a big mess that is out of control and is about to bury them. I have good news for you if you are in that boat today. You can start over and begin life anew. I like what the apostle Paul says in his letter to the Philippians. "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the prize for which God has called me." (Phil 3:13-14) The truth is that the door to yesterday is closed and gone forever. We cannot change the past. It does us no good to live life looking in the rear view mirror. Regrets over mistakes we made and missed opportunities will only sink us further. We need to bag up all these feelings and put them out on the curb so we can start fresh today. God is willing to help us because He has a plan for our lives.

Our calling, as people of faith, is to live today for the glory of God. God has promised to help us if we answer that call. He will move in a dumpster and help us throw out those things that have built up in our lives so we can serve him whole heartedly. So do you need to do some end of the year cleaning? What do you need to pack up and throw out so you can walk with God in the new year? Think about it and then call on Him. Take it from me. It feels great to walk in and see your house is clean and in order. It allows you to start dreaming again and making plans for the future. So go ahead and get started. God is ready when you are.

God bless. Happy New Year. See you in Church.

Cal Lord is the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Norwich and a weekly columnist for the Spirit Page of the Norwich Bulletin Newspaper.

Sometimes, One Can Go Home Again

By Nancie B. Mooney



When I remember my childhood days, I think of our beloved family homestead: the house, the yard, the woods, and the river. My two sisters and I spent a lot of time playing out of doors, as there was no television in our home until I was about eleven years old.

Our homestead consisted of three acres of land, including a huge yard, fields and woods that went from the street back to the Wading River. The back yard contained an apple orchard. A huge arbor, covered with old-fashioned roses, and a wide archway divided the back yard from the side yard. There were all the gardens: the rock garden, the iris garden along the grape arbor, and loads of phlox and other old-fashioned flowers everywhere. There were lilac bushes and Rose of Sharon bushes, and wonderful, huge maple trees to shade us as we played.

When we weren't playing in the yard around the house, we'd be exploring the woods or playing games with the neighbor kids out in the field. I remember well the time when I was about seven years old, and having found some matches, decided to see if I could build a little campfire in the field. I remember the flames quickly spreading their orange glow in ever widening circles, and my feelings of panic when I heard the fire engine sirens screaming up our street. I hid in an upstairs closet, knowing I was in big, big trouble. Hiding did no good - and yes, I was in big, big trouble!

The house is a turn-of-the-century cottage style home, with wonderful Craftsman touches - rich woodwork, maple hardwood floors, and beamed ceilings. There was a large open kitchen, with a butler's pantry off to the side. (We never had the butler - but we had the pantry!) Our family room, which we called "the den," was a multi-windowed room overlooking the side and back yards. It was a beautiful room, with rich, dark wood paneling, reminding one of an English country manor. It was in that room our piano resided, and I learned to play the hymns of my faith. The family dining room was bright and cheerful, with three huge windows forming a rounded curve on one side of the room. It was from these windows, late in the day, we'd begin to watch for Dad's car to come around the bend in the road - and the first one to see the car yelled, "Daddy's home!"

There is a sun porch across the front of the house - a long, narrow room with windows covering every exterior wall. It faces west, and in the late afternoon, I'd take a book to read, or my paper dolls to cut, and go climb on the daybed out there, and it was a wonderful, cozy space. The setting sun cast shadows of branches and leaves which danced around the room. There is no heat on the porch, so it is only occupied for pleasure when the weather is warm.

There are three large bedrooms at the top of the beautiful staircase. My older sister, Suzie, had the back bedroom, our younger brother, Vic, had a room, and my younger sister, Cynthia, and I shared the bedroom that faces west to the setting sun. It is a large room with slanted ceilings, cozy nooks, and beautiful windows with English argyle pattern windowpanes on the top, and pull open shutters. Cynthia moved to Suzie's room when Suzie went off to Nursing School in New York, and that wonderful room became all mine.

