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Our Sense of Call



Our Calling

Michael Saylor, Editor

The Ministers Council Communications Committee envisioned this issue of Ministers Magazine as a forum for addressing the calling of God that each of us experiences. Certainly the foundation of our mutual call rests in our initial allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord. But for most of us who are in “professional ministry,” be it the pastorate, the chaplaincy, regional leadership, the mission field or Christian Education, something else has transpired to summon us to a particular niche of service to God.

It isn't easy to decipher. Our sense of call is a thing to be struggled with, be confused by, be enamored with, be astounded by. It may be constant over our time of ministry, or it may change from year to year.

Our intent in this issue, then, is to let you hear the voices of some individuals who have experienced, and struggled with, God's call on their lives. Dennis Johnson speaks to the resources needed to persevere “over the long haul” of ministerial calling. Margaret Marcuson examines university chaplaincy through the eyes of Rev. Peter Gomes at Harvard and Rev. Paul Raushenbush at Princeton. Ketly Pierre traces her calling to missionary work from Haiti to Nicaragua. Jan McCormack looks at the personal issues involved in responding to military chaplaincy and teaching. Alex Pickens finds meaning and focus in the example of a bus ride through the hills of Haiti. Heather Entrekin examines the challenges she has faced as a woman in response to God's call to ministry. And finally, Trinetta McCray looks at the “culture of call” from a denominational perspective.

Each contributor has a story to share. Their stories, and yours, are all part of the larger story God is telling through American Baptist ministries. Thank you for being a part of it!

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The Call Over the Long Haul

Dennis Johnson

We are told that before David went to confront Goliath, he picked from the river five smooth stones and put them in his shepherd's bag. So, when it comes to persevering over the long haul in ministry, the question becomes, "What five smooth stones are in my shepherd's bag?"

Not that I think of ministry in the church as a never-ending battle with Goliath! I love being a pastor. The people are my friends. I am their friend. Of course, there are times we don't get along. Robert Frost put it as his epitaph: "I had a lover's quarrel with the world."

What minister called to ministry doesn't have from time-to-time a lover's quarrel with the church? Perhaps second only to boredom, nothing gets us to call into question sticking it out for the long haul more than those quarreling times, those stretches on the road when the going is tough, patches of conflict. I think of the persistent misunderstandings and endless meetings that accomplish nothing more than having a meeting, and frustrations and irritations and disappointments galore. I think of the parking lot conversations and hush-hush hallway warnings about who is not getting along and who is upset with whom and who is unhappy with the pastor. The lover's quarrel gets messy and aggravating, nasty and exhausting, and we are tempted to quit the call.

Like the disciples, we never know all we are getting into or see what's ahead. If we did, would we even start the journey, let alone hang in for the long haul? Then again, can we ever find the hope that holds us to persevere for the long haul?

"We boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God," wrote Paul. "And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." (Romans 5:2-5)

In those tough times on the journey of ministry, we are forced to look inward to see what's inside us, to look inside our shepherd's bag, because what's inside that bag will help carry us along over the long haul.

I share my five smooth stones, not because they should be yours. You may not even like mine. I share them because they serve to carry me in the call over the long haul. The stones we choose to put into our shepherd's bag are there for that renewing, refreshing, long-haul persevering work of the Spirit in us and through us that holds us in hope. And "hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

One of my stones is this: Wherever I am in my calling, I am not alone. I take my cue from Walter Rauschenbusch on this matter, along with several others. Early in his eleven-year ministry at the Second German Baptist Church in New York City's Hell's Kitchen in the late 1800's, he took the initiative to not be alone and to meet with two other friends--Leighton Williams, pastor of the Amity Baptist Church, and Nathaniel Schmidt, pastor of the Swedish Baptist Church. The three met each week for Bible study and reflection, and every Sunday afternoon for years they gathered together to share the Lord's Supper. After the model of Ignatius of Loyola, they formed a new "Society of Jesus." They were together, and met together in weekly study, discussion, mutual give-and-take and common worship, their thinking clarified, their devotion deepened, and their communion with one another led them to make a difference in the community around them as participants in God's transforming work in the world. When their ministries eventually took them to other settings, they still reunited once a year in upstate New York for a long retreat. Out of that small group of pastors came "The Brotherhood of the Kingdom," which eventually became an international movement of personal and social spirituality. They were not alone in ministry.

To persevere over the long haul, I need spiritual friends and soul mates and ministry colleagues. I need to hang around with people who replenish me in ways that restore me.

Another stone is this: Just as I am, I am unfinished. One of the many fabulous places to visit in Florence, Italy, is the Uffizi Museum, the oldest art gallery in the world. Some of the greatest works of the Renaissance and a host of ancient Roman statues grace the walls and halls of this unrivaled house of art and beauty, culture and history.

My wife and I roamed those halls and then came to room fifteen, which contains works by the young Leonardo da Vinci. That's where I saw it—one of the most important paintings in all of Italy. It was his "Adoration of the Magi." It has left a lasting impression on me.

He was commissioned in 1481 to paint it for a monastery near Florence. It's a large painting on wood, nearly eight feet square. He completed the underdrawing but left for Milan without completing the painting. Only a portion is painted, and that much later by a hand other than da Vinci's.

That is what speaks to me. And what I have reflected on so often is that it was never finished by Leonardo. That's what makes it so important. It is his unfinished "Adoration of the Magi."

How fitting, because the Magi's adoration is unfinished without my adoration and your adoration and all creation's adoration of Christ. And I am an unfinished Magi. My adoration of Christ in the call to ministry is incomplete, my homage to him is unfinished. My coming closer to Jesus is in progress. My formation in the call is still ongoing. I persevere on the long haul knowing I am unfinished and the Magi in me is incomplete. The painting of my adoration of Christ has more to go. This keeps me going over the long haul. I am unfinished. The call is unfinished.

A third stone: Pulled as I am, I must focus more on approachability than availability. That's what struck me years ago while reading Eugene Peterson's The Contemplative Pastor. Obviously, we make ourselves available to others in congregational life and the community. But what does being available 24/7 really communicate? Being busy. We work hard to be omnipresent as busy pastors.

The disciples, we are told in Mark 6, were too busy even to eat, with which I can identify more often than I like to admit. That's when Jesus told them to get in a boat and get away for a while.

