BAYLOR
UNIVERSITY

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Journal of Family and Community Ministries (FCM) is a peer-reviewed journal published quarterly (ISSN: 1935-5408) by the Center for Family and Community Ministries (CFCM) in the Baylor University School of Social Work. The journal's purpose is to strengthen family and community ministries in congregational and denominational entities.

Annual subscription rates for *The Journal of Family and Community Ministries* (four issues) are $30 for individuals and $45 for libraries. International subscriptions are the base rate, plus $13 (US). Subscription requests may be made online (www.baylor.edu/FCM_Journal) or sent to FCM Journal, Baylor University, One Bear Place #97120, Waco, TX 76798-7120. Subscribers in Illinois, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas and Washington, D.C., should add applicable sales tax or provide a copy of a tax-exempt certificate.

HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

www.baylor.edu/FCM_Journal

or call **254-710-4417** for more information

CENTER FOR FAMILY AND COMMUNITY MINISTRIES
BAYLOR SOCIAL WORK

CONTENTS

THE JOURNAL OF
Family and Community Ministries

The Journal of Family and Community Ministries is a resource for the heart, head and soul, committed to helping congregations and religiously affiliated organizations to be the hands and feet of God. Through the journal, the Center for Family and Community Ministries seeks to provide resources for family and community that foster creativity, promote critical thinking and inspire contemplation.

Loving neighbor more than self

Jon Singletary
Assistant Professor; Editor; Director, Center for Family and Community Ministries

I have recently been struck by several interpretations of Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. In this passage from Luke's gospel, Jesus is calling his followers and others who had gathered to love their neighbors, and he tells this story in response to one cynic's question, "Who is my neighbor?"

You know Jesus' offer of compassion and loving-kindness, but I have come to see how the story is one in which the love it references is rooted in working for justice. We all know the basic meaning and the core struggle of this story. Like the lawyer who questioned Jesus, we know who our neighbor is and we know we are called to respond with mercy. But there are so many people hurt and dying by the sides of the roads in our cities that, at best, we shrug out shoulders feeling overwhelmed by the needs and, at worse, we drive around the needs of our neighbors avoiding 'those' parts of town where 'they' live.

Adding to the immensity of the story and the scope of the work there is to be done, a group of students recently reminded me of the commentary by early 20th century American Baptist and social gospel preacher, Walter Rauschenbusch. He emphasizes the relationship between the charitable love of the Samaritan and the need for justice in our communities where we see many people whose lives have been affected by generations of poverty. He reminds us that mercy and justice often go together in what we are called to do, as in Micah 6:8. Rauschenbusch says that we must offer a compassionate response, but we must also learn to ask what contributes to the pain and the poverty of so many families in our communities. He writes,

"… we must offer a compassionate response, but we must also learn to ask what contributes to the pain and the poverty of so many families in our communities."

"The good Samaritan did not go after the robbers with a shot gun but looked after the wounded and helpless man by the wayside. But if hundreds of good Samaritans travelling the same road should find thousands of bruised men groaning to them they would not be such very good Samaritans if they did not organize a vigilance committee to stop the manufacturing of wounded men."

Seeing this passage again reminds me of another similar struggle with the meaning of Jesus' parable from recent American history. Andrew Young, Civil Rights leader, former U.S. congressman, mayor of Atlanta, GA, and our nation's first African-American ambassador to the United Nations, recounts a conversation he had with his friend, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

King told Young, "The Good Samaritan is a great individual. I, of course, like and respect the Good Samaritan, but I

don't want to be a Good Samaritan. I am tired of picking up people along the Jericho Road. I am tired of seeing people battered and bruised and bloody, injured and jumped on, along the Jericho Roads of life. This road is dangerous and I don't want to pick up anyone else along this Jericho Road; I want to fix the Jericho Road. I want to pave the Jericho Road, add street lights to the Jericho Road; make the Jericho Road safe for everybody."

In Dr. King's final speech, we hear another reference to the Good Samaritan story. King returns to Jesus' parable about the dangerous Jericho Road and asks why the Priest and Levite didn't stop. He gives the usual answers about the uncertainty and impurity of helping a beaten and bloody stranger, but Dr. King says fear is the most significant factor. But, he continues, fear is not the only response offered; the Samaritan is distinct as he takes a stand for the man maimed by the side of the road. Dr. King offers this:

"'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' But then the Good Samaritan came by, and he reversed the question, 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?' That's the question before you tonight. Not, 'If I stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to all of the hours that I usually spend in my office every day and every week as a pastor?' The question is not, 'If I stop to help this man in need, what will happen to me?' 'If I do not stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to them?' That is the question. So, let us rise up tonight with a greater readiness. Let us stand with a greater determination. And let us move on in these powerful days, these days of challenge to make America what it ought to be."

The next day, Dr. King was murdered. His life ended with the question 'What will happen to my neighbor?' rather than 'What will happen to me?' As I recount these words, and each interpretation of this passage from Luke, Jesus' challenge seems so simple, yet seemingly impossible. I know who my neighbors are; I have some idea about their needs. If I listened to them, I would know more. I must take the steps to become more interested in my neighbors and their needs and less interested in my own.

One of the things I love about this journal is the way the stories you share are able to inspire us to look beyond our own needs. The story from Walker Moore was first sent out as a shorter e-mail after a community event, the foundations of which were rooted in overcoming his fear of a particular neighborhood. In time, he found the courage and clarity of call that he needed, and since then he has clearly been more focused on the needs of his neighbors than on his own.

We see other references to looking out for others throughout the journal. A research article by Joe Wilmouth and David Fournier addresses one of the most common pictures of love in Christian circles, the love that serves as the basis for healthy marriages. These authors offer a study that looks at the barriers to marriage preparation and education, and do so with the belief that healthy marriages make for healthy communities.

The Faith in Action column by journal board member, Heidi Unruh, offers several components that she sees as foundational for churches seeking to transform their communities. She uses the metaphor of a journey to help us travel down this road, providing an invaluable resource that complements our Walking Alongside curriculum.

Another friend of the journal, Terry York, helps us understand the value of teaching our children the "voice" of our faith and of our congregations, as we teach them core values, such as the value of love and justice seen in the story above.

In each of these writings and in the other items in this issue, I continue to learn what it means to look beyond my own needs as I engage in ministry. It is my hope that you are encouraged and empowered to do the same. As you read, consider the ways you are being continually called to offer loving-kindness and, at the same time, to work for justice. And, as always, please let us hear your responses to what we are offering in these pages.

Photos by Dale Caffey

A neighborhood coming together

Walker Moore
MSW 2007/MDiv student,
Community Organizer
Waco Community Development
Waco, TX

The Rev. Maurice Walker (right) of Living Witness Missionary Church and a fifth-grade teacher at West Avenue Elementary, visits with a neighborhood friend at the Back to School Bash.

Want some weed?" It's not a question one is asked every day, but it was a logical question to ask me. I was a white guy walking into the "Green Store," a store known as a "million dollar spot" because millions of dollars of drugs had been sold there, and most white people walking into the store were there to buy drugs. Little did the drug dealer know that I was a Baylor School of Social Work intern at Waco Community Development and literally had no idea what I was doing.

It all seemed so simple when I formed my community organizing strategy. I would organize a residents' council in Parkside, a 200-unit, low-income, drug-infested apartment complex. It is located in a north Waco neighborhood of roughly 6,000 people (60% African-American, 33% Hispanic, and 7% White) with a median household income of $16,189). It was one of early Waco's finest neighborhoods, but like many older neighborhoods, the ravages of time began to take a toll. Houses were not maintained and began to decay. Eventually, many of these homes burned or were torn down leaving more than 200 empty lots in the neighborhood and a 16% reduction of housing units from 1990 to 2000. Like the neighborhood, Parkside was once a fine place to live. Its first residents moved there, in the 1970's, with a sense of pride, but by 2007, it was the center of north Waco's drug traffic. In fact many of the young boys living there look up to the drug dealers and aspire to be one when they become older. Parkside has the well-deserved street reputation as the toughest of all of Waco's low-income apartment complexes.

In large part, Parkside's law-abiding residents have ceded community areas to drug dealers, and the fact that the Green Store is one block away, only exasperates internal problems. After years of watching outsiders try to mandate changes in Parkside, Waco Community Development de-

cided to organize the residents so that solutions would come from the residents themselves.

When I started in January 2007, I felt confident that within a few, short months I would form great relationships, establish a residents' council, and Parkside would be a safe place for families. Although I knew relationships would take time to form, I failed to realize the internal difficulties I would have as a white male working in a predominantly African-American context.

These difficulties very quickly emerged. I spent all of January and the first part of February hiding in my office. Although I did not realize it at the time, I was scared of Parkside, specifically its culture. I was scared of the color difference. I was scared of being mugged. I was scared of being rejected. I was just plain scared. Instead of building relationships with Parkside residents, I read books about African-American culture, met with non-profit leaders about Parkside, and wrote grants to fund the work I was doing at Parkside. In short, I did everything except organize the residents because I was scared. It quickly became apparent that my seclusion was not going to change anything in the neighborhood.

My fear came to a head on February 7, 2007, when Gaynor Yancey, my internship supervisor, helped me admit that I was scared. After discussing my fear, she asked me what I was going to do about it, and I told her that I was going to walk through Parkside. That afternoon I walked through Parkside, and on that day, I lost my fear. I realized that the residents were people just like me. On that Independence Day of sorts, I gained the freedom to begin organizing in Parkside. In retrospect, I was suffering from culture shock. As a white male from a rural middle-class background, I did not know how to enter an African-American urban low-income community. Yet, even after I lost my fear; I struggled to develop relationships.

As a white male from a rural middle-class background, I did not know how to enter an African-American urban low-income community.

LEARNNG COMMUNITY CULTURE

I thought that I would be able to walk through Parkside, strike up conversations, build relationships, and then organize the residents. Through much trial and error, I discovered that meandering through Parkside was not a culturally acceptable way to enter the community. Instead of building relationships, I built misconceptions. Some thought I was buying drugs. For example, this misconception once led to the police stopping and searching me for drugs. Drug dealers thought I was an undercover policeman, leading to a couple of verbal altercations, and at least one resident thought I was a pedophile. After a month of fruitless meandering, I discovered two culturally acceptable ways for a white person to enter the Parkside community.

The first was through King's Club. For 15 to 20 years, Mission Waco, a local non-profit organization, has sent Baylor students to Parkside on Saturday mornings for King's Club, a time of games, songs, and Bible stories. Parkside residents expect and look forward to seeing the Baylor students. I began volunteering with King's Club, giving me the opportunity to meet children and their parents. I now had a reason to be at Parkside every Saturday morning. Two, I began leading a behavior modification group at Brook Avenue Elementary, one of two neighborhood schools that Parkside students attend. Five of the six boys lived in Parkside, and after establishing relationships with the boys at school, I began to visit them at their apartments and meet their families. The children I met through King's Club and the school gave me the cover and credibility I needed to meet families without raising the suspicion of the drug dealers.

SUCCESS AND STARTING OVER

After four months of building relationships and talking to people about a residents' council, three women came together on May 25, 2007 for

the first Parkside Residents' Council meeting in years. Over the next four months the council met eight times, and two more residents became active members. They worked with the police to shut down a "trap house" operating on Parkside property. A trap house is a vacant house or apartment used to sell drugs. They helped organize a school supply give-a-way, and advocated for and obtained better lighting. Although the council experienced some initial success, problems began to minimize its effectiveness.

Foremost of these problems was fear of retaliation. Fear was the primary reason that law-abiding citizens did not participate in the council. The members lived in continuous worry that drug dealers would retaliate against them or their families. This fear was only intensified when a group of about 15 drug dealers and their cohorts verbally assaulted one of the members. On top of this, there were serious conflicts between the council and management that prevented any type of collaborative work. The manager felt threatened by the council, and the council felt like the manager treated them and the other residents with disrespect.

Plus, change was painstakingly slow, and the members struggled to see the effectiveness of their work, especially when the summer of 2007 was extremely violent, highlighted by series of drive-by shootings. Even with these issues, the council was functioning, but then everything began to fall apart.

In September, one of the core members moved from Parkside because she did not want her family to be around the violence. She was the glue that held the council together, and after she left there was only one more meeting. Three more meetings were scheduled, but no one attended. In fact, the most vocal of the residents suddenly moved before a meeting with management and the owners to discuss issues that she had with Parkside. With these two key members gone, the Residents' Council was dead.

I spent September, October and November trying to drum up support for the Residents' Council, but found nary a soul willing to join. After two and a half months of treading water, my executive director asked me to evaluate the progress of organizing in Parkside. Although it was painful to admit, it became increasingly obvious that a Residents' Council was not feasible for three reasons:

- One, many of the residents were connected with drug trafficking. Some were users, and others had friends and/or relatives using or selling. These residents were unable and unwilling to come together against the drug dealers.
- Two, residents who were unconnected were fearful of retaliation from the drug dealers.
- Three, residents did not feel that Parkside was worth their time and energy. They viewed it as a place that had always been bad and had no chance of becoming better. They just wanted to leave as soon as possible. With this knowledge we went back to the drawing board and began crafting a community organizing strategic plan.

Fear was the primary reason that law-abiding citizens did not participate in the [Residents'] Council.

ENGAGING, ENRICHING PARENTS

As I began to craft the new plan, I took stock of what a year of community organizing had accomplished. Although the Residents' Council fizzled, my work had given me the opportunity to build solid relationships with several residents and key neighborhood leaders, including the Brook Oaks Neighborhood Association, both neighborhood schools (Brook Avenue Elementary and West Avenue Elementary), community organizations, and some of the local pastors. I also began to realize that the people who were unable to join the Residents' Council would jump at the opportunity to make the schools better. I felt confident that this would include people connected to drug trafficking because everyone cares about their kids. Out of this time of reflection came the Parental Engagement Project, or PEP.

The PEP began in January 2008, with a focus on strengthening the relationships between schools, parents and community. This approach to community organizing showed immediate results.

For example, Brook Avenue Elementary began actively inviting parents to participate in Learning Walks. Once a month parents visit each classroom during times of instruction and provide feedback on what they like and do not like. Parents who felt marginalized by the school are now given an opportunity to voice their opinion, and teachers who once feared parents now realize that the parents just want a quality education for their children. The Learning Walks have allowed a great diversity of parents to participate in their child's education, including Black, White, Hispanic, unemployed, employed, and drug users. These Learning Walks changed the culture of parent/teacher relationships from one of negativity to one of partners in education.

Members of "God's Precious Angels," a dance group from Living Witness Church, provide entertainment at the neighborhood Back to School Bash.

A group of Spanish-speaking parents once felt cut off from the school but have been meeting regularly. To date, they have improved the safety around the school and worked with the principal to have a bilingual computer class for parents and their children. For their latest project, they are planning a parent meeting that will reach out to Hispanic and African-American parents to engage them in the change process. The Learning Walks and this group of Spanish-speaking parents were a significant reason that Brook Avenue Elementary received an "Academically Acceptable" rating from the state of Texas for the 2007-2008 school year.

West Avenue Elementary recognized that parents were not receiving enough positive comments about their children and took the initiative to correct this. The school made a list of the more troublesome kids and their positive attributes. Then they recruited one of the student's grandmas to call the parents of these students and share the ever-so-important positive comments. The parents loved hearing the good news about their children and began feeling better about the school. In part, because of these phone calls, more parents have participated in PTA meetings than ever before. As a result of the school's "Recognized" rating, the second highest in Texas, for the 2007-2008 school year and the school's parental outreach, Andreia Foster, the school's principal was named Principal of the Year for the Waco Independent School District.

UNITY IN DREAMS

Another part of the PEP was to rally the community around the two schools. In May 2008, pastors from five neighborhood churches came together to begin dreaming about what they could do jointly.

Out of this time of dreaming came the Back to School Bash. Seven different neighborhood churches, both neighborhood schools, and three neighborhood organizations came

together for this event. The Back to School Bash was an outstanding success. In fact, Melvin Carter, a long-time community leader, stated that the bash was one of the best things to ever happen to the neighborhood. This was not the first time that an event like this has taken place in the neighborhood, but it was the first time that so many different parts of the community participated and acted on one accord. This event demonstrated what the community can do.

Darrell Abercrombie, program administrator at Waco Community Development and a long-time resident of the neighborhood, takes on grill duty.

The Rev. Maurice Walker, pastor of Living Witness Missionary Church and a fifth-grade teacher at West Avenue Elementary School, said, "The people were caught up in the amazement of what this community could be." This event helped the community see that it was "one". It showed this community that if we continue to come together then, as "one" we can overcome the obstacles that prevent this community from thriving and make it become even more alive.

HOPE WINS OUT

Community organizing in North Waco has been a slow process, but there is definite progress. In the beginning, my network of relationships was extremely limited. Now, that network includes a city councilman, drug dealers, church pastors, "crack-heads," and regular people who want to see their community transformed.

I still struggle to understand the culture, but I take great pride that one Parkside resident told me, "I think your soul is Black. You're white on the outside, but Black everywhere else."

The drug dealers still control Parkside, but they no longer ask me if I want to buy weed. Nor do they sell drugs at the Green Store because of police pressure on the storeowner. There is an exciting sense of hope that was but a dream two years ago, a hope that this community will become better. The neighborhood is beginning to come together, and I envision the day when this loose network forms into a tight-knit coalition that stands shoulder-to-shoulder against the ills of this neighborhood and champions the cures at every turn.