I was the first of the children to marry and permanently leave the Norton house. Carlos and I married in 1964, two years after I graduated from Norton High School. Carlos had accepted his first Pastorate in Oswegatchie, New York, and we moved into our first parsonage. There was never a day, from then until last summer that I didn't carry the warmth of the old homestead in my heart. I also carried photos of it, as well as a big painting done by my mother, of the house as it looked when we were children. This home became my anchor as we moved from church to church, living in homes that were not our own.

My family continued to live in that house until Dad's work took him to Long Island, and they sold the house in 1978. Even after we moved back to New England in 1990 and were finally able to buy our own home, we wished we could have bought my family house - it was definitely within commuting range to both of our churches in Rhode Island, but it was never on the market.

Fast-forward to 2004. We received an e-mail from my brother, who still lives in Norton, informing us that our old homestead, still owned by the couple to whom our parents sold it, had just come on the real estate market. Immediately I made an appointment with the agent. My mother and I returned to Norton, and spent well over an hour at the house. The real estate agent patiently listened to all of our stories. We told her we had once lived in the house, and we knew every nook and cranny. At first she thought we were simply doing a nostalgia trip. I thought so too - for the first thirty seconds!

I went back to Rhode Island, and said to my best friend, my husband, "Honey, I want to go home." The price of the house was, for us, seemingly astronomical, and I expected him to say, albeit sympathetically, "I'm sorry - we can't afford it." Instead, he responded "If we can, we will!"

From that moment on, everything fell into place beautifully. We were pre-approved by the bank for the asking price, and our offer on the house was accepted. Within a month, the closing occurred, and we moved back to the family homestead in August of 2004.

There have been changes: the kitchen is now fully equipped, and the butler's pantry is now a mud room. But the living room still has the white woodwork, and the bright red print wallpaper chosen by my mother thirty-five years ago. The lovely plaid carpet she had installed in the den is still here, too, and a woodstove has been added to the room. The apple orchard is gone, as are the rose arbors. But the maple trees remain, and the property is still fully intact. Carlos loves to ride around the yard on his lawn tractor, surveying his estate, just the way my father used to do.

There are no words to describe the joy and contentment I feel being here. With my retirement only a few months away now, the twenty-two mile commute through Providence is quite bearable. And recently, we moved my mother to live with us, here in the place that was her home for thirty years.

I believe this whole move was by the hand of God. I am thrilled to know my mother will spend her last years here, and my remaining years will be spent in the place I've always loved and called home. There are some ghosts here - memories that are not so sweet and lovely. God has graciously helped me to live peaceably with them, as each difficult memory is handed over, and placed away in God's own attic. I focus on the happy times, and all the rest fades into the shadows. This is the place of my heart, and as I continue to minister in my retirement years, I always feel a thrill when it is time to go home.

Nancie Mooney is Pastor, Lakewood Baptist Church, Cranston, RI.

Overlooking the Bay

By Don Ng



The view from my home office is the San Francisco Bay just north of Golden Gate Bridge. On my left is Mt. Tamalpais, the highest peak clos-

est to San Francisco and on the right is Angel Island where many Chinese stayed while their immigration papers were being processed before World War II. I see many sail boats, yachts, and kayakers that look like dolphins from where I sit. During the winter months, we can hear the barking of sea lions as the sound travels up the side of the hill where our house is situated.

After completing over 20 years with American Baptist Educational Ministries, I returned to the local church in 1998. Some have wondered whether or not there's life after denominational ministry, and the answer is, "Yes!" But that's for another article. The challenge for my wife, Joy, and me to accept the call to serve as the Senior Pastor of First Chinese Baptist Church in San Francisco did not have as much to do with local church ministry as it did to find suitable housing in the most expensive housing market in the country.

Our housing situation was nothing short of a miracle! For our initial move, a church member with apartment rentals had a vacancy. They installed new carpet and upgraded the kitchen to welcome us! We moved right into SF's Richmond District where I took the public bus to work. But the most amazing miracle was still to come.

After graduating from seminary at Andover Newton in Boston, my first call to ministry was at First Chinese Baptist Church as the Minister of Christian Education in 1975. When we lived in Daly City, my parents-in-law would come to visit. My father-in-law fell in love with the area since he lived in New York City at the time. As he was planning for retirement, he bought a two-unit house in Sausalito in Marin County. As the result of a number of events, the Sausalito house became a rental income property until my mother-in-law agreed we could invest in the house to renovate and live in it in 1998.

