



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



Denominational Support

Interview with

Mary Armacost Hulst

Mary Armacost Hulst is a friend and colleague. I interviewed her at a recent regional board meeting for the American Baptist Churches of the Rocky Mountains.

- Michael Sayler, editor.

Where have you experienced support in your professional journey? You've been down an interesting road, being an Associate and then the Senior Pastor at Calvary Baptist Church in Denver.

It has been an interesting road and one I feel blessed to have traveled. My greatest support in ministry, after my family, has come from the congregation that called me and nurtured me. Calvary has always been my cheering section, for which I am deeply grateful.

I had a remarkable mentor in Larry Loughhead. The journey, though, as a woman in ministry has been lonely at times. I cannot think of a single role model in the early years. There simply were no women in my area with whom I could be a colleague.

When I was installed as senior pastor at Calvary, I received a beautiful necklace that had a loaves and fishes design. The friend who gave it to me said, "You feed your flock in your own good way. Do not copy anyone else and someday give this necklace to another woman who needs encouragement." I have always tried to do that, and a number of years ago I did give the necklace to a young woman in Burma who was being ordained.

When I was in seminary I had classmates who enrolled with the intention of going into Christian Education or Missions, but the professors encouraged them to follow an MDiv track and become pastors. They excelled in their class work, but then found it very difficult to secure a calling to the pulpit. Was that unique?

Sadly, it wasn't unique. There are many exceptionally gifted women with seminary degrees who find it difficult even now to get placement. We know there are search committees that are never given profiles of women clergy and we know there are search committees that are unwilling to look at female candidates.

It took me more than 20 years to respond to the call of God's that I had felt in high school, for I, too, thought that education or the mission field were the only options open to me. Public school teaching was my first career. I became an educator and loved it. But I felt for years that in many ways I was not being fully faithful to God's call. I was a second career person. I went to seminary when our sons were almost out of the nest. I worked as a minister of Christian education at Calvary for 14 years. When my predecessor, Larry Loughhead, retired, I was asked to be the interim.

Were you surprised?

Yes, very. Unbeknownst to me there were a few people who were beginning to think that Calvary might be ready for a woman pastor. I did not know that. I assumed that I would be the interim for a year and then move on to

something else in another church. The transition committee had told me that being the interim would neither prevent nor guarantee the call as senior pastor, but quite honestly being called was the farthest thing from my mind at that time. By the way, an interim placement of a woman can be a great gift to a church that might not think the congregation is ready to make that call.

Where do you see denominational support when it comes to Women in Ministry?

My greatest source of support and encouragement has come from the friendships that I have developed through the women pastor's colloquium, which is sponsored by MMBB, for the larger mission giving churches. The friendships I have made in those annual gatherings are deep and meaningful.

Mutual support, shared encouragement – what does that look like?

We have worshipped, learned, laughed, and cried together. We have shared our stories. I have been fortunate in that I have not had to fight some of the battles fought by many women in ministry. Perhaps because I had been at the church working in Christian education first, I was known and trusted, and my gender seemed less of an issue.

That does not mean there have not been some difficult times. The week after I was installed at Calvary, I received a critical and angry letter from a Baptist pastor in Denver who closed by saying, "You were no more called by God to pastor that church than the devil going to heaven. It is a crying shame that a Baptist church has become so spiritually dead that they called you. Have you even been saved?" He had never met me, nor did he know anything about me. Incidentally, his church was not an American Baptist church.

I filed it under "A" for "An Awful Letter." That way it was in the front of my file and I saw it often. It still motivates me to work hard on behalf of women in ministry.

Did you respond to him then?

No, but I did call him the week that I retired.

To invite him to your retirement party?

No, but I wish I had thought of that. I wanted to see if he still thought the same way about women in ministry. Sadly, he did.

So, more specifically, what are some of the ideas coming out of the group with which you worked? Was it a task force on Women in Ministry?

No, we called it a roundtable discussion. It was a gathering of all the agencies and institutions that in some way contribute to support of women in ministry in our denomination. There was a recent press release about the

meeting.¹ Roy Medley, our General Secretary, asked me to provide direction giving support to women clergy at the time the position of National Executive Director of Women in Ministry had been defunded.

I called together a small steering committee composed of Holly Bean, Alice Greene, Lauren Ng and myself to get some wheels turning. It was out of that group's work that the roundtable was convened. Holly Bean has been hired as a consultant for the remainder of 2010. She's really the perfect choice. She is a wonderful role model for women in ministry. She is deeply committed to working on the issues facing women clergy. She is newly retired.

She was part of the Women in Ministry program at its inception when it was lodged with MMBB. She's very organized and very well connected. She is a great fit. Our intent in getting this roundtable together was to see what's currently being done in support of women and to discover what resources we currently have.

We also spent time making our wish list. The steering committee, which will be expanded, will continue to be an advisory committee for Holly as she networks, gathers data, and continues looking at new strategies and patterns of support and advocacy. Our denomination has a rich legacy of supporting women clergy and that will continue.

We are looking to a number of agencies and institutions to partner with us; we hope they will be resources and sources of encouragement, support, and advocacy. The Ministers Council, seminaries, American Baptist Women, the National Boards, chaplaincy programs, Interim Ministries, and the Profile Service are all existing networks and potential sources of partnership.

We're trying to figure out the most creative way that we can use existing resources rather than reinventing the wheel. Partnering rather than placing all the work with one person in one office offers some wonderful possibilities.

Even now seminaries are doing some great things, and we need to access seminary classes. We need to train women, educate search committees, educate our gatekeepers, do better work at biblical interpretation, and publish lists of resources where women can find training events and workshop events.

Just to push a little, you spoke of the letter from the pastor of another church. It is my sense that you sort of rode that out and didn't respond. Are there any other reactions you might have today besides "backing up?"

I would respond very differently now. We can respond to anyone who cites a biblical text to keep women silent. If the Bible is read through the lens of the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ, it is difficult to make a case against women as pastors and preachers.

I am convinced that Jesus would want both men and women to proclaim God's good news. Today I would not be silent in response to my letter writer. At the time I knew I could not change his mind, and I did not have the time to worry about it. Calvary, however, empowered me to find my voice. I will do all that I can to help other women find theirs, and provide a pulpit from which it can be heard.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Mary Armacost Hulst is retired from her position as Senior Pastor at Calvary Baptist Church, Denver, and is the past president of ABCUSA.

¹VALLEY FORGE, PA (ABNS 2/1/10)—A roundtable discussion was held at the American Baptist Mission Center on January 28-29, 2010, to discuss the future of the Women in Ministry program, overseen by the Office of the General Secretary. The roundtable included 25 denominational leaders from denominational agencies, caucuses, seminaries and other recognized interest groups in American Baptist Churches USA (ABCUSA). Specifically, the group considered how to best encourage, support and advocate for women who are in ministry positions within ABCUSA.

"We are part of a denomination that has faithfully supported women in ministry for years," said Rev. Mary Armacost Hulst, immediate past president of ABCUSA. "The charge that we have is to figure out where we are, what we all can bring, the data we need to gather, resources we have, and roadblocks we see for what we are doing. We need to develop a roadmap to bring before the General Board."

As a full-time Women in Ministry position no longer exists with the Office of the General Secretary, the roundtable allowed for a chance to consider how to continue advocacy and support for women in ministry in the future. The roundtable discussion included a look at ongoing issues women in the ministry face, and specific resources available to address those issues.

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.



minister MAGAZINE

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

Signed letters and comments are welcome, and may be used for publication. Send to www.pastor@firstbaptist-cs.org. Please include your return and email addresses in any correspondence.

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