

*Rev. Dr. Debora Jackson, Executive Director*

*July 2014*

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### From the Desk of the Executive Director

I recently saw the Samsung “Wall Hugger” commercial and was immediately transported back to a familiar scene. The commercial depicted people in airports desperately trying to charge cell phones. People were in bathrooms, sitting on floors, and squeezed into uncomfortable corners just to gain access to a plug. I could relate. I've sat on floors; I've crammed into corners; and I've waited out in smelly bathrooms, just to access an outlet to get that much needed battery recharge.



But beyond being able to relate, I could not help but remember that things were different when my cell phone was new. Oh it seemed that I could go for days without a charge. I felt as though I could have responded to email, surfed the web, watched several YouTube videos and still have juice to make phone calls. But over time, it seemed that the mean time between recharging was greatly reduced. Now all I have to do is use my phone as a hot spot for a few minutes and the battery is drained, thus requiring me to more frequently find new places for a charge.

This phenomenon is not only true with our various electronic devices, but it is also true of ministry. I don't know about you, but when I was first called to my church, I felt like I could go for days without wearying. I was called of God, I was pastor, and I felt certain of God's path and plan for my congregation. Perhaps that was just the honeymoon, but it was great. I knew what to preach, I knew what needed to be done, I knew how to lead, and my congregation was happy and growing.

Over time the story changed. Things got harder. The problems were more difficult to solve. The counseling was more heart wrenching. I remember having to practice a funeral sermon for a dearly loved member because even I couldn't get through my eulogy without crying. I remember the first time I met resistance to a plan that I had for the church, having to actually debate and sell the plan to gain support. I remember a sermon that drew complaints because it made some people feel uncomfortable. I remember having only 20 children signed up for Vacation Bible School when we had planned for 60. Ministry was starting to weigh heavily and my battery drained more quickly.

However as I reflect back on these times, it strikes me that this is how it is supposed to be. Similar to the experience that new believers in Christ share, we feel completely invincible when we first begin our ministries. Our footsteps are made firm, what we touch and do seems to prosper, and we are on top of the world simply reveling in the grace of God given through Jesus Christ. I believe this is as God intends. God wants us to recognize that we have been called and that we have been equipped to do the work that God has for us. But lest we start to believe that we are so gifted and capable in and of ourselves that we can do things by ourselves, God has ways of letting us know that "all of our help comes from the Lord." We have to plug into the source. We have to be connected to the vine. Without the sustaining grace of God, we wither and fall away. We cannot bear up under the challenges. If we try to go it alone, we will be emptied and depleted.

So the question is when was the last time that you connected to the divine power source so that you could be revitalized and recharged? Like finding that lone outlet in a dusty corner, you might need to find your secret prayer closet and reconnect. You may need to sit on the floor in your business suit and wing tips or your skirt and pumps. In other words, we just might have to humble ourselves before the Lord so that we know without doubt that God is the one who ministers to and restores us through the Holy Spirit. And some times, when you just don't have enough time to get a full charge, you might have to turn off the device and let it lie dormant but plugged in to fully power up. God knows this is true of us in ministry. At times we cannot go on, but neither are we meant to. Like Jesus taking his disciples away to a deserted place where they could rest, we need to do the same.

So next time you find yourself frustrated that your iPhone, Droid, or Tablet needs another charge, don't get angry as you scout out various places to connect. Just remember that like us, our devices need to connect to the source. It is as we connect to the source that we are able to fully live into all to which God has called us.

**The Ministers Council  
Awarded a Catalyst Grant  
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The Ministers Council is proud to announce that we have been awarded a Catalyst Grant from the Pastoral Excellence Network at [Christian Theological Seminary](#), a program of Lilly Endowment, Inc. Catalyst Grants are intended to provide funding to expand the Pastoral Excellence Network and to develop a body of wisdom and practice regarding the transition into ministry and/or sustaining pastoral excellence. This grant will aid in the planning, development, and implementation of the Clergy Health Initiative, a new programs which will foster sustaining pastoral excellence.

What is one of the biggest challenges impacting clergy today? Health. A seven year study conducted by Duke University that began in 2007 showed that Methodist ministers as compared with neighbors in their census tracts reported higher rates of arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure and asthma. Obesity was 10% more prevalent among clergy in this denomination as compared to other groups in society. The results of the study echoed surveys conducted among Evangelical Lutheran ministers, which found that 69% of its ministers were overweight, 64% had high blood pressure, and 13% were taking anti-depressants. The results were similar when compared to Baptist ministers. The effects of ill health have a major impact on the ability to perform effectively in one's ministry. It also has a direct effect on medical plan experience and subsequent costs on plan premiums as well as the rise in disability claims against the plans.