To persevere over the long haul we have to be careful that we are not so busy that others see us as unapproachable. There are two doors into my church office. One is through my administrative assistant's office, and the other directly from the hallway. That direct door has a double lock on it to secure entry from the outside. When I came to Baptist Temple, I began opening that hallway door. As people passed by, their first comment was always, "I never knew this door was here!" They thought it was a door to a closet, not to the pastor's office. Evidently in the past it had been kept shut to get work done without being bothered. Full calendars, frenetic schedules, closed doors to get work done, all shout, "I'm important. I'm busy." But here's the thing: When people don't feel free to approach us because they see us as very busy, it is, as Peterson warns, the death knell on a ministry. For a variety of reasons, when being busy as available pastors is more important than being available as approachable

pastors, the haul won't be long! So, I carry with me the stone of approachability over availability.

And I carry this stone: As careful as I am, I embrace failures. It's not always easy. It took traveling down the road a good distance before I added this smooth stone to my bag. Being successful and productive are such powerful and popular drives. When I came to realize and truly affirm that my calling is not to be successful, but faithful, not to produce results, but to bear witness, I began holding myself more lightly over the long haul.

I find one of the important dual threads in the Gospel of Mark to be failure and faith. Jesus' parents (3:21), his hometown (6:1-6), the authorities (3:22-30, 14:63-65), and his disciples (4:35-41) all fail. Not only are the disciples shown failing to understand what it means for Jesus to be the "Son of God," they are shown thinking that success means being popular and attracting big crowds. In writing about Christian discipleship Bonhoeffer said, "Never let (disciples) of Jesus pin (their) hopes on large numbers." The disciples were distracted by that temptation, which was but one of their failures.

Yet the disciples' failures never caused Jesus to give up on them. At the empty tomb the divine messenger told the women to tell "the disciples and Peter" that they would see the risen Jesus. The women fled in fear and failed to tell anyone. Nevertheless the church formed and the message spread and the church is here today despite their failure. Somehow their failure was overcome by God's promise.

From this good news I receive great consolation and comfort. I persevere over the long haul by remembering and believing and trusting that God's power and love will triumph over my failures, which gives me the grace to embrace them.

In his novel, Wheat that Springeth Green, J. F. Powers has a priest, Father Joe Hackett, say, "After years of trying to walk on the water...it's good to come ashore and feel the warm sand between my toes." I wonder how much of what we do every day is driven by this desire to show we can walk on water. It often takes those tough stretches on the long haul in ministry to let go of this illusion and false self, this "I can walk on water" self, as a pastor. We fail over the long haul and we are held in a grace that will not let us go. Faith on the long haul is not trying to be infallible water-walkers. Faith is trusting God to overcome our failures.

Like Father Joe, I can tell you it is a wonderfully liberating day of grace when I can say that it feels so good to accept my fallible followings and misunderstandings and missteps and mistakes, my humanness and pastoral limitations, and come ashore and feel the warm sand between my toes. I can no more be omni-

competent than omni-present, and I've stopped trying hard to be either one. Approachability and fallibility are precious smooth stones in my shepherd's bag, and they help me persevere over the long haul.

Here is the fifth smooth stone in my bag: As human as I am, I share wounds. I understand "truth" in scripture to mean not "fact," but "unhiddenness." To persevere over the long haul, it's more important that we bring our wounds out of the darkness and share them rather than hide them as if pastors never hurt. It is in sharing our wounds that others feel free to share their wounds and together we become, as Nouwen said, wounded healers to one another, so that together we can persevere over the long haul.

There is a wonderful passage in Zora Neal Hurston's novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, when Janie, the young southern black woman who comes into her own and courageously finds herself in a time and place that didn't come easily or make life easy, says: "When God made The Man, he made him out of stuff that sung all the time and glittered all over. Then after that some angels got jealous and chopped him into millions of pieces, but still he glittered and hummed. So, they beat him into nothing but sparks, but each little spark had a shine and a song. So they covered each one over with mud." When the shine of our real self cannot be shown and our unique song cannot be sung, covered over with mud by all kinds of forces, it hurts - it is wounding. When we cannot show our shine or sing our song as the persons and pastors God created and called us to be, it is painful, wounding. When pastors are not allowed to be human, when spouses are pressed to play a role rather than be themselves, or when our children are expected to be different as children, or worse yet when we as parents and pastors won't let them be themselves as children, they hurt. And the hurt should not be hidden. That is un-truth.

With the sensitivity of the Spirit, it is good to share our wounds and become wounded healers to one another, wounded soul to wounded soul. At the beginning of his story, *Dr. Fischer of Geneva or the Bomb Party*, Graham Greene has one character say to another: "Do you have a soul?" "I think so." "Well, I'm sure you have a soul." "How do you know?" "Because you have suffered."

Not only do I believe people are hungry for God, I also believe people are hungry to see our souls, which means to know we suffer, we hurt, too. I believe that sharing our woundedness, as Frederick Buechner does for me in his most healing book, *Telling Secrets*, is the essence of Christian community. When we share our wounds, others come to see that we are people, with sand beneath our toes, whom they can trust with their own pain, and they can then feel free to share their wounds.

We become wounded healers to each other in the image of Jesus as a community. With that, the call continues over the long haul.

So often the five smooth stones draw me back to what de Chardin once wrote: "Trust in the slow work of God." Yes, the slow work of God. Rest in the slow work of God. The call is a long haul.

One of my favorite theologians, writers and story tellers is John Shea. His writings have helped me persevere over the long haul, and here is a piece of a prayer he wrote for the long haul to the *Lord of Blood, Lord of Bone, Lord of Flesh*:

Give me, Broken Lord,
the long courage for compromised truths,
small justice, partial peace.
Keep my soul in my teeth,
hold me in hope, and teach me to fight
the way farmers with hoes defeat armies
and rolled up manuscripts survive wars.

What a gracious way it is to prayerfully persevere over the long haul in ministry with your soul in your teeth, being held in hope and fighting the good fight the way farmers with hoes defeat armies, and rolled up manuscripts survive wars.

Because truth is, over the long haul, "suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

Dennis Johnson is the Senior Minister at Charleston Baptist Temple, Charleston, WV.





