



minister

MAGAZINE

A Journal of the American Baptist Ministers Council • Speaking to the Practice of Ministry

Volume XXXIII, No. 2

Published Periodically at Valley Forge, PA

Summer, 2010

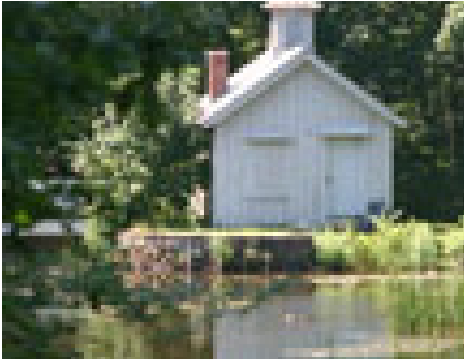


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Self-care

1000 Days in Ministry: The Prayer of Play



Alex Pickens III

Kirk Byron Jones, in his book **Rest in the Storm** introduces the idea of the minister seeking renewal in a place he calls the “Back of the Boat”. His image is lifted from the Mark 4 passage that finds the disciples in a deadly storm while Jesus sleeps on a cushion in the “back of the boat.”

Jones distills his message to the minister in his/her “first 1,000 days” by stating, “If I were limited to a single message of advice to aspiring

pastors, it would be this: Set aside at least one day per week for prayer and play, or the prayer of play.”¹ Aspiring pastors of all ages can find great benefit in the purposeful consideration of their first 1,000 days in a ministerial position.

The habits formed and disciplines adopted during the first 1,000 days will benefit the minister for the balance of his/her career. Conversely, the points of compromise and stumbling experienced by the minister in the first 1,000 days in a position will, without intervention, worsen over time.

Jones’ introduction of the term “prayer of play” elevates play by the minister from a space of furtive indulgence to a place of holy necessity. Prayer is communication with God.² Play is activity for amusement or recreation.³ According to Jones, when we take the time to play, God speaks to us.

Play may seem foreign to many professionals in ministry. Jones describes play as that thing that make your heart sing. What are the things you enjoy doing but feel unable to experience because of the pressures of ministry? For Jones play includes listening to jazz, drawing, video games and time spent with family. What does play mean for you? Take the time to write a list to help prepare you to experience the prayer of play.

During the first 1,000 days, our lists are often concerned with generating growth, preaching the Word, making disciples and serving the community. There are also lists of expectations leveled against ministers that have little to do with what are believed to be the essentials of pastoral responsibility, but that nonetheless require attention.

These expectations differ in each church. Norman Shawchuck, in **Leading the Congregation**, calls a pastor’s response to churches’ expectations ‘paying the rent.’ Shawchuck states that a pastor can choose to pay or not to pay. Paying the rent may involve using the King James Version of Scripture, shaking hands at the front instead of the back of church, delivering communion to sick and shut-in members or posting office hours on your door. If a pastor wants to thrive in the first 1,000 days, he or she either ‘pays the rent’ or trains others to do so.

Shawchuck goes on to state that once the rent has been paid, the pastor has more flexibility to pursue ministry priorities that are important to him or her. A priority critical to the success of a minister is the habit of setting aside at least one day per week for the prayer of play. The habits formed and disciplines adopted during the first 1,000 days will benefit the minister for the balance of his/her pastorate. Conversely, the points of compromise and stumbling experi-

enced by the minister in the first 1,000 days will, without intervention, repeat themselves over time.

During the first 1,000 days of ministry, establishing an appreciation for and commitment to the prayer of play can produce an environment that combats burnout and dejection. By forming the habit of the prayer of play, a minister can open a space for renewal and encouragement.

To do so:

- Plan a weekly Sabbath day for the prayer of play;
- Make a list of the things that make the heart sing;
- Believe that the Sabbath day is as sacred as the Bible teaches;⁴
- Communicate clearly to members and leadership the need for a Sabbath day.

Notes:

¹ Jones, Kirk Byron, *Rest in the Storm*, page 43

² <http://eastonsbibledictionary.com/search--prayer>

³ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/play>

⁴ Shawchuck and Heuser, *Leading the Congregation: Caring for Yourself While Serving Others*, page 83.

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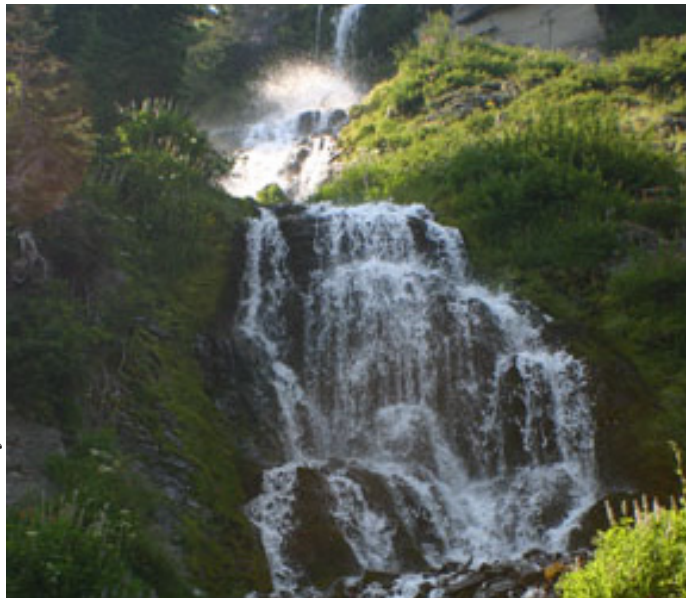


Photo Credit: Jennifer Whitmore

The Ministers Council is that Unique Place within the National Structure of the ABCUSA which:

- Offers leaders opportunities to articulate a distinct ministerial viewpoint, among the many denominational perspectives that need to be voiced and heard, as we work together for the growth of Christ's kingdom;
- Serves as an advocate for its members in times of difficulty and conflict;
- Is solely focused on the well-being of clergy as they engage in the ministerial calling in all of its dimensions.

www.ministerscouncil.org



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The Ministers Council Provides a Community for its Members:

- To assume responsibility for the faithful practice of the ministerial calling;
- To develop and promote ethical standards that both guide and shape the way in which the vocation of ministry is performed;
- To assume personal responsibility for and to encourage physical and emotional well-being in the practice of ministry;
- To inform, support and encourage one another in the deepening of personal and communal spiritual life;
- To work together to develop the skills necessary to become effective servants of Christ's church
- To encourage growing friendships that inform and correct the leader as she or he seeks to faithfully respond to the call of God in Christ Jesus.



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Published periodically as a forum for issues and events that pertain to ministry as observed and practiced by ministerial leaders of the American Baptist Churches USA

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mission

The Ministers Council is the professional association of ministerial leaders within the American Baptist Churches USA. We are working together to:

Connect colleagues through Together in Ministry groups and Communities of Practice

- Establish and maintain professional and ethical standards of the Christian ministry
- Give support to the members of this body and be an advocate for them in their professional relations
- Resource ministry through our web site at www.ministerscouncil.org
- Interpret the appropriate roles of professional ministerial leadership to the constituent parts of our denomination, and to our local American Baptist Churches
- Encourage the recruitment and nurture of candidates for the various church vocations
- Provide a means of expression and debate by members of this body on issues that affect the professional ministerial leadership of the American Baptist Churches USA
- Cooperate with the appropriate units of the American Baptist Churches USA in matters of mutual interest and concern, including recruitment, placement, compensation, continuing education, and counseling



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