The miracle is we now live in a contemporary home with a million dollar view of the bay! My commute is only 9 miles across the Golden Gate Bridge (one of the wonders in the world) to the front door of the church. Some have said, "When there's a will, there's a way." I would say, "When it's God's will, there's always a way." No one would think what happened 25 years ago in 1975 was actually preparing us to return to the Bay Area to be able to live in a beautiful place

like Sausalito. No one would say I would return to serve as the Senior Pastor of this historic church after I first served as the Minister of Christian Education. While we might have a short view of life, God has a long view and we realize we are blessed with God's gracious plan.

We came to San Francisco in faith that God will take care of us. As ministers, some of us have parsonages to live in. Others are able to come up with a down payment for a home and receive the benefits of a housing allowance in our federal taxes. These are all helpful benefits, making it possible for many pastors with modest or low salaries to serve. But when Jesus sent out the disciples to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal, he told them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there." (Luke 9:3-4) I fully know we need some resources and comforts to serve, but when we can trust in God's promise to provide, I can testify that God does!

If you are in San Francisco, you are welcome to visit us and to hear the sea lions barking.

Don Ng has served as the Senior Pastor of the First Chinese Baptist Church in San Francisco since 1998. He can be reached at: revdonng@fcbc-sf.org.

There's No Place Like Home

By Alan and Karen Selig



In 2004 our church was blessed with a Lilly Endowment sabbatical grant given for the purpose of clergy renewal. For three months, we were able to step back from the day to day responsibilities of pastoral ministry and take time to play and pray. After 12 years as co-pastors of the same congregation, we were ready for personal re-charging. We also valued the time to read and reflect on ways to move ahead in an intentional church transformation process that had begun in our congregation in 1998. What we learned about congregational transformation is a story for another day. This article is about an extreme home makeover!

In the course of the sabbatical, we had a variety of temporary homes. In addition to spending a number of nights in various bed and breakfasts, we enjoyed time in a tiny one-room cottage in Rhode Island and a stay on a working sheep farm. We shared a camping cabin with mice, hibernated in a lovely apartment over a library in Green Lake, Wisconsin, and watched for whales from the deck of a house overlooking a bay in the Pacific Northwest. We ended our sabbatical in the spacious home of family friends in Klamath Falls, Oregon and returned to the house in Manhattan, Kansas, where we had lived for a dozen years.

That house had been a great place for us to raise two daughters. It's only a few blocks from the high school and it has a large family room and an expansive backyard for Jenny and Cali and their friends to come together. But with both our daughters gone, it was more house and yard than we needed. We were happy in that house; it provided a lovely refuge from the real world. It was in a quiet, stable neighborhood with no sidewalks for pedestrian traffic and very little interaction with other neighbors...a nice place for pastors to retreat from the busy-ness of ministry. But God had other ideas.

It took many nights of God waking Karen up at 4 AM for prayer and journaling sessions before we began to seriously consider that God might be asking us to make a change in our housing situation. We longed for our church to become truly missional people who discerned where God was at work in the world and joined in. But it began to be clear that God was calling *us* to move out of our comfortable refuge and become more missional ourselves. We had to make a fresh start personally if we were to be authentic leaders for our transforming congregation. We invited a realtor in our church into the process. We told her we wanted a smaller house in an area where we could share the love of God with our community in tangible ways. She pointed out that there were two highly-transitional population groups in our community – military families and college students. We decided that with our gifts and life experiences (even though we were both over 50 years old) we ought to look for a place in one of the neighborhoods in our community where college students abound.

The house we found was not the ideal home. From the outside it looked like an abandoned

building—the paint was peeling off all three stories of the 75 year old house. Brick facing had fallen off and the yard was overgrown with weeds. It needed all new siding. We had to call in a plumber twice in the first week we owned it. Yet in another sense it was ideal -- it had a large front porch and a big living room for entertaining. The inside had been recently renovated, with new wiring, lighting, windows and doors. The sidewalk running by the front yard was used daily by neighbors walking dogs and students heading to classes. Best of all, the house came equipped with students! Four young college women live in the 4 bedroom, 2 bathroom apartment that makes up the second and third floor of this old house. Our downsized first floor/basement apartment has its own entrance, but it has definitely put us in contact with our community in a brand new way.