University Ministry

Margaret Marcuson

University ministry is a unique calling, and ministering in an Ivy League setting even more so. Several American Baptist ministers have found themselves in this setting, among them Rev. Peter

Gomes at Harvard and Rev. Paul Raushenbush at Princeton. The Ivy League is a group of eight elite Northeast universities with a long tradition of excellence (and exclusivity). The schools are still excellent but less exclusive—in terms of economic and social status, though not achievement—than they used to be.

Peter Gomes is Plummer Professor of Christian Morals and Pusey Minister in The Memorial Church, Harvard University. He came to Harvard in 1970 as an assistant chaplain after attending Harvard Divinity School and then teaching at Tuskegee Institute. “I sort of fell into it; I can’t say I looked for it.” Yet this became his life ministry.

Paul Raushenbush is Associate Dean of Religious Life at Princeton University. After a varied ministry he started working in chaplaincy at Columbia University. He says, “My father was a law professor, my grandparents were both professors; the university setting was very familiar to me.” He spent a time at Riverside Church in New York as a college and young adult minister and from there came to Princeton.

Both find plenty of opportunities for ministry. Gomes says, “This is a needy community of people. They are smart, but they don’t know anything about the Good News.” Raushenbush says Princeton students tend to be very focused on their work: “Anywhere else my job would be to get people on track; here my job is to get them off track. Students may say, ‘this is the only month I’m going to have fun.’ I try to pull back the lens a bit, help them with interacting with the wider world.” He can help them think through their vocational choices, and think beyond the frame their often “very impressive” families have given them. He also describes the “extraordinary international presence—it increases the opportunity for ministry.”

Raushenbush tries to raise questions with students such as: What kind of person do you want to be in the world? How do you want to be acting? What ideals do you want to have? He finds working with students encouraging: “I think I am a more hopeful person because I am around these students. Young people are amazing.”

In his own ministry, he tries to “take seriously Jesus’ mandate to love our neighbor. What I can do in a university setting as chaplain is to be intentional about being a loving presence to the community.”

In looking back over his years of service at Harvard, Gomes says, “Students are much more hospitable to the idea of belief today than they were 30 years ago. They say, ‘If you’ve got something, we’d like it to sustain us, too.’ In many ways it’s a lot easier being the ‘God person.’” He adds, “My sense is that a lot of kids want something that is permanent and worth while.”

Gomes says of his ministry, “One of the greatest gifts is being present with people: whether a freshmen who is coming in new, or a person who wants to die, I get everything. The gift of being present in people’s stories is something I much enjoy and flourish in.” He adds, “One of the greatest challenges is preaching in a university, where no one really belongs, there’s a lot of floating around and a fair amount of anonymity.” He says it’s different from a church community. “To try to create that in a university would be a mistake: you have to take the community as it is. It’s exciting and demanding, with people from every possible tradition, people who were devout in the tradition they came from, and people who came from no tradition, but are curious. I look forward to every Sunday.”

Gomes was raised at First Baptist Church of Plymouth, Massachusetts, where he is still a member (and still plays the organ every August). He says he values the notion of a free pulpit from the Baptist tradition. “I take that very seriously, my duty to make the most of that freedom.” He holds strongly to another Baptist value: “We are meant to be informed believers, to know something.”

Raushenbush grew up Presbyterian, but was drawn to his Baptist roots (he is the great-grandson of Walter Rauschenbusch, the famed Baptist minister) when he became connected with Madison Avenue Baptist Church in New York City while in seminary. There he became aware of Baptist ideals. He was struck by the notions of “freedom of conscience, priesthood of all believers, adult baptism - I agreed with all the polity.” He says, “the Baptist principles all rang true to me.”

Calling to ministry takes many forms. Our colleagues in university ministry, like those leading congregations, offer the gift of preaching, teaching and presence.

*Margaret J. Marcuson works with clergy who want to be better leaders and churches who want to develop their ministries. She is the author of *Leaders Who Last: Sustaining Yourself and Your Ministry* (Seabury).*



Missionary Calling

Ketly Pierre

Ketly and Vital Pierre have visited our congregation, First Baptist Church of Colorado Springs, several times over the past ten years. We have sent short-term mission teams to Nicaragua

on three occasions, and we partner with the Pierres in their ministry. I had the opportunity to interview Ketly at the recent Regional Gathering of Churches from ABC Rocky Mountains. – Michael Saylor

Q: When you were younger, who influenced you to explore the ministry?

A: When I was a little baby, my life was in danger. I was living in Haiti. I was very sick, and my mother was so desperate. She told God, “If you save my daughter, I’ll dedicate her whole life to you.” My mother read for me every evening Psalms 91:

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge
and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust.” *NIV*

I knew it by heart in French. From a young age I knew that God had set me apart for something special; I just didn’t know what.

Q: As you grew up in your faith were there other people besides your parents that were significant to you?

A: We moved to Puerto Rico when I was six years old, and I had a cousin who was an Episcopal priest. He used to take us to church. He was like a father figure; I was very close to him. I never saw him as a missionary, but he had a lot of influence on me.

Even when I was growing up in the Episcopal church I had a deep sense that God had something special for me, and at age 21 I was in college at University of Puerto Rico. I had a big spiritual emptiness in my heart, and I wanted to know why God had created me; I wanted to know what I was here for. It was on a Sunday evening when I asked God, “Are you real or not? Because if you are not real, I would not go any more to church.”

I was desperate. It was the following day, I was having lunch at the University, when a youth group from the University was having an open-air service where I was sitting, and I had forgotten my prayer from the night before. A young woman who was singing with the

group came to me and started talking about the Gospel, and asked me to be a part of that group. Then in one of my classrooms one of the class members was also part of that group, and I started attending. That’s when I really got to know the Lord. I was there for three years – they even baptized me – it was an interdenominational group, and they were really fired up for the Lord. That’s when I started to have a deeper understanding of who God is and to understand God’s purpose for my life.

We met every day from noon until one; we used to go to places the church usually would not go to evangelize, like to bars and movie houses, and we had retreats together. On one of the retreats they invited a missionary from Latin America to speak. At the time I heard that young man talking, I literally saw myself on a big TV screen, and in the picture I saw myself in the mission field with a little girl. That’s when I knew that’s what God wanted me to do.

