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## What Tree Rings Can Tell Us about Incivility

Charles H. Chandler, D.Min., Executive Director

During a recent tour of Jamestown, Virginia, I learned the results of some interesting research. Jamestown was settled in 1607, and is this nation's first continuous English speaking settlement in the new world. That era and area always attracts my attention because my immigrating forefather, John Chandler, landed in Jamestown in June 1610 as a ten year old and lived the remainder of his life in what is today Hampton, Virginia.



The guide at Jamestown pointed to recent research by climatologists from the University of Arkansas. By studying the rings of ancient, living bald cypress trees, they determined that the Jamestown area was deeply affected by drought for the seven years between the years 1606-1612. It was considered the worst drought in 800 years. The shortage of moisture not only affected the trees' growth, causing a series of very narrow rings that reveal a period of poor water quality, but it also suggested unsuccessful food crops. The climatologists contend that these natural clues help explain tensions between the English settlers and Indians over corn supplies. They believe it was not a coincidence that the first period of hostilities between the two cultures ended after 1612 when crops, especially corn, became more abundant. The guide pointed out that research also shows close correlation between another drought and the Indian uprising of 1622.

These reports call attention to some important trends. Remember, the colonists did not

bring any farmers with them because they did not want to appear to be a permanent settlement. Establishing farms might have been interpreted as permanence; thus, their presence might have been an even greater threat to the Indians. The settlers brought copper which they traded to the Indians for food. This worked at first, but as the drought raged on and the food supplies diminished, the settlers' need and demand for food threatened the Indians' way of life. The settlers became a burden the natives did not need.

These trends can be seen far beyond the tensions between English settlers and Native Americans during the 17th century. The diminishing food supply had (or has) the same effect as an economic melt down or a severe recession. A way of life is threatened, and the reaction produces incivility.

I noticed an increase in the volume of calls to MTM in August 2008. I noticed still another increase earlier this year. Many ask, "Why is there such an increase in incivility in our churches?" I believe the answer is at least hinted at in the results of the tree ring research by climatologists at Jamestown and Hampton. As the recession has affected more and more people, incivility among citizens has increased. The same "dis-ease" that affects society overflows into all organizations, especially churches.

When lifestyles are threatened, mob mentalities develop more easily and much faster. Church congregations provide an easy arena for such mentalities to develop and spread. It is fast becoming an epidemic. The volume of calls has reached a level that it is challenging our "manpower" and our resources.

The real culprit is fear. Even those who have not lost their jobs or whose lifestyles have not

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### MTM Mission Statement

The MTM Foundation seeks to be advocates for clergy and their families in all faith groups who are experiencing personal or professional crisis due to deteriorating employment or congregation-clergy relationships.



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*The Servant is an authorized publication of the Ministering to Ministers Foundation, Inc., a non-denominational Christian organization offering C.A.R.E. for Care Givers. Opinions expressed by publishers and writers are their own and are not to be considered as official expressions by the Ministering to Ministers Foundation.*

# The Servant

Volume 15, Issue 1

Winter 2010

## The Experience of Shame in Forced Termination

Beverley G. Buston, Ph.D.

Shame on you! You should be ashamed of yourself! How many times did we hear this as a child? How many times have we said it to ourselves as adults when things go wrong and there is a problem for which we claim responsibility? The posture of shame is easily recognized in a toddler; head and eyes cast downward, shoulders bowed, blushing in the neck and face. As we grow and mature we learn to mask the posture of shame, but that horrible feeling is still present.

Pastors who have experienced forced termination report tremendous feelings of shame. "How could I fail at something that is a call from God?" "How do I face my family and peers who have supported me and believed in my call?" "What is wrong with me? I feel like a failure." The feeling of shame can be paralyzing. We can be stuck in old patterns of blaming ourselves, others, and avoiding or denying a problem by pretending there isn't one. We may also withdraw physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We may shut down and become depressed. The reporting of such reactions is not unusual for pastors going through MTM Wellness Retreats.

