

Rev. Dr. Debora Jackson, Executive Director

November 2015



From the Desk of the Executive Director

I recently facilitated an exercise where I asked leaders to categorize the health of the various ministries of their church. A tree was drawn on a large blank canvas and leaves cut from construction paper. The leaves, in the colors of fall, were separated and placed on a table. For ministries that were emerging or growing, I asked participants to write the name of that ministry on a green leaf. Yellow leaves were to be used for ministries that were mature. Orange leaves were to be used to write the names of ministries that

were in decline. Finally brown leaves were used to list those ministries that were dead, dying, or should be.

After the exercise and adorning the tree, I did not engage the leaders in the task of determining whether said ministry was green or yellow. Instead, I wanted them to list strategies that they would use in support of those ministries given that ministry's designation. Leaders very quickly noted that if a ministry was designated as being "green," that is emerging or growing, then strategically, the church should pray for, support, nurture, encourage, expand, participate in and think beyond the present for the success of that ministry. If the ministry was designated as being "yellow," then the church needed to celebrate the success, reassess the ministry for future opportunities, strengthen, retool, go in greater depth, encourage, and plan for the future growth of that ministry. Now, if a ministry was in decline, that is if the ministry was designated as being "orange," then the church needed to pray for direction and strength for that ministry. They needed to evaluate and re-assess the need for the ministry. They might need to identify a new direction for the ministry. And very biblically, leaders talked about the need for pruning and fertilizing declining ministries.

But things got difficult when we talked about the ministries that were dead or dying. I would have expected that those ministries that were dead or dying would be the easiest with which to deal and dispense. However, when I asked, "What should be the strategy for a dead or dying ministry," the first response was "Resurrect it."

We are children of the resurrection. We know that by the power of the Holy Spirit, God can bring that which was dead back to life. We know it by the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But I tell you that I struggle with this notion when we consider some of the ministries and practices of the church. I told the story of my congregation and our annual Tenebrae service. Not being familiar with the service at the time, I asked my leaders to tell me how the service came to be: when was it instituted; why did we do it; who came to it; and what was its impact in the life of the church? They were unable to answer any of the questions. So as I turned to the church's annals, I

learned that my predecessor's predecessor had started the tradition and for 40 years we had done the same service in the same way. Moreover, I learned that it was not terribly well attended because there was little connection to this tradition. And yet, we were afraid to say, "Its dead. We need to get rid of it." We were happy to allow that ministry to limp along indefinitely. It was only after speaking with several leaders that we were able to boldly live into the prophetic words of Queen Elsa. We "let it go," and ended the annual Tenebrae service.

I learned a valuable ministry lesson from that experience. Isaiah 43:19 records the word of God saying, "*I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.*" Too often there is not room in our ministries for the new things that God wants to raise up in our midst because we are clinging to what is dead or what should be euthanized. In my case, when we eliminated the Tenebrae service, some of my leaders approached me asking if they could present a play called "God in the Concrete City." We presented it on Maundy Thursday and served communion afterwards. The gathering was beautiful and because it was such a different offering, many in the community came to partake of it.

God wants to do new things in our midst. Where we have flourishing and emerging ministries, God wants to give us increase. Where we have mature and sustaining ministries, God wants to show us where there might be new opportunities for impact. Where we have declining ministries, I believe that God wants to show us how we might breathe new life and new ideas for revival. And where something has died, I believe that God wants us to clear the ground to be open to what might grow up in its place. But we cannot realize the new unless we are open to it. Sometimes truly, we have to "Let it go."

Give Thanks for the Ministers Council

While attending *Space for Grace*, I had the opportunity to engage with many people. What was wonderful to hear was the support for the Ministers Council. Perhaps we don't consider it often, but it is a blessing to know that we have clergy colleagues with whom we can connect and fellowship. It is a blessing that we have leadership that advocates for clergy at a national level. It is a blessing that we have programs that are available to strengthen and equip clergy. It is a blessing that we can bring together partners to provide additional helps and resources. These are the gifts and graces that are ours because we have a national organization. We have the Ministers Council.



2015 is almost over, which means that your membership will soon expire. Give thanks for the Ministers Council, but then prepare to continue your membership or become a member in 2016.

Renewing is easy. You can contact your local Ministers Council chapter or you can go to <http://ministerscouncil.com/subscriptions/> to subscribe. Don't let your membership expire. Don't continue outside of the "Space for Grace" that is the Ministers Council. Renew or Join today.



