

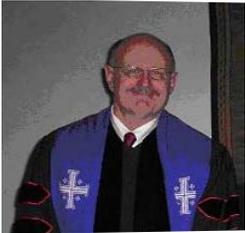


# The Grapevine

CONNECTING THE CONGREGATIONS OF THE PRESBYTERY OF DETROIT

June 2013

## Moving from Shame-Filled to Grace-Full Congregations



by the Rev. Dr. Allen D. Timm, Executive Presbyter

In one congregation I served, I remember running the gauntlet on the way into worship. After the leaders for the day prayed for God's guidance during the service, we walked a short distance to the choir room. On the way to the choir room, we had to walk between the critics. These were the folks who wanted to blame others for the church's decline. They did not like the new outreach efforts of the church that served the neighborhood. I could feel the tension as I walked through the hall. I could hear the barbs about the education department or the lack of young children. Visitors, too, walked this gauntlet from the fellowship hall into worship.

It is easy to blame someone else for the problems our church is facing. "The Sunday school is inadequate. The choir doesn't have enough tenors. We don't sing praise songs that attract young people. The pastor isn't young and doesn't have young children that will attract other young children."

Karen McClintock addresses these situations in her book, Shame-Less Lives, Grace-Full Congregations (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2012). First she distinguishes between guilt and shame. Shame occurs when we feel we are less than adequate; we are intrinsically made wrong. The feeling of guilt arises when we have done something wrong and need to repent and ask for forgiveness. We feel shame when we don't feel adequate, whether as person or congregations. We might blame that pastor who left, or the one we have, for not doing enough to attract members. Pastors blame elders for not doing enough.

Another kind of blame is comparison blame. As individuals we compare ourselves who went further in their career than we did or have more things. As congregations we compare ourselves to others without looking at our own context and asking God to guide us to serve our own neighbors.

How do we become grace-filled? McClintock has a number of thoughts about the topic. As children of God, we were created as gifted and special in the eyes of God.

Claiming our uniqueness begins our journey toward grace. As congregations we have a history, resources from the past, and our own setting. McClintock says that our path to service is to ask our neighbors what they need and to serve in a way that reaches out to fill those needs. The whole idea is to stop blaming ourselves or the faithless generation, but to find out what we can offer that would show the love of Christ. Instead of deciding what we need to build so they will come, we find out how we can touch lives and show the grace of Jesus Christ (McClintock, 56).

There may not be young people in our church's neighborhood. The first question is: how we can serve those who DO live or work in the neighborhood of our church. Then we need to ask questions about what it is they want or need. We shift from blaming ourselves or others, to see the future we see and the hope Christ gives us that we can share.

When someone blames us, how might we respond? McClintock points us to Jesus' words in Luke 7:27, 28, where Jesus calls us to turn the other

Continued on page 2

cheek when some slaps us. On the surface we think that means to we should invite the person hit us again. Yes, it does mean that, but there is more to it. A study of the language and situation tells us otherwise. In Jesus' day, when a person touched another with their left hand they were brining shame to themselves because they used the left hand for personal hygiene, and it was unclean. What does that imply? Jesus was saying if a person shames you, you need to stop the blame and shaming. Turn your other cheek to their left hand, because they won't shame themselves. Invite

constructive change rather than insidious blame.

At the last Leadership Training Day seven congregations told some of their story about why they grew in worship attendance or vitality. Their stories were refreshing. Each pastor said he or she and the ruling elders looked at their situation and answered the call to serve Christ. They was looking at their situation, not comparing themselves to other congregations and how they worshiped or served. They looked at other models only for ideas of possibilities. Last year 21 congregations of the Presbytery's 81 grew in worship attendance, and two of

them grew in attendance by over

20%. How did they do it? They asked themselves and their neighbors, how can we serve? These churches became centers for sharing the love of Christ.

May your congregation be grace-filled as you invite folks to share the love of God that you have, as you reach out with the love of Christ, and as you share "the hope that is within you" (I Peter 3:15).

