

PATHWAYS FOR PASTORS

SPRING 2007

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

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Day of Conversation for Pastors

April 19, 2007

The Spring Day of Conversation for Pastors is Thursday, April 19, 2007. It is designed to be a Sabbath, a day away for reflecting among caring colleagues. The agenda is conversation about our lives and ministries against the backdrop of a book.

For the sake of conversation, the group is limited to 12 participants. As I write, three openings remain.

Who Are You to Say? Establishing Pastoral Authority in Matters of Faith by Dale Rosenberger, a pastor and author, is the book selection for the day. The author says that the church has never been to a place like this before and goes on to describe the authority crisis we have all experienced. He offers directives as to how to speak as one with authority regarding Christ, the church, the Bible, sacraments and ministry. This is an important book for our postmodern context.

As always, we begin with worship at 9:00 a.m., following a continental breakfast at 8:30 a.m. We will conclude at 3:00 p.m. The fee of \$25 includes breakfast, a full lunch and a copy of the book. 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.

Ministry of Mental Health Awareness

For some people May is "the merry month." On the other hand, May is designated Mental Health Awareness Month. As many as one in five Americans will likely experience an emotional or mental disorder at some point in life. You can guess how many lives will be affected. Many anxiety and depression disorders remain hidden from congregations and pastors. Merely acknowledging that they exist is itself a ministry.

You are encouraged to do this in whatever way you choose. To make it easy, two written pieces are provided on page four for a front and back bulletin insert or for a one sided insert.

Annual Seminar for Pastors

January 24-25, 2008

National Anxiety Disorders Screening Day

Wednesday, May 2, 2007 – 4:00 p.m.

Free and confidential screenings
Literature and information
Registration is not required.

Event held at

Meadowbrook Community Room
18714 North Village Shopping Center

Hagerstown, Maryland

For more information call
301-733-0331 ext. 228.

Travel Tips

Possibility thinking is a biblical idea (“with men and women it is impossible, but with God all things are possible” – Mark 10:27). Limitation thinking is also a biblical concept (“One should not think more highly of oneself than one ought to think...” – Romans 12:3).

Some religious people embrace possibility thinking and resist limitation thinking. Sometimes they call it optimism, sometimes faith or hope. Sometimes it is denial. Possibility thinking has its place, but it also has its limits. Around terminal illness, e.g., advanced pancreatic cancer, it prevents loved ones from the candid near death conversations they need to have.

A much loved nursery worker in our congregation was in her last days. I did not know it, I suspect she did. She was known and loved even by people who did not have nursery age children. Her consistently cheerful countenance was so contagious, people would stop by the nursery to get a dose of it. She was the same on her death bed. I was faithful to visit her, but I lacked the wisdom to invite her to step out of her cheerleader role and be honest about death. I played into her denial (or was it mine?), and we pretended tomorrow would always come. She taught me how not to do it, i.e., ministry to the dying.

Later, sometimes sooner, we all die. People lucky enough to get a warning deserve the right to a hearing on their hopes and fears about death, their limitations to overcome it.

Some embrace possibility thinking well past its limits. Given Sarah’s conception of Isaac when she was 90 years old, one has to say that with God all things are possible. On the other hand, how many 90 year olds do you know who have given birth?

A patient who had been diagnosed with a bipolar disorder two years earlier was still praying for a cure. My efforts to help her think of acceptance of a chronic disease as an act of faith did not satisfy. “You do believe in miracles, don’t you?” she asked. “Yes,” I replied, “but when it comes to bipolar disorders, there are not enough miracles to go around.”

Most pastors know the language of possibility, the dialect of miracles. All need to know the language of limitation, the eloquence of silence. A ten year old dying with leukemia told his mother that he liked visits from the pastor because the pastor did not think he had to talk. He often greeted the boy by saying, “I’m going to sit with you for awhile. If you want to talk, we will. If not, we can just be quiet.” What do you say in the face of terminal disease anyway? Not much.

The feeling that it is up to us to look after others, to take on their burdens, to always be there for them for whatever the need is, is not good for them or for us. We are pastors, not messiahs, not even social workers, case managers, therapists, employment agencies, housing experts or legal advocates. We are pastors, a role brimming with possibilities and with limitations.

A pastor came looking for me after visiting a parishioner at our hospital. Red faced with frustration, he said of his congregant, “He makes me feel so helpless.” I replied, “You are not just feeling helpless, you are helpless” (to resolve his issues, to heal all his diseases, to make the pain go away).

