

The Servant

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Forgiveness and Forced Termination

by Roger Lovette

One of the challenges in church conflict is forgiveness. Long after a pastor has been terminated and the church pretends to have returned to a semblance of normalcy, there is unfinished business for the pastor and the congregation to face.

Though the terminated pastor has moved on, there remains a lot of unfinished business for congregational members. Much of this

unfinished business revolves around forgiveness. It comes out in conversations in the halls, in Sunday school classes, deacons meetings, business meetings, even in prayers. It may sound like this. The former pastor's supporters say, "We had more baptisms and higher attendance in Sunday school than we ever had before or since." Down the hall several people speak in hushed tones, "We like our new pastor, but he doesn't preach as well as Brother Used-to-Be."

Opposing sides may become critical of one another, creating further divisions by avoiding one another. Some may move their membership and bristle when they bump into one another at the grocery store. Small groups may assemble in the church parking lot before or after worship and fuel their wounds with editorial comments. "We have never had as many visitors as we have now." Someone else remarks, "The new preacher's wife is a breath of fresh air. She supports her husband and her children are well behaved."

Two hundred miles away the former pastor is trying to adjust to a new place of service. Driving to and from hospital calls he has flashbacks. Tears fall as he grips the steering wheel, a definite mixture of grief and anger. He remembers the cruel remarks about him or his wife. He remembers the "gang of three" that came to tell him he needed to leave. The pastor and his wife may suffer nightmares or wake up in a cold sweat.

Their emotional and physical health is threatened. His wife wonders why her husband is so edgy. The children may inquire of their mother, "What is wrong with dad?"

The pastor second guesses himself and wonders if he had visited more or not preached a particular sermon or lost his temper that night in the deacons meeting if

things might have been different. "Maybe," he muses, "I didn't try hard enough." Depression worsens and his self-confidence further erodes.

The church and the terminated pastor are not able to let go of the past. They are not able to forget or forgive. As many times as they have both prayed "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," they find that forgiveness is elusive and forgetting impossible.

Churches and pastors that do not engage in the hard work of forgiveness carry

an enormous emotional load and may be doomed to repeat the scenario again. Spiritually they can become

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MTM Receives Generous Donation

MTM has received a donation of \$100,000 to its Endowment Funds! An anonymous benefactor has made this a challenge gift with the view toward encouraging the Board of Trustees to find new sources of contributions to match this gift. Additional donations must be raised without diminishing the pool of annual contributions to fund our operating budget. The earnings from this gift will be an investment in perpetuity in the lives of wounded servants. Our gratitude is humbly expressed to the donor for his interest in the spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental health of ministers and their families.

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Forgiveness and Forced Termination

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stuck and unable to move ahead.

The world watched in amazement months ago the response of the Amish Community in Pennsylvania when five of their little girls were murdered in their little school house. The man who killed them turned the gun on himself and committed suicide. In their grief, the Amish reached out to the grieving widow of the man who killed their children. Some attended the man's funeral. The grieving widow asked if she could attend the children's funeral. The Amish community welcomed her. They took food to her home and prayed for her and her children. They also established a fund to help these fatherless children. Reporters continually asked, "How can you possibly do this?" Each time they answered, "We are Christians and Christ commanded us to forgive." That Amish community will grieve for a long time, but they chose to reach out in a redemptive way rather than to act in retaliation. Perhaps forgiveness is not what we feel but something we do. Like Jesus' hard command to love our enemies, we are to forgive those that hurt us.

What if the church that dismissed their pastor took Jesus' words seriously? Might they begin to see the mistakes they made? Maybe, with their new pastor, they will not repeat their painful history. Maybe the members will look across the aisle and decide to lay aside their swords. Perhaps the words "Forgive us...as we forgive" will take on a new meaning and the members will embrace one another and see that no one is innocent in a church fight. This might be the beginning of new life in that church.

Two hundred miles away the former pastor of that church prays, "Forgive them...forgive me." He, too, begins to see his mistakes. Maybe he will come to realize that the heaviest burden he carries is not forgiving self for what he did or did not do. Maybe this pastor will silently join with his former congregation

and allow the healing grace of God to perform its work in him. Perhaps no church or pastor will be able to move on with their ministry without taking the time to do some needed work around the issues of forgiveness.

One day the church that dismissed the pastor may invite him back for a special occasion. This may not happen unless the church and pastor have sufficiently done their grief and forgiveness work. If so, the pastor may discover that his old enemies have laid their weapons down and receive him and his family in a spirit of grace. Some may confess their own misgivings about what happened and ask his forgiveness. The pastor may be able to confess his misgivings and embrace them in a new light. Some of his former church members may be amazed at his attitude and how mature he has grown.