And I said to God, “Are you kidding? You want me to give this up?” Because what I really wanted to be was a university professor. I had always said I was going to go and live in New Orleans, so after my Bachelor’s degree that’s where I was going. I said, “God, what is this all about?” And this young missionary gave an altar call. I don’t remember exactly the call, but I knew if you weren’t called you wouldn’t even dare to stand up when a call was given. I couldn’t stay still. I said, “God, I will accept your call - but please let me be sixty-five years old.”

But the Lord did not let me wait. The Bible verse that God used to literally chase me was from Acts 26,

‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’ - Acts 26:16-18 *NIV*

That group really taught me the Bible. God is my Lord. So I thought from my early days, in that group, I should surrender myself to him and be obedient to his call. That verse spoke to me so much; it was like the letters were coming out of the book. I couldn’t resist it. And then there was seminary.

I did not want to go to seminary. That’s the last thing I wanted to do. So I said, “God, no seminary.” But God had another plan. In 1985 I was working, I had finished college, and was going to go back and work in the University, and my church in Puerto Rico had a mission trip to the Dominican Republic – it was a trip I did not want

to take, because I had it in my mind I wanted to go to Haiti, but at the same time the Lord was really leading me to go to find out about the mission field and to go to seminary.

I knew I didn't have the foundation yet to be a missionary. So two things were happening – the mission trip, and this call to seminary. I said to God, "Ok, you want me to go to seminary? I want to go to the United States, and I want a full scholarship, and I am not going to go looking for it." In the Dominican we finished the mission trip and then the medical mission team asked me to stay longer. I was planning to go to Haiti to spend the New Year with my family. I said, "I don't want to stay here." But I said, "God, again, what do you want me to do?" And God said "Stay."

It was very clear to me. I had no money to stay, but I stayed anyway. And someone from the team said, "Talk to the people at Eastern Seminary," so I did, and they sent me all the material, and offered me a full scholarship, and in September I was in seminary.

Q: What advice would you have for someone who said, "Ketly, I'm interested in being a missionary?"

A: I would say, "Has God called you?" Because it is very serious. Have you had God's confirmation in your life that this is what you should do? God gives me his confirmation with a burning in my heart, plus the affirmation of the people in my Baptist church in Puerto Rico. I stayed there only three years. But in that time God surrounded me with people who confirmed me in my call. God arranges things in your life. He affirms your call the same way. There is that urge that is greater than your own will.

Q: Has God's call changed for you over the years?

A: Oh, when I first received my call I wanted to go to Haiti. I couldn't see anything else until I went to Zaire to do my internship for my economic development work (when I went for my MDiv I also took a masters degree in economic development – also a free ride!) During that internship the Lord showed me that he doesn't just love one people, he loves the whole world. God said, "I'm not sending you to a particular people. I'm sending you to whom I want to send you. And God poured into my heart a love for the whole world. So therefore my love for mission wasn't only for my own people. That was the change – a love for the whole world.

I was in the Dominican Republic, and then in Bluefields, Nicaragua, but I would go wherever he sent me. As for ministry, it was never in my whole life I saw myself working with children. I had no ministry with children before I came to Bluefields. In Dominican I worked with young people, I worked as an Associate Pastor, I

worked in the batays with the medical teams, doing the spiritual work of accompaniment. But children – whoa! Children? That had to be God.

Q: What do you see as some of the biggest successes you've experienced? Over twenty-five years, what did you do well?

A: The last ten years of my life in Bluefields I have had a lot of work spiritually in accompanying people to come to know the Lord, sharing the gospel, watching those people receiving Christ, and then those people going out and doing the same thing I did with them.

Q: What about challenges?

A: At the same time I've seen people with some great gifts, and they're resisting God's call, and I've had to wait upon God. I'm the kind of person who's always had to have an answer. I've wanted to fix something right away, and in this ministry I cannot do that. I had to, in humility, I had to say to God, "I'm giving you permission to do the work," so I have to wait on God. It's been a challenge for me. I'm a fixer.

Q: Have there been times when you've just questioned the call? I have no idea what I'm doing here? Or have you always been clear about it?

A: I say, "God, I did not invite myself into this, so you go ahead and do what you have to do. Even my marriage to Vital – we married when I was already a missionary, I was thirty-five. Vital's mother accepted the Lord when he was a teenager, and his mother prayed for him to be a pastor, and it was at age 19 he accepted the Lord.

When I went to the Dominican I was engaged to a man from Liberia. I saw him there, in September '93, and he said, "Ketly, this thing of being a missionary is not for me. You come back with me and we'll get married." I was 33 years old at that time.

And I said, "You're not the man for me," and I let it go. I let it go. And then I met Vital, and I was very sure there wasn't a man or a woman or circumstances in my life that could make me turn back. No matter what happened this is what God wanted me to do.

Q: The city of Rama (Nicaragua) is your newest outreach. How did you focus on it instead of some other placed?

A: The Baptist convention of Nicaragua has tried to establish a church there – it's a very strategic place, it's the last city by road from Managua to Rama, and from there we have no other road, you have to take a boat. It is the biggest port on the Nicaraguan Atlantic coast. So the Nicaraguan Baptist Convention asked us to start a church in Rama. So here we are.

Q: What's your vision for tomorrow? What do you see on that "big TV screen?"

A: Bringing new people to Christ. Working with the children there. We started the church with the after-school program. God is using the children to bring the adults to the church. Then we can go to the homes.

Q: *What are some of the things people here can do to support you?*

A: Lots of prayer, because this is not an easy job. To keep us focused on Him, because then everything else will come, everything else will be added. God says, "All this will be added unto you." To pray for that focus – and to accompany us with their prayers, their visits, and when people are engaged with the ministry they will give. The money will come.

Q: *You seem to be very open to the leading of God's Spirit. That approach might seem strange to some people. Do you ever tell this story and have people say, "I don't know what you're talking about – being led – you aren't making any sense."?*

A: They haven't told me that yet. That is my story, and I have so many witnesses, so if they want to go and check, they can go and check it out. If they did say that I would say, "Come and see. Come and see."

Thank you for spending some time with us.

Thank you.

Ketty Pierre and her husband Vital work on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua to strengthen local churches and encourage existing churches to plant new ones. They began their work in Bluefields, Nicaragua twenty years ago, and have since established a new church in the village of Kukra Hill, with another to follow in the port city of Rama. Their ministry is a holistic, "hands on" endeavor in which they walk and work alongside people to build relationships.

