



PARAGRAPHS FOR PARTNERS

2024 – Issue #2



From the Executive Minister
Rev. Dr. James Kelsey

Timely Leadership for Our Churches

The Times They Are A-Changin'

As the present now
Will later be past
The order is rapidly fadin'
And the first one now
Will later be last
For the times they are a-changin'
- Bob Dylan.

There was a time in our nation's history when you would be better equipped for ministry if you owned your own horse; ministers traveled from church to church on horseback. In the 40s and 50s at Southern Seminary, the chief qualification to pastor a weekend church was ownership of a car; very few students had cars. Those who did were guaranteed a preaching position, regardless of aptitude, skills, or personal charisma.

What churches seek in a pastor—what qualifies one to be a pastor—changes over time.

I recently attended the “Religious Workforce Project Denominational Consultation” at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington DC. Over the past 4 years they have studied trends in Protestant clergy, things such as clergy age trends (they are trending older) and interest in bivocational ministry (it is increasing). They did research into what clergy feel they need that they did not get in seminary. They also looked into what competencies pastors say they rely upon in their ministry.

What Pastors Need for Their Ministry

The research drew upon interviews with pastors from a wide range of protestant traditions, from Church of the Brethren to NYC Episcopalians. Regardless of the traditions to which they belonged, most of the clergy leaders talked about five key areas: administration and management, technology skills, soft skills for leadership, counseling and pastoral care, and facilities management.

Strikingly, theology-related areas, both classical and applied, ranked below those listed above. There was a time, I can remember it, when pastors were seen as the resident theologian and Bible scholar. They were to engage, mostly, in priestly duties—such as preaching, teaching, counseling, and pastoral care. Churches members may still list these priestly duties as their priorities, **but pastors no longer experience** the expectations of parishioners in this way.

I want to unpack “soft skills for leadership.” The Wesley study provided an excellent clarification of what “soft skills” involve. These are skills that are not specific to any kind of career, also known as “transferable skills,” “people skills,” or “interpersonal skills.” They include the ability to: communicate clearly and effectively, work well with others, collaborate, adapt as needed, manage one’s time effectively, be a team player, be creative, think critically, and have a good work ethic.

These are all skills that seem particularly appropriate for church leadership roles, including the ability to:

- inspire others to achieve shared goals and objectives
- set a clear vision and communicate it effectively
- create a culture of accountability and excellence
- coach or mentor others
- solve problems
- manage conflict well
- delegate tasks
- have high emotional intelligence (including self-awareness and ability to do professional self-care)

Note, this is a bit far afield from resident theologian and Bible scholar.

All of this indicates that it isn’t easy being a pastor these days. A wide range of demands are made on clergy, some of which they did not anticipate and for which they are not prepared.

Some Observations

I see, at least, several implications for our congregations.

One, the demands on a pastor are so diverse that it would be difficult for any one person to possess significant competencies in all of them. So lay people need to step up and shoulder more of the work of the church. We must give up the illusion that “the pastor can do it all,” and pastors must give up the aspiration that they can be all things to all people. As Jethro advised Moses (Exodus 18:13—27), pastors must share the workload if they are going to go the distance. Pastors need help. Sometimes church leaders, again like Moses, need someone to help hold up their arms when the work is arduous (Exodus 17:10—13).

Two, one conclusion of the Wesley study was that seminaries cannot provide the breadth of learning pastors need; denominations will need to pick up where formal theological education leaves off. In our denomination, that would be the Region. Regions will need to continue the ongoing formation of pastors.

This leads into a third observation. These “soft skills’ that are becoming increasingly important for our pastors cannot be adequately taught in a classroom. It is like learning to drive a car. You can sit through classes and read the book, but you become competent by driving—perhaps not skillfully at first. So it is with soft skills. We grow in these skills by taking what we know about ourselves and others and then see what we can learn from our experiences. We take what we know about group dynamics/emotional systems and then lay that schema over the life of our local communities of faith. In other words, our pastors must become lifelong learners as they build evolving competencies in the midst of the shifting demands of ministry.

We need to recognize the challenges of church leadership and encourage our leaders as they evolve in their skills as the world around them shifts. Timely leadership. It is an evolving target.

Blessings,
Jim Kelsey

CELEBRATIONS & CONCERNS: **Rev. Robert Lewis** (Retired, Chautauqua Association) died 2/5/24 *
Pastor Terry Ramsey (Retired, Madison Association) died 8/12/23



ABCNYS reminds member churches to pray for one another, especially in times of pastoral transition. If your congregation wishes to invite ABCNYS to provide support to your church's search committee needs, please contact Rev. Jim Kelsey (315/863-7336, jkelsey@abc-nys.org).



LEADERSHIP CHANGES

Christopher Davis from Interim to Pastor, United Ch of Auburn 2/25/24
Michael Dickinson from FBC Corning & TABC Comm Ch Big Flats 4/28/24
Steve James from Marcy Comm Ch
Rickey Fuller to Pastor, Marcy Comm Ch
Kevin Grish to Interim, Fleming Fed Ch
Guytrell Johnson to Pastor, FBC Newburgh 4/21/24
Steve Matteson from FBC Macedon to Retirement 2/29/24
Philip Pratt from Interim to Pastor, FBC Falconer
Bruce Davis from Ebenezer BC Newburgh 11/23
Robert Searle from Interim to Pastor, FBC Wolcott
Carolyn Peeler, Antioch BC Bedford Hills, Ordination Recognized 2/22/24

DATES TO REMEMBER

May 5, 2024	-- WEGO Association Spring Meeting
	-- Iroquois Association Spring Meeting
	-- Adirondack Association Spring Meeting
May 27, 2024	-- ABCNYS Office Closed
July 4, 2024	-- ABCNYS Office Closed
September 2, 2024	-- ABCNYS Office Closed
September 22-24, 2024	-- Ministers Council Retreat @ Notre Dame Retreat Center, Canandaigua
October 11&12, 2024	-- ABCNYS Biennial @ Tabernacle BC Utica
November 15-17, 2024	-- ABY Convention @ Crowne Plaza, Syracuse

Intentional Mission Giving

Earlier this year, the Region sent out a report to all our churches showing how much support they contributed to American Baptist Churches of New York State (the Region) in 2023. A slim majority of our churches contribute to the various ministries of the American Baptist family. Each year, when our churches receive this report, some of them are surprised to find that they contributed very little or nothing to Regional ministry. (If you would like a copy of this report, contact Jim Kelsey at jkelsey@abc-nys.org.)