In your neighborhood

Is your church wanting to do some organizing? Models of transformative organizing ask how we seek to partner with God's Spirit in working for change in our communities and at the same time, how we seek to be changed by God as we engage our communities. Here are some questions to consider as you organize in your community:

- What specifically is the identified community and what are its boundaries?
- What are some key assets your church can identify in the community?
- With what individuals in the community do your church members already have relationships?
- With what community organizations do you already have relationships?
- What are some ways you can use your church's gifts and strengths to serve the needs of your community?
- What are some areas where you hope to learn more from your community members?

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. (Psalm 118:19)

How do you open this gate?
Where in the pictures does the Holy Spirit lead you?
What sound does the bell make?

Photo and reflection by Valerie Isenhower

Photos by Kevin Tankersley

The congregation as the village

Terry W. York
Associate Professor of Christian Ministry and Church Music, School of Music and George W. Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University

This article is based on portions of Chapter 2 and the Epilogue of the book, The Voice of Our Congregation, (Abingdon Press, 2005), by Terry W. York of Baylor University and David Bolin, Minister of Music at the First Baptist Church of Waco, Texas. Chapter 2 and the Epilogue are among York's contributions to the book. The Epilogue appears here in its entirety.

We are all familiar with the African proverb "It takes a whole village to raise a child." For the next several pages we will consider the possibility of the congregation being that village for the children in its midst.

In 2005, David Bolin and I co-authored the book *The Voice of Our Congregation*, encouraging congregations to look within for direction and resources when contemplating changes in worship and/or music styles. Too often, congregations immediately seek to import some "successful" method, style, or strategy from outside sources when the issue at hand is considered to be imperative. A sense of fear or urgency can cause people to do things they would never consider under normal conditions. That need not happen. A note of caution and reason must be sounded.

Our book calls upon each congregation to consider its integrity as an entity (its "voice"), related to like communities, yet autonomous in many ways. It makes sense for congregations to learn from each other, even to cooperate and covenant with each other. However, losing sight of their unique giftedness (their "voice") in a desire to imitate or "clone" another congregation can cause a worshiping community to also lose focus on Christ. "What congregation should we mimic?" and "What style shall we import?" These are dangerous questions for a congregation. "Who are we?" "What is our giftedness?" and "What is our stewardship responsibility of that giftedness?" These are the better questions; questions that acknowledge a certain discipleship being prepared and developed within their midst. This is the village (congregation) owning its identity and responsibility. A congregation cannot become the nurturing village it should be for its children until its identity and its responsibility in this regard are fully understood and embraced.

Consider the following excerpt from *The Voice of the Congregation* (York & Bolin, 2005, p. 23-32). It is offered here as one way to describe or understand the congregational village.

CHAPTER TWO: THE VOICE OF POETS AND PROPHETS

God places poet/prophets in every congregation. God speaks through these persons or groups of people when God chooses to do so. The beauty of it is that it is not always the same person or group on every issue. Therefore, one of the tasks or responsibilities of the congregation is to develop a sense of discernment. Discernment requires great humility on the part of everyone in the congregation, clergy and laity alike. We are not good at humility. It is easier to import music and worship styles than to discover and develop our own authentic expressions. Further, we can trust God's voice to always be right, but we cannot always trust God's will and promptings to be expedient. We cannot trust God to sign on to our agendas and schedules. God is not in our employ. We are to serve God and one another. Therefore, humility before one another and God is absolutely necessary if the voice of God is to be heard in the voice of the congregation. Interestingly, courage is needed as well; courage to speak, courage to listen, and courage to act. But remember, humility and courage are more closely related than are brashness and courage.

It is easier to import music and worship styles than to discover and develop our own authentic expressions.

The very words "poet" and "prophet" speak of this strange combination of humility and courage. They also speak of timelessness and strength. The words suggest truth and wisdom that is God-spoken through the poet/prophet's speaking or writing. But, they also evoke visions of unusual people; hermits or strange, out-of-touch misfits. That is an understandable, but unfortunate stereotype. It is an important breakthrough in our understanding of how the Holy Spirit works in a local congregation when we come to realize that there are poets and prophets in our midst. They are not "angels unaware"; they are familiar folks whom we know to be dedicated to God and the congregation. They can be trusted.

It is good for us to remember that rhyme can be bent to serve our lies and oratory can be bent to serve a shady agenda, but poetry and prophecy speak the truth and resist manipulation. Respected members of the congregation (truly respected, not just the loudest or those with the highest profile) do not bend and manipulate. They speak truth and resist manipulating or being manipulated.

The congregation does not elect poets and prophets. They are not, necessarily, to be found up front on Sunday morning. Look for them out among the congregation. Often, there are several in a congregation and they seem to be able to articulate what the congregation is thinking at a deep level. The very fact that these people exist and function in this way is evidence that a congregation is an entity with a voice and that the voice is clearly present in these persons, even if they represent the "minority report." The voice is recognizable at a deep level within the congregation and is unique to that congregation. In a real sense, finding the voice of the congregation is finding God's voice in the congregation. This realization does not diminish the prophetic role of the pastor or others on the ministerial staff, but it does speak to the fact that God can and does speak through individuals in the community of worshipers as much as God speaks through those who lead in worship. The role of the pastor includes helping his or her congregation understand the power of the Holy Spirit at work in their midst; the power, the call, and the resulting voice.

FINDING THE VOICE

There is great wisdom in a group of people called together by the Holy Spirit and bound together by their brotherhood and sisterhood in Christ. It simply stands to reason that a commu-

nity of Christ-followers with this kind of congregational awareness would also have its own voice for worship. Some songs and worship styles will fit this voice and some won't. That's true of any voice. Authenticity is the dynamic here. New songs can be brought into this repertoire, but only if they speak the truth and sound it forth in the authentic voice. Something that is fake or pretend is not only apparent to God, it is apparent to all who hear it. Even the singer knows such a song and the singing of it to be shallow. The poets and the prophets in a congregation will sense whether or not the song, old or new, can authentically come from this voice. Don't assume that all resistance is stubbornness or ignorance. Resistance may simply be the "INAUTHENTIC" alarm going off.

It must be said here, of course, that not all of the angry, vocal people who push back against change represent the voice of God in our midst. Again, discernment is important. Communal discernment becomes more reliable as an increasing number of people in the congregation come to understand the concept of a congregational voice. This voice can be heard in much the same way an individual can hear his or her heartbeat – through quiet concentration on the internal. The "still, small voice" is not a fairy tale. God the Holy Spirit is real, but does not shout, personally or congregationally.

Something that is fake or pretend is not only apparent to God, it is apparent to all who hear it.

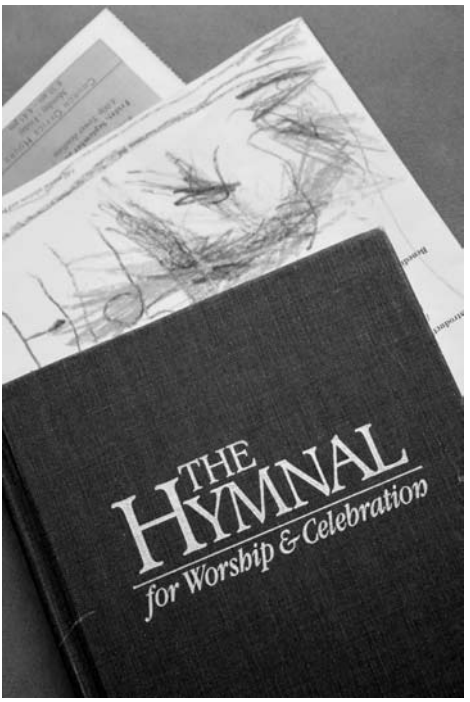
What does it mean when we say that a writer or a performer has finally "found their voice?" It means that there has finally emerged from within them an authenticity that makes their performance, their work, their contribution, something new and of value, indeed, a contribution, no longer simply imitation. Who they are begins to shine through their technical skill. We cannot borrow music or art of any form from someone else and claim it is ours or expect it to speak of our soul unless it connects with who we are and can authentically be expressed by our voice. This is especially true in our worship of God. We give back to God what God has given us. This gift will be unique in its combination of what God has given us and what we (not someone else) have done with it. Why is it that we can stand before one painting and "feel" nothing and then move down the wall a few feet, stand in front of another painting and suddenly realize we are weeping? Both paintings may be by recognized masters. Both may be priceless. But one may not connect with who we are. When that is the case, it does not call to our voice, thus our voice does not respond.

POSSESSION OF THE VOICE

The congregation possesses a common or communal voice that is the sound of God in their midst. The voice possesses the congregation. God is in them and around them. Authentic worship, worship that is initiated by the voice of God and is expressed in the voice of the congregation, worship that pulls us heavenward, is not bigger than life; it is as deep as life. It must, of course, be that particular congregation's life. The poets and prophets among us won't let us forget that fact.

Poets and prophets often operate outside prescribed rules and popular trends. Every congregation has those members who, whether or not they are formally elected to places of leadership, are acknowledged as leaders who have the right to challenge popular impulses. That is an example of being aware, even subconsciously, that God's voice does not sound from the pulpit only, that God isn't restricted to our organizational charts and agendas. It is an example of what some traditions refer to as the priesthood of the believer. So, if the congregation is a voluntary gathering of priests, each with the capacity of speaking God's words, it stands to reason that that group would have a common (do not read "unison") voice. That voice is best expressed in songs (monophonic and polyphonic) that reflect its message, mission, and heart. The congregation may know a song

the minister of music or worship leader doesn't know. Such a song is a treasure that they are not going to treat recklessly. They will not shout it above the songs selected for Sunday, but they will measure Sunday's songs against the treasured repertoire. The wise and caring minister will seek to learn the congregation's song(s) through the mining process of personal relationships and listening. At that point, the minister of music has "permission" to introduce new songs that, because they fit the voice of the congregation, will come to be treasured by them.



I was given some valuable advice years ago when I was considering taking a ministerial position in a church in Hawaii. A man in the inviting congregation told me that if I decided to accept the position, I should not change anything until I had learned to surf. As it turned out, I did not feel led to accept that position, but I have never forgotten the advice. He was telling me to be vulnerable, to "learn" the world and way of the congregation. He was telling me to take the time required to discern the voice of that particular congregation. When one has "learned to surf," any changes made will be in the context of that culture. The changes will be informed and cloaked in love. We will not come from our "mainland" to their "island" and attempt to make them like us. There is a voice and it is deep and quiet. It was humming before any of us arrived on the scene and it will be humming when we leave. Listen to the poets and prophets who express the voice most naturally, with a sense of reverence and respect for it.

I once became the associate pastor of a large congregation. Much of the day-to-day operation of the congregation's life and ministry was covered by my job description. It would be almost impossible to get to know everyone in that large community, but I needed to know the congregation's voice in order to fulfill my responsibilities properly. Though I wasn't the minister of music, I needed to know this particular community's "songs." I began my "voice lessons" by finding out who was the oldest living charter member of the 50-year-old congregation. Her name was Mrs. Davis. I called up one of her sons and asked if I could take his mother to lunch. I was delighted that he not only said "yes," but that he offered to come along.

At lunch I asked Mrs. Davis a simple, but important question, "Mrs. Davis, what do I need to know about this church?" She talked more than she ate. I ate and listened. She and her son beamed as she related chapter after chapter of the congregation's story. I was hearing the story and beginning to discern the story's soundtrack; to recognize its song and its voice. She knew the poetry of it all; the little things that were important for me to know because they pointed to the big things for which I now had some responsibility. Her voice nearly sang as her eyes glistened. The word got out that I had had lunch with Mrs. Davis and that she did all the talking. The word got out that I wanted to know who these people were and what story I had been invited into, that I was purposefully tuning my ear to hear the voice of the congregation. Though we didn't use the exact words, the congregation knew that I knew they had a voice, a story, a song.

There were other similar lunches, but far beyond lunches, bits and pieces of the story were being offered to me as welcoming gifts; gifts from the congregation's poets and prophets, their wise men and women, the ones to whom the congregation listened for the final and practical word of

God in that setting. I felt a qualified permission to lead. I had been educated – not programmed, not handcuffed, but appropriately educated. Preach, if you will, from what you know. Sing, if you will, from what you know. That is why they have called you here, but if your words are to be effective, they must harmonize with the voice of the congregation.

The voice that we begin to discern in the congregation is a voice that has been tuned by years spent in the Bible, the hymnal, and the trenches. The words of the poets and prophets from across the ages have been sought out, heeded, taught, and sung in the midst of this congregation. Opinions and agendas have been allowed to roam freely in this arena, but the arena has parameters. God's word through God's poets and prophets (biblical and congregational), have set the parameters, giving focus, guidance, and an authoritative voice over the years. We learn through the biblical accounts and we learn through the life testimonies of the poets and prophets around us, who live their interpretations of the scripture, that the voice of the congregation and its biblical song possess us as much as we possess them. We know when our ventures into new music and new worship styles have moved us beyond our authentic voice. We feel it in our bones, in our hearts. We often hear the admonition to congregations to move out of their comfort zone. That is a legitimate challenge because the voice of the congregation may well be a wider circle than the current circumference of their comfort zone. But we must never ask a congregation to move beyond the authentic expression that is their voice. Seldom do we hear a congregation say "no new songs." More often we hear "not those new songs." We must listen. We must lead. We must move forward. But we must not do so in disharmony with the voice of the congregation.

One of the characteristics of poets and prophets is that they are possessed by the message. When they hear God's voice they can heed no other. We encountered this concept earlier. Let's look a bit closer at it here. When a congregation hears God's voice calling them back or forward to their authentic voice, some will choose to ignore the call. It is the poet/prophet(s) who will speak up against such ignorance (read that word carefully). The voice of the poets and prophets will remind the congregation of its voice and its responsibility to sound forth in subservience to God's voice. God possesses

the congregation, individually and corporately. We are the Shepherd's sheep. The congregation does not possess its God. The voice of the congregation is obligated to say "yes" to the voice of God. The voice of God is still and small, but it exists in the hearts and heart of the congregation. We cannot escape it. We can ignore it and sing someone else's song, but we will be aware of the insincerity of such a song.

Finding the voice of the congregation is submitting our will to God's will, our way to the Shepherd's way. The song possesses us; we do not possess the song. We may want to sing higher, lower, faster, slower, newer, older, but "not my will, but thine be done" is our model.

Finding the voice of the congregation isn't just about music, just as worship isn't just about music. Finding the voice of the congregation is about bowing to God's will, loving God more than we love ourselves, and using the talents God gave us instead of acting as if we have the talents God gave someone else. To worship, work, and witness in the authentic voice of the congregation is to be a humble and grateful servant working with what we have been given in the field to which we have been sent. We are up to something questionable when we disguise our voice. We are trying to get out from under the requirements and responsibilities of who we are when we disguise our voice. For a moment we want to be someone else, so we hide the evidence that identifies us until the charade is over. To use our voice is to admit to who we are. That's true for individuals and for congregations. Are we not to worship in spirit and in truth? (John 4:23). Listen to the poets and the prophets in your congregation, be they few or many. The poet/prophet always calls us to speak, sing, and live the truth, back onto the path, forward on the Way. The song that is sung authentically from the voice of the congregation owns us. We do not own it. There you have it, one approach to identifying and describing a congregation, the congregation that has an obligation to its children and young parents to be their "village;" to help them find their voice. The application possibilities for families are obvious: "Who are we to be as a family, them or us?" "Who am I to be, him, her?" Many of the comparisons and lessons of the congregational concepts transfer easily. Others may take a bit more thought and commitment, even courage.

Now let us consider something of what the congregational village might teach its children. Although children are present throughout the book, the Epilogue to *The Voice of Our Congregation* (York & Bolin, 2005, p. 111-116) focuses specifically on the congregation's responsibility to the child. The Epilogue is presented here in its entirety.

> The voice of poets and prophets will remind the congregation of its voice and its responsibility to sound forth in subservience to God's voice.

EPILOGUE

Our stewardship of the voice of the congregation requires us to teach our children that there is such a voice. It requires us to help them know and discern the voice. Our stewardship of the voice of the congregation requires us to transfer ownership of the voice to our children as they mature in Christ and in churchmanship. What, then, shall we teach our children?

Our children belong to God. Our parenting and teaching, therefore, are acts of stewardship. As stewards of these precious gifts from God, we are to train our children in the context of our obedience to God. This does not mean that we are to mold them into the image of God. We read in Genesis that God has already done that. Our additional attempts would border on the idolatry of creating an image of God. We are, however, to train our children toward Christlikeness. Do you see the difference? We are to train our children toward Christlikeness. There is an important distinction between molding our children into the image of who or what we want God to be and raising them up toward Christlikeness. Do we want our children to grow up acting like they are God Almighty or humbly praying to be more Christlike? Do we want them to use worship or to be transformed by worship? Do we want them

to pretend in worship or to be authentically present in worship? Of course, we want them to be authentically present in worship.

What shall we teach our children? We will answer that question here and now and then spend the next several pages explaining the answer. What shall we teach our children? The answer is this: Let us teach our children what we used to know, but have somehow forgotten. I apologize for any unintentional echoes of Robert Fulghum's (1999) book, *All I Really Need to Know, I Learned in Kindergarten*.

We have somehow forgotten that worship is about God and that God is worthy of the very best we have to offer. We have forgotten that what worship costs us is more important than how worship comforts us or how it serves our agendas. We should not lift up to God worship or any other offering that costs us nothing. Let us remember, and then teach our children, that if worship costs us nothing but is fashioned to comfort our needs and preferences, it may not be worship at all. We know that, but it seems we have somehow forgotten it.

We have forgotten that what worship costs us is more important than how worship comforts us or how it serves our agendas.

Let us remember, and then teach our children, that a congregation is a community and that in a community we must learn to give and take, not just take. This includes singing songs that are the favorites of others, even if they are not our favorites. Let us remember, and then teach our children, the importance of humility and respect toward other people. Let us remember, and then teach our children, that God can and does speak through individuals in the congregation and through the congregation as a whole, as well as through the pastor. We know that, but many congregations and pastors seem to have forgotten it along the way.