**"How could I fail at something that is a calling from God?"**

These reactions/responses to an experience of shame are described by Donald Nathanson in his book, *Shame and Pride*. As a student of Sylvan Tomkins, Nathanson studied affect psychology and has spent his career writing and lecturing on the subject. Tomkins' work describes all human emotions as being hardwired at birth. He is the first to clearly connect neurobiology to our feelings. All of our emotions are automatic physiological responses to an external action. It is the brain's way of forcing us to attend to important information. Tomkins' research was done on infants who are able to get their problems solved by

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## MTM is Growing

Cathy Ralcewicz, Ministry Assistant/Director of Development



2010 has been a year of growth for MTM. In July of 2009 I joined the staff as Ministry Assistant and Director of Development. Previously, I worked for almost 11 years at the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond. A native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, I grew up in the Presbyterian Church and after moving to Richmond in 1987, I joined the United Methodist Church. Currently I am a member at Huguenot Road Baptist Church, where I served as Office Manager and Financial Secretary for seven years.

By virtue of a special grant, we also added Linda Serreno as a part-time Development Assistant. Together, we have updated the MTM database, enabling us to more effectively manage mailings, stay in contact with retreat participants, Prayer Partners, and supporters, and better manage donation records. Thanks to the generosity of a trustee, we will publish *The Servant* each quarter in 2011.

In the spring of 2010, our first monthly e-newsletter, the *MTM Messenger*, was sent. *The Messenger* included articles and stories by our trustees and retreat alumni with inspiring words of the impact of MTM in their lives. We also include educational material you can reference on our website at [www.mtmfoundation.org](http://www.mtmfoundation.org).

We now have three regional boards: Alabama Regional Board based in Birmingham, AL; Western Michigan Regional Board based in Holland, MI; and East Tennessee Regional

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## Ministering to Ministers

Foundation, Inc.

## Communicating Advocating Reclaiming Equipping

Offering C.A.R.E.  
for Care Givers

## MTM: Making a Difference

Charles Chandler, Executive Director

In 2009, more than sixty volunteers contributed over \$350,000 of service, lodging, meals, meeting rooms, personal and family counseling, legal advice, and coaching wounded ministers. Many of these provided their own travel expenses to make the journey to engage in helping hurting ministers and their families. These dedicated volunteers make the effort to walk with ministers who feel alone, offering them hope and inspiration, helping them to know someone cares and understands. Some of these volunteers also attend MTM trustee meetings, regional board meetings, and assist with the running of the MTM office to make these ministries happen. These gifts-in-kind/of service will likely be equaled or exceeded in the current year of 2010.

The ministry of MTM could not take place without these volunteers investing their time, energy, and expertise in aid to God's chosen servants who have been wounded while serving our Lord. God will bless each of you and your efforts as the ministry of MTM makes a difference.

### Support the MTM Mission and Ministries



Send your tax-deductible donation to: MTM at  
2641 Cromwell Road, Richmond, Va 23235  
or donate online at [www.mtmfoundation.org](http://www.mtmfoundation.org)

## Meet Our Newest Board Members

### John M. "Buddy" Moore, Saluda, Virginia

Mr. Moore is a native of Greensboro, North Carolina. His career includes 30 years with General Electric in consumer products marketing, 29 years in marketing with Pre-Need Programs, President of Estate Assurance Systems, Inc. (Provider/Horizon Trust), and 25 years as President of Horizon Burial Association, Inc. Twice elected to the Middlesex County School Board, he served as Chair for four years and was appointed by the Board of Supervisors as a key figure in school building and remodeling projects, and served on the Middlesex County Tax Committee. He is affiliated with the Disciples of Christ Church.

