



JOIN US IN THE EFFORT TO EXTEND MINISTERIAL EXCELLENCE

Case Statement for the Ministers Council USA 2012-2015 “Together In Ministry” Campaign

BACKGROUND

Nearly fifty years have passed since Bob Dylan wrote “The Times They Are A-Changin’,” and the changes have just kept coming!

The obvious impact of electronic social media is matched by less visible changes in the culture within which the Church must minister. Once it was thought that “everybody goes to church.” Now somewhere between 25 and 40 percent of the American population will find a place of worship on any given weekend. [*Nancy Ammerman, [Pillars of Faith: American Congregations and their Partners](#) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 1.*]

Once, an individual called to pastoral ministry assumed it was for life. Now 50% of ministers leave within five years, and 90% of pastors will not stay to retirement. [*attributed to studies by the Alban Institute, Fuller Seminary, and Duke University, cited in Kristin Stewart, “Keeping Your Pastor: An Emerging Challenge,” [Journal for the Liberal Arts and Sciences](#) (summer 2009) p. 112.*]

Once the church minister was seen as a strong, respected figure, laboring alone 24/7 to meet the spiritual needs of a local congregation and to model responsible ethical behavior for the surrounding community. Now the minister is caricatured as a harsh judgmental voice in a public arena that has little respect for leaders and lots of suspicions about the integrity of pastors.

The Church (as a whole), the churches (local congregations), and the leaders of both, must adapt to the changes in American culture in order to faithfully proclaim the gospel and sustain its life-sharing ministries. American Baptist Churches USA represents more than 5,500 congregations and 6,100 ministers determined to remain faithful. The national leadership of ABC is directing a 2011-2013 process of discernment in order to identify some of the most pressing adaptive changes required of our churches and pastors.

“Transformed by the Spirit” is the name of this exciting process, and if you have not yet heard of it, please check it out at www.abc-usa.org.

The Ministers Council is the only part of the American Baptist Churches USA solely concerned with the welfare and effectiveness of the pastor. Thanks to the insightful stimulus of the Lilly Endowment, the Ministers Council USA has been part of a larger ecumenical effort to identify the things that will sustain pastors in these challenging times and enable them to attain and maintain excellence. Since 2002, supported by Lilly grants, the Ministers Council has conducted an experience of adaptive change called “TOGETHER IN MINISTRY.” The positive results of that effort indicate that the Spirit is at work in it. We are thrilled to partner with the Spirit of God in the effort to extend ministerial excellence by continuing the Together In Ministry focus on collegial support.

THE TIM PROGRAM and ITS DEMONSTRATED EFFECTIVENESS

In 2002, with a significant grant from the Lilly Endowment, the American Baptist Ministers Council invited ministerial leaders to organize collegial covenant groups, bringing 6-12 ministers together to learn from one another and the facilitator who guided them. By the end of 2012, nearly 2,600 ministerial leaders will have participated in more than 440 TIM groups. (In addition, the TIM program sponsored 57 training events involving 3,620 pastors and 1,000 laypersons.)

What happens when ministerial leaders participate in TIM or TIM-like groups?

First, the isolation and stress that accompanies the “Lone Ranger” pastor is greatly diminished. Each year, 80-95% of the participants in the American Baptist Ministers Council Together In Ministry groups reported that they gained a supportive network of colleagues who pray for one another and are available for support in their work. *(You may obtain a copy of any of the TIM reports to the Lilly Endowment from the Ministers Council office, Sue.Sechrist@abc-usa.org.)*

The dozens of organizations reporting to Lilly in the first decade of the 21st century concluded, across the board, that pastors who participated in collegial groups experienced accountability; support and prayer among peers; enhanced preaching, teaching and leadership skills; a more positive perspective of self and congregation; reduction of stress; and improvement in personal health. Congregations led by pastors in collegial groups reported increases in lay involvement, leadership development, participation by youth, missional outreach in the surrounding community, and congregational growth. *(For the full report, see <http://www.austinseminary.edu/page.cfm?p=321>.)*

The obvious conclusion is that ministerial leaders who participate in TIM groups are more spiritually grounded and better leaders because of the collegial experience. *(For a videoed summary of the Lilly Endowment conclusions re Sustaining Pastoral Excellence, click on “Life In Community” at <http://pastoralexcellence.com/>.)*

WHY DOES IT WORK?

Dr. Craig Dykstra of the Lilly Endowment’s Department of Religion argues persuasively that effective ministerial leaders intentionally nurture networks of significant clergy friendships. Clergy who are connected with other clergy are more likely to be effective than those who are vocationally isolated. Conversely, clergy who are isolated are more likely to get into trouble than those who are connected by the bonds of shared vocation and friendship.

Why? It is within these vocational friendships that the issues and practices of ministry are explored, examined, tested, and often resolved. Friends in ministry help one another to mature in the practice of ministry, to become more effective practitioners of ministry, and to avoid those serious mistakes that sometimes destroy vocations.