In a community, some laugh and some cry. It shouldn't always be the same people doing either one. Further, everyone shouldn't be expected to laugh or cry at the same time. We know that, but somehow, in the context of a congregation's work and worship, we have forgotten it. So let us remember, and then teach our children, the importance of authenticity in worship rather than pretense.

Let us remember, and then teach our children, that we don't know, and will never know, all there is to know about God. We seem to have forgotten that God is God, beyond formula, definition, and lists of do's and don'ts. Let us teach our children that admitting there is more to God than we understand is not weakness on our part nor aloofness on God's part. Rather, admitting that we don't know all there is to know about God is an act of submission to our Creator and King. It is the first step into the great mystery of God, a mystery that opens our hearts to growth rather than shrinking our hearts into indoctrination. We know, but have somehow forgotten along the way, that we should be suspicious of and watch out for those who claim to know all there is to know about God and who question the Christian faith of those who have questions.

Let us remember, and then teach our children, that Christian heritage and Christian tradition matter; that we didn't invent Christ-following or worship or church music. Let us remember, and then teach our children, that old paradigms are the foundation of what we do today, that tradition helps define us and gives us a story to take into the future.

In a time of racial profiling, suspicion, and fear, let us remember and then teach our children, "Jesus loves the little children of the world" (Warner & McGuire, 1860). Fear and hate will have to be overcome in order to accomplish this. Let us teach our children faith in God and confidence in the life and teachings of Jesus. Let us remember, and then teach our children, that the Bible is the sword of the Lord that pierces our hearts, not the sword of the self-righteous that pierces only the hearts of the "bad guys."

Let us remember, and then teach our children, that forgiveness is a sign of strength, not

a sign of weakness, that constraint is a sign of power. Let us teach our children to trust the truth of Jesus' upside-down teachings.

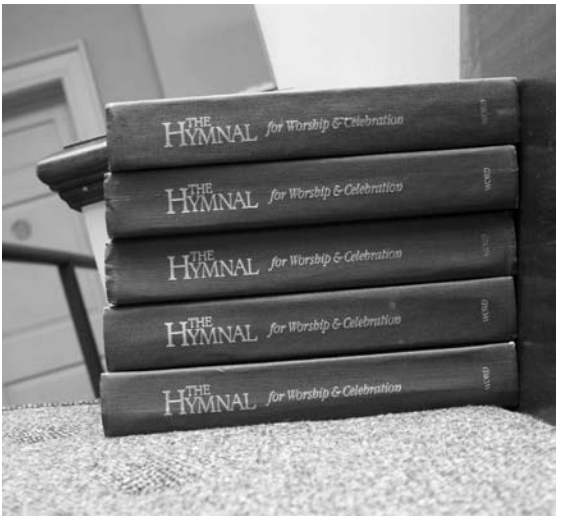
In a time of terrorism and war, let us remember and then teach our children, that Jesus' love is "a fountain flowing deep and wide" (*Deep and Wide*, n.d.). It never stops flowing. It covers the whole earth. It covers all sin. "Deep and wide, deep and wide, there's a fountain flowing deep and wide" (*Deep and Wide*, n.d.) and that Jesus' teachings must be believed and his love lived. Let us remember, and then teach our children, that Jesus loves our enemies as much as he loves us.

In a time of unbridled consumption of resources, let us remember and then teach our children, that "this is our Father's world" (Babcock, 1851-1901). Train their listening ears to the truth that "all nature sings and round us rings the music of the spheres" (Babcock, 1851-1901). Let us remember, and then teach our children, to "rest in the thought of rocks and trees, of skies and seas," that it was God's hand these wonders wrought," and that "all birds their carols raise" (Babcock, 1851-1901) (even the edible ones, and the ones whose nests get in the way of our expansion). Let us remember, and then teach our children, the importance of humility and moderation toward our planet and those with whom we inhabit this planet. Somehow, we have forgotten that much, maybe most, of what we are given, is given to us to share, not to consume. We have somehow forgotten, but let us remember and then teach our children, that sharing is not only Christlike and biblical, it is an investment in our future. Individuals and nations don't hate us for generosity, they hate us for greed. Sharing is a Christlike way of turning swords into plowshares.

Let us remember how, and then teach our children how, to learn from one another without being copycats. Let us remember the phrase our parents taught us, "I don't care if everyone else is doing it," and then let us teach that phrase to our children. This will keep them from following other churches into imported, and thus meaningless, worship styles. It will teach them to say "no" to political and social groundswells that get in the way of true Christ-following. It will teach them to say "yes" to thinking for themselves in the context of the life, work, and teachings of Jesus. It will keep them in touch with the voice of their congregation. We know all this, but somehow, along the way, we've forgotten.

Let us remember, and then teach our children, that life's poetry is as important as life's prose, maybe more so. This is more than teaching our children that play is as important as work. It is teaching them to see poetry in their work and in the diversity of humanity and in the beauty of nature and in the mystery of God. There are too many people in our churches who see their relationship to God as one of God's policemen, pointing out who is thinking and acting out of line. There are too many people in our churches who are invigorated only by what they are against. There is no poetry in their lives, only the prose of lists and labels: lists of what to do and what not to do, lists of who is right and who is wrong, lists of what sins are acceptable and what sins are not, labels that signify the other person's deficiency. There are too many people in our churches who are afraid of the Bible's poetry, focusing only on its prose, as they interpret it in the context of their own agendas. God spare our

children from a life of seeing the Bible and their faith as nothing more than a list of rules and a theology of works.



Let us remember, and then teach our children, while they still know how to play, that Sabbath is not sloth, but is, in fact, an act of obedience. We are not called to produce results in worship. Therefore, we need not deny the voice of our congregation in order to accomplish something. Let us remember, and then teach our children, that being a workaholic not only fails to impress God, it is a form of idolatry, giving God's time to someone or something else. We know that, we've simply forgotten it along the way. Perhaps this thought is best expressed by saying we should let our children teach us about play, and imagination, and the need for naps (Sabbath).

Along those same lines, let us remember, and then teach our children, that silence is not something they should fear, rather it is a place to find themselves and God. Silence is a place to come clean with God. Let us teach them that coming clean before God is a momentous project. Let us teach our children to cherish silence when they bump into it and to create it when none is to be found.

Let us remember, and then teach our children, that the cross of Christ was not and is not painted red, white, and blue; that there is a difference between being a Christian and being an American, that patriotism and discipleship are not synonymous, that while we stand when we hear the National Anthem, we bow when we hear the voice of God. The voice of the congregation is to be in prayerful dialogue with the voice of God; silent after voicing prayer to hear the voice of God.

Let us remember that these precious young lives are not meant to be our clones, carrying on our agendas. Rather, they belong to Jesus and we are to help them open their hearts toward Christlikeness, even if their Spirit-led life paths don't lead them toward the money, popularity, and comfort we would wish for them. Let us teach them that they are not to mimic another congregation's voice in an attempt to make their worship profitable.

What shall we teach our children? The question causes us to examine our own Christ-following and worship in the deepest recesses of our own hearts. For, if we are to be authentic worshipers and disciples, we must teach from that depth. We will find ourselves teaching ourselves while we teach our children. There is nothing more frightening than a teacher who has ceased to be a learner, unless it is a messenger who has forgotten his or her voice, or a worshiping congregation that is pretending to be what they are not.

What shall we teach our children? Let us teach them what we used to know, but have somehow forgotten.

Dear God, let the things we shall teach our children bring us to our knees and to tears, crying for mercy and singing your praise in the authentic voice of our congregation. In Jesus' name, Amen.

God bless you as you seek to discover, recover, trust, share the good news in, and worship authentically in the voice of your congregation.

Thus ends the Epilogue and the book, *The Voice of Our Congregation*.

CONCLUSION

It becomes apparent that focusing on what is being taught to its children will help a congregation stay in touch with its own identity and

mission. This is the nature of community. Good done within and for any facet or segment of the community enhances and enriches the whole of the community. Think on these things.

REFERENCES

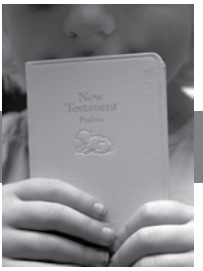
Babcock, M. D. (1858-1901) Hymn, "This Is My Father's World."

"Deep and Wide." Traditional children's Sunday School song.

Fulghum, R. (1990). *All I really need to know I learned in Kindergarten*, New York, Vaillard. Deep and wide. (no date).

Warner, A. & McGuire, D.R. (1860). "Jesus loves me."

York, T. & Bolin, C. D. (2005) *The Voice of Our Congregation*. Nashville,TN: Abingdon Press.



Application to the church

by Randall Bradley

Terry York's thoughtful and reflective piece offers broad application for the church or agency that is seeking to assist caregivers in the formation of their children, and it offers helpful insights into the church leadership and decision-making processes.

Following are specific ideas regarding the implementation of this article into the life of the local parish or into the mission and operation of an agency.

PARENT/CAREGIVER FORMATION

Often when working with parents and other caregivers, we assist with parenting problems and offer little help in the area of Christian formation; i.e., many parents are not able to guide their children toward appropriate goals and behaviors because they are not deeply grounded themselves. This article provides a discussion of some of the core values of Christian family units and could be used effectively as the backbone for a conference or study on parent/caregiver formation. This article could be discussed weekly within small groups and could form the core of a weekend retreat. Additionally, this article might be reprinted and distributed to parents who turn to the church for guidance with their children. A synopsis might also invite continued discussion by printing it as a series in a church or agency newsletter.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

As a means of initiating discussion among a Christian education advisory team, this article could inspire healthy dialogue about what is important in the Christian education of children and could serve as a broader philosophical template for some of the areas/issues that are sometimes neglected. For example, Christian education programs may teach biblical material, i.e., stories and scripture without giving adequate attention to broader issues such as respect, kindness to others, and reaching out to those who are different.

ANALYZING DECISION MAKING

Every church needs to reflect on how it makes decisions. Churches establish patterns that become the norm for congregational decision-making; however, these patterns may fail to reflect genuine Christian community. This piece serves as a call to think carefully about how decisions are made. Does the majority always rule in your church or organization? Should it? Do the loudest voices win in every discussion? Are church/organization-wide decisions made out of fear? Is change embraced without appropriate discernment? Are changes that affect the life of the church imported from other congregations without appropriate

discussion? In order for an organization to remain healthy, a discussion of this process should occur prior to a moment of crisis when the discussion is difficult and often unproductive.

LEADERSHIP IMPLICATIONS

Leadership is as much about listening as it is about vision and forward thinking. This article encourages leaders to know those they lead, to understand the heartbeat of the organization or church, and to respect the group's history. Imagining how our leadership will harmonize (rather than providing counterpoint) with those we lead can help us to lead from a position of respect and authenticity. This article could assist leaders in evaluating their leadership styles. It could also serve as a discussion starter for a church staff or organizational leadership team. Consider building a staff retreat around the first part of this article using it as core reading. Church staffs and other leadership teams tend to become insulated from the group they lead, resulting in a team that loses touch with the people, i.e., fails to hear the voice of the congregation.

CONGREGATIONAL RECENTERING

For churches and organizations that believe in congregational or constituency input, this article is a fresh way of imagining this concept. As admonition to listen to the poets and the prophets – groups often ignored – this piece encourages us to consider the voices of the people who sometimes find themselves on the periphery. For example, in congregational meetings, prophets can be perceived as too far ahead of the crowd, and their input can be ignored. On the other hand, poets can be perceived as having thought not rooted in firm logic, and their intuitive input can likewise be diluted. Perceptive leaders will find these voices and will ask for their perspectives regarding the church or organization.

Randall Bradley is the Ben H. Williams Distinguished Professor of Music, Director of the Church Music Program and the Center for Christian Music Studies at Baylor University. He is also minister of music at Calvary Baptist Church in Waco, TX. He is married to Brenda who is an instructor of English at McLennan Community College, and they are parents to Hannah and Isaac.

Scattering New Blessings

Edwina Gateley

Often we anxiously seek the will of God,
as if God had gleefully hidden dreams for us
deep in unfathomable places.
As if it were God's intention
that our whole lives be spent
in endless searching for signs and directions
buried in obscurity.
The will of God is that which brings us
peace and fullness of life.
The will of God is the seed of our dreams
ever gestating with possibility
and longing to leap forward
scattering new and surprising blessings
in our gray reality.

Source: A Mystical Heart

For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him.
He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.
On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.
(Psalm 62:5-7)

What is St. Francis holding in his hand?
Are you called to go inside the church or stand outside with St. Francis?
What do you feel when you see this picture?

Photo and reflection by Valerie Isenhower

Photos by Kevin Tankersley

Building the church's readiness for a transformational ministry journey

"My question is, 'What makes the difference? Why is one church a place of total transformation, while another is a place where people are saved and then sit there until they die? What kind of church changes the community and what kind of church is just there taking up space?' … I pray God will show me how to fulfill the passion I have for a different kind of Christian ministry, one that makes a difference."
(Seminary student)

Heidi Unruh
Director of the Congregations, Community Outreach and Leadership Development Project

The cry of this seminary student echoes in many churches. A growing movement of Christians is taking ownership of the biblical mandate to care for the poor, the prophetic call to "do justice and love mercy," and Jesus' example of ministering to the whole person. Their heart yearns to be part of a church that makes a difference. Yet many churches find themselves stumbling on the path from intention to action.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO DEVELOP A TRANSFORMATIONAL COMMUNITY MINISTRY?

Transformational ministry with the community flows from the Great Commandment to love God and love our neighbor with all we've got (Mark 12:30-31). It is expressed through ministry programs as well as a discipleship paradigm of serving Christ by serving others. It energizes the church with a vision of extending Jesus' healing presence in a broken world through a mosaic of justice, compassion and spiritual renewal (Mic. 6:8). It leads churches to invest with abandon in the *shalom* of their city, working alongside other instruments of God to rebuild struggling lives and neighborhoods (Jer. 29:7; Isa. 61:4).

What kind of church can develop transformational community ministry? Is this kind of ministry more likely to take root in a growing church, an urban church, a liberal church, a young church?

Studies have identified various factors such as size, class, theological tradition, and location that correlate with social service activity.[1] But none of these fully satisfies the seminarian's desire to know "what makes the difference" between churches that place mission at the heart of their existence and those that are motivated primarily by self-maintenance. After reviewing the relationship between community ministry and salient variables, Ram Cnaan concludes:

> Given that most congregations are involved in at least one social service program, the distinction between the high performers and the low performers is not mediated by budget, size, membership, or theology. Rather, it is mediated by the congregation's commitment to faith-based action and a tradition of congregational care.[2]

Based on a study of how churches learn to do ministry,[3] we conclude that moving a church into transformational community ministry often entails more than comprehending new ideas or implementing new projects. It calls for becoming a new kind of church. A missional church sees itself as a "sent" church (Matthew 28:19), one that exists not just for itself but also for the sake of a beloved, broken world. As this paradigm seeps into a church's DNA, it changes how a congregation sets its priorities, communicates its identity, allocates its resources, and defines success.

Sharing in God's transforming mission in the community goes hand in hand with transformation within the church. Thus developing effective ministry typically means venturing through change. And change is never easy.

What does it take for a church to make it through the process of change, despite the obstacles? Research suggests seven critical components for church mobilization:

- a healthy foundation
- a compelling vision
- a plan for action
- missional resources
- a motivational catalyst
- change-sustaining relationships
- transformational leadership skills

BUILDING READINESS FOR A TRANSFORMATIONAL MINISTRY JOURNEY

Becoming a church that embraces transformational community ministry is a journey – hazardous, winding, and richly rewarding. What does it take for a church to make it through the process of change, despite the obstacles? Research suggests seven critical components for church mobilization: a healthy foundation; a compelling vision; a plan for action; missional resources; a motivational catalyst; change-sustaining relationships; and transformational leadership skills.[4]

Note that these components are not how-to steps to developing community ministry. They are, rather, characteristics of a church that is ready to take effective steps toward developing community ministry. They describe elemental qualities of churches that live out Christ's good news in word and deed in their community. A church that has these qualities is more likely to succeed in carrying out the changes needed to truly make a difference.

Lacking one or more of these readiness factors, a church may experience more difficulties on the path toward transformational ministry. If a church has all the pieces in place except a plan for action, the momentum toward change may produce reports and committees but no true real-world traction. Without sufficient resources, a church is likely to experience frustration as it starts ministry projects it lacks the capacity to complete. A church that does not have a sense of urgency for change may still move toward community ministry, but only gradually. If a church lacks leadership skills, the change process may generate overwhelming anxiety and conflict.

Following the metaphor of a journey, each readiness factor corresponds to a metaphor for travel:

1. ROAD: The journey toward transformational community ministry must be launched on a sufficient foundation of church health. This includes mature leadership, relational health, and spiritual vitality. A church that is struggling with bitter internal divisions or a pastoral crisis is not in a position to initiate a new ministry. Another foundational element is a general theological compatibility with a sense of calling to external ministry – or at least, a theological framework that is not opposed to outreach of word and deed.

How to strengthen this readiness factor: Assess your church's relational, spiritual and organizational health; work toward healing wholeness among members, and build up the church through intentional opportunities for mission-oriented discipleship.

2. DIRECTION: Eric Swanson notes, "City transformation (like personal conformity to Christ) is more like the North Star (a direction to pursue) than the North Pole (a destination we can arrive at)." [5] Change is guided by a compelling vision or portrait of a preferred future for the church and community, worth exchanging people's time and energy to help bring about. Hunger for God's kingdom and God's righteousness is the compass that points toward transformational ministry.