### Nancy Ellen Meck, Ph.D., M.Div., Midlothian, Virginia

Dr. Meck was educated at The Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest, Austin, Texas; West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia; and Mary Baldwin College, Staunton, Virginia and ordained to the Priesthood by the Diocese of Virginia and ordained to the diaconate by the Diocese of West Missouri. She serves as the Associate Rector of The Episcopal Church of the Redeemer in Midlothian and has served the Dioceses of Virginia and Southern Virginia as a supply priest, Associate Rector at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Richmond and as a Chaplain at Saint Luke's Hospital, Kansas City, Missouri. Dr. Meck is a certified and licensed psychologist and worked as a developmental psychologist at the University of Kansas Medical Center; a visiting instructor in the Department of Psychology at West Virginia University; and a graduate teaching assistant in the Department of Psychology at West Virginia University.

## Rings

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been affected by loss of income are afraid they will be next. As job insecurity continues to grow, the fear factor spreads. Anxieties erode relationships. Contentment levels decrease. People do not understand the dynamics around them, they just know things will not be like they used to be and it's not a good feeling. The blame game begins and a congregation's fellowship is splintered. Healthy congregations facing such challenges may begin to function in dysfunctional ways. Though the dynamics and behavior may be out of character for a congregation, decisions made during these dysfunctional times can affect the pastor and family, the congregation, and the community for many years to come. The sad part is that it does not have to be that way. In healthier circumstances, wiser decisions are more likely to be made. With a lesser "fear factor," stabilizing voices may emerge and the tidal wave may dissipate. But, with fear touching so many, silence is interpreted as approval and a mob mentality can function like a tsunami resulting in disaster.

What should be done in periods of "drought?" It helps to have procedures in place that will be followed during times of conflict. It also helps to realize that problems are never solved by just removing one person. Life is never that simple.

Children are taught to "Stop! Look! And Listen!" before crossing the street. Maybe that's good advice for congregations before taking drastic actions that affect so many for so long. I believe there is a "more excellent way." (I Corinthians 12:31)

### Tom Denham, M.Div., Alpharetta, Georgia

Mr. Denham received a Bachelor of Arts in Bible at Mississippi College and a M.Div at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky. He completed Pastoral Counseling residencies at the University of Mississippi Medical Center and the Baptist Health System in Birmingham, Alabama. During seminary he served as pastor of First Baptist Church of Thomasboro, Illinois. While Director of Employee Assistance Programs at the Baptist Health System in Birmingham, Tom served as interim pastor to three churches. Relocating to Atlanta, Tom operated counseling offices at Alabama Road Baptist, Oglethorpe Presbyterian, and Crabapple First Baptist Churches. Led to redirect his career, Tom trained as a computer engineer; working as a network analyst for the city of Alpharetta, a database analyst and systems administrator for CGI Information Systems and Management Consultants, and as a network administrator at Elliott Wave International (EWI), where he works today as Senior European Stocks Analyst. Active in Alpharetta Presbyterian Church, Tom serves on the Commitment and Mission Committees.

### Edward P. Harrow, Sr., M.Div., Deltaville, Virginia

A Virginia native, Reverend Harrow was educated at the University of Richmond, University of Virginia and Vanderbilt University School of Divinity. He currently serves as interim pastor of Hermitage Baptist Church in Church View, VA. Past experience includes Chair of the Board of Middle Peninsula Insurance Agencies, Inc., Middle Peninsula Financial Services, Inc., and Middle Peninsula Northern Neck Lawyers Title. He has been active in many civic and charitable organizations.

## Shame

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caretakers who learn what the baby's facial expressions and vocalizations mean. Because these neurologically based emotions are contagious, the adults resonate to the baby's feelings. Tomkins identified emotions using the language of toddlers—mad, sad, scared, and glad. It is our brain's way of telling us something important has happened and that it is problematic for us. A toddler who is told "no" when chasing a colorful ball into the street will react with an obvious shame posture. Hopefully, that child is held and comforted rather than punished while the caregiver explains the danger of running into the street.

