

From the Desk of the Executive Director

Ok, I could not resist this as a graphic to accompany my musings this month. The comic made me laugh because I am reminded of the folly. Each year society is bombarded with ideas for New Year's resolutions, chief among them are opportunities to lose weight. Yes we have good intentions, but few of us can change habits immediately. That is why resolutions are broken so quickly. And recognizing that inability to change, companies like Weight Watchers, Nutrisystems and various health clubs take advantage. We can count on their advertising messages no sooner than the holidays are finished. As an aside, I might add that we as clergy probably want to consider some of those options. If you had not noticed, clergy officially rank right up there as some of the fattest people in society... I'm just sayin'...



But what really got me in this comic was Calvin literally screaming at Hobbes, incensed at the suggestion that he should change. Truly it made me think of clergy. How often are we supposed to be the prayerful, non-anxious presence and yet the pressures of ministry have us ready snap if someone looks at us cross-eyed? There are times when the stresses are high and we can feel like a tautly stretched rope starting to fray. You see it in our demeanor. You can hear it in our voices. You can even sense it in the emails. It is a tell-tale terseness that comes across all too clearly. And if called on it, we might even respond as Calvin did: "Me?!? Change??"

Now I maintain that if we would subscribe to a little self-care, we could address both the issues of weight and stress management. So in light of this need, whether or not you want to go as far as establishing a New Year's resolution, perhaps you might be open to some self-care suggestions. First, we could eat better. There is a reason that the number one New Year's resolution is to lose weight. We are a chubby society. But losing weight does not have to be difficult. We need to commit to exercise. It does not take much – 30 minutes, three times a week would be a huge plus. And we do not need to spend a lot of money on gyms or equipment. Walking is wonderful exercise and just about anyone can benefit by taking a walk.

Then we have to watch what we eat. Working from a home office when I'm not on the road makes me incredibly cognizant of how many times I can walk past a cabinet to grab a snack. However, that is

why I keep fruits and vegetables on hand. Sure, I'd rather the chips and "Double Stuff Oreos", but I also recognize that a few healthy substitutions go a long way.

Additionally, we need to connect with others in ministry. Again, I get it. We feel so busy given our responsibilities as clergy that getting together with others seems like a hardship. I had a clergy gathering recently and remember actually bemoaning the event. "Oh I don't have time for this," I complained. "I should be doing some work," I rationalized. Since I was hosting the gathering, I couldn't back out, and that was a good thing, because rather than being the hardship that justified my laments, the gathering was extremely restorative. I so enjoyed the company of other clergy. We broke bread and fellowshiped. Then we were treated to a wonderful paper by one of the colleagues. I went home feeling refreshed, energized and far more enthused to return to my work than I would have been if I had blown off the gathering. And of course none of this is news. This kind of opportunity to gather with clergy colleagues is therapeutic. But why in the moment do we kick up such a fuss about it? This would be a real goal for 2015: take more time to remember the benefits of gathering rather than erecting objections.

So this is a very doable list for the New Year: eat better, move more, and gather with colleagues. While I recognize that you are practically perfect in every way and like Calvin, without need of change, I also know that we are called to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. It is in that spirit that I encourage you onward, and pray God's blessings for you in this New Year.

The Work of Christmas

Howard Thurman

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,
The work of Christmas begins.

To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers and sisters,
To make music in the heart.



Extra, Extra, Read All About It!

Our local Ministers Council Chapters are the lifeblood of the organization. But will anyone know of your good works if you do not share them? Let us know your events, your best practices, and your ideas so that we can share them across ABC, USA. Send your news by contacting the Ministers Council office at (800) 222-3872 x 2334 or email Joyce Moon at joyce.moon@abc-usa.org

Balancing the Challenges of Leadership and Ministry with the 7R's of Sanctuary

How do we balance the demands of leadership: caring for the congregation, doing the work of the church, and serving in the community; while also tending to our own spiritual well-being? This is one of the greatest challenges of ministry. When we lead with vision and vitality, our churches and communities can thrive. But when we are depleted, we are less able to inspire creativity and our churches suffer. Because the well-being of our churches is intrinsically tied to the well-being of the leader, it is critical for us to have practices that increase our effectiveness in ministerial leadership and enable us to attend to self in healthy, restorative ways.

There is such a practice that allows us to realize both of these goals and I call it the 7Rs of Sanctuary. Combining leadership theory with spiritual practice, the 7Rs help leaders create space for reflection to expansively consider potential strategies. Through this process, our leadership is energized by a renewed sense of purpose, and we are spiritually nurtured.

The first step in the process is to **Retreat**. Retreat means to step away from your leadership. Just as Jesus invited his disciples to come away to a deserted place to rest (Mark 6:31), you must do the same. It is necessary for your leadership and your well-being to seek an isolated physical or mental space whereby you can create separation from the work and the challenges that confront you.

Then you must **Release**. Release is the intentional act of letting go. We are encouraged to cast our cares upon God because God cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). Each of us needs a period of dormancy and restful quiescence where we can “be” rather than “do.”

Third we have to **Review**. This is the opportunity to consider your leadership context in a mindful way and without condemnation. Imagine your work as if you were watching clouds go by. What is going well? What could be improved? Are you where you hoped to be? It is as we review and then offer the pieces of our work to God that God helps us gain a sense of priority.

