



minister

MAGAZINE

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

Volume XXXIII, No. 1

Published Periodically at Valley Forge, PA

Spring, 2010

Connecting

Lisa Drysdale



Has this ever happened to you? It's just a few minutes before the worship service starts and you are ready to lead, standing at the back of the sanctuary as a few more people settle into the pews. The music is outstanding, the energy is high, and you are confident that your message is full of the wisdom of God. Life is good.

Then, seemingly out of nowhere, the church member who pushes your buttons every time she steps near you approaches, and from the periphery of your vision you see the dark clouds rolling in.

Your conversation is no different than the hundreds of conversations you've shared with her before. She attacks. You defend. And your ability to lead the worship service is negatively impacted by this early morning exchange.

Now imagine for a moment the Monday morning conference call with your Together in Ministry colleagues, when you vividly and passionately tell the story of this Sunday encounter with the always-attacking church member. They listen with compassion. They ask thoughtful clarifying questions. And then this: "Lisa, put your big girl pants on and get over there with her so you can understand what is troubling her!"

What?! How did this get to be about me?

Welcome to the world of my Together In Ministry group. There are nine of us, and in one form or another we've been together for about five years. We have worked hard—sometimes with outside leadership, and often on our own—to understand each other at deep and meaningful levels. We have met face-to-face eight to ten times per year, gathered once or twice annually for 2-1/2 day retreats, talked on the phone for an hour every Monday morning, and emailed regularly back and forth as we posed questions about being church leaders, people of faith, family members and colleagues.

This is what I have learned along the way: I no longer desire to lead my church from a place of weakness, fear, disappointment, isolation, or sorrow. I know all about these things and I suspect you do, too. Each of them has played a part in making me the person and pastor I am today. I understand that.

What is critical to me now is that I connect with a group of colleagues who also strive for excellence. I have found them in my Together in Ministry group.

An email that made the rounds in our group this morning is a perfect example of how we function together. A colleague shared this: "Here is a question just posed to me at the very end of our CE Board meeting and I welcome your input. If ultimately we pray, "Thy will be done," then what is the point of praying for what we want? I promised to address the question this coming Sunday. Any wisdom welcome!"

Within one half hour, a collection of profound and revealing responses arrived in my inbox from group members. They spoke about understandings of scripture, the mystery of God and the never-ending call to trust God, stories

of pleading to God for what we want...all of them revealing authentic experiences of prayer and God. Always with humor. Always with honesty.

OK, maybe not always with honesty.

By the grace of God, it is in the moments when I am still trying to cover up my true feelings, when I am still projecting an image that is not true to who I am, that my colleagues push me. They ask questions. They encourage me to go deeper. They wonder with me. They wait in silence while I try to figure out what is going on in my head and in my heart. And then they make me laugh.

I am in my 25th year of pastoral ministry and I am just now getting the hang of it. For so many of my early years I cared about things that didn't matter, stepped into situations where I had no business, cajoled people to do what I wanted them to do, responded with vigor anytime someone suggested I jump, and buried any concerns I might have had about my own health and well-being because, well, there was work to be done! There were sermons to write! There were meetings to run! There were people to visit! There were books to be read! Now I wonder how I got up every morning.

Connecting on a deep level with a group of authentic—and yes, flawed!—colleagues has helped me be a better professional church leader. Rabbi Edwin Friedman said, “All leadership begins with the management of one’s own health.” These colleagues have helped me be a healthier person and pastor, and for that I am grateful. As hard as our work is sometimes, I would not want it to be any other way.

Lisa Drysdale is pastor of the Brighton Community Church, in Tonawanda, NY, and is serving as the President of the NYS Ministers Council.

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.



Photo Credit: Michael Saylor

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

THE COVENANT AND CODE OF ETHICS

for Ministerial Leaders of American Baptist Churches

Having accepted God's call to leadership in Christ's Church, I covenant with God to serve Christ and the Church with, the help of the holy spirit, to deepen my obedience to the Two Great Commandments: to love the Lord our God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love my neighbor as myself.

In affirmation of this commitment, I will abide by the Code of Ethics of the Ministers Council of the American Baptist Churches and I will faithfully support its purposes and ideals. As further affirmation of my commitment, I covenant with my colleagues in ministry that we will hold one another accountable for fulfillment of all the public actions set forth in our Code of Ethics.

I will hold in trust the traditions and practices of our American Baptist Churches; I will not accept a position in the American Baptist family unless I am in accord with those traditions and practices; nor will I use my influence to alienate my congregation/constituents or any part thereof from its relationship and support of the denomination. If my convictions change, I will resign my position.

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

I will seek to support all colleagues in ministry by building constructive relationships wherever I serve, both with the staff where I work and with colleagues in neighboring churches.

I will advocate adequate compensation for my profession. I will help lay persons and colleagues to understand that ministerial leaders should not expect or require fees for pastoral services from constituents they serve, when these constituents are helping pay their salaries.

I will not seek personal favors or discounts on the basis of my ministerial status.

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

I will recognize my primary obligation to the church or employing group to which I have been called, and will accept added responsibilities only if they do not interfere with the overall effectiveness of my ministry.

I will personally and publicly support my colleagues who experience discrimination on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, age, marital status, national origin, physical impairment or disability.

I will not proselytize from other Christian churches.

I will, upon my resignation or retirement, sever my ministerial leadership relations with my former constituents, and will not make ministerial contacts in the field of another ministerial leader without his/her request and/or consent.

I will hold in confidence and treat as confidential communication any information provided to me with the expectation of privacy. I will not disclose such information 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 life-threatening or substantial harm will be caused.

I will not use my ministerial status, position or authority knowingly to abuse, misguide, negatively influence, manipulate, or take advantage of anyone, especially children.

I will report all instances of abuse as required by law to the appropriate agency. In any case involving persons working in ABC ministry, I will also report the circumstances to the appropriate regional and/or national denominational representative.

I will show my personal love for God as revealed in Jesus Christ in my life and ministry, as I strive together with my colleagues to preserve the dignity, maintain the discipline and promote the integrity of the vocation to which we have been called.



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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

Editor: Michael Saylor

Associate Editor: Sue Sechrist

Publisher: Joe Kutter and the

Ministers Council Communications Committee

Contact:

The Ministers Council

PO Box 851

Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851

Phone: 1 • 800 • 222-3872 ext 2333, 2334

Fax: 610 • 768-2066

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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

ministers council membership

You are eligible for membership if you are either

- ordained
- commissioned • a lay professional or
- a student in seminary
- eligible for inclusion in the

Directory of Professional Church Leaders of the American Baptist Churches USA and serving an American Baptist Church or auxilliary organization

- paying dues through a constituent council or to the National Office of the Ministers Council

Join the Ministers Council through your local constituent council. Contact information is posted on the web at www.ministerscouncil.org under the "Who We Are" link.



Photo Credit: Michael Saylor