

## **Together in Ministry Stories**

That the development of holy friendships would strengthen support and accountability was the primary premise of the Together in Ministry project goals. The pattern and frequency of testimony from group facilitators and participants as well as their regional executive ministers affirm the experience for development of holy friendships, “supportive networks of colleagues who will pray for one another.” From the areas of group participation impact, 83% of participants identified that impact as key.

Some comments from participants that support that rating:

“The Holy Spirit revealed to me the need for prayer and deeper fellowship among clergy. Then he stirred a sense of urgency within me about the needs and my desire...to pray for and support each other, to give the assurance that someone on whom you can call is always there.”

“The opportunity to gather regularly and explore emotional, intellectual and spiritual aspects of my life and ministry has been a profoundly exhilarating and supportive experience. Personally and professionally I have grown and been strengthened.”

“The group has allowed me to seek prayer about specific issues, has given me a support group in working through many issues surrounding being a pastor for the first time, and has allowed me to network with other pastors who have already experienced many of the situations I now face.”

Region executive ministers in their observation of and interaction with pastoral leaders involved in TIM collegial covenant groups also report the value of supportive networks of colleagues:

“We are a small region and have at least half of our active clergy participating in TIM groups. Most of our clergy are in their second year as TIM members. I see the formation and deepening of friendships as one observable result. These friendships and support relationships build the confidence of the clergy, they hold the clergy accountable in positive ways, and they strengthen the fabric of the region. Most of the clergy look forward to these meetings and have made them a priority in their lives. In some cases clergy have been intentional about building groups which are diverse theologically. These groups have built trust and created understanding. “

“There is no doubt in my mind that ministerial leaders who gather regularly with peers do better in their ministry settings. They have opportunity to talk out not only their issues in ministry and get perspective, but also have the opportunity for perspective in other areas of their life. I know it makes a difference for my own ministry.”

“There has been talk of wanting to continue meeting together even after the grant is past, that groups appreciate meeting with individuals who have become both study companions and share/support groups. I believe it has been overwhelmingly positive for those who have participated regularly and who are in groups that have some affinity for each other.”

“The feedback I have gotten has been all positive. Folks value it for relationship and content. I see them come and go. One meets in this building. The time is important to them. They also speak about the usefulness of the content.”

“The reactions I have heard from collegial group participants has been positive. It created several new groups and provided some 'deeper learnings and commitments' ... As is probably the case the groups have involved those pastors who have a tendency to be drawn to collegial settings already and, unfortunately, that means we still have 'lone rangers' out there who do not even recognize the need they have for closer relationships.”

“The collegial groups are a must. I am very grateful for what the Council has done to make them possible. I hope you will continue to enable this. A major need that I encounter is the isolation of clergy.”

“These groups have been a great blessing to us in this region. It has added a lot to the sense of family and not being "out there" on one's own. One of the four groups we have meets here in our office building...and the group is growing, seems to have a good time in the sessions and they all appear to leave upbeat. Our congregations are concerned about their pastors and they are pleased that we have this to offer them.”