These and similar findings motivated the Ministers Council to propose a Clergy Health Initiative in partnership with MMBB Financial Services, American Baptist Foundation, and American Baptist Home Mission Societies. Through this partnership, we want to positively impact health outcomes for clergy, emphasizing a holistically approach to health through peer group learning. Specifically, this initiative will leverage the clergy peer group learning model while focusing participants on the areas of self-care, physical wellness, financial wellness, and retirement readiness as the means to help individuals achieve their health goals.

The Ministers Council's connection to the Pastoral Excellence Network resulted from the Together In Ministry (TIM) program. Over the course of a decade, thousands of clergy learned first hand the benefits of realizing clergy friendships, establishing a network of support and being strengthened in ministry as individuals covenanted together through TIM. This initiative takes that learning one step further. We want to intentionally focus on health as a component of clergy group gatherings with the hope that coming together for support around health goals will help individuals better meet those goals. With accountability partners found in clergy peer groups, we believe that clergy will be emboldened and motivated to make progress toward their self-determined goals. How much easier might it be to lose 10 pounds if others knew that that was a goal? What a motivator we would have if we knew that someone in our group was going to ask us whether we have made progress on our retirement plan. That is what this initiative offers: the incentive to care for self as we participate in the care and keeping of others.

Work has already begun in preparation for an August launch, coinciding with the Ministers Council Senate / Annual meeting, August 11-14. Group participants will be presented with a Clergy Health Initiative Workbook, containing a series of checklists and tools through which the individual can make a baseline assessment of their own health needs and goals. The groups will then be encouraged to participate in a year-long study, during which time groups will check in monthly so that we might obtain a general assessment about the gatherings, how people are progressing against the achievement of their wellness goals, and any challenges that the individuals or group may be experiencing. At the end of the study, a report will be made and shared throughout the denomination and with the Pastoral Excellence Network in hopes of further expansion and clergy involvement.

Existing TIM groups are encouraged to apply to participate in this study. We are also encouraging new groups to form. A fee of \$200.00 per person is required for participation, but scholarships are available. The fees cover the cost of a facilitator to work with the group for the year; however the fees also provide resources in support of this initiative. For example, MMBB and the American Baptist Foundation will offer financial and retirement planning workshops and consultations for participating groups. ABHMS, as our denominational endorser, is sponsoring three teams of Chaplains and Pastoral Counselors. Participants will also receive a "Fit Bit" for tracking physical activity and online resources to aid in managing and tracking health goals in community.

The Ministers Council, MMBB, ABF, and ABHMS are excited to offer this initiative that has been generously supported by the Pastoral Excellence Network. We have an opportunity to help clergy realize greater health, which will enable clergy to be more effective in the call that God has placed on their lives. For more information about this new Clergy Health Initiative, register for and plan on attending the Ministers Council Senate / Annual Meeting or call (800) ABC-3USA ext. 2334.

**Last Chance! Register Now for the Ministers Council Senate / Annual Meeting – August 11-14, 2014 at Green Lake Conference Center, Green Lake, WI**



**Registration for the Ministers Council Senate / Annual Meeting closes on July 21.** Don't miss your opportunity to join with your colleagues to fellowship, be renewed, and increase your ministerial competence, while learning more about the Ministers Council.

Our gathering will feature the Rev. Dr. Molly Marshall, President of and Professor of Theology and Spiritual Formation at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. We will also offer workshops led by Rev. Margaret Marcuson on Leadership, Rev. Betty Wright-Riggins on Spiritual Direction, Rev. Denise Henderson on Clergy Health, Rev. Dr. Perry Hopper on Planning for Retirement and Rev. Perkin Simpson on Financial Wellness. In addition, we will kick off our new Clergy Health Care Initiative!

Don't miss this opportunity to register and attend the Ministers Council Senate / Annual Meeting. To register for the **Ministers Council Senate/Annual Meeting 2014**, please use the following link: <http://www.abc-usa.org/coordinatedcalendar/event-registration/> . Click "Register Now" located next to the **Ministers Council Senate/Annual Meeting**.

## Extra, Extra, Read all about it!

We know that there is a word from the Lord, but is there any news from your council or region? Share the word and let others know of the good work that you are doing. Send email announcements to Debora Jackson at [Debora.Jackson@abc-usa.org](mailto:Debora.Jackson@abc-usa.org). We will do our best to include your events in upcoming announcements through the Ministers Council.



## Do the Numbers

Do any of these statistics describe you<sup>1</sup>?