The Amish community can teach us powerful lessons about forgiveness. They have been able to let go of their anger and allow love and forgiveness to reign. A marvelous freedom comes whenever we can put the pain of past hurts to rest.

Forced termination leaves many scars for pastors, their families, and church families. All involved will never be the same. But old wounds can experience healing, and a pastor and congregation can, with the help of God, grow strong in their broken places. Perhaps this is why Jesus spent so much time talking about and, more importantly, demonstrating forgiveness.

Roger Lovette, D.Min., is a Baptist minister who experienced forced termination. Since that time he has served another congregation for eight years and five congregations as Intentional Interim Pastor. He continues to believe in church. Roger lives in Birmingham, AL with his wife, Gayle. He is a charter member of the MTM Board of Trustees. His email address is: LRL1035@bellsouth.net.

Introducing Our New MTM Trustees



Greta N. Morris assumed her position as Dean of the School of Language Studies of the Foreign Service Institute on September 5, 2006. Ms. Morris was

most recently the U.S. ambassador to the Republic of the Marshall Islands from 2003-2006.

A career member of the Senior Foreign Service, Ms. Morris served from 2000 to 2003 as the Counselor for Public Affairs in Jakarta, where she led the U.S. embassy's public diplomacy program to strengthen U.S.-Indonesia ties and to build support within Indonesia for counter-terrorism

efforts.

Prior to her posting in Jakarta, Ms. Morris was the Deputy Director of the Office of Public Diplomacy in the Bureau for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Previously Ms. Morris held postings as Counselor for Public Affairs in the Philippines, as Public Affairs Officer in Uganda, and Press Attache' in Thailand. Ms. Morris had also served as Director of the Office of Public Affairs in the Bureau of African Affairs, Information Center Director in Nairobi, Kenya, and Cultural and Exchanges Coordinator for Africa.

Ms. Morris joined the Foreign Service in 1980. She is the recipient of two Superior Honor Awards, three Senior Foreign Service Performance Pay Awards, and a Presidential Meritorious Service Award. She speaks Bahasa Indonesia, Thai, and

French.

A native of Redlands, California, Ms. Morris earned her B.A. from the University of Redlands and an M.A. in English from the University of California, Los Angeles. Prior to joining the Foreign Service, she taught English at the high school and university levels in California and Indonesia. Her hobbies include swimming, playing the cello, and choral singing. She resides in Arlington, Virginia.

Brad Meester is the starting center for the Jacksonville Jaguars (Florida) of the National Football League. He was drafted by the Jacksonville team in the second round in 2000 and has played for a team record of 92 consecutive games. Brad was named to the All-Rookie team his first year in the NFL. He anchors one of the best offen

Introducing Our New MTM Trustees

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sive lines in the league.

Brad was the starting center for four years on the University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA football team and was named to the Division 1-AA Associated Press and Coaches All-American team. Brad was a GTE Academic All-American and played in the East-West Shrine Game. In 2000, he graduated from UNI with a degree in Business Management with a 3.76 G.P.A.

In his senior year at Aplington/Park-

ersburg, IA, High School, Brad was an All-State First-Team lineman and led the school to a state football championship. He lettered in four sports while in high school.

Married to his high school sweetheart, Jamie Krusey, of Parkersburg, IA, Brad and Jamie have three children, Lily, Emma, and Colby. They are very active in their church and community in Jacksonville, and participate in a bible study with other Jacksonville Jaguar players.

Brad is actively involved in an on-going reading initiative (Playbooks) and Honor Rows Program in Jacksonville. He participates in the Habijax Building Project (Habitat for Humanity) and supports the Miracle Network in Jacksonville.



MTM Ministry Receives National and International Exposure!

At the March meeting, Charles Chandler, Executive director for MTM, reported that following the news of Ted Haggard's resignation from a mega-church last November, Stephanie Simon, a *Los Angeles Times* reporter, called to speak with the Director of MTM. Her staff had found the MTM website as she was preparing an article for the Sunday edition (November 5). This paper has a circulation of 1.25 million.

On Monday, a reporter for the British Broadcasting Company called to set up an interview that was broadcast later that week in England, the United States, and other countries.

The following day, a reporter from the Los Angeles Public Radio called to set up an interview that was broadcast across the nation. A past Healthy Transitions Wellness Retreat participant was included in the interview and shared how the MTM ministry had impacted his life.