It is within these covenantal groups that ideas are explored, skills are enhanced, and spiritual lives are deepened. As ministerial leaders study scripture, share their thoughts and feelings, and pray together, ideas become embodied in the concrete lives of ministers and ultimately in the lives of their churches.

HOW HAS IT BEEN SET UP?

For the ten years (2002-2012) that the Ministers Council administered grant support for TIM groups, ministerial leaders were invited to form groups of 6 to 12 colleagues who pledged to meet regularly and pursue activities of their own design to grow spiritually and professionally. Grants of \$1,500-\$3,200 were made to qualifying groups in order to pay for a facilitator or retreat leaders who guided the sharing and learning process and to underwrite the expenses of Minister Council participants.

The period of Lilly Endowment subsidy is drawing to a close, but the Ministers Council is committed to sustaining the TIM process and to nurturing a culture of collegial connections.

WHAT IS NEEDED TO CONTINUE?

Sustaining and expanding the effectiveness of the Together In Ministry culture requires three things.

1. The ABC Ministers Council to continue subsidizing new collegial covenant groups and groups with limited resources by providing financial support and/or the services of a qualified facilitator (via the facilitator's donation of time).
2. The regional/constituent Ministers Councils and the ABC-related Seminaries to put into place a continuous process that encourages the formation of collegial covenant groups and accesses the resources available from the national Ministers Council.
3. The American Baptist Churches USA, via partnerships among its various organizations and the Ministers Council, to sponsor national gatherings for ministerial leaders in order to celebrate ministry, to forge collegial networks among ministerial leaders with special concerns in common, and to encourage participation in local collegial groups.

HOW DOES THE TOGETHER IN MINISTRY CAMPAIGN RELATE TO THE "TRANSFORMED BY THE SPIRIT" PROCESS?

The Together In Ministry Campaign overlaps the "Transformed by the Spirit" discernment process, and the fund raising necessary to support it. The leaders and advisors of the two campaigns are working together to honor both needs. So much so that all five members of the National Executive Council are serving as Honorary Chairpersons of the Ministers Council TIM Campaign.

In fact, the timing of the Ministers Council effort in some ways is providential. The Transformed by the Spirit initiative by no means is going to address all of the adaptive challenges of American Baptist congregations for two main reasons:

1. There will be more adaptive challenges identified than could possibly be addressed during a two-year process; and
2. Given the pace of change within our world, the most important adaptive challenges may not even be on the horizon yet.

TIM Groups can be a key component that will allow pastors to learn from the Transformed by the Spirit initiative and carry the process forward into the future. There will be no better place to perpetuate a process

of discernment than TIM groups of clergy who provide mutual encouragement and accountability as each seeks to discern God's will and provide congregational leadership in the power of God's Spirit.

YOUR OPPORTUNITY

You are reading this because you love the church of Jesus Christ and you know the value of ministers who continue to grow in the depth of their spirituality and in the quality of their leadership. The Ministers Council is convinced that working in collegial community is essential to spiritual growth and leadership development. You want your church to be led by a pastor of excellence who can effectively manage rapid change. Act on that priority today. Join us in the effort to extend ministerial excellence.

Here's what you can do:

Membership in the Ministers Council

- Pastors, join your regional and the national Ministers Council;
- Churches, pay for your pastor's annual dues

Participation in a TIM Group

- Pastors, form or join a Together In Ministry Group in your area;
- Churches, contribute to this as continuing education

Donation of Expertise

- Facilitators, donate your time and skills as a facilitator/retreat leader

Donation of Dollars

- Pastors, churches, and lay folk who care about ministers:
pledge financial support to this 2012 - 2015 Campaign

Every dollar counts and we welcome gifts in any amount, donated now or pledged over three years. Many of our Senators have already pledged \$1,000/year. If you are able to give even more, we are looking for 3 gifts of \$30,000...5 gifts of \$20,000...and 10 gifts of \$10,000.

Please see the "Announcement of the Ministers Council Together In Ministry Campaign" for details about giving or pledging.

Thank you for reading this document and considering the invitation to join us in the effort to extend ministerial excellence,

Rev. Dr. Debora Jackson, Executive Director
Ministers Council ABCUSA and Co-Chair of TIM Campaign

Rev. Dr. Joe Kutter,
Co-Chair of TIM Campaign

Honorary Chairpersons: Rev. Dr. A. Roy Medley, General Secretary, American Baptist Churches USA
Rev. Dr. Sumner M. Grant, Executive Director, Ministers & Missionaries Benefit Board
Mrs. Virginia R. Holmstrom, Executive Director, American Baptist Women's Ministries
Rev. Dr. Reid S. Trulson, Executive Director, Board of International Ministries
Rev. Dr. Aidsand F. Wright-Riggins III, Executive Director, AB Home Mission Societies