

## **STAFF APPRECIATION DAY**

University Baptist Church

Austin, TX

*Gladys M. Peterson*

The Church/Staff Relations Committee of the University Baptist Church, which is fairly new to American Baptist Churches, obtained a copy of the Ministers Council Code of Ethics for ministers and other related material. As we studied the documents, an idea was generated that we needed to present this to the church, or at least make the church aware of this important commitment. Out of that grew the plan that we would designate a day in the winter between Christmas and Lent celebrations as Staff Appreciation Day.

Dr. Larry Bethune, the Senior Minister, gave his blessing to the committee to plan whatever we saw fit. The first thing we decided was to give all the Sunday staff, including the custodial and security people, the day off to sit with their families or friends in the congregation for worship. All positions were filled by members of the church at no cost to the church. Several retired clergy are members, and the rest of the participants were lay members. Though it wasn't the regular time for Communion, we felt that it would be meaningful for the staff to be served by the volunteer participants, and so we included Communion in the service.

Many of the support staff of the church are members of other churches in their own neighborhoods, but a special invitation was given to all of them to attend on that day. There was a good representation, and everyone was recognized in the service. The entire worship was planned around the idea of worshipping God and honoring our professional staff. The sermon, "Servant Power," was based on Ephesians 4, and the children's sermon, "How May I Serve You?" used flash cards of various public servants and how they help us, followed by pictures of the various staff members and their role as servants of Christ and his church.

A litany was prepared from the Ministers Council documents, and the congregation and worship ministers committed themselves to meaningful ministry together.

Following the worship service, we had a luncheon, after which various members of the church paid tribute to the individual staff members. Many humorous stories had been collected from among the membership, and the ministerial staff in particular was "roasted," to the enjoyment of the entire group.

### **A COVENANT FOR MINISTRY For the Congregation and Ministers**

**Congregation:** We will affirm the call, preparation and commitment of our ministers and will give support through prayer and encouragement; we will support our ministers' leadership in our church, our community and the larger mission of Christ.

*Ministers: I will respect and recognize the variety of calls to ministry among my American Baptist colleagues and other Christians.*

**Congregation:** We will seek to support our ministers without comparison to previous leadership.

*Ministers: I will not seek personal favors or discounts on the basis of my professional status.*

**Congregation:** We will recognize and assume the responsibility of providing adequate and appropriate financial support for our ministers.

*Ministers: I will maintain a disciplined ministry in such ways as keeping hours of prayer and devotion, endeavoring to maintain wholesome family relationships, sexual integrity, financial responsibility, regularly engaging in educational and recreational activities for professional and personal development. I will seek to maintain good health habits.*

**Congregation:** We will covenant together to pray regularly for our ministers and other staff persons.

*Ministers: I will hold in confidence any privileged communication received by me during the conduct of my ministry. I will not disclose confidential communications in private or public except when in my practice of ministry I am convinced that the sanctity of confidentiality is outweighed by my well-founded belief that the parishioner/client will cause imminent, life-threatening or substantial harm to self or others, or unless the privilege is waived by those giving the information.*

**Congregation:** We will provide our ministers with the necessary facilities and time for work and study.

## **TOGETHER IN MINISTRY**

**Recognizing that we, as ministers and members of the congregation, are called together in the ministry of Christ...**

- We will work together to create an effective ministry that will renew, strengthen, and enable the whole people of God to minister within our congregation, in our community, and to the whole of God's world.
- We will be sensitive to the moral and ethical soundness of every program or project we are asked to support.
- We will welcome all who seek membership in our church without regard to their economic, cultural, or ethnic status or orientation.
- We will seek to minister in the name and spirit of Jesus Christ to all people, in our community and world.

## COMMENTS ON STAFF APPRECIATION DAY

When Gladys Peterson asked me to pick a date for a Staff Appreciation Day, I thought she meant space for an announcement of thanks at the end of the service. When she explained the Church Staff Relations Committee wanted all the staff present but none of them working, I was amazed. We had recognized staff anniversaries from time to time, especially at the five and ten year mark, but I had never heard of a church recognizing the whole staff *as a team*.

The service was a positive experience for everyone. The Committee did a wonderful job of organizing and getting competent substitutes from the laity and retired ministers in the congregation. It wasn't an entirely effortless day for the staff. We had to explain what we do and how we do it to the people filling in for us - where to find things, how to make certain transitions from one part of worship to the next - but those conversations made us feel appreciated all the more because someone realized what it takes to do what we do! And there were a few confusing moments during the day when the substitutes failed to do what the staff usually does without thinking. But those awkward moments made us feel more appreciated, too; perhaps it isn't so easy to do our job. I think the congregation enjoyed the opportunity to thank the staff and let us know they appreciate our work. And I greatly enjoyed the rare opportunity to sit in the congregation and participate in worship with my family.

I cannot emphasize strongly enough the importance of this kind of encouragement for the health of the congregation as well as the staff. Many churches do not even have a Church Staff Relations Committee, let alone a Staff Appreciation Day. People assume the staff knows they are affirmed, but the staff only hears from those who are unhappy. Most of us get five or ten complaints to every thank you. But ministers and church staff members are usually people-pleasers. They respond to a call into a career that doesn't pay as well as others because their greatest pay is knowing they have helped, and that they have made a difference. Hopefully, it will be a while before they hear "Well done, good and faithful servant!" directly from the Lord. Meanwhile, the Lord speaks through the church. Telling your ministers and staff, "Well done! You make a difference! Thank you! We love you!" lifts their spirits and calls out their best work for you. As we say in Texas, "It's like saying sic 'em to a dog!"

*Larry Bethune, Senior Pastor*