We've been in our new house for only a few months, so what is to become of this call is yet to be seen. But already we've had more contacts with our neighbors than we had in many years of living in our old neighborhood. The young women upstairs spent a few hours with us in the basement recently when the tornado sirens went off. We've loaned them a nativity to use during Advent and sent cookies upstairs after a marathon baking session. Several neighbors were guests at a recent open house.

A wonderful plus is that this action in our personal lives has served as a living parable on transformation for our church. Another church family has sold their home and is building a larger home in an outlying community, hoping to use their new place as a base of entertaining in order to share the good news with friends of their three young sons. Another member of our congregation decided to go ahead with a dream she's had for some time. She bought a rental house with friends and they have started a ministry to international students in that house. It's only two blocks from our house! And you know the realtor who helped us find our house? She headed off to help victims of Hurricane Katrina when the call came, because she says she better understands what it truly means to be a missionary disciple of Jesus Christ.

We have no idea what new surprises God has in store for us in this amazing adventure. We're just living it one day at a time. But we can say with assurance, as did a much more famous Kansan, "There's no place like home!"

Alan and Karen Selig are Co-Pasters, First Baptist Church, Manhattan, KS.

Our House On the Rock

By Michael Harvey



A few weeks after I had begun my new work as the Executive Director of the Conference of Baptist Ministers in Massachusetts, my family moved into our new home in Worcester. It was the first home we had owned. (I know, the bank really owns it, but you know what I mean.) I was 57 years old, so I would have a mortgage burning at age 87. For over 36 years, we had lived in parsonages. My family now consists of me; my spouse, Paula; our 8 year old daughter, Stephanie; my mother-in-law, Joyce; and Butterfly the Cat. My mother called from West Virginia one day to say she and Dad were proud of me. She was proud of me because of my new position, and Dad was proud of me because I finally became a home-owner.

When I accepted the position in Massachusetts, I knew we would have to buy a house. Paula and I made three trips to Massachusetts from Chicago searching for a house. The houses in our price range included a house with a toilet on the basement steps, one with back steps to nowhere, one complete with a large pigeon coop, one across the street from a junk yard, and one with the promise that the walls would be in before we were ready to move in.

I started my work living in a rooming house near a local college while my family remained in Chicago. My plan was to spend Sunday afternoons at open houses. The first Sunday, I found our dream house. We needed 4 bedrooms, at least 2 baths, and an office. I had been through five or six houses that Sunday. None of them came close to what we needed. My last house was in a

town north of Worcester called Holden. The bedrooms were so small I was thinking we would have to sleep hanging from a nail. I was driving down Main Street toward the State Road 222A back to my room in Worcester. I was praying for God to lead me to the right house when I saw a Salisbury Street sign. That morning I had worshiped in the First Baptist Church of Worcester and it was on Salisbury Street. I didn't know for sure that this was the same Salisbury, but I took a chance. About three miles down the street, out of the corner of my eye I caught a small open house sign pointing to a side street. By the time I had seen it I had passed the street. It was getting late and I was tired, but something told me to turn around and check it out. I turned around in the parking lot of Temple Sinai. There was a sculpture out front called "The Burning Bush."

I stopped in front of the house on Spring Valley Road, and my first thought was "It is out of my price range." But I went in anyway. It was the perfect house for us. I knew my family would love it. There was a family room with picture windows looking out on a very private back yard with a fish pond complete with waterfall and spewing egret. The kitchen was big with lots of cabinets. There was the right number of bedrooms, including a pink bedroom for Stephanie. And there was a "manly" office. After walking through the house I picked up a brochure, sure that it was out of my range. It was, by about \$13,000.