How to strengthen this readiness factor: Study Scriptures and other sources that lay out a biblical vision for the local mission of the church; gather for ongoing prayer to discern God's direction for your church.

3. ROAD MAP: Churches need a strategic plan to move from vision to action. This does not necessarily mean a detailed strategy for the next 10 years of ministry. Rather, what is needed is an intentional plan for taking the next step, and then the next. Putting feet to faith entails a basic framework of accountable action steps for discerning ministry opportunity, mobilizing people and resources to respond, and growing through reflection and relationship. The next leg of the road map may only take your church through next year, or even next week. But unless the goal of movement is intentional and accountable, it is most likely the church will not move.

How to strengthen this readiness factor: Train a community ministry team empowered to develop an action plan for the next steps of community outreach, and to work with church leaders to implement it.

4. FUEL: The journey toward transformational mission requires resources of "time, talent, and treasures." Assets can include money, facilities, equipment, and people, as well as intangible strengths such as skills, connections, and reputation. Assets should be recruited for ministry from both the church and the community. The magnitude of the resources is not as important as whether there is a plan in place for identifying and mobilizing them for community ministry.

How to strengthen this readiness factor: Conduct an asset inventory in the church and community; [6] seek training in fundraising and volunteer mobilization.

A catalyst for change propels a church out of its normal routine and generates missional momemtum.

5. STARTER: A church may be drawn toward the ministry journey, but needs a larger-than-life motivation to hit the start button. A catalyst for change propels a church out of its normal routine and generates missional momentum. A catalytic sense of urgency can come from many sources: a spiritual awakening, a newfound biblical conviction, a powerful short-term ministry experience, a crisis in the neighborhood or the nation. The spur to change may also be less altruistic – such as a wake-up call that the church's decline can only be reversed by revitalizing its relationship with the community.

How to strengthen this readiness factor: Create opportunities for church members to share catalytic ministry experiences, such as short-term ministry projects or exposures to poverty. [7]

6. ENGINE: Relationships are the driving force behind transformational ministry. Missional change is guided and sustained through

redemptive relationships with the community, within the church, and with ministry partners. The core of transformational ministry is love for God and neighbor (Mark 12:30–31). A church can best prepare for a ministry journey by cultivating loving, accountable fellowship within the congregation, an authentic, servant-hearted connection with the community, mission-oriented links with the broader body of Christ, and a deep passion for God.

How to strengthen this readiness factor: One of the first and most important ways to show love to a neighbor is by simply listening to their concerns and dreams, while opening our lives to them. Create opportunities for church members to develop relationships with members of the community (some ideas: block parties, family game nights, community garden, neighborhood newsletter, "dining clubs" in local restaurants, community clean-up days).

7. DRIVER: Churches need a core leadership team with the skills, vision and support to navigate the transformational ministry journey. The transition from faith to action is smoother if piloted by the pastor or official governing body of the church; at minimum, if not on board, they need to be out of the way. But other ministry midwives can also emerge: mission staff, ministry committees, Bible study groups, vision teams. Leaders assess the congregation's readiness for ministry in relation to the first six readiness factors described above. They take responsibility for developing internal conditions and external connections to help the church creatively and collectively put their faith into action. They may not know how to do this exactly – but they are eager and empowered to learn.

How to strengthen this readiness factor: Offer leaders training in a missional paradigm and transformational leadership skills;[8] identify and equip lay members who display vision and gifts for ministry leadership.

GETTING STARTED ON THE JOURNEY

These seven factors describe a church that is ready to roll, motivated to move, pointed in the right direction, with empowered leadership at the helm. But it still takes a spark to ignite the motor. The spark of the church is the Holy Spirit. The conduit for the Spirit's work in our ministry is persistent prayer. Without prayerful dependence on God's love and power, none of these seven elements is sufficient to produce a church that truly makes a difference. Only the transforming grace of God can drive us beyond our stubborn resistance, prideful self-reliance, faithless fears, and self-centered comfort.

The good news is that it is God's design to supply the church with all that it needs for ministry (1 Corinthians 12:7, Ephesians 2:10, 1 Peter 4:10). The test of readiness for transformational ministry is not what a church has, but how it is willing to use what it has.

Even if a church lacks a detailed understanding of what it means to be a missional congregation, it can still decide that it needs to become one. Even if a church doesn't know exactly where it is headed, it can take the next step toward serving the community in love. Even if church leaders make mistakes along the way, they can choose to learn and grow from

each ministry experience. Even if only limited people and resources are available for ministry, the church can invest what assets it finds in the church and community, in faith that God will provide for each stage of the journey.

Ministry development is an incremental process. There are no "transporters" to vault us to our goal. Each small step toward reflecting God's kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10) creates the opportunity to plant relationships, generate learnings and create momentum for the next step … and the next. If you hunger for change in your church and community, don't focus your energies on cataloguing the church's deficiencies. Rather, look for signposts of opportunities to share God's love, particularly with those cast off on "the streets and alleys" of life (Luke 14:21). Then ask the question, "Who is willing to go there with me?" Start with those who say yes, and see where this leads your church and community.

ENDNOTES

1. David Roozen and Carl Dudley, *Faith Communities Today: a Report on Religion in the United States Today*. Report from the Faith Communities Today (FACT) Study (2001); Jason Scott, *The Scope and Scale of Faith-Based Social Services* (Albany, NY: The Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy, 2002).

2. Ram A. Cnaan, Stephanie C. Boddie, and Gaynor I. Yancey, "Bowling Alone but Serving Together: The Congregational Norm of Community Involvement," in *Religion as Social Capital*, ed. Corwin Smidt (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2003), 114-115.

3. Heidi Rolland Unruh, "Learning About How Churches Learn About Social Ministry: Reflections on Research that Explains and Empowers," research report to the Lilly Endowment (September 2004).

4. This analysis incorporates material from Stan Rowland, "Church Initiated Neighborhood Transformation," a PowerPoint available from the Collaborative For Neighborhood Transformation, http://www.healthwholeness.net/index.php.

5. Eric Swanson, "To Transform a City" (January 2, 2007).

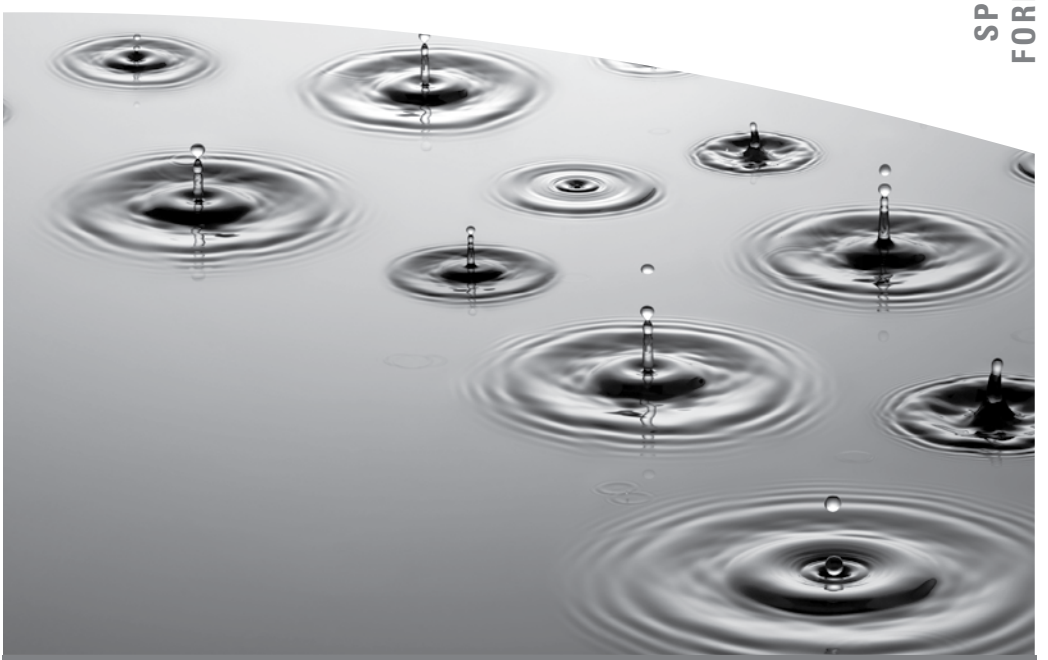
6. Jay Van Groningen, "Learning the New ABCDs," in *Family and Community Ministries*, v. 22, no. 1 (Spring 2008), 37-40.

7. Three good resources for getting started: Faith in Action, www.putyourfaithinaction.org; Harvest's seed project guide, www.harvestfoundation.org; Mission Waco's exposure trips and poverty simulation, www.missionwaco.org.

8. Three useful books for transformational leaders in training: Jim Herrington, *The Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997); Milfred Minatrea, *Shaped by God's Heart: The Passion and Practices of Missional Churches* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004); Alan J. Roxburgh & Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What are your church's greatest strengths for a transformational ministry journey (readiness factors already or mostly in place)?
- What are your church's greatest priorities in growing toward transformational ministry (readiness factors to be developed)?
- What are one to three action steps (including prayer) that can be taken in the near future to strengthen your readiness for transformational community ministry?



The 'nested meditation' *by Kevin Anderson*

I am not a fisherman, but our 5-year-old son Jim was insistent: "Let's go see if we can catch some bass with this purple, scented worm, Dad! Can we!? Can we!?" I was pretty sure we couldn't, given a life of futility in the realm of fishing, but his boyish wonder was too vibrant to quash.

We walked out onto the dock and I tied on the artificial rubbery worm, all the while thinking, we're not going to catch anything with this fake lure. In the dusky light, a fish stirred near the surface about thirty feet from the dock. To my great surprise, the cast landed right on the spot where the fish had stirred, and a moment later a fish struck that artificial, rubbery, purple, scented worm! While Jim fought the fish in, however, the line snapped. We hooked into two more fish within minutes, but each time I tried to set the hook, the line snapped. Almost everything was perfect – a beautiful evening, quality time with my son, the bass biting – but the line kept snapping! A voice in my brain that I call the "heckler" said: "See, it really is futile."

Taking my fishing frustration to reflection time later, I wrote the following "nested meditation":

Prayer is casting awareness into silence.

Prayer is casting awareness into silence, fishing for the Big One, waiting for the tug.

Prayer is casting awareness into silence, fishing for the Big One, waiting for the tug of the sacred—setting the hook, reeling.

Prayer is casting awareness into silence, Fishing for the Big One, waiting for the tug of the sacred—setting the hook, reeling with laughter when the line snaps again.

In the 30 minutes it took to create this piece, I'd stumbled on a new image for prayer – "casting awareness into silence" – and a certain peacefulness with realizing that God is very much like the Big One that we can never quite land, hold in our hands,

This piece was first published in The Florida Catholic, Sept. 4, 2003, p. A25. Reprinted with permission.

and put on a stringer. We live for those brief moments of being hooked into the sacred, but the line always snaps. We always return to a more mundane consciousness. The Gracious Mystery remains forever too big, too deep for us to reel in.

I've been writing meditations in this form for the past 10 years. I don't remember exactly how the first one came about. It was the result of an afternoon of playing with words, a predisposition instilled by a father who made humor with wordplay throughout every day of my youth. That afternoon I was curious to see if by keeping the words the same and adding a single line to each stanza I could get the meaning or direction of the piece to shift in subtle or surprising ways – like the tug of the fish becoming the tug of the sacred or reeling in the fish shifting to reeling with laughter.

The first collection of 76 of these meditations was published in *Divinity in Disguise: Nested Meditations to Delight the Mind and Awaken the Soul*. As the book made its way into the world, I heard what I had hoped: that many people are using this new writing form to reflect on their own life material.

WHAT IS A NESTED MEDITATION?

The nested form is rather simple. Each piece begins with a single line that makes a complete sentence. The next stanza repeats the first line, then adds another line, so that the entire piece continues to read as a complete sentence (or in some cases, more than one sentence). The order and spelling of the words and the line breaks (where the lines end) all stay the same, but punctuation changes and wordplay are used to make surprising shifts. The nesting can go on indefinitely. Most of mine nest to four levels, but I have written several that nest to six levels.

Unlike much modern poetry, which emphasizes the use of language that often leaves the reader feeling distanced or puzzled, nested meditations use plain, everyday language intended to result in "aha!" moments. The whole idea of this form is to allow the sacred, the surprising, the miraculous to emerge from the ordinary. Because they use simple language, nested meditations are accessible both to the reader and to those who attempt to write them. All that is needed is some quiet time, a willingness to start with a single line from one's present awareness, and a playful approach to words.

WORDPLAY AS A PORTAL TO THE SOUL

The fascinating experience of writing nested meditations is that one never knows where they will go when the first line is committed to paper. The attempt to play with words so that the piece changes directions almost guarantees that it will shift in directions that surprise the writer. The feeling after writing a nested meditation is often something like, "Where did that come from?" That's because wordplay takes us into the right brain where anything can happen. It's almost as if the sacred is dancing in the spaces between words or lines just waiting for our playful energy to reveal it.

Recently I was at a friend's new home on a gorgeous lake in Minnesota. As I walked around the neighborhood, I felt the rising of that familiar enculturated longing for more. The line "I want to live on water!" presented itself in my brain. At first my superego moved in to judge: You should be grateful for what you have, you shouldn't covet what others have. But I opted to play with the line instead, and here is what emerged.

I want to live on water.

I want to live on. Water
stirs that up in me.

I want to live on. Water
stirs that up. In me
pulsates an eternal longing.

I want to live on. Water
stirs that up. In me
pulsates an eternal longing
for what a breaking wave may know.

In writing this piece, I was able to transform coveting and self-judgment into a realization that the longing for beauty and abundance in this world is just a mirror of my ever-present thirst for the Infinite One. The process of writing this brief piece was healing somehow—and this followed from moving the period in the first line from after "water" to after "on." I want to live on! Yes, that's it. My desire for the abundance of a home on the lake is one with my eternal desire for the Abundant One. A simple punctuation change opened up my soul.

EACH STANZA IS ITS OWN MEDITATION

Nested meditations are best appreciated when read slowly, pausing after each stanza for one or more breaths. Some readers want to skip the repetition of lines from stanza to stanza and jump ahead to the newest line, racing to get to some imagined final meaning of the piece. But this approach misses the fact that each stanza is its own separate meditation. The last stanza does not contain the whole or final meaning of the piece.

Consider, for example, the following meditation:

I picked you.

I picked you
to be my wife.

I picked you
to be my wife
and I didn't know you.

I picked you
to be my wife
and I didn't know you
were a wildflower.

The third stanza stands alone as its own reflection on how we know far less than we think we do when we commit our lives to another person. The fourth stanza is not a linear progression from the third, but a reflection on how surprising beauty can be discovered in relationships as they progress.

The final stanza also illustrates what I call the "circular" quality of some nested meditations. The last line ("were a wildflower") allows us to circle back to the first line ("I picked you") and hear it in a new way. What does it mean if you have been a wildflower all along and I have picked you? Is this a reflection on how we hurt the ones we love more deeply than anyone else in our lives; or an opening to the need for forgiveness to reconnect or re-root our relationships?

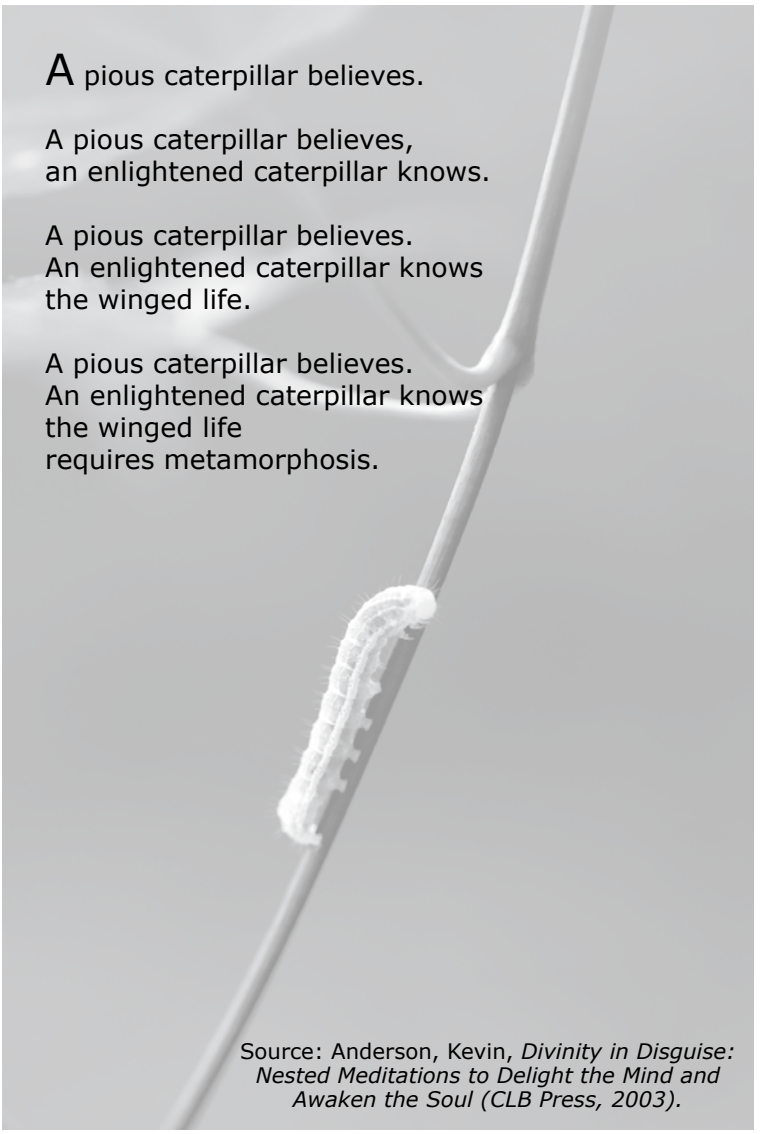
DELIBERATE INEFFICIENCY?