You are invited to attend the Chaplaincy and Pastoral Counselors Training Event during the Together In Called to Care, Called to Serve The Lord Ministry Renewal Conference, in Orlando, FL on Monday, January 4, 2010, 8:30 to 11:30 am and 1:30 to 3:30 pm. The speaker, Dr. Glenn Asquith, will provide a discussion and review of the nature of our call, how it is that we felt called to this ministry, and why this call is so critical to the spiritual and physical health of the people of God. We will look at the biblical and theological understanding of call as well as some of the recent research on the clear relationship between spirituality and health. This will be a time of spiritual renewal for those who serve so faithfully in ministry. Registration deadline is Dec. 2, 2009; download forms at www.abc-usa.org.

*– submitted by Rev. Paul E. Clark
Chaplaincy and Pastoral Counseling Services*



Relishing the Call to Chaplaincy

Jan McCormack

In 1969, as a high school senior, I was applying to colleges. I had always known that whatever vocation I pursued, it would involve helping people; I just never knew what direction that passion would take. For women back then, the normal post high school route was wife and mom, K-12 teacher or nurse. None of those options felt right to me. Fortunately my dad was ahead of his time and he encouraged me to follow my heart, even if it wasn't culturally normal. I went to college with my plan to be a married social worker with 2-3 children, a dog, and a house with a white picket fence.

The Vietnam War colored my college experiences. As an original "Hippie Flower-child," my sense of justice and fairness led me to join in the campus protests against the war and the draft. Little did I know that my future first husband's lost draft deferment would be the impetus to hear God calling me to serve him professionally! We married right after we graduated college and he joined the Air Force to fly rather than be drafted into the Army Infantry. I prayed to find something meaningful to do with my degree and life as I followed him around in the Air Force.

As we moved from training base to base I tried several options and did volunteer work as a physical therapist. I explored joining the Air Force as social worker or physical therapist, but the more serious I got about a vocation, the more God seemed to be drawing me to his ministry—and in unexpected and spectacular ways.

I had always been active in my Baptist church until college and the war caused me to try to "go it alone" without the Lord. My first husband was not a believer when we married and it was not a concern of mine until he joined the Air Force and ruined my fairy-tale plans.

As I struggled to find purpose for myself vocationally and make sense out of the war and the military as a Christian, it brought me back to the Lord. Imagine my surprise when my non-believing husband brought up the idea of me being a military chaplain "since you can't separate yourself from this Christian thing." My first response was, "Don't be crazy; women can't be ministers or chaplains!" I suspect God laughed at that because he began chasing me 24 hours a day.

It was not my faith experience or learned theology at the time, but God began to “badger” me through dreams. All I can do is testify that he sent me dreams, day and night for weeks, which showed me ministering as a chaplain. I saw myself preaching, teaching, counseling, marrying, baptizing and burying as a chaplain in both US and international settings. I was so confused and upset that I would try to shake these dreams as if they were nightmares, but it was like God was showing me a video and would push “pause” till I was ready to watch again. I kept telling God to “read your own book! It’s you who says women can’t be pastors!”

To make matters worse, my husband made appointments for me to talk to the senior chaplain about becoming a chaplain, since he was seeing us as a two-paycheck couple. I skipped the first two appointments he set up for me so he picked me up and took me to the third one. Had I made the first meetings, I would have spoken to a Catholic priest, but the third meeting was with the new senior chaplain—an ABCUSA chaplain! My intent was to go in and say “I think I am supposed to be a chaplain.” I expected, and hoped, he would tell me that women couldn’t do that and then I would go with my plan to join the Air Force as a physical therapist or social worker. Instead he got so excited that he called Valley Forge to find out what I needed to do.

I was even more confused, but I agreed to read the scripture aloud at our desert outdoor Easter sunrise service. As I was reading the text where Jesus sends the women back to the male disciples to tell them He is risen, it was as if God was teasing me personally and saying, “So, isn’t that the Gospel message? And it was I who told the women to go tell the men.” So much for my excuse about women not being allowed to preach!

After everyone left, I sat in the sand under the empty cross and sobbed as I told God “my demands” and “put a fleece before the Lord.” I would go forward with the work to become a chaplain *if* He would get my local church to agree to sponsor me, get me accepted into an SBC seminary (the only seminary near the Air Force fighter base) and get my husband assigned to that base. Still I was hoping God wouldn’t come through with his end of the bargain.

But in the end, my local church and my pastor said they had known of my call to ministry since I was a pre-teen, I was accepted at that SBC seminary as one of only four women in the MDiv program, and my husband got the only open flying assignment. At that point I said yes to this miraculous call to ministry — specifically the military chaplaincy — and never looked back. Not bad for an idealistic hippie from the Vietnam era!

The Ministers Council Provides a Community for its Members:

- To assume responsibility for the faithful practice of the ministerial calling;
- To develop and promote ethical standards that both guide and shape the way in which the vocation of ministry is performed;
- To assume personal responsibility for and to encourage physical and emotional well-being in the practice of ministry;
- To inform, support and encourage one another in the deepening of personal and communal spiritual life;
- To work together to develop the skills necessary to become effective servants of Christ’s church
- To encourage growing friendships that inform and correct the leader as she or he seeks to faithfully respond to the call of God in Christ Jesus.



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I loved my ministry to the military personnel and the way the military expanded my world view and culture. I've had so many awesome opportunities to minister in so many creative ways and places. Many of those original dreams from God came back to be as déjà vu when I found myself in the places I had dreamt of doing what God wanted me to do for him, but it was not an easy call—as most calls are not always easy. It had taken me so long to hear and accept the call to chaplaincy, it never occurred to me that I was doing something that was so non-traditional—joining the double world of religion and the military.

As the seventh woman chaplain it was often hard and lonely working for and with some male chaplains who thought I had no right to be a chaplain. It hurt when parishioners I had pastored through a crisis asked the male chaplain to dedicate their baby, when a junior chaplain said he was not theologically able to work for a woman, when I could only supervise the Sunday School and women's group or when my performance report was downgraded simply because I was a divorced woman at that time or I had a "professionally jealous" supervisor. Yet it was these hard and hurtful times that God used to strengthen my belief in my calling even more than in the fun, joyful and professionally successful times. I remember a journal entry I wrote where I said, "Ministry was a way of being for me. I would be doing it if I never had the title or a paycheck since I could easier stop breathing."