Sustaining in Ministry Requires more than "Lord Have Mercy"

When I was a girl, I remember the "old folks" saying, "Lord, have mercy." I would hear the prayer in response to noisy neighborhood children, "Lord, have mercy!" I would hear the prayer in response to tragic events, "Lord, have mercy!" I even heard the prayer as church women talked among themselves, "Lord, have mercy!"

When I began seminary, I took to saying, "Lord, have mercy." I was so busy with classes that my prayer life was reduced to "Lord, have mercy." I was seeking mercy from my classes. Called as pastor

while in seminary, I was seeking mercy from the challenges of ministry. And also being a wife and mother, sometimes “Lord, have mercy” was the only utterance that made sense.

While it was gratifying that I was continuing this ancient ritual, declaring, “Lord, have mercy,” as I ran hither and yon was hardly restorative. I needed more: more for myself, and more for my leadership.

I was struggling as a pastor with a congregation in decline. My faithful flock was aging and growing tired. How was I to encourage them to help me build a ministry? How was I to do the work of maintaining a congregation, motivating new ministries, and reconnecting with a community who had lost contact with the church? “Lord, have mercy,” was often the response.

But I learned that if I were to be effective in my ministry, I had to find ways to mobilize my congregation while feeding my spirit so that I could be sustained. I needed to be able to step away from the challenges that were confronting my church in order to gain perspective. And I needed to be able to lead in a way that put shared onus on the congregation because I did not have all of the answers.

This was the beginning of a process that I call the 7Rs of Sanctuary. Ronald Heifetz noted that leaders need to create sanctuary as a means to restore their sense of purpose and well-being. Inspired by this idea, I wanted to learn whether leaders who created sanctuary by taking time apart from their leadership in order to be reflective were more effective. And it was through this research that I could answer the question affirmatively. By stepping away from your leadership context, you create perspective and realize greater objectivity toward confronting challenges. By reflecting, you gain increased well-being. But you are also positioned to learn as you take action, analyze that action, and refocus efforts to recognize future improvements. Additionally, this time apart spent in sanctuary helps us to be self-differentiated, emotionally engaged yet individually distinct, in our leadership and energized as a result of our personal renewal and refocused outcomes. As such, we are positioned to lead in ways that enable us to mobilize congregations, organizations, or teams so that they learn and make progress on confronting challenges. The leader, in the process, moves from leading the charge to facilitating the change. So freed, we are no longer struggling in the “Lord, have mercy” moment.

The 7Rs of Sanctuary was developed to provide a way of life process to help you realize greater effectiveness in your leadership while increasing your spiritual well-being. I pray God’s mercy that you might engage this process for yourself.

Save the date - November 19, 2015 at 2:00 PM Eastern for a Webinar sponsored by the Pastoral Excellence Network. To **participate in the webinar**

click: <https://cpx.adobeconnect.com/pentalknov2015/> Or See more at:

<http://cpx.cts.edu/network/events/2015/09/29/pen-talk-spiritual-practices-for-effective-leadership-7r-s-of-sanctuary-for-pastors#sthash.MAi4d4IR.dpuf>.

The Finances and Faith System: Help Your People Connect Their Money With Their Faith in 29 Days!

Rev. Margaret Marcuson, pastor, consultant, and former Ministers Council Executive Committee Member, announces a new program called The Finances and Faith System. The program is designed to be a congregation-wide program, not connected with stewardship season, to help people get thoughtful and prayerful about their money. Find out more by clicking:

<http://margaretmarcuson.com/financesandfaith/>



Local News Anyone?

As we share the news of what we are doing in our local Ministers Council chapters, others are inspired. We want the light of your good works to shine brightly so that others might be informed. Our readership increases every month. Share your news and spread the word.

Human Dignity and Racial Justice: A Workshop for Religious Leaders



Donna Hicks, Ph.D.



Dr. Ray Hammond, M.D., M.A

November 19, 2015
Thursday 8:30am 3:30 PM
Hebrew College
160 Herrick Road
Newton, MA
Fee: \$20 (includes meals and materials)

8:30 – 9:00 am – Registration and Breakfast
9:00 am – Introduction and Welcome
9:15 am - Key Note Speaker: Dr. Donna Hicks, “Dignity”
Plenary Session, Panel Response and Study Groups
12:15 pm – Lunch
1:15 – Ken Note Speaker: Rev. Dr. Ray Hammond, “Racial Justice: The Ongoing Quest for Dignity”
Plenary Session, Panel Response, and Study Groups
3:00 pm – Closing Interfaith Ceremony
3:30 pm – Conclude

Register here: hebrewcollege.edu/form/human-dignity

Donna Hicks, Ph.D., author of *Dignity: The Essential Role It Plays in Resolving Conflict*, is an internationally renowned authority on dignity who has developed a foundation for people of diverse backgrounds to live together with respect.