Nathanson has developed a Compass of Shame that describes our response to the physiological reaction stated above. If we learn good problem solving skills as a child—which many of us do not—we respond to the reaction when comforted by going back to the problem that interrupted our good feeling and focusing our energies on the issue that triggered the negative feelings. What is the problem? What caused it at the time? Who is involved? What is my part in the problem? What a wonderful gift we have been given by our caregivers when we have good problem solving skills. Sadly, we are often left on our own to do the best we can to struggle with problems early on in life. Therefore, we develop "scripts" that even as adults keep us mired in the Compass of Shame by blaming ourselves, blaming others, avoiding, denying, and withdrawing; thus, the paralysis and perpetuating behaviors are always self-defeating in the end. The reality is that the shame response is perceived to be helpful to us. We will always experience it. It is not a conscious event unless we begin to focus on it.

**Now here is the good news.** We can learn to avoid the paralysis of shame! The key is creating an inventory of calming and comforting skills to use when a problem occurs and throws us into a powerful, painful Compass of Shame. And, the shame response happens to us twenty times on a good day! We typically develop those things that are calming to us. It may be taking a walk, curling up with a lap robe and repeating calming words, choosing a Psalm that is comforting and carrying it in our pocket, or memorizing a comforting prayer. The possibilities are endless. Learning to recognize our body's shame response and knowing our strategies for calming and comforting ourselves allows us to move out of that swirling place of self blaming, attacking others, avoiding, denying and withdrawal so we can focus on the problem. We were never taught about this negative emotion, but its function is to highlight the problem which is not to be addressed or resolved.

A primary focus of the MTM Wellness Retreat is working on self care and putting in place those things that keep pastors healthy. Having a support group that one meets with regularly and provides a high level of trust and confidentiality is essential. Choosing a mentor or spiritual director who supports one's growth and development in the spiritual realm helps one to stay focused on his/her ministry. Having a select group of people, possibly in one's congregation, who will provide honest feedback is important for being aware of the possibility of potential problems. And, having a therapist "in the wings"

## Growing

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Board, based in the Knoxville/Chattanooga area. with two more planned in the near future.

We are encouraging all Trustees to host an awareness dinner during the year to educate their communities about the ministries of MTM. Watch for an Awareness Dinner in your area in 2011 and plan to invite family, friends, and colleagues. We are excited to work with our partners in the Northern Neck area of Virginia. We are planning a one day "Friends for the Journey" seminar, and a *Healthy Transitions Wellness Retreat*, in this area.

I look forward to the coming year as we work to spread the good news of the MTM ministries, so that all who experience the hurt and despair of forced termination or congregational conflict will know of the valuable resources MTM offers for support and guidance.

We need your financial support. Please give generously so we can continue to minister to those in crisis. Use the enclosed remittance envelope or visit [www.mtmfoundation.org](http://www.mtmfoundation.org)/donations, to make a donation through PayPal, or call me at (804) 594-2556 to set up easy monthly automatic credit card donations. I wish you a joyous and prosperous New Year!

### Coming Soon!

#### Healthy Transitions Wellness Retreat for Ministers and Spouses

January 10-14, 2011  
Carson Springs Conference Center  
Newport, TN

April 4-8, 2011  
Green Lake Conference Center  
Green Lake, WI

#### Retreat Alumni Comment

"I've been to conferences for thirty years and have never experienced the care we received at the Healthy Transitions Wellness Retreat. The servanthood of the staff was as if our feet were being washed all week long."

Check our website for more retreats in 2011  
[www.mtmfoundation.org](http://www.mtmfoundation.org)

Scholarships Available



to meet with when times are tough can be vital. All of these resources can provide comforting support that is so important in solving problems without becoming stuck in shame.

Our God is a loving God, not a shaming God. What better way to honor God than to strive to be healthy and not live in the paralysis of shame.

Dr. Beverley G. Buston is a member of the MTM Board of Trustees. A certified psychologist, she has served as clinician at Healthy Transitions Wellness Retreats for Ministers and Spouses.