

# PATHWAYS FOR PASTORS

WINTER 2007

Brook Lane's quarterly newsletter for pastors ■ Deryl Fleming, Editor

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## Annual Seminar For Pastors

### January 24-25, 2008

"Pastor, Person and Persona: Who and Whose We Are" is the theme for the 2008 edition of Brook Lane's Annual Seminar for Pastors. As always, the purpose of the seminar is tending our souls and caring for our callings. Getting away and being with caring colleagues in worship, reflection and fellowship will restore your soul.

Guest preachers are Ginger Gaines Sorelli, Pastor of Capitol Hill United Methodist Church in Washington, DC, and Ron Foster, Pastor of Bethesda United Methodist Church in Bethesda, MD. Foster will be preaching and presenting on Thursday and Sorelli will be preaching on Friday.

The day and a half seminar is a best buy in continuing education. The \$45 fee includes a continental breakfast and a full lunch both days. We begin in the chapel with breakfast at 8:30 a.m. and worship at 9:00 a.m. Thursday's session will conclude at 3:30 p.m. and Friday we finish up with lunch.

One CEU credit is given to those who participate in the entire event. A registration form is found on page five.

### Our Mission Statement

As an expression of our Christian heritage, we are committed to utilizing our resources carefully and creatively to provide quality behavioral health services.

## Goodbye and Hello

So long, farewell, I hate to see me go. Nevertheless, I have decided to retire from Brook Lane at the end of January. My last day will be January 25, coinciding with my 17th and final Annual Seminar for Pastors.

For several years I have said that when I retire, it will be from my drive, not my job. Leaving home in the dark and getting home after dark, enough already.

My 16 years here have been a fitting culmination of my full time ministry, even as my years as a parish pastor were excellent preparation for my work here. In March I will begin a part time position as a pastoral associate at Burke Presbyterian Church in Burke, Virginia.

Being here has been such a privilege. To be invited to be a companion to people in the dark places of their lives is a high calling for pastors. To be given the privilege to be a pastor to pastors, better than that it does not get. I am grateful to David Rutherford, the CEO who hired me, to current CEO Lynn Rushing, my supervisor for most of my time here, and to the faith tradition of Brook Lane for providing me with this privilege.

I am also grateful for the support of my colleagues at Brook Lane. For most of us this is one good place to work, in large part, because of the people who work here.

My deep thanks, too, to those of you who have been in any and many ways supportive of my work. More than you know, you have fueled my ministry and nourished my soul. I continue to give thanks for your partnership in the gospel.

For all this and more, what other answer can I make but thanks and thanks.

# Travel Tips

Once again we pack a bag and head to Bethlehem, where life goes on and taxes are to be paid, and where we hope there to find a Messiah sing-along and join the chorus in “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those God favors.”

On the Advent journey we yearn to become “lost in wonder, love, and praise,” and not in mere activity. We hope not to become so distracted by shopping and services that we never make it to the barn out back. And we hope on arriving there to have some energy left with which to celebrate the birth of God, from which everything in human history comes.

To save us from our sins (“missing the mark” as to what life and Christmas are all about), “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Jesus came to be one with us that we might become one with him.

Etched in my mind when I became a pastor was Paul’s “all things to all people,” which I thought a proper script for one of Christ’s undershepherds. I still think that, unless one tries to take it too literally for anyone’s good, even God’s. It is one thing to step out of one’s own frame of reference and into the other’s frame of reference; it is quite another thing to “go along in order to get along.” Tempted to please, placate, and keep peace, a pastor is vulnerable to becoming a collection of other people’s expectations.

While at Christmas God became human, Jesus did not literally become all things to all people. He was too conservative for some and too liberal for others, too meek for the aggressive and too assertive for the passive, too engaged for some and too detached for others. Clear about his identity and his God, he had well defined boundaries. He knew his limits.

“All things to all people” is a proper poetic script for pastors, but taken literally, it becomes a tyrant. An ever present

temptation, it may be even more tempting during the season before us, when the life of the church and that of the family are accelerated to try to do everything. It is ironic that in this season it may be more difficult than usual to remember who and whose we are. With such high expectations and demands, how can one take time to be holy and whole? Only by faith and prayer, I think. I remember a friend and parishioner asking, “Why do I think I have to do before Christmas everything I have not done all year long?” I did not know the answer, but I identified with the question.

My prayer for you during this high and holy season is that you will take time to be whole and holy on the way to Bethlehem’s barn, to Egypt, and to wherever life takes you. A joyous journey, a merry Christmas, and a glad Epiphany.



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# Maps for the Journey

Gregory Boyd, *Is God to Blame?* Intervarsity, 2003, \$15. 0830823948.

This is a strong argument against a “blueprint worldview” which holds that God ordains everything that happens. The author locates natural evil not in a plan of God but in the enormous complexity of the cosmos. The author challenges interpretations of biblical texts which lend themselves to a “blueprint” mentality. The book is rather textbookish, but a good text for people who like to think they are rational. If your people who struggle with theodicy like Buechner, keep giving them Buechner. If they don’t like Buechner, try Boyd.