I didn't say anything to my family. On Tuesday I called my real estate agent and told her about the house. She took me to the house again. When she walked in she said, "This is the house for Paula." It had not appeared on her list for me because it had just been reduced by \$20,000, and she had not received the information. She called the bank and we figured out a way we could finance it. I called Paula and told her about it, and how I believed God had led me to the house, and that I knew she would love it even though she had not seen it. I made an offer.

There had been two other offers like mine, but they chose mine. The owners seem to like the idea of a minister's family living in their house.



Paula first saw the house at the inspection. There were several other ways that God's presence was evident to us as we worked through this.

Well, here we are two years later, very happy in our house to which God sent us. My Dad died last December, but he died at peace, knowing all three of his sons were homeowners. Every year on October 10, the day we moved in, we go out to celebrate, and our celebration always begins with a prayer of thanksgiving and a prayer of hope that our home will be filled with love and will always know the presence of God.

Michael Harvey is the Executive Director of the Massachusetts Conference of Baptist Ministers.

Be Prepared: The Holy Spirit Is at Work!

By Jim Autrey



My wife, Marsha, and I are the same age (61) and a year or so ago she began making noise that she would like me to retire earlier than I had planned. I was going to stay in the active pastorate until 65 or 66, and then retire - but somehow, the thought of calling it "quits" as early as 62 filled me with dread and fear. Her reasoning was that her father retired from the railroad at the age of sixty, and her parents had a great time together. But he died when he was seventy from cancer, and she saw her mother be alone for nearly twenty years. Marsha is also aware of my workaholic tendencies and she did not want to be left alone. As I said, I was filled with dread because I am a very scheduled person and the thought of months and years of unscheduled and no-ministry time brought to mind visions of an early grave or insanity. Needless to say, I was dragging my feet.....big time!

We had also decided to retire in Council Grove, Kansas - that is where our three grandchildren live, and our daughter who resides there is probably more likely not to move than our other two children. One night, Marsha and I were sitting in our home in Hutchinson and Marsha said, "I don't want to downsize. We did it when we

moved here, it's no fun, and I don't want to do it any more." I then said, "Wouldn't it be neat if there were a big old house in Council Grove in good condition, and priced really cheap because it has the reputation of being haunted? After all, we know the Holy Spirit is more powerful than any ghost or goblin." We chuckled and continued with what we were doing.

Two weeks later we were in Council Grove for our son-in-law's birthday party and I was sent to the grocery store to pick up some last minute supplies. On the way back, I decided to go home via a route I seldom, if ever, go. I got a block off Main Street and saw a big house on the corner with a "For Sale" sign in front. There was also another sign which read, "Kendall Funeral Chapel." Because the realtor was out of town, we couldn't get in to look it over, but we did walk around the perimeter and peeked in the windows as much as we could. That was on a Saturday. On Sunday night, our daughter called to tell us that she and her husband had just taken a tour of the building and were going to fax us a line drawing of the place. The house has 5200 square feet and an attached three car garage (1700 square feet) with a built-in wash bay. On Tuesday, we made the almost two-hour drive to Council Grove and looked over the property.

On the way home, I asked Marsha if she felt like the Lord wanted us to have the place, and she replied, "All I know is that ever since we saw it, I have been thinking how we could use it for sewing retreats, couples' conferences, and other retreats." The facility could never be used again as a funeral home and the city was changing the zoning to residential from business. The next day, I called in an offer to the realtor and even though the place had been vacant for over one year, three offers had come in that day! Ours was the high offer, but the second one was pretty close and the third one was a long way off. The funeral corporation that owned the property wanted us all to resubmit our bids, so I raised my offer and the other folks raised theirs a little more, and we both submitted the same dollar offer. Now I had mentioned to the realtor we were planning on financing locally, and that proved to be to our advantage: even though the facility had three bathrooms, there was no tub or shower, and it would take a long time for FHA to approve a loan. So we got the bid and now are the proud owners of a former funeral home!