**80% of pastors** are discouraged in their role as pastors.

**40% of pastors** seriously considered leaving the pastorate in the past three months.

**50% of pastors** say they are unable to meet the demands of their job and are so discouraged that they would leave ministry if they could, but have no other way of making a living.

For every **20 pastors** who go into ministry, only one retires from the ministry.

**25% of pastors** have been forced out or fired from their ministry at least once.

**45% of pastors** say they've experienced depression or burnout to the extent that they need to take a leave of absence.

Of **1,050 pastors** surveyed by the Schaeffer Institute, every one of them – 100% - had a close associate or friend from seminary who had left the ministry because of burnout, conflict in their church or from a moral failure.

**70% of pastors** say they do not have a single close friend, and the same percentage say they have lower self-esteem than when they entered the ministry.

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<sup>1</sup> Fail: Finding Hope and Failure in the Midst of Ministry Failure (IVP, 2014). [www.ivpress.com](http://www.ivpress.com).

Denominational health insurance agencies report that **medical costs for clergy are higher** than the average professional group.

If any of these statistics describe you, contact your local Ministers Council or the National Ministers Council at (800) ABC-3USA ext. 2334. You are not alone; we are here to support you.



## Together in Ministry – Current Status

The Bible says, “You have not because you ask not.” This is so true in so many cases. Asking feels difficult or awkward at times. No one wants to hear “no” or be rejected so we shy away. But we do not always hear “no,” especially when we have relationships. Our friends, our families, and the people who love us want to see us succeed. Thus, when we ask, more times than not, the answer will be “yes.”

So if that is the case, why are we as clergy so unlikely to ask? Maybe it is because we believe that we are self-sufficient, all the while proclaiming that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Yes we can do all things through Christ. But it is not unfair to at times recall the words of another John who said, “I get by with a little help from my friends.”

With that in mind, I decided to ask my pastor, the Rev. Dr. Wesley Roberts of Peoples Baptist Church in Boston, if the church would support the Together in Ministry Capital Campaign. I reasoned that as clergy, he could understand the need to encourage clergy to come together for support. And as a pastor, he could also appreciate the need to finance the work. Did these realities make it easier to ask? Not really; it’s hard to ask for money. Any pastor who has ever had to promote the need for stewardship during worship knows that truth. But remembering that I could not hope to get what I would not ask for, I asked anyway. And guess what? On behalf of the church, he said yes. Peoples Baptist Church has pledged \$4500.00 to the Together in Ministry Capital Campaign.

You have not because you ask not. Who might you ask to support you or some other individual who has been meaningful in ministry? We are working to reach a \$500,000 target. Can you make the ask and help us get there? To date, our cash gifts and pledges total \$ 288,978.05 and our in-kind contributions total \$70,519.20, making our overall total \$359,497.25. Make the ask and help us to meet our goal of extending ministerial excellence through the continuation of clergy peer groups for decades to come. Tax-deductible donations can be made securely and electronically by going to <http://ministerscouncil.com/together-in-ministry-capital-campaign/> and clicking on the Donate button.

### **Come Cruise with AB Women’s Ministries and AB Women in Ministry!**

Women are invited to join us on “A Time to Serve: A Time to Prepare,” a three-night cruise to the Bahamas on the Royal Caribbean “Enchantment of the Seas,” and fellowship with your American Baptist sisters as you relax and renew in the tropical sunshine. Highlights include a welcome reception to meet all your American Baptist women cruise-mates, dinners together in the main dining room, sessions together for Bible study, worship, and inspiration, and plenty of time to enjoy all the ship has to offer and visits to Nassau and CocoCay.

During our sessions, keynote speakers Rev. Dr. Debora Jackson, executive director of Ministers Council, and Dr. Lisa Croft, family practitioner, will help us explore how we are prepared to serve in discipleship. How do we attend to our spiritual and physical health to help us be effective disciples for Christ? What practices can we adopt to help us continue to grow as women of faith while we are called into an ever-deepening relationship with God? Additionally, performing artist Joyce Sinclair Lake will bring us worship through song.

Visit [www.abwministries.org/cruise](http://www.abwministries.org/cruise) for information, program fee and registration information. This cruise is sponsored by AB Women's Ministries in partnership with American Baptist Women in Ministry.

## Upcoming Events

- Christian Leadership Institute Fellowship in Jerusalem, July 14-25, 2014.
- The Ministers Council Senate / Annual Meeting – This year's **Ministers Council gathering will be open to all ministerial leaders**. August 11-14, 2014, at Green Lake, WI. Register at <http://www.abc-usa.org/coordinatedcalendar/event-registration/>.

## Ministers Council Contact Information

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