Mike Graves, *The Fully Alive Preacher*. Westminster John Knox, 2006. \$20. 0664230203.

This is my new choice for a preaching textbook. Tom Long says its “every page sings for joy.” Barbara Brown Taylor says it “reads more like a conversation with an old friend.” Graves identifies and explores four stages of sermon preparation. He suggests exercises and “sacraments,” offers questions for reflection and serves up a dazzling buffet of stories and excerpts. He believes that homiletical burnout is the result of preaching’s divorce from the preacher’s daily life and that the cure is the ordinary pleasures of daily life. His playful manner calls to mind an Ed Friedmann question for therapists, “Why let the Devil have all the fun?”

G. Scott Morris, Ed., *I am the Lord Who Heals You*. Abingdon, 2004, \$16. 0687066582.

This collection of 16 sermons by mostly well known preachers consists of reflections on brokenness and healing. The editor, an M.D., is founder and director of the largest faith-based, not-for-profit primary health clinic in the country. He has a good introduction on healing and our relationship with God, as well as one of the sermons. A leading rabbi has an excellent sermon on “The Healing Power of Community.” Known preachers include Brueggeman, Dunham, Forbes, Taylor, Lundblad and Coffin.

Sherwin Nuland, *The Art of Aging*. Random House, 2007, \$25. 1400064779.

The author’s thesis is that aging is an art, not a disease. While affirming being realistic about one’s limitations, he asserts that aging can offer extraordinary rewards. Nuland has been practicing medicine for four decades, and he brings to the table inspiring stories of people who have gotten it right, including Michael DeBakey, who stopped doing heart surgery at age 90 because there was so much else he needed to do.

Ann Packer, *Songs Without Words*. Knopf, 2007, \$25. 0375412813.

The author’s second novel is the story of a lifelong friendship threatened by one’s depression and the other’s daughter’s depression. The shadows of a long ago suicide linger, and the complexities of family myths and roles within families are explored. Packer expertly describes inpatient and outpatient psychiatric treatment and their stressful effect on family. She also weaves a wonderful and gripping story.

Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*. Jossey-Bass, 2004, \$23. 0787971006.

Palmer is concerned that we live “divided no more” and that we do not lose our souls in pursuit of roles. To respond to his concerns requires nurturing both solitude and community. He calls for “circles of trust” which are “spaces between us that honor the soul.” The ground rules are “no fixing, no saving, no advising, no setting each other straight.” Try that in your boards, councils, sessions and consistories, and see what happens. Palmer demonstrates soul work in community with good stories and great questions. This is a unique guide to the art of spiritual conversation.

Howard W. Stone, *Defeating Depression: Real Help for You and Those You Love*. Augsburg, 2007, \$18. 0806690315.

This is an excellent workbook, written by a therapist who himself suffered a major episode of depression for several months more than 35 years ago. In addition, he writes well. The subtitle tells it like it is. Every church library needs a copy, and every family that lives with depression could use one.

## **PAT'S PONDERINGS**

Today I turned the calendar to December 1, 2007. There is no escaping the reality that the winter season is upon us. Preparation for the holy days that many traditions celebrate this season is taking place in our homes, churches and on lawns. It is a season of reflection on the past year and on what may lie ahead in the year to come.

Personally I am having a much keener awareness that this is also the "winter" season of my own life as much as I may want to avoid that reality. This past week I attended a memorial service for a church member with whom I have shared events of birth and death in her own family. When I arrived home, there was a call from a sister that her sister-in-law's death was imminent. Two days later her obituary was in the paper. These are my peers, not the "older" generation.

By December 1st, usually I have begun to decorate the house with the trimmings of winter and Christmas. There is very little evidence of that as I sit and write this. What is different this year? Well, I have chosen different priorities as my own numbered days are inevitable. Instead, I have made time to talk with a sister who needed to process her own feelings about this sister-in-law's death and to talk to my son about my disappointed feelings when his own health issues did not permit him to be with us at Thanksgiving. I listened to a 90 year old aunt who is ready to move to the next realm of this journey called Life; she is weary, and all of her immediate family members have pre-deceased her.

Another priority has been not to allow myself to get caught up in the consumerism of the culture that shouts at all of us to buy and spend, to show our love for those near and dear to us. I believe that making time to listen, talk, be with those near and dear is much more important than any item I may purchase for them. I may choose to do that also, but maybe it will be in January when I send those cashews that Aunt Elizabeth loves to munch on in the evening, or the grocery cart that my son needs to move his groceries from his vehicle to his apartment to avoid the pain of carrying them.