The repetition built into this form is intended to create a meditative experience. From Gregorian chants to breath work to sitting listening to waves roll in at the beach, meditation involves repetition. A commitment to making space for spiritual growth stands counter to the culture's insistence on efficiency which abhors a moment lost to unproductive repetition. God breaks through when we slow down, when we stop focusing just on being productive and start paying attention to the sacred recurring rhythms of existence.

There's something about the repeating of lines that models our own growth process. Like it or not, we often work and rework the same issues in our quest for growth and wholeness. Our progress is often incremental, much like the adding of a single line, moving our life work forward by degrees. Sometimes in that incremental growth process a shift occurs that allows us to break through to unexpected awareness and move in new directions. That is the hope that the nested meditation form symbolizes. The part of our lives that is already written need not completely limit where the story goes from

here. Openness and playfulness can produce magical encounters with grace. The next line, chapter, day, or year may hold surprising potentials we could not have glimpsed with the more limited awareness of our younger selves.

I have journaled for nearly 30 years, and that form of writing has been a reliable tool on the spiritual path. Lately, however, I have preferred to come to the page with an empty, waiting approach. By casting awareness into silence, a line appears or a stream of consciousness is set flowing that begins the process of letting simple words and phrases lead me to the sacred. A teacher of mine used the metaphor of the rope tow in skiing to speak about this kind of openness. Just as a skier sidles up to a rope tow and gently squeezes down on the rope and follows it up the hill, we can quiet our spirits and squeeze down on whatever thread of awareness is running through us. If we have pen in hand and follow the thread with a playful spirit, new and healing discoveries can emerge as if they were trapped there among the words all along, just waiting for a childlike playfulness to set them free.



Source: Anderson, Kevin, *Divinity in Disguise: Nested Meditations to Delight the Mind and Awaken the Soul (CLB Press, 2003).*

Barriers to providing marriage preparation

Joe D. Wilmoth
Assistant Professor of Human Development and Family Studies, School of Human Sciences, Mississippi State University

David G. Fournier
Professor Emeritus, Human Development and Family Studies, Oklahoma State University

The costs of divorce and the association of marriage with social good in America (Wilcox et al., 2005) have made healthy marriages an increasingly popular topic among scholars, politicians, bureaucrats, and churches. For example, the Bush administration's Healthy Marriage Initiative was authorized to spend $150 million a year on programs and research designed to promote healthy marriages. A smaller-scale, multidisciplinary effort to strengthen marriages and prevent divorce is the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative, a public/private partnership launched in 1999 (Johnson et al., 2002).

Governmental involvement in this arena often has been prompted by economic concerns. However, serious social and spiritual costs that are more difficult to quantify have provided additional impetus to focus new attention on relationship education. One focus of these marriage-strengthening efforts has been premarital education, an intervention of particular relevance to churches. Consistent with the literature, the terms premarital education and marriage preparation will be used interchangeably in this article to refer to any intentional effort delivered prior to marriage that is designed to help couples form and sustain healthy marriages.

Well-constructed premarital education programs can have a significant effect on behaviors related to marital satisfaction (Carroll & Doherty, 2003; Reardon-Anderson, Stagner, Macomber, & Murray, 2005). A random survey of 3,000 households in Oklahoma, Kansas, Arkansas, and Texas (Stanley, Amato, Johnson, & Markman, 2006) found that couples with premarital education experienced a 30% decline in the

likelihood of divorce over five years. Two observations from this study are particularly noteworthy for this article. First, the vast majority of premarital education was provided by clergy (90% in Oklahoma). Second, the study did not investigate the content or quality of premarital education; presumably, some forms of marriage preparation would have been more effective than others.

Clergy occupy a strategic position in making premarital education available, whether by providing the program directly or by serving as gatekeepers whereby couples are referred to other providers (Fournier & Roberts, 2003; Stanley et al., 2001). Although anecdotal evidence suggests an increase in the proportion of civil marriage ceremonies (Grossman & Yoo, 2003), clergy continue to provide the majority of premarital education in the United States (Murray, 2005; Stanley, 2001). Advantages for clergy as providers of premarital education include their access to and influence with couples, a belief in the value of marriage, a strong educational tradition, and an institutional base of operations (Stanley, Markman, Peters, & Leber, 1995).

In response to the belief in the salience of clergy interventions, groups of clergy in more than 200 cities and towns in 43 states have established Community Marriage Policies® setting minimum standards for marriage preparation (McManus, 2008). An evaluation of these programs suggests that counties with a Community Marriage Policy® have a decline in the divorce rate nearly twice that of control counties (Birch, Weed, & Olsen, 2004).

Not only is marriage education generally effective, but also the public seems to recognize its potential value. Fournier and Roberts (2003) found that the premarital stage is clearly the most socially acceptable time for couples to receive relationship education. Approximately two-thirds of Oklahoma residents surveyed said they would consider using relationship education, such as workshops or classes, to strengthen their relationships (Fournier & Roberts, 2003; Johnson et al., 2002). Of those who have attended classes, more than 70% reported having had a very good to excellent experience, and almost 90% would recommend premarital education to engaged couples they know (Fournier & Roberts, 2003).

Stanley et al. (2001) determined that clergy and lay religious leaders who were trained in presenting PREP (Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program), a program designed to prevent marital distress and divorce, were as effective in the short run as university staff. However, information on the effectiveness of clergy without such intensive training is unknown, and some have questioned the availability or effectiveness of premarital education provided by most churches (McManus, 1995; Stanley et al., 2001). This study explores the perception of clergy about hindrances that keep them from implementing effective marriage education.

HINDRANCES TO PROVISION OF MARRIAGE PREPARATION

General systems theory provides the primary conceptual framework for this study. Marriage preparation, the ultimate focus, is

conceptualized as system output, specifically as information produced by the "marriage preparation system" under investigation. All of the complex, open subsystems comprising the larger interactive system directly or indirectly relate to the production of marriage preparation. The clergyperson, the unit of analysis, is viewed first of all as an individual subsystem with system properties, including information-processing strategies and boundary permeability through which information flows between the individual clergyperson and other subsystems in the system. In addition, the clergyperson is viewed as being embedded within several of the subsystems under consideration. The identified subsystems include the clergyperson individual system, the clergy marital system, the religious denomination system, the local congregation system, the community system, the engaged couple system, and the engaged couple's family of origin system. Each of these interdependent subsystems can facilitate or hinder marriage preparation.

Systems theory applied to families allows clinicians and researchers a variety of constructs to better understand relational dynamics. This article is based primarily on the ideas of equifinality, multifinality, and pattern. Since complex systems are capable of a wide range of responses to situations, it is always curious when observed behavior is limited to a small number of redundant patterns that are unique to the system being evaluated. In theory, underlying structures reduce the likelihood of potential responses. For example, church-based couple mentor programs can be very successful. However, if mentor couples struggle with their own financial matters and avoid discussing finances with premarital couples that clearly need to discuss money, the systemic notion of a redundant pattern (avoiding money discussion) sets limits to the helpfulness of responses in couple mentoring situations.

This pattern that limits responsivity becomes a "barrier" to successful mentoring. Barriers are hypothesized to be structural patterns, based on past experience, that limit the ability of a service provider to fully respond to clients. The application of this awareness of barriers to premarital education can be used to identify education, skill-building, and decision-making interventions that can maximize the impact of marriage programs.

Breunlin's (1999) theory of constraints suggests that "…the most straightforward and efficient approach to problem resolution is the removal of the obstacles to solving the problem" (p. 366). Thus, identifying hindrances should be an appropriate strategy for interventions intended to maximize the potential effectiveness of clergy in preparing couples for marriage. The theoretical model suggests that effectiveness is influenced by the relationships of the clergyperson to each subsystem in the marriage preparation supra-system.

The application of this awareness of barriers to premarital education can be used to identify education, skill-building and decision-making interventions.

Community influences tend to be indirect, interacting with other systems to create an environment that enhances or constrains marriage preparation. Two possible domains for this interaction are community atmosphere (Macomber, Murray, & Stagner, 2005) and community marriage initiatives (Doherty & Anderson, 2004).

In addition, clergy marriages are prone to vulnerabilities such as role overload (Beck, 1997; Crouter, Bumpus, Head, & McHale, 2001) that might indirectly affect the ability of clergy to provide effective marriage preparation.

Although some research directly relates the congregational system to clergy involvement in marriage preparation, the literature most often identifies indirect factors as potential hindrances, such as administrative role expectations (McKown, 2001), congregational

size (Beck, 1997), boundary issues, and constraints related to insufficient time and money (Barlow, 1999; Morris & Blanton, 1994).

The literature implies that the denomination influences marriage preparation through quality of life factors (Morris & Blanton, 1994), resources, and expectations (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1987) and through training as a function of the relationship between the clergy and the denomination with which he or she is affiliated (Barlow, 1999; Buikema, 2001).

Hindrances associated with the couple occur because premarital couples are typically idealistic relative to the challenges associated with marriage. In addition, couples may be so focused on the wedding that they have difficulty devoting attention to marriage preparation (Fournier & Olson, 1986; Olson, 2006).

Murray (2005) notes that cultural and family attitudes, such as the belief that families solve problems without outside help (Fournier and Roberts, 2003), may discourage participation in marriage preparation. It also is possible that the relationship between the clergy and the parents could influence the process and content of marriage preparation.

... cultural and family attitudes ... may discourage participation in marriage preparation.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the theoretical model and the findings pertaining to the subsystems, three research questions addressed hindrances to effective marriage preparation:

- First, how is the clergyperson's perception of marriage preparation effectiveness related to each individual hindrance and to each subsystem in the model?
- Second, how do denominational groups and denominationally related hindrances influence clergy perception of effectiveness?
- Finally, what is the relative importance of each hypothesized hindrance to the clergyperson's perception of effectiveness?

METHOD

Participants

The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative provided funding for this study, which influenced the decision to limit the survey to Oklahoma clergy. Based on the available data (Association of Religious Data Archives, 2002) showing the religious distribution of Oklahoma residents [evangelical Christian (68.3%), mainline Christian (21.6%), Roman Catholic (8.0%), Orthodox Christian (0.01%), and Other (1.9%)], the researchers limited the population of interest to evangelical Christian, mainline Christian, and Roman Catholic Christian groups, as defined by the Association of Religious Data Archives. A sample of 2,501 Oklahoma churches was randomly selected from a commercial list of all churches in Oklahoma. Two identical waves of questionnaires were mailed to the entire list approximately two months apart. Of the responses returned, 425 (17%) were usable for data analysis.

To determine how accurately the responses reflected the religious population of Oklahoma, the mean size of active membership for each denominational group was multiplied by the number of respondents for each group, and the percentage of the total active members was calculated for each group and compared to the Oklahoma distribution described in the previous paragraph. Percentages of active members represented by each group were 4.4% for Roman Catholics (n = 18; mean of active membership = 1360.28), 71% for evangelicals (n = 291; mean of active membership = 199.09), and 24.6% for mainline (n = 101; mean of active membership = 309.38).

The 425 clergy who responded to a mailed survey were predominantly male (93.4%), married (90.8%), in a first marriage (76.4%), evangelical (69.6%), and senior pastors (90.8). Mean age was 51.6 (SD = 10.58), the mean number of years in ministry was 22.1 (SD = 11.59), and the mean tenure in the current

Table 1

Clergy Reports of Hindrances and Perception of Effectiveness (N = 425) and Perceived Effectiveness Regressed on Linear Combination of Hindrances

	Descriptive Statistics					Regression Analysis[a]			
Variables	Mean	*SD*	Range	α	Zero-order correlation[b]	*B*	*SE B*	β	Sig. of Change
Perceived Effectiveness of Marriage Preparation	14.64	2.89	2-20	.64		17.774	.559		.000
Hindrances [c]	49.74	14.63	17-136	.83	-.373				
Couple factors [d]	15.19	5.26	4-32	.70	-.287				
Denominational factors	12.28	4.86	4-32	.58	-362				
Congregational factors	10.55	4.58	3-24	.58	-267				
Community factors	6.74	3.39	2-16	.77	-.012				
Couples focus on wedding	4.32	2.06	1-8[e]		-.298**	-.222	.102	-.158	.030*
Engaged couples do not value	4.09	1.79	1-8		-.258**	-.025	.127	-.016	.843
Couples still have problems after prep.	3.95	1.63	1-8		-.184**	-.131	.100	-.072	.190
Inadequate training	3.79	1.81	1-8		-.307**	-.259	.098	-.159	.009**
Unaware of available resources	3.77	2.05	1-8		-.243**	-.136	.084	-.097	.107
Not enough time	3.74	2.04	1-8		-.164**	.065	.082	.046	.424
Church finances are limited	3.73	2.24	1-8		-.128**	.028	.076	.021	.711
People of community do not value	3.71	1.95	1-8		-.048	.006	.101	.004	.955
Parents make the process more difficult	3.49	1.77	1-8		-.036	.145	.095	.087	.127
Other clergy in community do not value	3.04	1.72	1-8		.022	.301	.107	.182	.005**
Congregation does not value	3.04	1.86	1-8		-.271**	-.253	.097	-.161	.010*
Not convinced programs effective	2.86	1.98	1-8		-.126**	.021	.078	.014	.791
Couples more difficult to work with	2.83	1.60	1-8		-.242**	-.183	.105	-.100	.083
Lack of denominational encouragement	1.87	1.42	1-8		-.240**	-.259	.115	-.126	.025*
My own marriage has problems.	1.43	.80	1-8		-.151**	-.144	.186	-.040	.439

[a]Dependent Variable: Perceived Effectiveness [b]All variables correlated with Perceived Effectiveness.
[c]Mean substituted for missing data. [d]Remaining variables listed in order of size of mean.
[e]1 = *strongly disagree*; 8 = *strongly agree*
p<.05*. p<.01*

position was 8.35 years (*SD* = .53). Although the mean number of active congregational participants was 281.1 (*SD* = 460.31), the median was only 140. The mean number of weddings performed in the most recent year was 3.39 (*SD* = 4.74), and the median number was 2.

Measures

Because no suitable instrument was discovered in the literature, a four-page, 178-item, self-report questionnaire was created for this study based on a review of the literature and a small preliminary qualitative study. To assess face validity, the instrument was presented to scholars in the field and to a panel of clergy from a representative cross section of denominations. Minor changes were made in the instrument in response to recommendations. The instrument included eight sections: demographic, requirements, content, risk factors, resources, hindrances, attitudes, and Oklahoma Marriage Initiative. The hindrances section, of particular relevance for this study, included 17 Likert-type items "seeking [clergy] ideas about factors that might hinder clergy from providing effective marriage preparation" (Chronbach's alpha = .84). Five respondents (1.2%) suggested other hindrances. The range for each item was 1 – 8, with a potential range of 17 – 136 for the scale.

The Hindrances to Clergy Involvement Scale included the following subscales based on the theoretical model: *Clergy Marriage Problems:* My own marriage has too many problems. Community Factors (Chronbach's alpha = .77): (1) Other clergy in my community do not seem to value marriage preparation; (2) The people of this community do not seem to value marriage preparation. *Congregational Factors* (Chronbach's alpha = .58): (1) My

congregation does not recognize the value of marriage preparation; (2) Church finances are limited; (3) I have too many responsibilities and not enough time. *Denominational Factors* (Chronbach's alpha = .56): (1) My denomination does not encourage marriage preparation; (2) I do not think that I have received enough training to provide effective preparation; (3) I do not know what resources are available to assist me; (4) I am not convinced that these types of programs are very effective. *Couple Factors* (Chronbach's alpha = .70): (1) Couples are so focused on the wedding they cannot focus on marriage preparation; (2) Engaged couples do not think marriage preparation is valuable; (3) Too many couples still have problems after marriage preparation; (4) Couples are much more difficult to work with than individuals. *Family-of-origin Problems:* Parents often make the preparation process more difficult.

An objective measure of how effective clergy are in providing marriage preparation is beyond the scope of the self-report mail survey used in this study. Therefore, a three-item scale was used to measure the perception of clergy regarding their effectiveness: (1) I think that I generally do a good job preparing couples for marriage; (2) I think couples have benefited from the marriage preparation I provided in the past; (3) Effectiveness now compared to five years ago. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for variables used in the data analysis.

Data Analysis

To explore the first research question, a Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated between perceived effectiveness and each scale or subscale intended to measure hindrances associated with various systems in the theoretical model. The significance level was set at .005 to compensate for the multiple correlations using the same set of values.

The second question examined whether denominationally related hindrances and denominational groups influenced perceived effectiveness. A 2 x 2 ANOVA tested whether clergypersons' perceived effectiveness varied as a function of low and high levels of denominational hindrances (range = 4 - 28; low = 4 - 15; high = 16 - 28) and denominational group (evangelical and mainline). Roman Catholic clergy were omitted from this analysis because of the small sample (n =18). Significance level was set at .05.

To assess how each variable within the hindrances to clergy involvement scale individually contributes to the prediction of perceived effectiveness, perceived effectiveness was regressed on the linear combination of the variables from the hindrances to clergy involvement scale, using an ordinary least squares multiple regression analysis. Significance level was set at .05. The analysis omitted the *"Individual Clergy Factors"* subscale, primarily because of problems with multicollinearity among variables in the subscale and the dependent variable.