## Clergy Ordination Anniversaries

### June

CLISE, W. KENT	45
COBLEIGH, GERALD R.	45
GEPFORD, WILLIAM G.	60
McINTYRE, DEWITT	45
PICKRELL, BROOKE	5
SMITH, PETER C.	40

### July

DYKSTRA, CRAIG R.	40
McMILLAN, JUDITH	15
MELROSE, SUE ELLIS	40
MIHOCKO, DAVID	40
PRICE, MICHAEL T.	50

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# THE PARISH PAPER

## IDEAS AND INSIGHTS FOR ACTIVE CONGREGATIONS

Coeditors: Herb Miller and Cynthia Woolever - [www.TheParishPaper.com](http://www.TheParishPaper.com)

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### Clergy Groups: Are They Worth the Investment?

A pastor new to parish ministry sought advice from another pastor about continuing education opportunities in their community. "It's hard to explain, but this pastor group I'm part of is just different from anything else I do," his friend began. "Yes, I attend one or two conferences or seminars a year and I go to the denomination's meetings. But each time that we meet I learn something from the other pastors that helps me in my ministry. I encourage you to find a group of pastors that will help you become a better pastor." Is this good advice? Will the pastor's participation in a peer group make a difference in the congregation's effectiveness?

New research concludes that the answer to both questions is a resounding yes. If clergy attend groups appropriate for their ministry and those groups use best practices, they are beneficial. However, not all pastor groups are created equal. The following information about peer groups offers tips on how to get the most out of the experience.

**What is the purpose of clergy groups?** Pastoral peer groups give clergy the opportunity to share ideas and resources, focus on biblical study and theological reflection, and develop friendships and support among their peers.

**How many pastors participate?** At least three out of four pastors report meeting regularly with other ministers in a small group for continuing education and support. Mainline Protestant pastors are somewhat more likely to participate in a clergy group than Catholic priests or conservative Protestant pastors.<sup>1</sup> Typically these groups meet monthly for about two hours. However, some meet for weekend retreats several times a year and others convene weekly. Further, many pastors simultaneously take part in more than one form of clergy peer learning, such as a weekly lectionary group.

**Who forms clergy groups?** Sometimes a set of friends or seminary classmates self-organize based on their common goals or experiences. But more often, institutions devoted to supporting pastoral ministry organize groups. For example, judicatories

or national denominational efforts to revitalize congregations include clergy education and support in the form of peer groups. A seminary, university, pastoral counseling center, or other clergy development organization may also start groups to foster excellence in ministry.<sup>2</sup>

#### Fundamentals of the Best Clergy Groups

Authors of a comprehensive review of clergy peer groups claim that any group experience is better than none. What draws a pastor into a particular group is different from what makes a pastor stay in the group. Certain peer learning experiences separate pastors who merely survive from those who thrive.<sup>3</sup> What distinguishes the *best* clergy learning groups from others?

**A group that fits the pastor.** The best group experience fits the competency needs of the pastor for where they are in their ministry. A first-time pastor needs different information and support than the seasoned pastor.

• **Groups for early-career pastors.** Pastors in their first five years of local church ministry benefit from a group led by a skilled facilitator, especially



I WISH OUR CLERGY GROUP WAS A BIT MORE DIVERSE...FIVE OF US ARE PASTORS AT THE SAME CHURCH.

if this person also acts as a peer mentor. The group works well if it is not highly structured and gives new pastors spiritual energy, time for biblical and theological reflection, and a safe place to share perplexing problems that are bound to arise in the early years. The best groups also intentionally involve spouses and families in some of their activities.

- *Groups for midcareer pastors.* These pastors join a clergy group because they believe their ministry is going well and they feel a great sense of satisfaction with ministry. However, they know that something more is possible for their ministry and for their congregation's ministries. Because their seminary education can be decades in the past, these pastors search for ways to keep up-to-date with scholarship and strategies. The group can provide an intellectual challenge as well as practical ideas to improve ministry. Midcareer pastors benefit from groups that are more diverse—participants could be pastors from different denominations, racial or ethnic groups, culture or nationality, or even ministry setting (such as urban vs. rural).

- *Groups for clergywomen.* Female pastors join peer groups more frequently than their male colleagues do. Women can feel isolated as ministers because they are more likely to serve in small or rural congregations and to have long commutes. As a result, clergywomen seek out groups that are more likely to be all women or diverse denominationally. Female pastors favor the focus on spiritual practices and experiences that incorporate the arts that these groups provide.