A local Richmond radio station executive heard one of these interviews and set up a 30 minute live interview broadcast in the Richmond metropolitan area.

Christian Century also quoted excerpts from the LA Times story in an article in one of their issues. All of this came as the result of an Internet search that pointed the researcher to the MTM ministry. And the ripple effect continues.

This is one of the interesting tidbits of information one can hear at an MTM board meeting. Well done, Charles!

Church Conflict

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to produce healthy communities. Healthy communities contribute to a healthy society. These kinds of healthy relationships can go a long way to developing their own distinct contagious healthy dynamic. A good starting place is to embody the words of Micah, "To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

These characteristics can transform individuals and congregations. This kind of transformation enables discipleship to take on a life of its own.

MTM Mission Statement

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

Coming soon:

HEALTHY TRANSITIONS

Wellness Retreats for Ministers and Spouses

October 29-November 2, 2007

First Baptist Church
Cullman, Alabama
Co-sponsored by
First Baptist Church
Cullman, Alabama

December 3-7, 2007

Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond
Richmond, Virginia
Co-sponsored by
Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond

January 7-11, 2008

Carson-Newman College
Jefferson City, Tennessee
Co-sponsored by
Norton Institute for Congregational Health
Carson-Newman College

Scholarships Available

Join us on the Web...

MTM Foundation has a Web Site.
The purpose of the web is to make
the ministry available to more people.

Our address is:

www.mtmfoundation.org

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Church Conflict Takes On a Life of Its Own

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

Chris Hedges states that after a period of time, war begins to develop its own life. The former theology student turned journalist wrote in his book, *War Is a Force that Gives Us Meaning*, that those involved are able to perform superhuman acts because they are energized by the war.



DR. CHANDLER

A veteran war journalist, Hedges studied the nature and dynamic of war (especially the wars of the 1980s and 1990s), concluding that war provides a purpose for living. He argues that war bonds people together from diverse backgrounds into a common cause, sometimes bringing together strange "bedfellows." This cycle can be contagious.

Church conflict, sometimes like war, can take on a life of its own. And it does so for the same reasons. Swords are drawn among the factious groups, gossip flows, and the myths take on a life of their own to fuel the conflict (war). In this war both sides share a cause that unites them because they have something or someone to oppose or support. Each side convinces themselves that they are participating in a "noble cause." A communal march against a common "enemy" generates among people who otherwise have so little in common. It can disintegrate into a feeding frenzy. Perspectives are blurred as people engage in gossip that destroys the enemy without considering what it does to the body of Christ. Pack thinking replaces reason and investigation of the facts. The end justifies the means no matter who is wounded or killed. The cause demands full attention and follow-ship. Sometimes the major issue(s) is no longer the focus. The conflict is now the focus. Lines are drawn in the sand creating divides that are seldom bridged.

Disregarding the spirit of Christ and the mission of the church, however, is never right or productive. The prophet Isaiah admonish, "Come, let us reason together" (Isaiah 1:18). The Apostle Paul said, "And now I will show you the most excellent way" whereupon he launches into his discourse on love (I Corinthians 13).

Conflicted congregations dissipate their time and energies warring, thus they have little time or energy for ministry to others. Research by the Hartford Theological Seminary confirmed something that we already knew or at least suspected: churches with major conflict experience less church growth, produce fewer members going into vocational ministry, and have less positive influence in their community. And the reasons are self evident. When congregations lost their way they lose their spiritual effectiveness.

Seldom do healthy congregations emerge accidentally. They are the result of healthy clergy and lay church leaders who embody spiritual commitment, a high level of trust, shared leadership, genuine concern for the body of Christ, and personal investment in ministry to others. This is intentional, not accidental. Ministers and lay leaders pray for one another and are more concerned about being faithful to the opportunities for ministry around them than they are in "statistical success" or who gets the credit. Healthy church leaders mentor the younger brothers and sisters and are not obsessed over who gets the credit-or blame.

Let's wonder what might happen if time and energy expended in church conflict were channeled into a healthy ministry of mutual trust and respect based upon the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

I'm convinced that healthy ministers help produce healthy churches. Healthy churches help

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Offering C.A.R.E. for Caregivers

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Charles H. Chandler, D. Min., Executive Director
Bill Trimyer, D. Min., Editor
2641 Cromwell Road • Richmond, Virginia 23235
Phone: (804) 320-6463 • Fax: (804) 320-9178
E-mail: mtmfoundation@comcast.net
www.mtmfoundation.org

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