RESULTS

Research Question 1

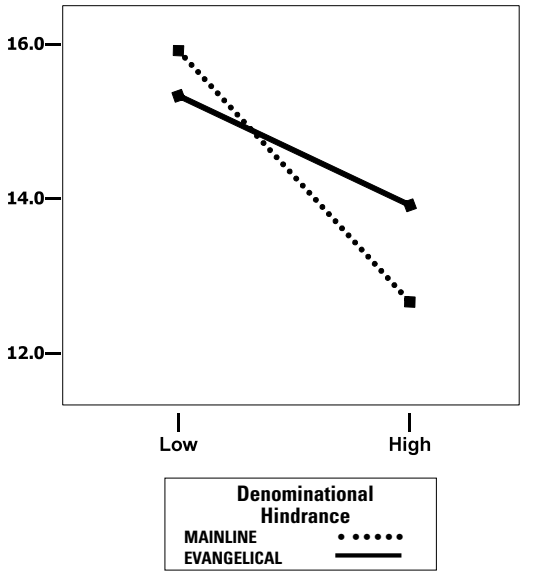
Consistent with the theoretical model, perceived effectiveness was significantly cor-

TABLE 2
Means of Denominational Group Perception of Effectiveness by Level of Denominational Hindrances

	Denomination Group	
	Mainline	Evangelical
Low	15.88 (SD = 1.93; n = 33)	15.35 (SD = 3.02; n = 99)
High	12.64 (SD = 3.11; n = 33)	13.85 (SD = 2.82; n = 75)
Overall	14.26 (SD = 3.04; n = 66)	14.69 (SD = 3.02; n = 178)

related with the Hindrances to Clergy Involvement Scale (rXY = -.37; p < .001), which indicates that clergy who perceive a higher level of hindrances to effective marriage preparation are less likely to believe that the preparation they provide is effective. Significant correlations also were found between perceived effectiveness and premarital couple factors (r_{XY} = -.29; p < .001), denominational factors (r_{XY} = -.36; p < .001), congregational factors (r_{XY} = -.27; p < .001), and clergy marriage problems (r_{XY} = -.16; p < .001). There was no relation between perceived effectiveness and either community factors subscale (r_{XY} = -.01; p = .81) or family-of-origin problems (r_{XY} = -.04; p = .40).

FIGURE 1: Interaction of Denomination Groups and Denomination-related Hindrances



Research Question 2

The 2 x 2 ANOVA, shown in Table 2 revealed a significant interaction effect of denomination group x level of denominational hindrances on perceived effectiveness (F = 4.47; df = 1; p = .035). Tests of main effects were significant for denominational hindrances (F = 33.418; df = 1; p < .001) but not for denominational group (F = .699; df = 1; p = .40). Examination of the graph (Figure 1) suggests a meaningful difference as a function of denominational groups in the way clergy perceive denominational hindrances to constrain their ability to provide effective marriage preparation.

Research Question 3

The final question explored how clergy perceived specific hindrances to be related to effective marriage preparation. Perceived effectiveness was regressed on the linear combination of the variables from the Hindrances to Clergy Involvement Scale, with change in the *R*-square value of the equation significant at a probability of .05. Table 1 shows the standardized and unstandardized betas and the significance level of change in the *F* value when each variable was added to the equation.

Five variables added significant change in variance: other clergy in community do not value (p = .005), inadequate training (p = .009), congregation does not value (p = .01), lack of denominational encouragement (p = .025), and couples focus on wedding (p = .03). Two of these five variables (inadequate training and lack of denominational encouragement) were associated with the denominational subsystem. Other subsystems represented were community factors (other clergy in community do not value), congregational factors (congregation does not value), and engaged couple factors (couples focus on wedding).

DISCUSSION

Research Question 1

Consistent with the systems model of constraints on clergy provision of marriage preparation, hindrances associated with five of the seven subsystems were significantly related to clergy perception of effectiveness. As expected,

attitudes and priorities of the premarital couple are perceived to be a major influence on the effectiveness of marriage preparation (Fournier & Olson, 1986; Olson, 2006). If the couple does not consider marriage preparation valuable, if they are so focused on the wedding that they do not attend to marriage preparation, or if the clergyperson perceives couples hard to work with, it is reasonable to expect that marriage preparation programs will be less effective if they occur at all.

Factors related to the local congregation also are perceived to be a hindrance to effective marriage preparation. The relationship between effective marriage preparation and the value the congregation places on marriage preparation confirmed the implication that administrative role expectations might affect the effectiveness of marriage preparation (McKown, 2001). Two items measured the effect of inadequate resources (time and money) that were identified in the literature as potential constraints (Barlow, 1999; Morris & Blanton, 1994).

The lack of correlation between the community subsystem and perceived effectiveness is surprising in light of the reported effectiveness of a Community Marriage Policy® (Birch, Weed, & Olsen, 2004) and the efforts to promote community marriage initiatives (Doherty & Anderson, 2004). The findings also did not indicate that attitudes of the extended family interfere with marriage preparation (Fournier and Roberts, 2003; Murray, 2005).

Research Question 2:
Denominational Factors

The literature suggests several reasons that denominations might influence whether a clergyperson might believe his/her efforts at marriage preparation are effective, including setting expectations and providing resources (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1987) such as training (Barlow, 1999; Buikema, 2001). The ANOVA not only confirmed that the degree of perceived denominational hindrances is related to perceived effectiveness but also found a significant interaction effect between denomination group and level of denominational hindrances on perceived effectiveness. The data suggest that evangelical clergy, compared to mainline clergy, perceive their effectiveness to be more independent of denominational influences.

Research Question 3:
Relative Importance of Individual Variables

Although the community subscale is not correlated with perceived effectiveness, regression analysis indicates that the attitude of other clergy in the community is the most powerful predictor of whether a clergyperson believes he/she provides effective marriage preparation, information consistent with the findings of Birch, Weed and Olsen (2004). Examination of the regression model also reveals the importance of denominational factors for perceived effectiveness. Of the five variables that added significant variance to the equation, two of them (inadequate training and lack of denominational encouragement) were denominational factors.

In summary, the findings suggest that the factors identified as potential hindrances are perceived by clergy to constrain their effective provision of marriage preparation. The exception is the premarital couples' families of origin.

IMPLICATIONS

Christian clergy provide a vast majority of premarital education in the United States. Research indicates that their efforts make a positive impact on marriages, but there is also reason to believe they could be more helpful. The results of this study have several implications for maximizing the effectiveness of marriage preparation provided by clergy.

Particularly encouraging is the recognition that some of the most powerful constraints can be addressed through specific, targeted interventions. A long-term strategy for increasing effectiveness of marriage preparation should direct efforts toward denominational leadership, with goals of improving seminary training, continuing education, program resources, and the perception that the denomination values marriage preparation. The study also suggests that it may be especially beneficial for mainline

denominations to focus on providing education and other resources to clergy.

Clergy often identify inadequate training as a hindrance to their effectiveness. Although the literature identifies denominations as having primary responsibility for training clergy and providing educational resources (Barlow, 1999; Buikema, 2001), these needs can be addressed in other ways. For example, the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative provides free training in the use of PREP, a research-based relationship education program. Also, community marriage initiatives have been established in more than 200 cities, and these groups often organize training opportunities (McManus, 2008). Because most clergy perform no more than two weddings a year, training to use an educational approach that focuses on individual couples may be more appropriate than group-based interventions. Examples of such individualized programs are curricula utilizing a premarital inventory and programs that involve mentor couples.

The best way to maximize the contributions of some clergy may be to encourage them to utilize community resources such as those described by Doherty and Anderson (2004) and Birch, Weed, and Olsen (2004). For example, the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative has begun to focus on developing sites statewide, including churches, where relationship education will be available for individuals and couples at convenient times throughout the year. Clergy could utilize such programs for much of the marriage preparation they believe themselves to be ill-equipped to provide. This study also indicates that the attitudes of other clergy in the community influence the perception of effectiveness, thus affirming the appropriateness of efforts by the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative to promote the value of marriage preparation among the state's clergy (Johnson et al., 2002; Oklahoma Marriage Initiative, n.d.).

Clergy tend to believe that couples are so distracted by preparation for the wedding that the effectiveness of their marriage preparation is compromised. Although this hindrance may be difficult to eliminate, its effect may be diminished by beginning premarital education as soon as possible.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DECISIONS

Though the findings are important, especially in light of the gap that exists in research on clergy involvement in marriage preparation, caution must be exercised when generalizing from this study. Although the respondents appear to represent clergy in Oklahoma fairly accurately, the population of Christian Oklahoma clergy probably differs from clergy from other religious groups or in other parts of the United States. A 17% response rate is not uncommon for mailed surveys of clergy, but it is not possible to know all the ways in which the respondents

may have differed from the non-respondents. One of the limitations of the current study was the inability to measure outcome rather than the clergy's perception of effectiveness. Objective measurement of actual clergy effectiveness could be approached through longitudinal studies utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods, including analysis of marriage duration, marital conflict, and seeking of additional marital counseling. More precise scales should be developed to measure each of the dimensions in the model. For example, only one item was used to measure hindrances from two systems. Reliability estimates on some of the subscales point to the need to do more work building accurate scales.

Further studies should compare these findings with conditions in states besides Oklahoma and among faith groups other than Protestant and Catholic Christian churches, with an eye to issues of gender and racial/cultural diversity. The relatively low response rate leaves questions unanswered about subjects who did not respond. It would be helpful to conduct studies utilizing telephone, Internet, and mailed surveys with more exhaustive follow-up efforts.

CONCLUSION

This study looks at a group of individuals who have access to couples at a developmentally critical moment, who already help couples prepare for marriage, who recognize they can be more effective, and who are willing to receive training. These would seem to be ingredients for making a major difference in the stability and quality of marriages. Though previous studies suggest that clergy provide a positive influence on the outcomes of marriages, research in this area is remarkably rare, and no previous study asks clergy about what hindrances they believe keep them from being more effective. This exploratory study provides information that can help design interventions that will promote relationship stability and satisfaction by reducing hindrances to effective marriage preparation.

REFERENCES

Association of Religious Data Archives. (2002). *State Membership Report*. Collected by Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies. Retrieved June 19, 2006, from www.TheARDA.com.

Barlow, J. L. (1999). A new model for premarital counseling within the church. *Pastoral Psychology*, 48(1), 3-9.

Beck, J. H. (1997). *The effects of the number of roles, the time spent in different roles, and selected demographic variables on burn out and job satisfaction among Iowa Lutheran clergy*. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (UMI No. 9805643)

Birch, P. J., Weed, S. E., & Olsen, J. (2004). Assessing the impact of community marriage policies on county divorce rates. *Family Relations*, 53(5), 495-503.

Breunlin, D. C. (1999). Toward a theory of constraints. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 25(3), 365-382.

Buikema, J. K. (2001). *The preparation of pastors in premarital counseling*. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (UMI No. 3034171)

Carroll, J. S., & Doherty, W. J. (2003). Evaluating the effectiveness of premarital prevention programs: A meta-analytic review of outcome research. *Family Relations*, 52, 105-118.

Crouter, A. C., Bumpus, M. F., Head, M. R., & McHale, S. M. (2001). Implications of overwork and overload for the quality of men's family relationships. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63(2), 404-416.

Doherty, W., J., & Anderson, J. R. (2004). Community marriage initiatives. *Family Relations*, 53(5), 425-432.

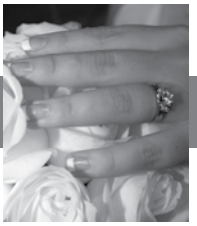
Fournier, D., & Olson, D. (1986). Programs for premarital and newlywed couples. In R. F. Levant (Ed.), *Psychoeducational approaches to family therapy and counseling* (pp. 194-231). New York: Springer.

Fournier, D., & Roberts, K. (2003). *Survey of adult Oklahomans on barriers to relationship help-seeking: An examination of why couples choose to attend or not attend marriage education or other couple services*. Oklahoma City,

OK: Oklahoma Marriage Initiative.
Grossman, C., & Yoo, I. (2003). Civil marriage on rise across USA. *USA Today*, p. 1.
Johnson, C., Stanley, S., Glenn, N., Amato, P., Nock, S., Markman, H., et al. (2002). *Marriage in Oklahoma: 2001 baseline statewide survey on marriage and divorce*. Oklahoma City, OK: Oklahoma Marriage Initiative.
Macomber, J. E., Murray, J., & Stagner, M. (2005). *Service delivery and evaluation design options for strengthening and promoting healthy marriages: Investigation of programs to strengthen and support healthy marriages*. Urban Institute.
McKown, D. G. (2001). *Pastors in conflict: The nature, extent, contributing factors, and consequences of conflict in ministry*. Fuller Theological Seminary.
McManus, M. (1995). *Marriage savers: Helping your family and friends avoid divorce*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
McManus, M. (2008). *Marriage Savers is a proven way to increase the success of marriage, reduce divorce rates, and provide a better environment for children to thrive*. Retrieved July 10, 2008, from http://marriagesavers.org.
Morris, M. L., & Blanton, P. W. (1994). The influence of work-related stressors on clergy husbands and their wives. *Family Relations*, 43(2), 189-195.
Murray, C. E. (2005). Prevention work: A professional responsibility for marriage and family counselors. *Family Journal*, 13, 27-34.
Oklahoma Marriage Initiative. (n.d.). Faith coalition. Retrieved June 21, 2006, from http:// www.okmarriage.org/ProgramHighlights/FaithBasedInitiatives.asp.
Olson, D. H. (2006). *PREPARE-ENRICH Counselors Manual* (Rev. Ed.). Minneapolis, MN: Life Innovations.
Reardon-Anderson, J., Stagner, M., Macomber, J. E., & Murray, J. (2005). Systematic review of the impact of marriage and relationship programs: Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
Stahmann, R. F., & Hiebert, J. (1987). *Premarital counseling: The professional's handbook*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
Stanley, S. M. (2001). Making a case for premarital education. *Family Relations*, *50*, 272-280.
Stanley, S. M., Amato, P. R., Johnson, C. A., & Markman, H. J. (2006). Premarital education, marital quality, and marital stability: Findings from a large, random, household survey. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *20*, 117-126.
Stanley, S. M., Markman, H., Prado, L., Olmos-Gallo, P., Tonelli, L., St. Peters, M., et al. (2001). Community-based premarital prevention: Clergy and lay leaders on the front lines. *Family Relations*, 50(1), 67-76.
Stanley, S. M., Markman, H. J., Peters, M. S., & Leber, B. D. (1995). Strengthening marriages and preventing divorce: New directions in prevention research. *Family Relations*, *44*(4), 392-401.
Wilcox, W. B., Doherty, W. J., Fisher, H., Galston, W., Glenn, N. D., & Gottman, J., et al. (2005). *Why marriage matters: Twenty-six conclusions from the social sciences*. New York: Institute for American Values.

ENDNOTE

We thank Dr. Laura Hubbs-Tait for comments on previous drafts of this manuscript and Public Strategies, Inc., for the grant that funded the study.



Application to the church

by Cindy Harr

Clergy invest significant time and effort in crisis intervention with couples who face relationship difficulties. They are confronted with the guilt, deep pain, and confusion felt by those who seek their counsel when a marriage is miserable or when divorce occurs. Faith leaders are well aware that when a family is fragmented, it often creates waves of discouragement and disillusionment that impact other marriages, families, the church, and society as a whole. However, clergy often face significant challenges when attempting to integrate programs such as premarital and marriage education into their ministry and the life of the church.

Wilmoth and Fournier found in their research study that several factors, real or perceived, often prevent or negatively impact the ability of clergy to provide these services. Premarital couples may be focused on the wedding ceremony or may not see premarital education as necessary or valuable preparation for the marriage itself. Clergy often feel unprepared for the task of premarital and marital education due to denominational factors such as the lack of seminary training in this area and the lack of resources. They may experience role conflict when pressured by their congregations to focus on administrative tasks and sermon preparation rather than pastoral care. Clergy seem to be especially influenced by other clergy in the community who demonstrate negative attitudes related to the effectiveness of premarital and marriage education. They may also be facing difficulties in their own marriage and family which inhibit their ability to minister effectively.

The following practical suggestions may assist in overcoming these constraints to premarital and marriage education.

MARRIAGE EDUCATION is a process that begins long before premarital sessions with the clergy and continues after the wedding. Parents and other influential individuals in the life of the couple make positive or negative contributions to the individual's readiness for marriage. Their lifestyle and words will have significant impact and they assist in creating behavioral patterns that will continue on into the marriage relationship. Premarital and marriage education should be recognized as a shared responsibility of family, friends, and faith community rather than the individual duty of the clergy.

MARRIAGE EDUCATION should be a primary focus of the entire church body with teaching integrated throughout the life span using a variety of venues and methods to promote healthy marriages and families. Healthy marriage support and preparation must be appropriate to age and each developmental stage of life with planned growth in areas such as relationship skills, conflict management, forgiveness, and reconciliation. There should be an emphasis on life modeling and mentoring. The initial years of marriage are often the most challenging. However, premarital education or counseling sessions with the clergy should be just one aspect of a holistic approach by congregations.

CLERGY OFTEN DO NOT RECEIVE THE TRAINING and resources they need for ministry in this area. Denominations are key players in leading out in making premarital and marriage education a key focus both in seminary training and in congregational literature. There are many available curricula for use in premarital and marriage education that are both scriptural and research based. Teaching these programs in the seminary

and providing opportunities for continued education would allow clergy to become certified in their use while increasing their confidence and skills in presenting the material.

Clergy who do not feel qualified or gifted in this area should be aware of and recommend the use of community-based marriage education programs in combination with spiritual counseling. Some clergy may find it wise to use trusted professionals or lay persons within the church or community to develop this ministry. Faith leaders should encourage each other in a non-judgmental manner in their attempts to reach out to couples and to families by making it "safe" to discuss areas of needed growth while stressing the importance of this ministry.

