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Sent: Tuesday, July 26, 2011 12:17 PM
To: mtmfoundation@verizon.net
Subject: The Highs and Lows of Pastoral Life



Ministering to Ministers Foundation, Inc. Newsletter
July 26, 2011

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The Highs and Lows of Pastoral Life

If I may alter Dickens' line from *A Tale of Two Cities*, "it was the worst of times and the best of times," reflecting on the sequence of events of that Thursday in May 2010. That one day seemed to typify the highs and lows that so many of us pastors experience, and in this case, experience on the same day.

In mid-April I sent out what I thought was a proactive letter to the employed members of our congregation concerning our financial situation. Most members took it for what it was worth, but for one it was a button pusher. She in turn wrote a scathing letter, hand-delivering it to five selected members (but not to me) the following Sunday, in which she vented feelings toward me that had apparently festered for years, and threatened to leave the church. Following the prescribed first step in the by laws regarding conflict resolution with the pastor, I invited her to meet with me and talk; twice she failed to respond. My deacon chair skipped that first step and called the deacon body together to confer while I was out of state. To this day I do not know whether the deacon chair, not knowing how to proceed, simply panicked or used this as an opportunity to make life miserable for me. To compound matters, difficulties relating to a staff person climaxed with two acts of insubordination and a reluctance of the personnel committee chair to help me address those issues.

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One month had passed since all of this broke, and no one who had knowledge of the "angry letter," including the deacons, had consulted me about it. The silence was deafening. That Thursday I sat down with the three deacon officers who shared concerns that had been expressed about my pastorate. No single concern signaled an insurmountable problem, but the combination of several smaller ones painted a picture of greater concern, according to the spokesperson. By the end of the two-hour session, I said, "sometimes I wonder if I've ever done anything right here," to which there was no response. I went home feeling sad and despondent. Had my fourteen years of service meant anything to anyone? It was "the worst of times."

The phone rang later that evening. It was the son of parishioners from a former pastorate. "I'm calling to let you know that Mom has cancer and is not expected to make it through the weekend. Mom and Dad always appreciated our ministry to them over those years. You've been a blessing to our entire family. I don't know what your schedule is at your church, but we would love for you to take part in her service when the time comes." (In 1992, I had taken part in the funeral service of his father, a retired state Baptist employee, and I had seen his mother only once since then.) I began to cry, so much so that my wife put an abrupt end to her cell phone call to respond to me. I told the son that I might have plenty of time to help out, that I was in the midst of situations that may very well bring an end to my pastorate. I expressed my concern for his mother, then I said, "You have no idea how much your call means to me. I am struggling and you have blessed me and you have reminded me of the joy and fulfillment of pastoral ministry." It was "the best of times." Thank God for these serendipitous expressions of affirmation!

Failing to resolve either of the presenting issues and in the face of an increasingly toxic environment, I resigned one week later. I left in early June 2010 with a bit of severance but without an offer of any church-wide opportunity to say goodbye. My ministers' support group, my family, and the Ministering to Ministers wellness retreat have provided much support, insight and feedback in the ensuing months. We have joined a loving and caring church that has been an oasis of healing, particularly for my wife. And exactly one year since my leaving I began my first interim pastorate.

Bob Lewis
Glen Allen, VA

Recent Retreat Responses

Sometime you may wonder if the Wellness Rretreats conducted by MTM are worthwhile. If you talk to the participants and/or the leaders of the retreat, you would have a clear answer, an affirmative answer, to that question. The Wellness Retreats are worth the time, energy, emotion and money required to conduct them. Have no doubt, the retreat is hard work for both the leaders and the participants, but it provides a good step toward healing in the life of the minister and h/her family.

Here are a few remarks from a recent retreat:

Future Wellness Retreats

July 25-29, 2011
Samford University
Birmingham, AL
Co-Sponsored by
Samford University

For additional information go to the
MTM Website:

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What's MTM all about?

Our Mission:

The Ministering to Ministers (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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- On what she learned, "I am not alone facing this"
- "Change the word from 'retreat' to 'workshop'. It was hard work I see was necessary."
- "I was encouraged in my gifts and calling."
- In his story he reflected, "I have been to hell and back and He [God] has delivered me and there is nothing He can not deliver me from."
- Reflecting on the church's response, "The ones that should have loved us the most, shocked us the most."
- Another reflecting on the church's response, "What is it about us that warrants so much meanness toward us?"
- About the retreat, "I am so grateful for each provision you provided for us."
- "When I consider the magnitude of the gift (in time and professional services) that MTM and its leaders graciously give to promote "healthy" healing among the persecuted servants of God's Church, I am reminded of the angel that God sent to strengthen Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. As a recipient of your gift I am indeed strengthened for the journey ahead. . . ."



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