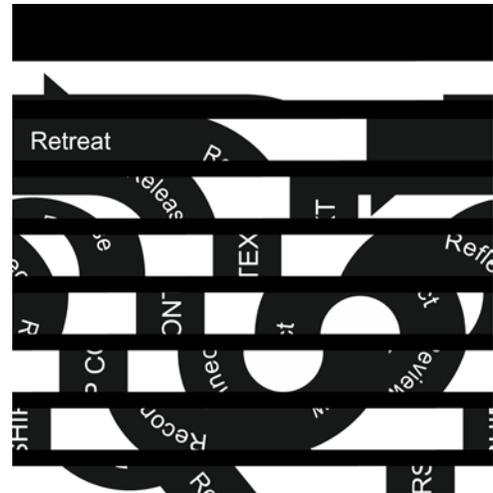
The fourth R is to **Reconnect**. We need to reconnect to our calling and sense of God's purpose in our ministry. We have to reconnect to the ideals that are core to who we are and where we are going. And as we reconnect and remember, the flames of dreams lost are sparked. We can consider anew our goals and our plans to reach them.

This work positions us to **Reflect**. Reflection allows us look forward at the current context and situation that was remembered during review, while looking backward to examine the original goals and ideals that came to mind during reconnection. As we hold those ideas in parallel we can recognize the gaps and disconnects between where we are and where we were called to be.

Given the learning that is gained from reflection, we can then **Recalibrate**. To recalibrate acknowledges that we cannot direct our own steps. We need God to correct us in just measure so that we might get back on track. This is the opportunity to mentally “try on for size” the emerging ideas that were brought to mind in reflection and to discern whether there is energy and excitement that arises from them.

Then we **Return**. Return prepares us to go back to our leadership. In returning, we celebrate having taken time apart and we give thanks for the opportunity to step away. In returning, we recognize God's affirmation of our ministry as a beloved son or daughter. And we realize the eagerness to return, particularly as we emerge from the process with new ideas and strategy for our ministries.

In Matthew 11:28, Jesus said, “Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest.” Ministry is a heavy load and we need strategies that will help us to flourish in ministry. The invitation is extended: take time apart from your leadership, engage in the process, and be restored.



A New Year and a New Structure for the Ministers Council

The Ministers Council is celebrating a new structure as of January 1st. Our Local Chapters come together as a Ministries Team to share, collaborate and determine the programmatic work of the Ministers Council. Our Development Council serves to support our fund development and marketing efforts. And our Board of Governors handles the governance of the organization. The hope of this new structure is that we might more adaptably respond to the needs of clergy, providing the support, advocacy and programming that you need to make you more effective in your ministries.



What a great time to be a part of the Ministers Council as we respond to the needs of our members and position ourselves for more efficient functioning. Join the Ministers Council today. Membership fees are based on a personal income sliding scale as follows:

\$55,000+	\$100
\$25,000 - \$54,999	\$50
\$10,000 - \$24,999	\$25
< \$10,000	\$10

Become a member or renewing your membership in the Ministers Council. Contact your local council or go to www.ministerscouncil.com for more information.



Together in Ministry – Finishing Well

The Together in Ministry Capital Campaign ended in 2014 and we are celebrating the end of this milestone endeavor. We are proud and grateful to have raised \$295,932.25 in cash and pledges and \$76,680.00 in in-kind donations. That is a total of \$37,2612.25. How amazing! Thank you all for your support.

Now that the campaign is over, we want to make sure that all that was pledged is received. Do you have a pledge that you made to the Together in Ministry capital campaign that is still outstanding? If so, please contact Joyce Moon at the Ministers Council at (800) 222-3872 x2334 and make your payment or send your check payable to the Ministers Council to P.O. Box 851, Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851.

Is it possible that you never got an opportunity to make a donation? Well, far be it from us to refuse your generosity. Feel free to click <http://ministerscouncil.com/together-in-ministry-capital-campaign/> and make your secure donation. Who knows, we still might make that \$300,000 mark in cash and pledges or \$100,000 in in-kind donations.

We are finishing well. Not only have we accomplished something that was heretofore untried by the Ministers Council, but we have also created a revenue stream for future ministry. In 2015, we will begin to draw revenue from our capital campaign proceeds to support still-functioning TIM groups and encourage the establishment of new groups. In addition, we will use the services of our colleagues who have so generously donated their time to support our groups as well. So you see; we are finishing well. All win because you generously gave. Thank you!

Philadelphia Baptist Association Ministers Council Prayer Breakfast

The Philadelphia Baptist Association Ministers Council is holding their annual Prayer Breakfast for pastors and their spouse. This special breakfast celebration will convene at the PBA office, 8711 Ridge Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19128 on **Wednesday, January 14, 2015, 9:00am**. The schedule is outlined below:

9:00-10:00am	Breakfast—Enjoy A Hot Meal
10:00-11:30am	Prayer Breakfast Theme: “Praying the Great I AM” Rev. Julia Bruton-Sheppard, Prayer Guide
11:30am	Business Meeting

A full breakfast will be provided, so please confirm your attendance upon receipt of this letter by contacting Mrs. Rosalyn L. Martin by phone (215-482-8222 x 10), fax (215-482-8232), or email (rlmartin@philadelphiabaptist.org)

Upcoming Events

- Graduate Theological Union / American Baptist Seminary of the West – Womanist Symposium 2015. January 10, 2015.
- MLK Day Worship – New Beginnings Christian Fellowship, Renton, WA – January 18, 2015.
- MLK Day Worship, Evergreen Association of the American Baptist Churches – January 19, 2015.
- New England Assembly of American Baptists, Leominster, MA – January 23-24, 2015.
- Ministers Council Board of Governors Meeting, Overland Park, KS – February 1-4, 2015
- ABHMS Board Retreat, Charlotte, NC, February 10-13, 2015.

Give to the Ministers Council

Support the work and ministry of the Ministers Council through the Ministers Council Endowment. Visit <http://ministerscouncil.com/the-ministers-council-endowment> for more information.

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