MARRIAGE EDUCATION counseling may be avoided by clergy who are experiencing family and marital difficulties. They may feel hypocritical when discussing with authority principles they are unable to incorporate into their life. This requires continued self examination and a personal commitment to making the home their primary place of ministry. This may involve participating in marriage education seminars or receiving counseling themselves.

Considering the positive impact that marriage preparation and education has on marital satisfaction, the church should be intentional in their ministry to couples by incorporating practical interventions that provide ongoing support.

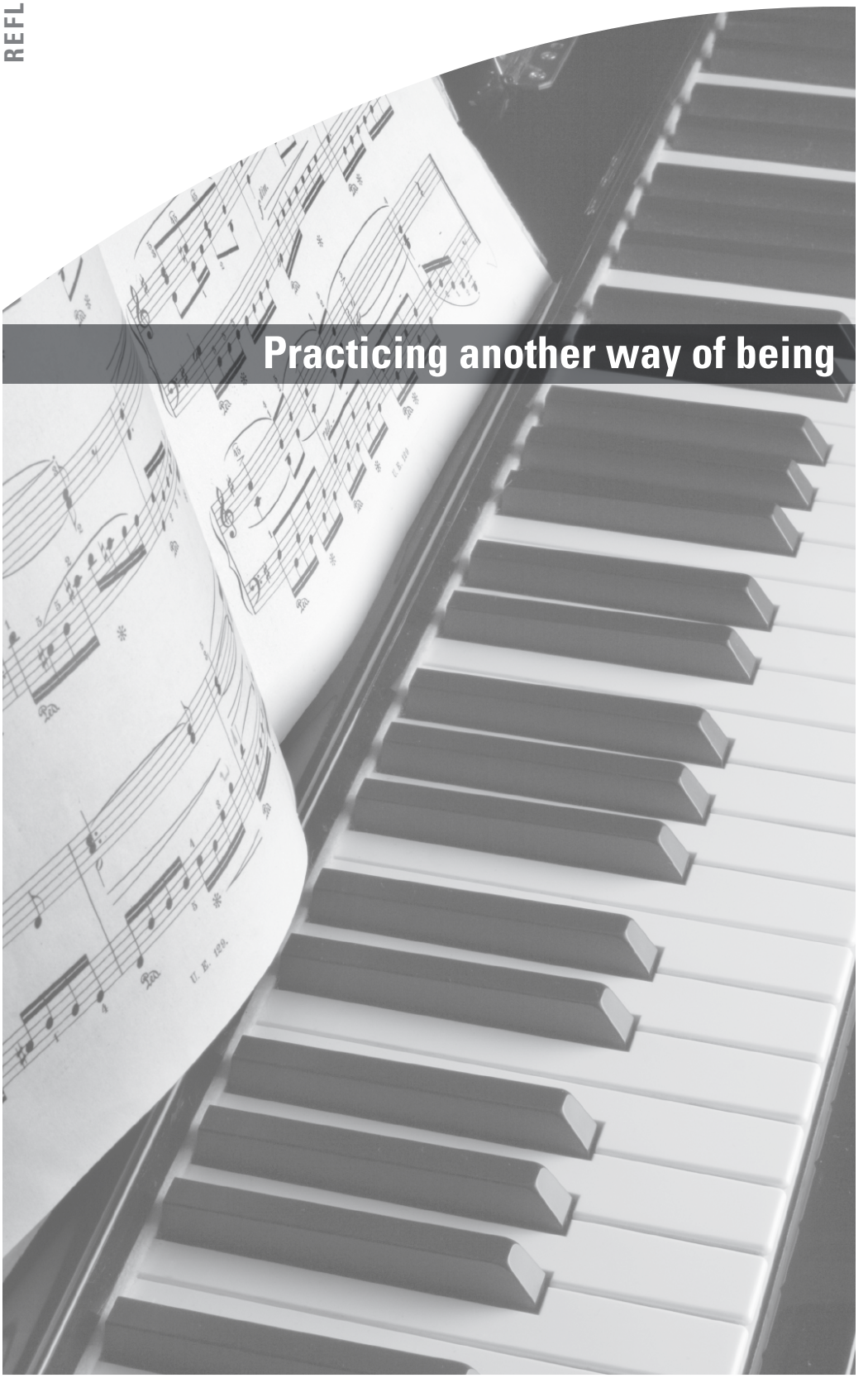
Cynthia (Cindy) Harr, MSW, PhD, LCSW, is an assistant professor in the Baylor School of Social Work. She has a master's of religious education and is a counselor/therapist in marital and family counseling.

Photo by Sterling Severns

We are a eucharistic people which means that we are a people of thanksgiving, people who realize that we are prodigal sons and daughters. We are not called to judge or to condemn but to be instruments of life, to give life and to receive life.

Source: Jean Vanier, From Brokenness to Community

Practicing another way of being



One of the sacrifices my family made for me when I was a child was to get a piano. It was a huge old upright that took up nearly an entire wall of the dining room in our small house. "Will you practice if we spend the money on piano lessons?" Oh, yes! Because I thought "practice" meant "play the piano." I didn't know yet that 'practice' was an entirely different creature – scales and theory and drills and finger exercises – and that "playing" would be limited to nonsense ditties that contained no more than four notes.

I would open the hymnbook and gaze longingly at "Amazing Grace" and "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," determined to play real music, but all I accomplished was something more like real noise. The only way I mustered the discipline to sit on that bench each afternoon to plunk and plod my way through what didn't sound like music was that I wasn't fond of the alternative, which was to be in the barn feeding animals and milking the cows.

Kayla McClurg
inward/outward
The Church of the Savior
Washington, DC

I did improve as a piano player, but I never became what I thought of as a pianist. I was quick to tell people I wasn't good enough to play in a recital or to accompany them when they wanted to sing. They insisted I was being too humble, but what they didn't know was that ego and pride were the real culprits. I only wanted to do what I was good at doing, and I wanted to be good from the very start. Fortunately I haven't let that philosophy rule my entire life or I would be missing out on a lot of great experiences. I'm still surprised, though, by how often a sense of whether or not I'll be "successful" at something determines whether or not I leap in. Even something I really want to do can fall prey to this inner judgment and caution.

On Tuesday, God willing, I will begin a six-week sabbatical. With the support of a community who makes it possible, I will head out – and in – to rest, and listen and practice another way of being. I am cautiously excited about standing apart for 40 days, but I wonder – will I be any good at it? Will I be able to relax into having no schedule, no goals, no preordained purpose? Will I be able to "sit down at the piano," face the reality that I don't really know what I'm doing, and just practice?

What exactly would "success" look like with something like this? I'm attracted to these words of Jesus, read yesterday in our noon chapel prayer time:

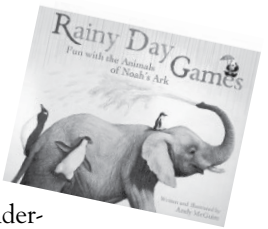
> *Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, carefree in the care of God… . Walk into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They don't fuss with their appearance – but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? If God gives such attention to the wildflowers, most of them never even seen, don't you think God will attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you? What I'm trying to do here is get you to relax, not be so preoccupied with getting so you can respond to God's giving.… Steep yourself in God-reality.*
>
> *(Luke 12, The Message)*

That's what I hope to practice – steeping myself in God-reality. I couldn't ask for a better starting place for my next becoming.

This piece first appeared May 17, 2008, in Saturdays, part of the inward/outward Web site.

Books and resources

Rainy Day Games: Fun with the Animals of Noah's Ark, *written amd illustrated by Andy McGuire*
Harvest House Publishers: Eugene, OR, 2008). ISBN: 13:978-0-7369-2371-2.



Move over, Cat in the Hat! There is now another terrific book that imagines what wonderful and whimsical adventures might transpire on the kind of rainy day that leaves children restless and bored. *Rainy Day Games*, however, doesn't invite balancing a cake on a rake or similar disasters that the Cat wrought. Instead, it wonders what silly games like "turtle-tac-toe or tic-tac-turtle" the animals on Noah's ark might enjoy.

The book's first page, headed "Before we get started… ." has the most kid-friendly and subtly humorous introduction to the Noah's ark story I've encountered. "A flood was coming. God told Noah he needed to build a big boat for his family and two of every kind of animal. Noah probably guessed it wouldn't be easy. First of all, boats are tough to build. Also, people would laugh at him. And, of course, everybody knows llamas and rhinos hate to sail. But maybe worst of all, can you imagine staying indoors for 40 rainy days in a row? What would they do to pass the time?"

Turn the page and over the text reading, "When it's been raining night and day, and you don't know what games to play," you see a picture of a young boy, swimming goggles over his eyes and yellow "floaties" inflated on his arms, glumly staring out the window at the pouring rain. The facing page continues, "Pretend that Noah's ark floats by, and watch the games that they would try," with the little boy now gazing out the window at a chimp with a ball and an aardvark with bubbles who peer out the portholes of the ark floating past.

There ensues a riotous romp through silly suggestions, accompanied by marvelous illustrations. "Hide-and-seek can be a treat. Chameleons can be tough to beat." Or, "Jacks with yaks can be a blast. A sloth-race winner gets there last." (My daughter, 7, and niece, 5, got a giggle out of the snail and turtle depicted in the race finding an even slower animal, the sloth, which they could outpace.)

Rainy Day Games, unlike most relating to the Noah's ark story, doesn't take pains to show the animals in pairs. Older children, in fact, may note the one illustration that shows two parent penguins and a baby penguin, prompting conversation about why God wanted there to be pairs of animals to begin with.

At the end *Rainy Day Games* invites, "Try playing something from our list. And think of other games we missed. Or just sit back as clouds go by, Until God's rainbow paints the sky." I can't wait to give copies of this book to children in my life, accompanied by a set of tiddlywinks or jacks or another of the games suggested, to spark their imagination on the next rainy day … or any day they need to jumpstart their creativity. I think it would be a great addition to the bookshelf of a church-based childcare program or nursery school, a welcome resource for a Vacation Bible School, and it would be a great book for any church school leader who wants to enliven a lesson about God's good creation with this playful and imaginative delight of a book.

Reviewed by Shannon Daley-Harris, who has served the Children's Defense Fund since 1990. She has written many publications including Our Day to End Poverty: 24 Ways You Can Make a Difference *(Berrett Koehler, 2007).*

To Do Justice: A Guide for Progressive Christians, edited *by Rebecca Todd Peters and Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty*

Westminster John Knox Press (Louisvillek, 2008). ISBN: 978-0-664-23282-5, 192 pp.

Seeking to provide Christians with a relevant means to care for the "least of these," Todd Peters and Hinson-Hasty craft a volume of opportunities to engage and transform current challenges facing the globe. Climate change, human trafficking, HIV/AIDS, health care, war, displaced persons, poverty, and hunger are merely a few examples cited by the editors as crises faced by what they refer to as "the human community." They encourage the church, first-world Christians, to engage in these issues and respond as people of faith.

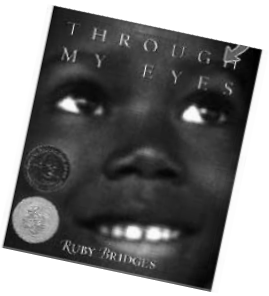
Each chapter serves as a topical response to issues raised by *A Social Creed for the Twenty-first Century,* a document provided by the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the National Council of Churches to mark the 100th anniversary of the *1908 Social Creed*, a confession that served as the catalyst for the Social Gospel movement. Christian social ethicists educate, encourage, and prescribe action for issues impacting the church and the larger human community: work, families, prisoners, homeless, creation, education, and war, among others.

This topical structure invites the reader to approach the volume as a buffet of issues that can be served in small portions as appropriate to the level of engagement of the faith community in which they serve. Readers also may use this text as a small group resource to sample a range of issues to which the church is responding around the world. The text is laden with scriptural references and social justice traditions of the church that not only support, but challenge, the reader to wrestle with each issue as a person of faith. This aspect, above all, makes this engaging work a tool for conservative evangelicals as well as mainline parishioners, despite the misleading subtitle.

Reviewed by Meredith Story Williams, MDiv/MSW 2007, who is central southern regional organizer for Bread for the World.

Through My Eyes, *by Ruby Bridges*

Scholastic Press (New York, 1999). ISBN-10: 0590189239, 64 pp.



Perhaps you are familiar with the story of Ruby Bridges: the little 6-year-old Black girl who integrated the New Orleans public schools. I had read Robert Coles' account of this child who prayed for the hysterical, abusive white adults who screamed at her as she was escorted to school by the federal marshals each day. I knew there was also a picture book by Coles about Ruby and that she is considered by many to be an icon and an inspiration. But until I heard Ruby speak briefly in the summer of 2006 at Alex Haley Farm at the Proctor Institute of Child Advocacy Ministries, I hadn't really given much thought to the flesh-and-blood Ruby. What was it really like to be that 6-year-old child?

At Proctor when the adult Ruby spoke briefly, it was about her experience of being in New Orleans when Katrina hit, and of how much she had needed to sense the safe haven of Haley Farm. When I visited the sales tent, I gravitated to this book. As engaging as Coles' picture book is, it is this account in Ruby's own words that is to me the more compelling portrait of that little girl. Accompanied by quotations and excerpts from news accounts of the day and illustrated with black-and-white photo-

graphs, Ruby's own voice comes through with clarity: "When I was six years old, the civil rights movement came knocking at the door. It was 1960, and history pushed in and swept me up in a whirlwind."

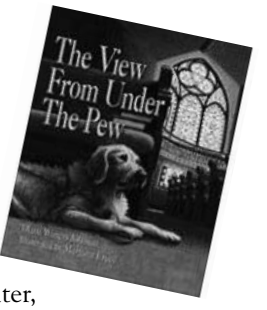
This is the account of a Black family in the south called to make the difficult decision to place their child on the front lines of school integration. Through Ruby's eyes, we see her own impressions of what was happening. Often, she was unaware of the implications of events taking place until later. With her words, we come to understand that she was just a little girl who really believed that prayer would get her through anything, one who knew that she was expected to obey her mother no matter what.

The power of this book is in painting the picture of an ordinary child made extraordinary by situations that were to shape a generation. Here we are privy to the pain experienced by her family when the pressures mounted and the confusion and uncertainty of an older Ruby when doors she and her mother assumed would be opened remained firmly shut. Here we also read of the adult Ruby and the sense of purpose that gradually transformed her life. We have evidence of the impact strong adults can have in the faith and life of a child. As the book closes Ruby comments: "I know that experience comes to us for a purpose, and that if we follow the guidance of the spirit within us, we will probably find that the purpose is a good one."

This is a book for parents to read with an older child, taking time to examine the photographs carefully and to honestly answer questions about the events of that tumultuous time. Children will find not a plaster saint to be emulated or admired from afar, but a real child like them, one who can indeed inspire them to seek their own purpose amid whatever challenges they may encounter.

Reviewed by Martha Bettis Gee, Associate for Child Advocacy, Presbyterian Church (USA), Louisville, KY.

The View from Under the Pew, *by Diane Winters Johnson, illustrations by Margaret Freed*
Abingdon Press (Nashvile, 2998).
ISBN-978-0-687-64478-0, 32 pp.



The View from Under the Pew walks us through a week with Pastor Diane (the author) who "has difficulty seeing" and her golden retriever Seeing Eye dog, Walter, whose "job is to guide her through the day so she can do her work of caring for the church."

Written for children ages 4-8, the book uses the appealing figure of Walter to spark children' s interest in a book that turns out to be more about the typical work week of a pastor than about the Seeing Eye dog that accompanies her. Even though Walter will be enough of a hook to keep most children interested, children who are expecting a more "dog-intensive" story may be a bit disappointed. ("This book would only be good for kids who go to church," commented one young reviewer.)

Johnson does a terrific job of giving kids – churched or not – a behind-the-scenes glimpse into the day-to-day life of a pastor – from Monday's meetings with people who visit her office to plan Sunday worship or "to talk about their worries, to pray, or to find help with their lives," to Tuesday hospital visitation, to Wednesday's meeting and evening potluck, to Thursday's Bible study and choir rehearsal, to Friday's laughter-filled church lunch and work preparing bulletins, and finally Sunday's worship as Walter escorts Pastor Diane to the pulpit and lies in the pew behind her.

Johnson, whose master's degree is in Christian education, does a good job of explaining church-related words that may be unfamiliar to some children, such as ordination, stole, bulletin, chaplain, and pulpit. (Interestingly, she doesn't define pew leaving one 5-year-old regular churchgoer

to guess "Is it a little church?") Johnson also teaches with a light touch about aspects of her life as a visually impaired person, explaining her computer that talks as she types, reminding the chaplain not to pet Walter when he is working, mentioning that hospital volunteers tell her how many doorways to count to find the rooms of people she will visit.

Given her educational background and the care taken to explain some things, however, I was surprised to find other elements that could have used perhaps a bit more explanation. "Difficulty seeing," the only description of her visual impairment, is pretty ambiguous. The extent of her vision impairment is further complicated by unexplained illustrations. One shows Pastor Diane's hand touching a paper on her desk, as if she might be reading Braille, but no mention was made whether she uses Braille or not.

An illustration of the Bible study class shows Pastor Diane at a chalkboard holding chalk and the text says, without helpful explanation for children, "Pastor Diane helps them read the verses and understand what each one has to say." (Adults may know that one can help someone read a verse without seeing it oneself, but that can be confusing for youngsters.)

The page that raised the most questions for one young listener refers to a picture on the church wall of Jesus with the children, saying, "The picture reminds Pastor Diane and the people at the church meeting that Jesus himself helped people." I loved the point, but it made us wonder if she could see the picture or had just been told that it was there.