What are we going to do with all that space? I recently read that 49.6% of churches in America have fewer than fifty in attendance on Sundays. That means there are a lot of pastors who can't afford to get away, even to Branson, for conferences or retreats. We are going to offer clergy couples' conferences at a really reduced rate, one or two day pastors' seminars or times of encouragement, sewing retreats, and church choir directors' retreats (I used to be a high school music teacher for nine years and have a master's degree in music education). We have a vision of being able to minister to the Church in a broader way than what we had been able to do while serving in the local pastorate. And we are certainly looking forward to seeing how God is going to use us and our former funeral home for His glory! I'll tell you what: after all the "God sightings" I witnessed in seeing this thing come together thus far, I am not dreading retirement at all, but really anticipating a new sector of ministry.

Jim Autrey is Pastor at First Baptist Church, Hutchinson, KS

Ten Tips for Handling Complaints In Ministry



By Margaret J. Marcuson

1. **Know** that complaints are an issue in every area of ministry. The more you don't take complaints and criticism personally, the better off you will be emotionally and the more you will be effective in ministry.
2. **Maintain** some humility. Sometimes complaints are about an area where you need to improve.
3. **Avoid** getting defensive. It takes energy, and it undermines your effectiveness as a leader.
4. **Apologize** when necessary. It will go a long way toward defusing criticism.
5. **Expect** criticism and complaints when you take a stand or move in a clear direction as a leader. This is not about you; it is about the

whole system reacting to an upset in the balance. Stay on course, and don't let it throw you. Coach other leaders to do the same.

6. **Notice** that complaints may bubble up in areas that are not related to the direction you are moving. For example, if you take a stand or make a move to develop worship in a new way, problems may come up in the youth group or the building committee. This is normal. Churches, like other systems, resist change in a variety of ways.

7. **Watch** how people express their views about something they don't like. Those who can define their position in terms of themselves are more mature than those who say "you should," or "you shouldn't" or "they always" or "they never." This will give you a clue as to those who are more mature than others.

8. **Use** care when expressing YOUR views about something you don't like. Try not to react but to think through your response first. As above, define your position in terms of yourself rather than others: "I" rather than "you" or "they." Take responsibility for your own position.

9. **Notice** when the petty everyday stuff starts getting to you. Some days, weeks and months it will wash off your back, other times it will be like fingernails on a chalkboard. This IS about you and your own emotional state, and finding some ways to get a little distance physically or emotionally will help.

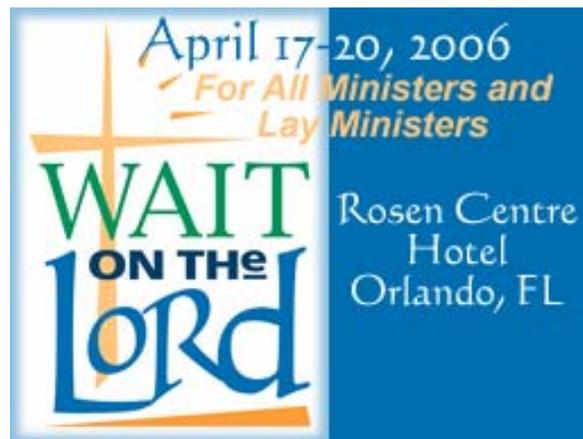
10. **Remember** that a complaint-free church is probably going nowhere. That much togetherness works against growth and development. Complaints are part of the price of progress. Don't take it too seriously.

Copyright 2005 by Margaret J. Marcuson

Margaret Marcuson is founder of the Marcuson Leadership Circle and an American Baptist ordained minister. She served as pastor of the First Baptist Church of Gardner, MA for thirteen years and now lives in Portland, OR. Learn more at her website—www.margaretmarcuson.com.

You may join your regional Ministers Council by contacting your president or treasurer. Contact information is posted on the Ministers Council website—www.ministerscouncil.com or call the office.

Editor: Debbie Kamm
Publisher: Kate Harvey
Layout and Design: Sue Sechrist
1-800-222-3872, extension 2334



For More Information on this
Spiritual Formation Conference
Go to this Link

↓
[http://](http://www.ministerscouncil.com/WaitontheLordInformation.aspx)

[www.ministerscouncil.com/
WaitontheLordInformation.aspx](http://www.ministerscouncil.com/WaitontheLordInformation.aspx)