*A group that uses best practices.* The longitudinal review of clergy groups revealed that key elements were part of every successful peer group: an effective group facilitator, a formal group covenant or contract, regular attendance by all participants at group meetings, a climate of trust and accountability, innovative group worship and spiritual practice, and diverse members, especially pastors representing different denominations. Geographic proximity was not a factor for success but affinity in ministry was essential.<sup>4</sup>

### The Rewards of Clergy Groups

Both pastors and congregations find that the investment of time and resources in peer groups pay big dividends.

**For pastors:** Clergy participating in groups say it renews their call and commitment to ministry. Research shows that these clergy are more engaged in their own development and self-care and they more

successfully balance their family and private life with the ongoing demands of ministry. Solo pastors and clergy serving in small churches especially benefit from a community of peers. For some pastors, group support keeps them from leaving ministry. One estimate places clergy departures from parish ministry at more than 1,700 a month, with half of all beginning pastors leaving before completing their fifth year.<sup>5</sup>

**For congregations:** Congregations led by pastors who participate in peer groups differ from those churches led by clergy who do not participate in some type of clergy group. Pastors in peer groups lead in highly participatory congregations—higher proportions of worshipers are involved and take on church leadership roles. Because peer group pastors are empowering leaders, new members and youth in these congregations also serve on church committees and boards more frequently. Their congregations emphasize community service and seek to mobilize members as change agents. Finally, peer group pastors tend to serve in numerically growing churches. The longer a pastor has participated in a group, the greater the impact on congregational effectiveness.

### What is the Power of Pastoral Peer Learning?

The seasoned pastor's counsel about finding a clergy group reflects a wisdom that is now documented by the experiences of thousands of pastors and their congregations. Clergy peer groups sustain pastors in ministry and push them to grow as church leaders. Congregations gain when their leaders are able to spiritually renew and enhance their skills. When churches encourage their pastor to participate in a clergy group and budget funds for continuing education, the congregation realizes significant returns from their investment.

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1. Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce, *Leadership That Fits Your Church* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2012), 57.

2. Penny Long Marler, et al., *So Much Better: How Thousands of Pastors Help Each Other Thrive*; The Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Peer Learning Project (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2013).

3. See the appendix of *So Much Better* for a listing of Peer Group Resources, 179-86.

4. *So Much Better*, 10.

5. Pastoral Care Inc. ([www.pastoralcareinc.com](http://www.pastoralcareinc.com)).

## Presbytery of Detroit Calendar of Events

To have your Churches event posted please send the information to [sandy@detroitpresbytery.org](mailto:sandy@detroitpresbytery.org).

