



American Baptist Churches USA

Clergy and Leadership Development

Professional Ministry Task Force - Clergy Development

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As American Baptists we honor the vital role played by leaders at all levels. Wherever mission and people intersect, leaders are called upon to model, mobilize and multiply their efforts. We recognize that no one set of skills and gifts meet the broad demands of leadership in the church today. We recognize that diverse contexts demand differing styles of leadership. And yet it is important to identify areas for development. (Adapted from Key Ministry Area – Leadership)

In that our charge is that of attending to the concerns and needs of clergy in the American Baptist Churches/USA our focus in this document is clergy development.

Within the area of psychology, “development” refers to a sequential change with a purposeful directionality. An organism will move from one state of being to another state of being in an ordered way. In addition, it is assumed that the organism’s survival potential is related to moving through the developmental process. There is some concept of there being a “final” stage at which the individual will eventually arrive. This final stage is called maturity.

There are some assumptions which are made when the general concept of development is applied to “clergy development.

The first assumption is that clergy development can be seen as taking place in semi-discrete stages. It is implied that one can identify where a particular clergy person is along the road to what could be called “clergy maturity.” What is not clear is whether or not these semi-discrete stages that can be identified. One starting out could be identified as a “novice,” but how does one identify the stages between “novice” and “clergy maturity.”

A second assumption is that these semi-discrete stages are sequential in nature. The focus of this assumption is the word “sequential.” There are things that a clergy person will have to do in an ordered way.

A third assumption is that the sequential stages are somewhat under the control of the person taking progressing through the stages. If a man or woman does not have some choice about moving from one stage to the next there is no need for any concern about enhancing or facilitating clergy development, it will either happen or not happen.

The areas where maturity can be developed are:

- Skills, equipping for ministry (Excellence in Ministry), Leadership
- Spiritual health
- Emotional health
- Intellectual health

- Physical health
- Relational health
- Financial health

Skills, equipping for ministry (Excellence in Ministry), Leadership

In order to be mature as a clergy person one must have the skill needed to function as a minister. This does not assume that one has achieved perfection in these skills. In the martial arts one receives a black belt and is considered a “master.” This does not mean that everything needed has been learned. It means that the “master” is now knowledgeable enough about himself or herself to continue teaching himself or herself and evaluating himself or herself in terms of how effectively the skills attained are being used. It also implies that there will be an ongoing relationship with other “masters” because no one person can possess all knowledge or understand everything about his or her own use of skills.

For our purposes here, the implication is that the clergy person would have achieved some level of competence in terms of the skills needed for ministry. For ministry in a parish setting these skills would include administration, teaching, preaching, pastoral care, and leadership.

In order for there to be a planned approach to clergy development some schema must be devised which assesses skills in these areas with the intention of increasing and/or refining skills.

While not an exhaustive list, some of the needed skills for excellence in ministry for this time might be:

- Growth in the ability to make innovative changes in order to improve the health of congregations. Learning to experiment and take risks are specific skill sets as are learning from failures and mistakes.
- Ability to inspire a shared vision, believing that they can make a difference. Breathing life into a vision and getting people excited about the future.
- The work of clergy is to “equip the saints” for ministry. The fostering collaboration and building spirited teams of leaders. They must learn how to strengthen others, making each person feel capable and powerful.
- Clergy who are healthy create standards of excellence and set an example for others to follow. They unravel bureaucracy when it impedes action; they put up signposts when people are unsure of where to go or how to get there; and they create opportunities for victory.
- Another important skill area is encouraging the heart. Clergy who recognize the contributions that others make keep hope and determination alive. In every winning team, the members need to share in the rewards of their efforts, so leaders celebrate accomplishments.

Spiritual health

Many times people assume that one is either spiritual or they are not spiritual. This is particularly true of clergy. Any implication that they are not spiritually healthy carries an implication that they should not be in ministry. Spiritual health is often seen as absolute, with few if any gradations in between. For our purposes we would need some way to categorize spiritual health in gradations which would not be threatening. This might be in terms of actions or habits that are developed. It would be helpful to avoid some standard of measure that is too mechanical, such as the “number” of minutes spent in Bible study or prayer. However, in looking to the practice of developed spiritual disciplines, an active life of prayer and a commitment to spending time deepening their relationship with God and Christ we might find ways of accessing spiritual health. The three-fold rhythm of work/study/prayer provides some wisdom for clergy seeking to be spiritually whole.

Emotional health

Emotional health has a variety of interpretations. In this context emotional health does not refer to pathology. If there is pathology involved it is a whole different matter and is not a clergy development issue.

Emotional health is about a pastor increasing his or her ability to both experience and express appropriate emotions. Can the pastor cry? If a member of the congregation who the pastor feels a connection with dies, is the pastor aware of that loss in his or her self. Is the pastor able to feel anger and express it in appropriate ways? Does the pastor have the appropriate frame of mind and motivation for the role of pastor? Is Christ-like behavior exemplified? Does this pastor have a servant’s heart?

Intellectual health

Intellectual health is related to a pattern of lifelong learning. It begins with a pastor’s experience and training in preparation for ministry and continues with ongoing reassessment, retooling and study.

Intellectual health would also apply to curiosity and investigation in areas not directly related to ministry. Is the pastor exploring areas of literature, science, history, philosophy, and the arts? Has the pastor explored ideas and arguments where there is disagreement as well as agreement? How is the pastor being challenged or stretched?

Physical health

A healthy clergyperson attends to health with an annual physical, dental and eye exams; maintain a healthy diet and use caffeine, tobacco, alcohol and other mood altering substances in moderate proportions, if at all. They also give adequate attention to their mental health and be willing to seek professional help if need be.

For most clergy today the work week is too long (59 hours) and leisure time is too short (7 hours). This is 35 hours less leisure time than the average American. A healthy clergyperson would have more balance in her or his life moving closer to the national average of 38 hours of work and 42 hours of leisure.

A healthy clergyperson would view recharging themselves while playing with our partners or children or practicing a favorite hobby or sport as being as important as church work.

The important piece would be consistency and movement toward what are defined as better practices. The focus could be on assessing process rather than results.

Relational health

Relational health relates to how a pastor maintains relationships in his life. We are not talking about congregational relationships here; those would be better addressed under Ministerial Excellence.

Included is the area of health of relationships outside of the congregation, including spouse and children and with the family of origin.

Another aspect would be friendships that are non-pastoral duty related. These could be with other pastors or friends who are totally unrelated to the church.

Finally, involvement in community, not just the church is an important factor in relational health. As citizens, they participate fully and personally within their communities. This is as important for the health of the clergy as for the health of the congregation. If the pastor is engaged in the community the congregation is often encouraged to build relationships which further the reach of a congregation.

While the amount of time spent in these relationships is an obvious way of assessing the health of the relationship the quality of time spent is equally important in evaluating relational health.

Financial Health

An important area of clergy development which can greatly impact many of the other areas is financial health. Financially a healthy clergyperson would be responsible with their personal and discretionary funds. In giving a tithe would be a minimum and if not tithing there would be a plan of moving toward a tithe. Responsible stewardship can positively impact relationships as the pastor is seen as being of sound judgment and trustworthy.