The young son of a colleague told his friend about his dad’s recently granted Ph.D. “You mean your dad is a doctor?” he asked. “Not the kind that helps people,” was the reply. Sometimes we do, sometimes we don’t help people. In some ways we can, in some ways we can’t. God be thanked for knowing when we can and when we can’t.

Brook Lane

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Pat Robinson

Pastoral Counselor & Associate Chaplain

Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor

Maps for the Journey

Rachel Basch, *The Passion of Reverend Nash*. W.W. Norton, 2003, \$24. 0393057682.

This novel explores faith and family, loss and grief through the story of two sisters, one of whom is a pastor. Jordanna's ministry is blessed and a blessing until a member she has counseled disappears and a member of the youth group gets pregnant. Abby, Jordanna's sister, is a high school guidance counselor. Their complex relationship and the interplay of religion and psychology make for an intriguing journey. The author knows well church and ministry, how good it can be and how difficult it can become. Near mid-point of the novel is a sermon worth the price of the book and scattered throughout are keen theological observations.

Dave Burchett, *When Bad Christians Happen to Good People*. Waterbrook, 2002, \$12. 1578564905.

Here's a lover's quarrel with the church written by a layman who knows Christians have failed each other, beginning with his disabled daughter being banned from the church nursery. A media professional, Burchett also has prescribed how we might begin to reverse the damage. One of his suggestions is to ask, Would Jesus Spend His Time on This? The question and the book would prompt lively discussion in a Sunday School class.

Daniel Gottlieb, *Letters to Sam: A Grandfather's Lessons on Love, Loss and the Gifts of Life*. Sterling, 2006, \$18. 1402728832.

A psychologist and family therapist, the author has been paralyzed from the neck down for more than twenty-five years. His wise and warm letters were written to his six year old grandson, who has a form of autism, in hopes that Sam would one day be able to read them and, through them, get to know his grandfather. Gottlieb says, "Books taught me a bit about psychology. But paralysis taught me to sit still and keep my ears and heart open so I could listen." His wonderful stories opened my ears and heart.

Peter Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What*. Alban, 2006, \$18. 1566993288.

Following the lead of his mentor, Ed Friedman, Steinke describes in a most engaging manner family systems theory at work in congregations. This is an enlarged presentation of the day he recently spent at Brook Lane's annual seminar for pastors. The substance and style of the book make it a hands-on manual in narrative form.

Jon Sweeney, *Born Again and Again: Surprising Gifts of a Fundamentalist Childhood*. Paraclete, 2005, \$20. 1557254311.

This affectionate critique of the author's faith of his childhood is a clear and even-handed description of the strengths and weaknesses of Christian fundamentalism. It works for those who grew up in or around fundamentalism and for those who did not. It would be a guide for individual or group work in spiritual autobiography.

Dale Allison, *The Luminous Dusk: Finding God in the Deep, Still Places*. Eerdmans, 2006, \$14. 0802832180.

This wide ranging collection of essays is a provocative cultural critique and a profound spiritual guide. Against the backdrop of a loss of a sense of wonder, the author contends that our disconnect from the natural world has dampened certain religious feelings. He calls for a retreat from our addiction to noise and a return to a proper quietness. Allison draws on other religious traditions and philosophies to inform and affirm the biblical story. His essay on the Bible is a convincing call for literacy in a culture where people are reading less and less. His final two chapters on prayer are so good, they should be read aloud to all congregations. "We do not get to the deep end until we learn that prayer is much more than our own speech," he says. Throughout these essays the author points us to the darkness and stillness where God seems to like to hide.

Mental Health Awareness

“To every one of my oppressors
I am contemptible;
Loathsome to my neighbors
To my friends, a thing of fear.
Those who see me in the street
Hurry past me;
I am forgotten, as good as dead in their hearts,
Something discarded.”

Psalm 31:11-12

After more than a decade around persons with emotional disorders and mental illness, I know many of them feel as did the psalmist. They have told me so.

Granted some of their feelings may be due to their perception, but for them perception is their reality. And more than perception is at work. The reality of the unwarranted stigma about emotional and mental illness lives on.

I suspect people back away from the emotionally and mentally distraught because of fear. We are afraid of what we do not understand. In addition, we are afraid of feeling helpless, and anxiety, depression and mental illness can quickly render you helpless. I remember a parishioner who came by the office to tell me he was no longer coming to prayer meeting because we continued to pray for people who never got well, two of whom were mentally ill.

The goal of Christian caring is nonanxious presence, staying connected without becoming anxious. Years ago a severely depressed retired pastor came to Brook Lane. A lifelong friend of his, also a retired pastor, faithfully came to visit. I said more to the visitor than the patient did. Only after coming out of the depression could the former patient say how important the “staying connected” visits were for him.