I want this season of my life to be lived engaging in what has value for my spirit as well

as those whose lives I touch daily. So, if you choose, join me in choosing to live life by the values that Christ brought into the world for each of us to follow: to speak up for peace when war may be the most popular method of "settling the score," to "judge not, that you be not judged" when it comes to differing lifestyles, to be the Good Samaritan even though you might be late for that meeting, movie or shopping expedition, and to live peacefully and thoughtfully in this "hurry up" culture.

Patricia Robinson

## **Pastors at Brook Lane**

You are welcome here. Patients seem to enjoy saying to us, "My pastor came to visit me."

Visiting hours at the hospital are 6:30-8:30 p.m. daily. If you need to visit at another time, you may by calling the nurses' station for an appointment. Otherwise, you may have to wait for your parishioner to complete a therapy appointment.

To see a patient in the child and adolescent unit an appointment is the only way to be sure of the patient's availability. The need for confidentiality is such that we ask for a patient's ID number before we offer any information.

## **Excursions**

### **(Ongoing offerings to you)**

1. Support to pastors in crisis (on an occasional basis or as many as five sessions without charge to you).
2. Five sessions without charge to members of a pastor's family.
3. Consultation on matters of church and ministry.
4. Consultation on matters of mental illness or emotional disorders.
5. Referral information regarding Brook Lane or other services you or members of your family, staff, or congregation may need.
6. Assistance with ministering to members of your congregation who may be patients at Brook Lane.
7. Confidentiality in all of the above.

## Tips to Save Your Team

Patrick Lencioni's bestselling *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* was originally intended for corporate audiences but has found a home in groups ranging from professional sports teams to local schools to churches. Here is a quick overview of the five core dysfunctions as well as tips to revitalize your church or group.

### 1. Absence of Trust

Have every team member explain 1) where they grew up; 2) how many kids were in their family, and 3) what was the most difficult or important challenge of their childhood. By simply describing these relatively innocuous attributes or experiences, members get comfortable with being open and learn to relate on a more personal level.

### 2. Fear of Conflict

It is critical to select an individual to mine for conflict during team meetings, a facilitation skill that requires an individual to extract buried disagreements within a team and bring them to the surface. The "miner" must remain objective during meetings and be committed to the conflict until it is resolved.

### 3. Lack of Commitment

At the end of a meeting, the team must explicitly describe and settle on the agreements and decisions that have been made so that there is no room for ambiguity in what they subsequently do and say.

### 4. Avoidance of Accountability

Have team members identify the answers to two questions about every member, excluding themselves: 1) What is the single most important behavioral characteristic or quality demonstrated by this person that contributes to the strength of our team? and 2) What is the single most important behavioral characteristic or quality demonstrated by this person that can sometimes derail the team? Once everyone has finished jotting down their answers, the facilitator starts by putting the leader of the team up first.

### 5. Inattention to Results

Collectively, the team must clarify what they need to achieve, who needs to deliver what, and how everyone must behave in order to succeed. Teams that are more willing to commit publicly to specific results are more likely to work with a passionate desire to achieve those results.

([www.tabelgroup.com](http://www.tabelgroup.com))

## REGISTRATION FORM

YES, I WILL ATTEND THE ANNUAL SEMINAR FOR PASTORS, JANUARY 24-25, 2008.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Church \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form with a check for \$45.00, payable to Brook Lane, P.O.Box 1945, Hagerstown, Maryland, 21742-1945.

# Trail Guides

*After the dead are buried, and the maimed have left the hospitals and started their new lives, after the physical pain of grief has become, with time, a permanent wound in the soul, a sorrow that will last as long as the body does, after the horrors become nightmares and sudden daylight memories, then comes the transcendent and common bond of human suffering, and with that comes forgiveness, and with forgiveness comes love...*

Andre Dubus

*A whine is a form of grumbling, and a lament is a debate with God. In a lament, the speaker demands that God be faithful. A lament is a statement on behalf of creation, a yearning for God to heal creation; a grumble is a complaint against creation.*

Art Ross

*Though Mother Theresa longed for joy in her faith, she knew that her feelings were not the point. Perhaps in an age of prosperity preaching and happy-clappy worship, in which faith is so often equated with feeling, Mother Theresa's example again brings us the word we need.*

Christian Century

*Leave your good Christian life behind, and follow Christ.*

Garrison Keillor

*If you want to do better exegesis, become a deeper person.*

Brevard Childs

*The church says that it wants better preaching – and really means it. But there is in this demand some bitter irony for the preacher. To preach well requires time, reflection, solitude; and the church makes other demands of the preacher that annihilate these three requirements.*

Joseph Sittler

*Most learning is not acquiring new insights: It's letting go of the old ones.*

Joan Chittister

*If words could describe it, there would be no reason to paint.*

Edward Hopper

*Human nature hasn't changed. We can't improve ourselves.*

Alan Greenspan

*One never knows, do one?*

Fats Waller

*Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.*

Vaclav Havel

*Remembrance is sufficient of the beauty we have seen.*

E. B. White

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E-mail us at [curt.milller@brooklane.org](mailto:curt.milller@brooklane.org). Thanks!

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