Finally, no mention was made of Saturday, a curious omission given the book's day-by-day approach. Children might have appreciated seeing just what it is like when pastors are not at church, i.e., that they have homes and lives apart from the church (for the most part!)

One of the strengths of the book, for me, was the many ways it depicted not only the pastor but the whole church as actively caring about those in need, from a meeting about neighborhood children collecting shoes and supplies for children in need, to members making a quilt to sell and give the proceeds to help people who are poor. "There are difficult problems to solve, but the church and Pastor Diane are determined to help people."

Although the book may leave readers with some questions that will prompt conversation and wondering together, it does a good job of answering many others – about the life of a pastor, her church, and her Seeing Eye dog. *The View from Under the Pew* is, overall, an excellent resource for the church library and church school classroom. It would also be a great addition for those churches that offer books to young children heading into worship – that is, for kids in the pews.

– Reviewed by Shannon Daley-Harris

People

They were nothing more than people, by themselves. Even paired, any pairing, they would have been nothing more than people by themselves. But all together, they have become the heart and muscles and mind of something perilous and new, something strange and growing and great. Together, all together, they are the instruments of change.

Source: Kerri Hulme, The Bone People

A JOINT CALL FOR PAPERS
FOR SPECIAL ISSUES OF

SOCIAL WORK & CHRISTIANITY
http://www.nacsw.org/cgi-bin/publikio.cgi
AND
THE JOURNAL OF FAMILY & COMMUNITY MINISTRIES
http://www.baylor.edu/FCM_Journal

The two leading academic journals in the field of social work practice and faith integration are producing parallel issues on the topic of the Latino/a Perspective in Serving Communities. Latino/a practitioners are especially encouraged to submit manuscripts.
Two types of manuscripts are solicited:

1. Academic, peer-reviewed manuscripts (20-25 pages)
2. Profiles of existing community ministries and their impact or reflections from practice experiences, written in first person (4-6 pages)

Topic:	Latino/a Perspectives in Serving our Communities
Date of Issue:	Summer 2010
Guest Editors:	Virginia Rondero Hernandez and Kretcha M. Roldán-Rodríguez
Managing Editor:	T. Laine Scales
Deadline:	August 1, 2009

The Latino community has a strong tradition of mutual aid and informal support networks that can take the form of a neighborhood, church, cultural or grassroots organizations. Latinos traditionally have worked within these systems to empower and bring social change into their communities. These parallel issues attempt to shed light on the multiple narratives, history and contributions of services offered for and by Latino/a populations. They also attempt to define systemic resources and service limitations confronted by Latinos. Considerable attention will be given to submissions by Latino/a social workers, ministers and other professionals working in faith-based communities.

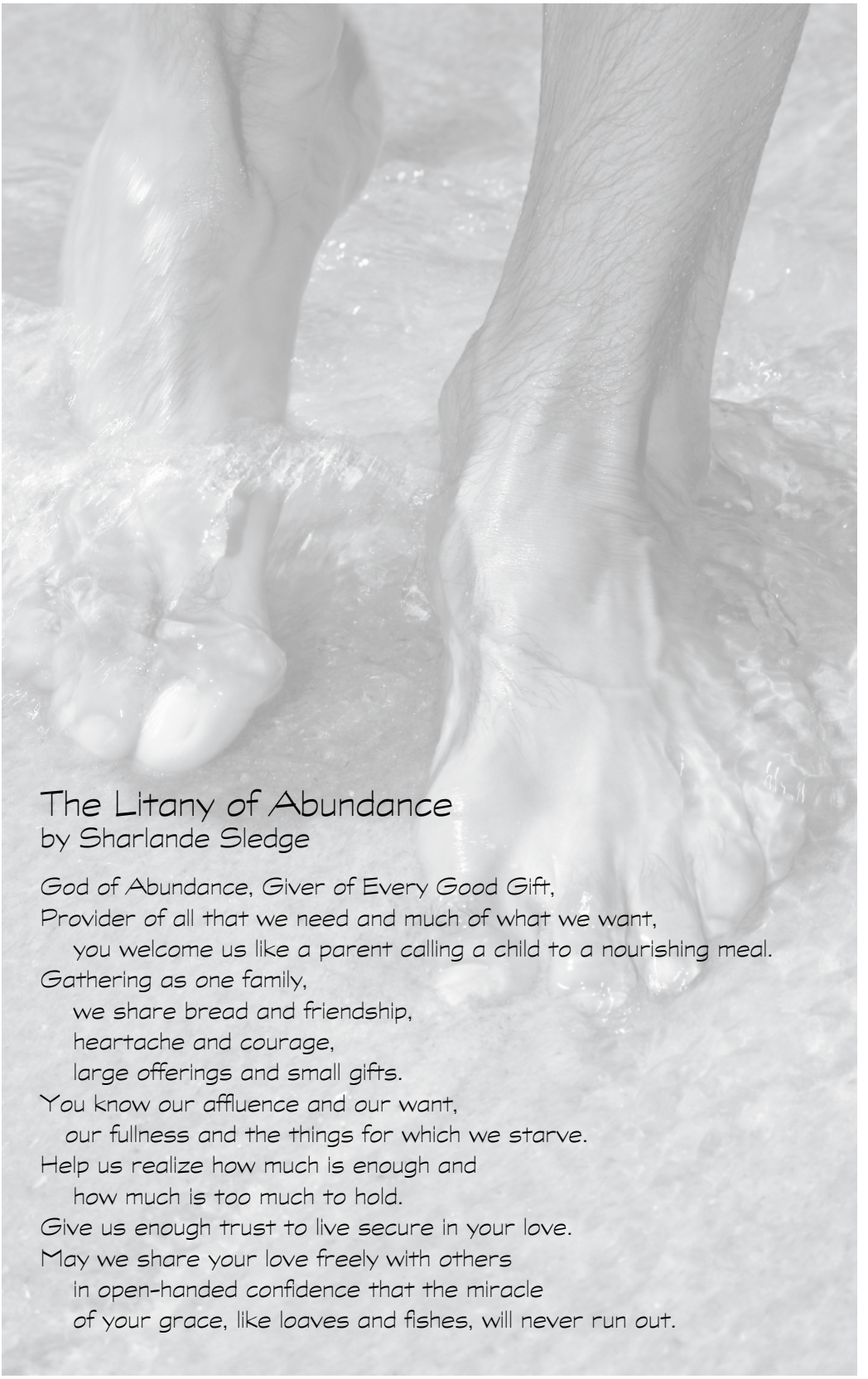
Submissions describing approaches, strategies, programs, community projects, church ministry and initiatives by and for the Latino/a Community will be considered.

Guidelines forAll Submissions
All authors are strongly encouraged to contact the special edition managing editor, T. Laine Scales, by e-mail or phone (see contact information below) to discuss ideas for paper submissions. The deadline for all submissions is August 2009.

Guidelines for Academic Peer-Reviewed Manuscripts
Articles should begin with a title page, including the author's name, address, phone number, e-mail address, abstract of no more than 200 words, and a list of key words. Only the title should be repeated on the first page of the text. The article text should be double-spaced and is limited to 20-25 pages, including all references and appendices. Please use the American Psychological Association Style Manual format (5th edition) for in-text references and reference lists. Submissions will be accepted by e-mail in Microsoft Word as an e-mail attachment.

Guidelines for Profiles of Ministries and Reflection Articles
These articles should be written in the first person and provide an overview of an existing community ministry or program or practice experiences with reflections. Authors are encouraged to incorporate aspects of their faith in the profile. Consider this an opportunity to network and share ideas about innovative programs that work and how they began and operate. Submissions should be four to six double-spaced pages.

Submit all manuscripts by August 1, 2009, to: FCMJournal@baylor.edu



The Litany of Abundance

by Sharlande Sledge

God of Abundance, Giver of Every Good Gift,
Provider of all that we need and much of what we want,
you welcome us like a parent calling a child to a nourishing meal.
Gathering as one family,
we share bread and friendship,
heartache and courage,
large offerings and small gifts.
You know our affluence and our want,
our fullness and the things for which we starve.
Help us realize how much is enough and
how much is too much to hold.
Give us enough trust to live secure in your love.
May we share your love freely with others
in open-handed confidence that the miracle
of your grace, like loaves and fishes, will never run out.

February 9-11, 2009
at Baylor University

Register today at
www.baylor.edu/bigidea
or call 254.710.3854

Jointly sponsored by:
George W. Truett Theological Seminary
Baylor School of Social Work
Leadership Network

transforming ideas into action

featuring...

Kay Warren
world-renowned HIV/AIDS activist and co-founder of Saddleback Church

Lynne Hybels
author, social activist and co-founder of Willow Creek Community Church

Rick McKinley
founding pastor of Imago Dei Community missional church in Portland, Oregon

Michael Stroope
the M.C. Shook Chair of Missions George W. Truett Theological Seminary

and many other national leaders in the discussion about new ways to 'be' church!

Are you ready to live out the second part of the Great Commandment - "to love your neighbor as yourself"?

Join us at *"The Next Big Idea"* conference at Baylor to learn how you can turn big ideas into actions that can transform you, your congregation and your community.

Workshops on: local and global poverty, HIV/AIDS crisis, nurturing faith in the family, community development, intergenerational volunteerism, developing an externally focused church, and much more

Register today at
www.baylor.edu/bigidea
or call **254.710.3854**

TRUETT LEADERSHIP NETWORK BAYLOR SOCIAL WORK believing caring serving

CONTRIBUTORS

Kevin Anderson, PhD, is a poet and psychologist. His writing is informed by the experience of spending thousands of hours listening to details of the joys and struggles of people's lives. The main focus of his life – raising five children with his wife Claudia – also provides regular inspiration to pause and put pen to paper to reflect on the meaning of it all. Two of his recent books are *Divinity in Disguise: Nested Meditations to Delight the Mind and Awaken the Soul* and *The 7 Spiritual Practices of Marriage: Your Guide to Creating a Deep and Lasting Love*.

David G. Fournier, PhD, is professor emeritus of Human Development and Family Studies, Oklahoma State University, College of Human Environmental Sciences, Stillwater, OK. david.fournier@okstate.edu

Valerie Isenhower is an ordained American Baptist minister serving as executive director of Water in the Desert Ministries: A Christian Center for Spiritual Renewal located in Albuquerque, NM. Val has co-authored two workbooks on Individual Spiritual Discernment and Corporate Spiritual Discernment. Her photographs can be accessed at www.visenhowerphotography.com. She offers workshops in Spirituality and Photography across the country.

Kayla McClurg is editor of inward/outward, a devotional site on the Web for The Church of the Saviour, Washington, DC.

Walker Moore, MSW 2007/MDiv student, is community organizer for Waco Community Development, Waco, TX.

Sharlande Sledge has been associate pastor since 1985 of Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco, TX, where she ministers through worship, pastoral care and missions. A writer and poet, she is the author of *Prayers and Litanies for the Christian Seasons* and a guest columnist for the Waco Tribune Herald. sharlandes@aol.com

Kevin Tankersley is lecturer in the journalism department at Baylor University, Waco, TX, and a freelance photographer.

Heidi Unruh is director of the Congregations, Community Outreach and Leadership Development Project, co-author of two books on church-based social ministry and co-editor of *Hope for Children in Poverty: Profiles and Possibilities* (Judson, 2007).

Joe D. Wilmoth, PhD, CFLE, is assistant professor of Human Development and Family Studies, School of Human Sciences, Mississippi State University, Mississippi State, MS. JWilmoth@humansci.msstate.edu

Terry W. York, DMA, is associate professor of Christian ministry and church music, serving on the School of Music and George W. Truett Theological Seminary faculties of Baylor University, Waco, TX.

SECTION EDITORS

Michael D. Sciretti, Jr. is pursuing a doctorate in historical studies through Baylor University's Religion Department. After graduating from George W. Truett Theological Seminary, Michael attended the Epiphany Academy of Formative Spirituality in Pittsburgh, Penn. He and wife, Rachel, have two daughters, Anastasia and Zoe. Michael_Sciretti@baylor.edu

T. Laine Scales is a professor of higher education and associate dean of Graduate Studies at Baylor University. She previously served as professor of social work and associate director of Baylor's Center for Family and Community Ministries. She is author or co-author of seven books and numerous articles. Laine_Scales@baylor.edu. She and husband, Glenn, are parents to April.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

For complete instructions, visit www.baylor.edu/FCM_Journal

ACADEMIC ARTICLES

The editorial board specifically seeks articles on the following topics:

- research on the intersect of faith/religion on ministries that impact families and communities
- research that advances developmental and practice theory in congregational or faith-based settings

Manuscripts for full-length articles should not exceed 15 pages, including references and tables. The review process is anonymous. Three reviewers critique each manuscript and then make a recommendation for acceptance based on the following criteria: relevance of content to major issues concerning the topics of family and community ministries, literary merit, conciseness, clarity and freedom from language that conveys devaluation or stereotypes of persons or groups. Final decisions regarding acceptance will be made by the editor and associate editor.

Submit articles electronically to FCMJournal@baylor.edu.

COLUMNS/ESSAYS

The purpose of these submissions is different from the academic articles. These articles are not peer reviewed. Tone and writing style should be first person, straightforward, informal and accessible. Consider this a forum for networking with others in your profession and these articles as a way to share practical, helpful information and/or inspiration. We adhere to no one denomination but hope to draw from the best of all, and all language should reflect this approach.

Faith in Action

First-person accounts of family or community ministries that address specific needs with emphasis based on analysis of practice and indication of effectiveness. Submit Faith in Action articles electronically to Vicki_Marsh-Kabat@baylor.edu.

Reflections

Personal stories up to 750 words that convey a spiritual truth or revelation to encourage others in their faith journeys. Submit Reflections electronically to Vicki_Marsh-Kabat@baylor.edu.

Contemplative work

Throughout the journal are several opportunities for meditation and contemplation. We are especially interested in original poetry, hymns, artwork and short meditations. If you would like to submit your work for consideration in the journal, please send a hard copy as well as a digital copy to Michael D. Sciretti, Jr., 1824 Northcrest Dr., Waco, TX 76710, Michael_Sciretti@baylor.edu.

In My Opinion

An opportunity to explore topical local or global issues that impact families and communities to encourage dialogue and progress. Length is 1,200 words. Submit to Vicki_Marsh-Kabat@baylor.edu.

COPYRIGHT ISSUES

- All contributors to the journal must sign an FCM Journal Publishing Agreement (available on our web)
- All submissions to the journal represent a certification on the part of the creator of the work that this is an original piece and that it, or no version of it, has been published elsewhere or is now being considered for publication elsewhere.

ADDITIONAL COPIES

Authors or creators of a published work will receive two copies of the journal issue. Additional copies may be ordered for $10 each by contacting the journal staff.

The Journal of Family and Community Ministries

One Bear Place #97120 • Waco, Texas 76798-7120 • 254-710-4417

FCMJournal@baylor.edu

CENTER FOR FAMILY AND COMMUNITY MINISTRIES

BAYLOR SOCIAL WORK

This journal appreciates the generous support it has received from the CIOS Foundation, the Lilly Endowment, Inc., and our subscribers.

Have you had enough?

Vicki M. Kabat
Associate Diretor, Center for Family and Community Ministries, Baylor University

I often ponder the word "enough." Beyond puzzling out how those letters can result in that sound, I wonder what "enough" is. How much is enough? Who has enough and who has more than enough? It seems relative, unquantifiable and indefinable.

We push ourselves away from a holiday table ladened with roast turkey, potatoes, gravy, rolls, salads, fruit and desserts and exclaim, "Ooh, I've had enough." Judging by the unzipped pants and the expanding elastic around our mid-sections, we've had more than enough.

We consume and accumulate material goods – requiring extra storage sheds in our backyards and garages too cluttered to hold cars – as though we can never "get enough."

When we're angry or overwhelmed or frustrated, we shout, "Enough is enough!" and walk away.

A pastor I heard preach recently introduced me to a Hebrew word – *dayenu* – that means "it is enough, would have been enough, was or will be sufficient." In Second Corinthians 12, Paul describes the thorn in his side and how he begged God to take it from him. In verse 9, Paul writes that God said to him "My grace is '*dayenu*' – sufficient for you."

Grace enough. For Paul, for me, for you. Grace enough for this day. When the Israelites were in the desert for 40 years, the manna God provided daily was *dayenu* – enough, but no more. Not enough to hoard for the next day. God would take care of the next day.

Talk about countercultural! What in the world would happen to all of us if we actually lived as though we believed in God's enough? How would our families, neighborhoods, churches, country be different if we moved beyond the mentality that if I give you some of "mine," there won't be enough for me when I need it?

What in the world would happen to us if we actually lived as though we believed in God's enough?

I have a sneaking suspicion that the reality of Jesus's parables is lived out every day, but most of us aren't attentive to it. The other night at church, though, I did notice. I worship in a small house located next to a government housing unit where some of the poorest people in our city live. We have about 20 to 25 folks who attend. Sometimes an addict or alcoholic from the street wanders in, sits quietly with us, and then leaves. On this night, Jack,* who is homeless and an alcoholic, joined us. When the small offering basket was passed, many simply passed it on, and we understand that. But not Jack, not this night. From his pocket he took a dirty, almost unrecognizable penny and placed it in the basket.

I have more than enough of almost everything. There is food on my table three times a day, a roof over my head, hot and cool air when needed, clothes to wear, health insurance and access to medical care, a car that works, and enough money to buy gasoline.

But I still have much to learn about enough. I have much to learn from Jack, who in giving his small mite taught me volumes about living into God's *dayenu*.

* *Not his real name.*