I always expected that if I could last in the military long enough to retire at 20 years, that would be the end of my "calling" and I would begin a life of travel and volunteer work. Once again God had other ideas for me as I "fell" into a job as a seminary professor responsible for a chaplaincy program I was asked to create and run. This for one who was easily bored after three years of the same thing and who promised never to be a teacher.

I am now in my 12th year of teaching and feel like God has rewarded me for following his leading and being obedient and faithful in the tough times of ministry. My students have renewed my passion for ministry as I have watched them struggle with their own calling, find joy in their learning and confidence in their gifting. I take great joy in helping them discern and claim their call, as well as sending them into the often "foreign lands" of their calling. As I stand at graduation and help launch them into their future ministry, it occurs to me that I am still ministering, but now through those that I have taught, encouraged and mentored.

So what have I learned about a call to ministry? There is no "cookie cutter" form to a call. Some hear the call as youth, some at the beginning of a vocational

life, some after other vocations. Sometimes it is a clear, direct message, sometimes it takes a circular route and requires much discernment. It can be a clear call to one particular form of ministry, a more non-specific call to care for others, or one that changes over the course of years. It can come in the form of a Damascus Road or a burning bush experience or through dreams that feel like nightmares just as easily as it can through the reading of the Word, a sermon or another's comment. I do believe it takes eyes and ears of faith to see and hear the calling and that it must and will be validated by other believers, the Word of God and experiences. It often seems that a call is manifest when one is not looking for it and often not even wanting it—as in "send Aaron." It is not often easy to answer that calling, but it is incredibly rewarding to share one's first love (the Lord) with others and help them heal and grow as they come closer to being the person God intends them to be.

Jan McCormack is Assistant Professor of Chaplaincy/Pastoral Counseling, Denver Seminary and Chaplain, Lt Col, USAF (Ret)



Driving the Bus: A Reflection on Self-Care

Alex Pickens III

Our 12-ton school bus rocked and groaned at the edge of a narrow Haitian mountain pass. With each waddle of the monstrous frame, the passengers' conversations were brought to fearful hushes. Although frightened, I began to watch our driver and his methods.

He had a rear-view mirror, but most of his attention was directed toward the road. Distraction would have led to disaster, but he was focused. His eyes reminded me of the importance of focus in ministry.

I must remain focused on the Word of God. There are distractions in the life of the church that lead to disaster. My preaching and teaching ought to be powered by the Bible. I must also keep my focus on the words that aren't meant to be preached or taught. There are some things God has to say only to me, for me, about me. By cultivating personal devotion, I am able to better equip myself for ministry. Our driver was focused on the road; I must focus on the Word for my public and private ministry.

I continued watching our driver and saw that he had a pillow beneath him. In the midst of danger and uncer-

tainty, he understood the value of self-care. As we traveled on thinly padded steel benches and over pothole after pothole, the driver understood that his well-being was intricately tied to the well-being of his passengers. His preparation reminded me of the importance of self-care in ministry.

My effectiveness as a leader is directly linked to my overall satisfaction. I have learned that the cushions of laughter and time shared with family help dull the barbs of church life. Intentional cultivation of my marriage and my relationship with our children help me sit in a seat of leadership more confidently. When the day's activities or evening's demands are over, I know I have somewhere to go. Many hug their position and title because they don't have anywhere else to go for fulfillment. By nurturing my home life, I become a better minister for others.

As the driver ministered to me, other passengers familiar with the route began to block my view. Our school-bus rocked from 2 wheels to 4 wheels to 2 wheels and the veteran riders threw their weight to the side of the bus being lifted off the ground. Balance became crucial to our safe arrival and the driver's success. Their actions reminded me of the importance of balance in ministry.

To maximize self-care in ministry, I need to maintain balance in my life. I need to learn how to play as hard as I work. I need to learn how to say 'no' as easily as I say 'yes'. I need to make caring for myself a habit, not a response to crisis. I need to remember my personal Sabbath, and to keep it holy. By maintaining balance, I am able to minister more effectively.

I was learning to care for myself as our driver drove. We made it to our Haitian destination safely, and I learned valuable lessons for ministry. Though tried and challenged, I must remain focused on the Word, faithful to my family and frequent in my efforts to find balance.

Alex Pickens III is a graduate of Howard University. He spent time in the US Peace Corps, and currently serves as Pastor of University Baptist Church in East Lansing, MI.



GENDER ISSUES IN MINISTRY

Heather Entrekin

It happened almost three decades ago in a downtown Chicago church I loved for its creative, inclusive, progressive congregation. One summer Sunday a guest preacher stepped up to the pulpit. The preacher was a woman. Although I

was pushing 30 and a lifelong American Baptist, she was the first clergywoman I had ever seen in the pulpit. The sermon was excellent, but the best part was a profound sense of connection and belonging that, until that moment, I had not realized I lacked.

Following the service, I shared this epiphany with my 20-something friends. One of the men in the group instantly quoted a few Pauline texts to support his opposition to women in the pulpit. He triumphantly declared that he had almost walked out of the service in protest.

I knew that my experience was holy and real but I could not articulate or defend it. Out of frustration, stubbornness and hope, I enrolled in seminary, expecting to gain a few proof-texting skills of my own for the next attack. Instead, to the amazement of self and others, I began a slow but steady journey toward pastoral ministry.

Stories and statistics indicate that issues manifested in the circumstances of my call continue to reverberate in the church. Navigating the obstacles to call and ordination is difficult enough, but once ordained, women continue to face resistance. It comes in congregations of all denominations, sizes and locales. While mainline Protestant denominations have ordained women for decades and many have taken pride in recent prominent leadership roles for ordained female clergy, conservatives continue to argue that the pulpit is not an appropriate place for us.¹

We are clearly taking steps forward with increasing numbers of women enrolled in seminary, seeking ordination and serving churches in some denominations, but this is still an uphill calling.