June 2013	
30-July 5	Covenant Gathering 2013 "Seasons of Faith" at Michindoh Conference Center, Hillsdale, MI. More information on the Covenant Gathering web site <a href="http://www.covenantgathering.com">http://www.covenantgathering.com</a>
July 2013	
4	Presbytery Office closed in observance of Independence Day
16-20	Presbyterian Youth Triennium 2013 at Purdue University. <a href="#">Click here</a> for the Detroit Delegation Registration information and forms. If you have questions please contact Matt Nickel at <a href="mailto:mnickel@fpcro.org">mnickel@fpcro.org</a>
22-26	Detroit, Fort Street, 631 W. Fort Street, Detroit, MI 48226 is holding Peace Camp 9:00 am - 3:00 pm. <a href="#">Click here for flyer</a>
25	Foster Care Ministries meetings with the Faith Communities Coalition on Foster Care 6:30 p.m., Washtenaw Co. FCC: First Presbyterian Church, 300 N. Washington, Ypsilanti, MI 48197. (Corner of Huron and Cross Streets Rev. Laura Speiran ( <a href="mailto:laura@fumc-saline.org">laura@fumc-saline.org</a> ); Heidi Church ( <a href="mailto:hgeibster@gmail.com">hgeibster@gmail.com</a> ) or Katie Page Sander, <a href="mailto:katie_page-sander@judsoncenter.org">katie_page-sander@judsoncenter.org</a> MDHS Director Maura Corrigan to speak
August 2013	
1-3	World Mission partner conference at Big Tent. The Power of "We": Collective Impact in God's Mission. <a href="#">Click here for more information</a>
8	Foster Care Ministries meetings with the Faith Communities Coalition on Foster Care 6:30 p.m., Northwest Wayne Co FCC: Hartford Memorial Baptist Church, 18700 James Couzens Freeway, Detroit, MI 48235. Host Coordinators: Marsialle Arbuckle <a href="mailto:marbuckl@hotmail.com">marbuckl@hotmail.com</a>
15	Foster Care Ministries meetings with the Faith Communities Coalition on Foster Care 6:30 p.m. Eastern Wayne Co. FCC, Grosse Pointe Memorial Church, Lakeshore Dr., Grosse Pointe, MI Contact: Sue Acton, <a href="mailto:sacton@gpmchurch.org">sacton@gpmchurch.org</a>
19	Board of Pensions Orientation for New Clergy 12:00 pm to 3:00 pm at Ann Arbor, First 1432 Washtenaw Ave., Ann Arbor, MI 48104
20	Board of Pensions Discussion of the Coming Change in Health Benefits 10:00 am to 12:30 pm at Ann Arbor, First 1432 Washtenaw Ave., Ann Arbor, MI 48104
20	Retired Clergy Luncheon 12:30 pm with Board of Pensions Rep. Allison Seed at Ann Arbor, First 1432 Washtenaw Ave., Ann Arbor, MI 48104
<b>27</b>	<b>Presbytery Meeting at 4:00 pm, St. Paul's Presbyterian Church, 27475 Five Mile Rd., Livonia, MI 48154; 734-422-1470</b>
27	Foster Care Ministries meetings with the Faith Communities Coalition on Foster Care 6:30 p.m., Mid Oakland Co. FCC: Kirk in the Hills, Long Lake Rd., Bloomfield Hills, MI MDHS Director Maura Corrigan to speak
September 2013	
2	Presbytery Office closed in observance of Labor day
3	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at <a href="#">Dearborn, Littlefield</a>
21	Warren, Celtic Cross Fall Holiday Craft Show and Bake Sale from 9 am-4pm and table rentals will be \$25. For further information please contact Celtic Cross Presbyterian Church, 11451 E. Ten Mile Rd., Warren, MI 48089 or call 586-757-7832.
23-24	Pastors in Transition at St. Francis Retreat Center, DeWitt, MI
28	Presbyterian Men's work day
October 2013	
1	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at <a href="#">Dearborn, Littlefield</a>
10-12	Kenya Mission Annual Conference at Dearborn, First 600 N. Brady. <a href="#">Click here for more information</a>
10-13	Take a Pilgrimage Through Faith with a group at Howell Conference and Nature Center. Sponsored by Presbyterian Pilgrimage. <a href="#">Click here for more information</a>
<b>26</b>	<b>Month of Mission Breakfast 9:00 am followed by Presbytery Meeting at 11:30 am at Grosse Pointe Memorial, 16 Lakeshore, Grosse Pointe Farms, MI 48230</b>
November 2013	
3	<b>Daylight Savings Time Ends</b> - set clocks back one hour
5	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at <a href="#">Dearborn, Littlefield</a>
28	Presbytery Office closed for Thanksgiving Day

	<b>December 2013</b>
3	Taizé Worship 7:00 pm at <a href="#">Dearborn, Littlefield</a>
14	Men's Advent Communion Breakfast 8:30 am at Park United Presbyterian Church, 14 Cortland, Highland Park, MI 48203. Speaker is the Honorable Kurtis Wilder, Judge, Michigan Court of Appeals and member of Plymouth, First. <a href="#">Click here for flyer</a>
24-25	Presbytery Office Closed for Christmas Holiday
31-Jan 1	Presbytery Office Closed for New Year Holiday
	<b>January 2014</b>
28	Presbytery Meeting at 4:00 pm, St. John's Presbyterian Church, 1961 E. Lafayette, Detroit, MI 48207; 313-567-0213. Installation of Moderator and Vice Moderator.
	<b>February 2014</b>
22	Presbytery Meeting at 9:00 am Location TBD This is a Saturday Meeting
	<b>March 2014</b>
	<b>April 2014</b>
26	Presbytery Meeting at 9:00 am Location TBD This is a Saturday Meeting
	<b>May 23014</b>
	<b>June 2014</b>
14-21	General Assembly Here - No Presbytery Meeting.
	<b>July 2014</b>
	<b>August 2014</b>
26	Presbytery Meeting at 4:00 pm Location TBD
	<b>September 2014</b>
	<b>October 2014</b>
25	Month of Mission Breakfast 8:30 am followed by Presbytery Meeting at 11:30 am Location TBD
	<b>November 2014</b>
	<b>December 2014</b>
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