Rev. Dr. Ray Hammond is a founder of the Ten Point Coalition in Boston, Pastor of Bethel AME Church and a nationally recognized leader promoting racial justice and interfaith understanding.

Co-Sponsors: **CMM and the C.I.R.C.L.E. Program of Hebrew College and Andover Newton Theological School**

Contact

info@coopmet.org

with any questions

Local Chapter News

The Valley Forge Ministers Council Monthly Meeting

The Valley Forge Ministers Council will meet on Wednesday, November 18 at 12:00 to 1:00 pm in the side dining room of the cafeteria. We are pleased to have as our speaker for this session Ms. Carole Sydnor, International Ministries Missionary for Nepal's Mission. She has been directly involved with the Nepal earthquake response, as supported by One Great Hour of Sharing and will give a presentation on the earthquake and the relief work being done in Nepal. Since 2013 in her new role with IM she dedicates 20% of her time to this missionary service non-residentially and continues her relationship with two of IM's partners in Nepal by correspondence and at least two yearly visits to that country. She and husband Bucky previously lived in Nepal for 16 years first commissioned by IM in 1978. Carol has served Nepal through IM for 21 years.

You are all invited and encouraged to attend meetings of the Valley Forge Ministers Council whether you are ordained or not or even if you are not currently a member. Palmer students, staff and faculty are most welcomed to attend. We are following a "Brown Bag" lunch format with drinks and dessert provided so a RSVP by Nov 13 would be most helpful.

PBA Ministers Council

Please receive this memorandum as your official invitation to the upcoming Ministers Council meeting. This meeting will be held at the PBA office, [8711 Ridge Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19128](#) on **Wednesday, November 11th, 9:30am**. The schedule is outlined below:

[9:30-10:00am](#) Social Gathering (Coffee, tea, etc.)

[10:00-11:30am](#) **Presentation:** "Making the Prison Jerusalem: How to Find Your Former VBS Students – Ministry with Prisoners And Families: The Way Forward"

Facilitator:

Harold Dean Trulear, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Applied Theology
Howard University Divinity School

[11:30am-12:00pm](#) **Business Meeting**

Lunch will be provided immediately after the business meeting. **Please confirm your attendance** by contacting Mrs. Rosalyn L. Martin (phone: [215-482-8222](#) x 10; fax: [215-482-8232](#); or email: rlmartin@philadelphiabaptist.org) upon receipt of this notice.

Ministers Council of Greater Bay Area

Join us Monday, January 11 to Tuesday, January 12 at Redwood Glen as we consider the theme:
On the Edge of Chaos: Loving Life's Transitions.

Life is full of transitions. Birth. Death. Family. Church. Career. Retirement. Change is all around us. While we as pastors often journey with church members through life's transitions, how do we as ministers face the crossroads of our personal and professional lives?



This is the topic we will be exploring with **John Landgraf**. A friend and confidant to many ministers in the SF Bay Area, John was the former Director of Oakland's Center for Ministry before moving to

Idaho where he now lives and serves through his teaching and music.

Make plans to join us at **Redwood Glen** (100 Wright Drive in Loma Mar) for this one night, four meal event. Costs:

\$110 for MCGBA members (\$140 for non-members) in shared motel-style accommodations in the Siden Conference Center.

\$75 for MCGBA members in cabins with bunk bed, no linen or towels (\$90 for non-members).

The retreat begins with **registration on Monday at 9:00 am** and concludes Tuesday at 1:00 pm following lunch.

However, to make the most of this retreat opportunity, you are invited to arrive Sunday for an extra night of fellowship and/or to stay an extra night for additional rest **at no additional cost**.

Click [here](#) for a flier and registration form. Contact **Larry Jay** at larry@redwoodglen.com if you have questions. Please register by January 1st.

Upcoming Events

- Mission Table, Valley Forge, PA – November 9-11

Give to the Ministers Council

Support the work of the Ministers Council. Use our [Donor Information Form](#) to contribute to the Equipping Ministries Endowment Fund, Together in Ministry Endowment Fund, General Fund or to a designated ministry effort that you specify. As you support the Ministers Council, you make ministry happen.

Ministers Council Contact Information

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