

TOGETHER IN MINISTRY

The **Ministers Council** of the American Baptist Churches USA has received a grant of \$1,959,600 from the Lilly Foundation for sustaining excellence in the pastoral ministry. The money will fund *Together in Ministry*, the formation of **collegial covenant groups** for the strengthening of ministerial leaders.

Each group that forms can receive **\$1,800 per year** to pay a trained facilitator to lead the group. An additional \$100 per year will be provided to each National Ministers Council dues-paying member participant for incidental meeting costs such as books or travel.

Participants are encouraged to tap other financial resources to enhance the possibilities for group study materials, retreats, attendance at conferences, and so on. It is suggested that other possible resources be sought from continuing education funds through ministry context professional expenses, through ABCUSA Renewal Grants, or through regional funds set aside for continuing education.

The following pages will tell you how to apply for *Together in Ministry* funds.

A COLLEGIAL COVENANT GROUP is a meeting of ministerial colleagues around a specific topic whose ultimate goal is to be supportive of colleagues in ministry. The development of these groups is to get the job done of clergy support and encouragement so that ministry might be enhanced and improved because the minister has a sense of well-being and support.

Regional Ministers Councils are invited to encourage and receive applications from their colleagues and submit them to the national office by October of the current year for group funding the following January. Grants are renewable each year through 2007. Each application will present this information about the group:

- **FRIENDS**
- **FOCUS**
- **FACILITATOR**
- **COVENANT**

There are several decisions to make as one develops a covenant group. They are:

- Who will be in the group? What **FRIENDS**, (present or potential) do you want to ask to be a part of your group?
- What exactly will the group be doing: What will be the group's **FOCUS**?
- Where will the group be meeting?
- When or how often will the group meet?
- Who will be giving leadership to the group or who will be the **FACILITATOR**?
- What **COVENANT** will express the group's intentions on accountability, attendance, confidentiality? A covenant model is provided on page nine.

Who (FRIENDS)

The group may be a number of American Baptist colleagues who can get together often and long enough to accomplish the general goals.

- A group may invite ministerial leaders of other faith groups (such as a ministerial association).
- A group (either ABC or ecumenical) might get together with spouses.
- If your situation warrants and you are isolated enough, you might also want to consider an on line collegial group. Alan Selig (revselig@prodigy.net) has agreed to facilitate an online group and can be contacted at his e-mail address.

What will be done/discussed? FOCUS?

Whatever a group decides to "do" must be part of the covenant that it develops. Again, there are various possibilities, keeping the general aims in mind:

- Overcome the sense of personal and professional isolation
- Enrich ministerial leaders' perspectives of themselves and their ministries
- Provide a supportive network of peers who will pray for one another
- Offer opportunities for disciplined focus through specific study

- Create a climate for checking in and mutual accountability

Although the design is for all these needs to be met, it is best to select one focus or the thing that you will major in.

For example:

- The group could decide to do a book study and hold each other accountable to putting the practices the book recommends into practice in ministry.
- The group could decide that prayer is the main thing and that the majority of time will be spent in prayer, preceding the prayer time in sharing and updating one another on your ministry concerns.
- The group could decide that accountability is most important and set up a procedure for making individual covenants with one another on ministry and personal concerns.
- The group could decide to meet as an affinity group, such as those with a common language, women in ministry, ministry specialty, urban or rural ministers, to focus on shared issues.
- The group could decide to follow a case study presentation model and collaborate together on best practices for particular ministry scenarios.

Where you will meet: State clearly in the covenant even if you intend to meet at a different location each time, so you know what needs to be decided at the end of each meeting.

- **Review of Covenant:** It is recommended that the covenant be reviewed every three months. Reviews help you keep on track and make any necessary modification.

A Sample Covenant:

The six persons named below will meet the first Tuesday of the month at First Baptist Church Anywhere from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. beginning the first Tuesday in January 2004. We will begin with discussing the book *Leading Congregational Change*, and will decide once we are finished what book we will study next. We agree to set goals from the book for our ministry and to hold each other accountable to those goals. We agree to make this meeting a priority in our schedules and be faithful in attendance unless an unavoidable conflict prevents being at a meeting. We agree to arrive on time and stay until the end. We agree to hold each other in prayer

daily. We agree never to violate the confidentiality of the group by telling outside of the meeting any personal information shared in that context. We agree to have J.D. be our facilitator and to pay her \$1,800 for the year. We expect her to facilitate our meetings and to ensure that everyone will have the opportunity to participate appropriately. We will review this covenant when we finish with *Leading Congregational Change* or in three months, whichever comes first.

Where will you meet?

This is dependent upon the situation of the group. Meet in a room where everyone can sit at a similar comfortable level, be heard easily by everyone and not have any distractions. Do not hold the group meetings in a restaurant unless you can have a totally private space for the meeting. Otherwise, the meeting space is what works best for the group.

Persons who live far from any ministerial colleagues may consider participation in an online group. Contact information for a convener may be found on page five at the conclusion of the section on FRIENDS, about how to comprise a group.

How will you begin?

It is recommended to start the groups off on a two day retreat or longer time away. This allows for an initial time of getting to know one another that can set the tone and help folk get into the process.

A model for a regional Ministers Council retreat focused on relational ministry is available. Along with the model some funds will be provided to help your Ministers Council sponsor a retreat to lift up a relational model of ministry and encourage commitment to it through group participation. Please contact the Ministers Council once you have a retreat date established.

Bibliography

The list below is a beginning list of possible books that can be used for discussion.

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Ken Sande. *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997.

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Iyanla Vanzant. *One Day My Soul Just Opened Up: 40 Days and 40 Nights Towards Spiritual Strength and Personal Growth*. New York City: Fireside, 1998.

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