The challenge begins with a dearth of models and mentors. Even a denomination as historically and structurally open to women as the United Methodists has only 18.5% clergywomen. Most girls do not encounter women clergy and those who do may find them struggling. Research of American Baptist women clergy reveals that compensation is demonstrably lower than for male colleagues, the ordination process more difficult and pastoral placement more challenging.²

The gender distinctions that make it difficult to hear a call and respond to it also raise obstacles once we do. A shortage of female peers in ministry exacerbates the loneliness that is an occupational hazard for anyone in ministry. Self-doubt is heightened by the negativity of others. Comments in the receiving line after worship like, "That wasn't as bad as I expected" or "I forgive you for preaching," have an annoying, residual capacity for undermining energy and confidence.

Sometimes the difficulty comes from women parish-

ioners uncomfortable with other women in an unfamiliar role. Women clergy may be seen as a threat to traditional hierarchical family relationships. One colleague sees this as a particular problem for African American clergywomen. She recalls being confronted by a member of the congregation who said with more candor than most, "I don't want a woman to have authority over my husband!"

Prejudice against women is sometimes overt, but the covert variety is equally insidious. One woman holding a high denominational office described the pain of simply being ignored by male colleagues in regional meetings. Another colleague, competent and experienced, confessed a sense of dislocation and conspicuousness when she walked into a room filled with clergymen only. Many of us have had the unsettling experience of tokenism when even supportive male colleagues turn to the lone female in the room and ask, "What do women think about that?"

Women often major in spiritual gifts of compassion, encouragement, humility, gratitude and hospitality. We may naturally embrace and practice a healthy theology of servant leadership. While these are good and necessary strengths in ministry, when women clergy display them they may feed age-old stereotypes that obstruct recognition and acceptance of other qualities and roles a pastor must assume. A congregation is likely to affirm a clergywoman's nurturing and pastoral care ministry but disdain her authoritative voice before the finance board or in the midst of conflict or problem-solving.

Passive or aggressive opposition to women in ministry feeds self-doubt and hesitance to claim strengths and power. Women become more than willing to emphasize and apologize for inabilities. Conversely, we may refuse to use and honor the skills and abilities we do have or seek to learn them. As a child, I was convinced that I could not do well in math because this was the consistent lament of my mother. Despite high grades in math courses all the way to graduate level statistics, the perception of inability persists. Likewise a culture of hostility, skepticism or indifference toward female pastors promotes deep insecurity about genuine abilities.

Women may also harbor a prejudice against traditional male models and metaphors that do not serve us well in ministry. I think of a leadership training program in which the opening Super Bowl clip on the giant screen closed my mind to the possibility of any learning. It didn't help that I was already feeling alienated as one of only two women among 100 clergy in the room, but I was quick to take offense at the excessively macho theme and dismiss the curriculum out of hand. Flying mud and crashing helmets will never be my idea of an inspir-

ing leadership model, but hierarchy, coaching and team work do have something to offer leadership in ministry. Masculine and feminine models of leadership both bring strengths to the table.

I have argued that gender issues are real and harmful to faithful, effective ministry. But they may also help. It was, after all, opposition to a woman preacher that triggered my decision to enter seminary. Opposition may also strengthen us along the way. It happened for one clergywoman after hearing this comment following a sermon: "I'm against women in ministry, but don't take it personally." She described that as some of the best advice she ever received because it prompted awareness and development of the essential ministry skill of self-differentiation. Concern about persistent barriers for women in ministry positions is prompting seminaries, denominations and foundations to seek new ways to prepare and sustain women for ecclesial leadership with promise for broadening and strengthening theological education and the church overall.

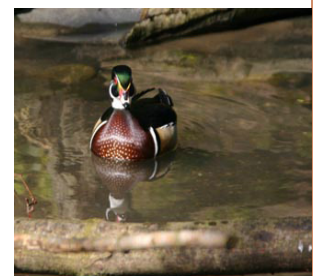
Despite persistent human obstacles to women in ministry, God continues to open doors to ministry and women continue to walk through them. As one clergywoman wrote out of painful experience, "You can continue your relentless efforts to contain the spirit of God, squelch it, silence it and damage it, but it will not die in us. I pray that we will have the courage to follow our Lord into a kingdom where enemies are loved, where sons and daughters prophesy, even behind pulpits, and where God's Spirit is poured out on all flesh." (Rev. Nancy Hastings Sehested, from *An Open Letter to the Home Mission Board*, Southern Baptist Convention, 1989)

God helping us, may it be so.

¹ "Women Clergy: Steps Forward and Back," *Christian Century*, October 31, 2006

² Study by James Owen Wolfe III, "American Baptist Women in Pastoral Ministry: A Contemporary Survey." Cloverdale Books, 2007.

Heather Entrekin has served as Senior Pastor at Prairie Baptist Church in Prairie Village, Kansas since 1999. She is a daughter and great granddaughter of Baptist pastors. Contact her at entrekin@prairiebaptist.org





A Culture of Call: the Calling of All God's People

Trinette McCray

A fully engaged culture of call in ministry is vital to the life of the ABC.

This is a most significant call as a denomination—a call to greater discipleship ministry through the work of cultivating an environment that creates a space for persons to notice, name and be nurtured in the claim and call of God on their lives. As Karl Barth has stated, “all believers are called at baptism ... some are given a specific call to be clerics (ordained) who then become leaders of leaders. But all are leaders.”

Over the past thirty or so years we have seen both a decline in younger people entering ministry, challenges in future leadership for the church, and drastic changes in seminary education in the traditional MDiv programs. Yet colleges and universities are recognizing a generation of students who are much more service minded, more focused on living and leading lives that matter, who are faith-attuned and exploring their spirituality, and who are inclined to dedicate themselves as Christians serving in “faith-based” organizations. Is the church one of those places of calling? I believe it is.

Several months ago a few American Baptist leaders were invited to an informal exploratory conversation on cultivating a culture of call within the ABC. The conversation was initially stimulated by a think piece document that was a very early vision of how American Baptists as a calling church would address the growing need for a new generation of leaders in ministry in the ABC. Subsequently, two conference calls have been held — sponsored by the Ministers Council — with the second call involving even more participants from among denominational and regional leaders, key seminary leaders, persons engaged in ministry counseling, local church pastors, and retired ministers. A social network hosts the conversation online and has posts of related websites, articles, books, blogs, and discussion forums. Membership can be requested by going to the web site www.cultureofcall.ning.com.