What can you do for persons who are so isolated by their illness? Become informed about the illness. Stay connected through brief visits, cards, calls, e-mail. Pray for yourself and the one who is sick. Be a listener and encourager for the family members.

An Inviting Church

“I believe with all my heart that if mental illness destroyed the body, it would be the number one health crisis in America,” says W. Walter Menninger of the Menninger’s Clinic & Society. One family in four is directly affected by mental illness. Since mental illness is frequently tagged with a stigma and kept in the closet—a self-perpetuating cycle—it provides unusual challenges to churches. The chronic nature of many mental illnesses affords another set of challenges. It is easier to rally compassion, casseroles and prayer for acute illness, be it mental or physical.

Recently I accepted a pastor’s invitation to preach on depression. Afterwards a number of people identified themselves or family members as former or current sufferers of depression. Later a distinguished man came to the pastor’s office and informed the pastor that he was in treatment, was making progress and would be willing to talk with others about his depression and treatment.

How can the church be open and welcoming to people with mental illness or emotional disorders? Listen to them. Validate their feelings and do not try to cheer them up. Occasionally say you do *not* know how they feel. Never say you *do* know how they feel. Refrain from offering advice or admonitions. Telling a depressed person to be more positive or active or prayerful is comparable to telling a person with a broken neck to keep his chin up or a person with a broken back to stand tall.

If in the presence of persons with mental illness you feel helpless, good. You *are* helpless to make them feel better. You may help them get better if you will just be with them. Medicine and talk therapy will probably help them get better *and* feel better.

Spirituality and Mental Illness

Spirituality often plays a central role in helping people with mental illness cope and recover. Spirituality can be experienced in the context of an established religion, but it doesn't have to be. Whatever concept of a higher power feels comfortable – be it God, an Energy Force, or a Creator – can give one a sense of having a meaningful place in the universe.

Many studies have shown that an active sense of spirituality is associated with increased happiness, hope, and life satisfaction, along with decreased levels of anxiety and loneliness. Spirituality can help people cope with the onset of mental illness and can function as a significant source of strength that facilitates recovery.

The Catholic faith provides one fascinating example of the inter-section between spirituality and mental health recovery. Saint Dymphna is the patron saint of those afflicted with mental and nervous disorders. The earliest accounts of the veneration of Saint Dymphna date from the middle of the 13th century, and this devotion continues today. She is an inspiration and a profound comfort to the thousands who request her intercession in the lives of people experiencing mental illness.

From Thresholds Open Door
www.thresholds.org
(St. Dymphna's Feast Day is May 15.)

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.

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.
8. Preaching or teaching at your church as time allows.
9. A day of prayer and conversation for church staff.
10. Conflict consultation.

REGISTRATION FORM

YES, I WILL ATTEND THE DAY OF CONVERSATION FOR PASTORS, APRIL 19, 2007.

Name _____ Church _____

Address _____ Phone _____

Please return this form with a check for \$25.00, payable to Brook Lane, P.O.Box 1945, Hagerstown, Maryland, 21742-1945.

Trail Guides

The main point of prayer is, in essence, to express and establish some kind of connection with God. This connection may take on many different forms, but when all the external facets are taken out, it is as if the one who comes before God to pray is saying, "Hello, I'm here."

Adin Steinsaltz

Our authority for ministry, like that of the laity, is rooted in our baptism.

Dale Rosenberger

My own family contains grandchildren baptized in a Presbyterian church who participate in both a Catholic parish and a Presbyterian congregation. Are they Catholics or Presbyterians? I think the answer is yes.

John Buchanan

Art Buchwald taught us how to live and love and laugh and, in the end, how to die with grace and humor.

Tom Brokaw

Healing is not a science, but the intuitive art of wooing the body.

W. H. Auden

The true art of memory is the art of attention.

Samuel Johnson

If many remedies are prescribed for an illness, you may be sure that the illness has no cure.

Anton Chekhov

The writer's secret is not inspiration – for it is never clear where that comes from – but stubbornness, endurance.

Orham Pamuk

My formula for success has three elements: the talent you're given, the hard work you do to get better at whatever it is that you do, and a certain amount of luck.

Ed Bradley

Grumbling is apparently endemic to human beings and, among some, epidemic.

Peter Steinke

Sometimes you have to suffer as much from the church as you do for the church.

Flannery O'Connor

Nothing in life is more exhilarating than being shot at and missed.

Winston Churchill

All faith is autopsy.

Soren Kierkegaard

A Continuum of Mental Health Programs
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