Of the several recommendations in a 2001 Alban Institute Special Report — *The Leadership Situation Facing Congregations* — one prompted a major program and financial effort from the Lilly Endowment that resulted in the funding of 88 colleges and universities through Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation.

That recommendation states, “Major attention must be given to recruiting the next generation of leaders. Special efforts must be made to reach young people with compelling images of the leadership challenges and opportunities awaiting them in congregational life. Great attention must be paid to removing the systemic barriers that discourage their consideration of such roles.”

Lilly's vision, started in 2001, seeks to foster a new generation of faith leaders in the church and society. They hope to look ten to fifteen years into the future and identify a significant number of younger people who will assume roles in the pulpit, and other vital ministries of the church and in society, as principled leaders.

Joe Kutter once stated, “The question is not whether God is calling the leadership that is needed for the ministries of Christ; God is. The question is whether the church is prepared to nurture women and men to recognize and respond to that call.” The question is, how do we, as a denominational family, join with the work of God in calling out and raising a generation of believers in Christ whom we support in noticing and naming their call? How are we (local churches, regions, denominational ministries, camps, colleges, and seminaries) strategically positioned, right now, to be collectively used by God to help persons in the discernment process, claim their gifts, and be nurtured to fulfill that call in the world, and yes, within American Baptist churches, institutions, organizations, and agencies as well as partner institutions?

Frankly speaking, many analysts have purported that the present church, i.e. the traditional church, is not the church that can attract and sustain the leadership of this next generation — for a variety of reasons that present barriers.

The Alban Institute report acknowledges an urgent need for change, stating that, “The challenge before us in a time of sea change is to shift from the preoccupation with institutional problem-solving to a new commitment to capturing people's imagination and providing wellsprings of hope. To make this shift requires a new calling of leaders, a new training of leaders, and a new supporting of leaders, both clergy and lay, who can stand with poise and fidelity in both the crisis and ferment of this great sea change.”

In regards to the calling of lay leaders, remember the work of Jitsuo Morikawa. (I love to draw upon our American Baptist history. It informs our present by considering our past.) Morikawa said of vocation and calling, “Ministry is the vocation and purpose in which the whole human race is constituted and called: every life born into the world, every family and institution, every people and race and nation. Life is literally ministry.” As I have attempted to understand his thinking,

identifying the calling of all Christians to live their faith in the vineyard through ministries was job one. I must acknowledge that there are others who worked more closely with him and were his contemporaries. They might be better positioned to speak more clearly of his work. But I still find great inspiration in the calling of the laity work of Morikawa and his co-worker Richard Broholm, both of whom were once National Ministries staff leaders. The ministry of these two led to their work with Andover Newton Theological Seminary, where they established the Center for the Ministry of the Laity.

Jitsuo Morikawa believed deeply that American Baptists had a unique contribution to make in empowering laity for ministry. In a letter written only a few months before he died he reflected on the mission of the national agencies of the ABC. He wrote, "Because of our smallness and hence flexibility we have less to lose. We should identify a 'driving force,' a singular unique, most urgently needed missionary-evangelistic spearpoint around which our total resources must be focused. That spearpoint or driving force in my judgment is the ministry of laity in the institutions of our society. It should be informed by a theology of accountability, to transform institutions to fulfill their true vocation and calling, namely, to serve the common good. There is no question that this is the urgent, most critical mission of the Church today and in the years ahead."

The calling of all of God's people, those who would be ordained leaders and lay leaders, presses upon us to cultivate an environment which expects that persons are being called by God and will answer that call when nurtured and supported to do so. So allow me to share a few *what-ifs*.

What if we were driven by a vision that stands upon the truth that God does call each believer to ministry in the church, in the workplace and marketplace of our society and world?

What if the impact of our effectiveness in developing a strong culture of call resulted in greater disciple-making and deeper discipleship, steeped in an American Baptist identity of mission and ministry?

What if this culture furthered connections with our American Baptist colleges, universities and seminaries to educate and train students through formative experiences that engage their unique calling, and support their full placement in American Baptist churches, home mission centers, and global missions, so they would become leaders in educational, corporate, and governmental units at all levels?

It would result in American Baptists equipped to serve as the hands and feet of Christ, every day and

everywhere. The culture of call conversation is action in the ABC-USA. American Baptists are rich in ministerial, educational and programmatic resources that are already in our hands, ready to be leveraged through a culture of call.

I look forward to continuing this conversation in order to find out what others are doing to effectively cultivate a culture of call, and to discovering best practices that are being experienced by local churches, in regional programming, and with our educational partners.

How can we in ABC agencies better coordinate our efforts to maximize the results and the benefits of all we do? What is the real role of the seminaries as they work with local churches to help young people engage in various forms of ministry? Women in ministry are ready. How do we cultivate a more open environment for the placement of women into the ministry areas for which they have been gifted and called?

As one person commented during the last conference call conversation, "the goal is not to reinvent the wheel but to discover what American Baptist churches and organizations are already doing in this area to better coordinate and leverage their efforts to increase the numbers of American Baptist leaders in the pipeline. This is our collective work for the sake of the Kingdom. It is in our heritage to respond to God's calling of all God's people.

Trinette V. McCray is a former president of the ABC-USA, the first clergywoman so elected. Currently she is the President of the American Baptist Historical Society and serves on the General Board. Trinette lives in Milwaukee and is the Executive Director of the Center for Calling and Engagement at Cardinal Stritch University.





minister

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Editor: Michael Saylor

Publisher: Joe Kutter

Ministers Council Communications Committee

Contact us:

The Ministers Council

PO Box 851

Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851

Phone: 1 • 800 • 222-3872 ext 2333, 2334

Fax: 610 • 768-2066

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The Ministers Council is the professional association of ministerial leaders within the American Baptist Churches USA. We are working together to:

- Connect colleagues through Together in Ministry groups and Communities of Practice
- Establish and maintain professional and ethical standards of the Christian ministry
- Give support to the members of this body and be an advocate for them in their professional relations
- Resource ministry through our web site at www.ministerscouncil.org
- Interpret the appropriate roles of professional ministerial leadership to the constituent parts of our denomination, and to our local American Baptist Churches
- Encourage the recruitment and nurture of candidates for the various church vocations
- Provide a means of expression and debate by members of this body on issues that affect the professional ministerial leadership of the American Baptist Churches USA
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