I get calls where folks say things like: "Why isn't my church on the list? We gave \$XXX to ABC missions, and the Region received none of it? I didn't realize that."

We have created a narrated PowerPoint presentation to help churches understand how to direct their mission dollars in such a way that they are funding the ministries they care about. You can find this narrated video at <https://www.abc-nys.org/giving-to-the-region.html>.

Region staff (Jim Kelsey jkelsey@abc-nys.org & Jerrod Hugenot jhugenot@abc-nys.org) are always willing to talk with your church about how you can fund the ministries you care about.



Ministers Council Retreat at Notre Dame Retreat Center in Canandaigua
 Sunday, September 22nd to Tuesday the 24th with the Rev. Jim Stone
 “Abiding in the Vine: Growing Good Fruit,” based on John 15.
 This is something you do not want to miss. Details soon.



Patricia Ludwig, ABCNYS Ministers Council President
butterflypreacher@juno.com 716-433-0976 (h) or 716-266-5770 (c)

AMERICAN BAPTIST
 MISSION SUPPORT

AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES
 OF NEW YORK STATE
 THROUGH MARCH 2024 & 2023

	United Mission	Annual Offerings	Institutions, Specifics & Targeted	Total ABMS
Received 2024	45,290	48,518	39,740	133,548
Received 2023	43,894	49,261	42,905	136,060
\$ Ahead (Behind)	1,396	(743)	(3,165)	(2,512)
% Ahead (Behind)	3.18	(1.51)	(7.38)	(1.85)



Vick and Pathfinder Camp and Conference Ministries

T.E.A.M: Together Everyone Achieves More!

“A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” Ecclesiastes 4:12b.

CAMP VICK

We are sweeping away the remnants of winter, testing the NEW water system and making all the necessary repairs to be open for Family Camp Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day. We continue refurbishing the house to be ready for a caretaker. Support this ministry by spreading the word about the caretaker position and helping with general clean up around camp. Then get your camper or tent ready to spend some time with God at Camp Vick!

PATHFINDER

The new water treatment system has been installed, thanks to David Malone and John Granata who spent many hours preparing and then two days in freezing temperatures putting it all together. Septic system upgrades are happening now.

Winter was not kind to the aging kitchen linoleum floor, making the need to replace it critical. We plan for this to happen after the Youth Retreat, May 17-19. Volunteers will be needed!

PROGRAMS

At Pathfinder, Children’s camp dates, Youth Retreat, Intergenerational Programs and Freestyle Camping are all listed on the website, vpccministries.org . You will find registration forms and scholarship applications there also. There are programs for all ages, so please encourage your children, youth, adults & friends to attend camp this summer!

Do you know that your church can rent Pathfinder Lodge or Camp Vick for a Saturday picnic? Activities abound and rates are reasonable. Dates are filling up, so reserve yours soon by contacting us at vpccministries@gmail.com.

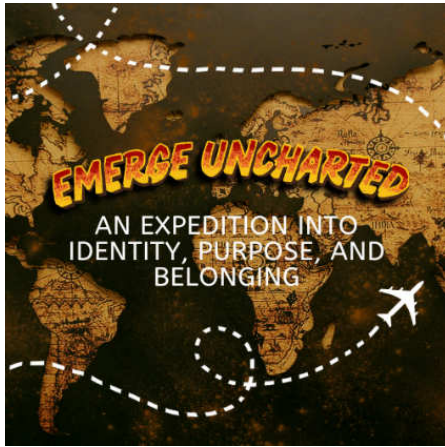
MORE WAYS YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

- Do you know anyone who would like to work on staff at Pathfinder this summer, especially lifeguards? Or manage Camp Vick for our family campers? Please encourage them to contact me.
- Be a volunteer! Do you like to cook? Are you a spiritual leader? Do you have medical skills? Could you mentor children as a cabin counselor? Spend a week at Pathfinder!
- Do you have maintenance skills? Plumbing or carpentry? Are you handy with a rake or a mop? Join a work day at either site! Some special projects at Pathfinder: May 4 & 11 – installing new toilets & fixing leaks; May 25 & 27 – work on the kitchen floor; June 1 & 8 – carpentry repairs to Fairbrother, replacing Cottage window; June 15 & 22 – setting up waterfront, prepping food to freeze for summer.
- “Let it Flow”, the volunteer fundraising campaign to support the numerous water needs at both sites is still seeking contributions. Emphasis in 2024 is to replace the bathrooms in Conklin Lodge. We are making good progress toward the goal of \$20,000. Consider a special gift and watch for other ways to be involved.
- Your donations of money, gift cards and goods are essential to support our Christian camping programs. There is a list of specific needs for both sites on the website.

Please check the website, www.vpccministries.org for information about our summer programs. Or contact me at vpccministries@gmail.com. I love to talk about our camps!

Above all else, please pray for God’s blessings for our Christian camping ministries.

Marilyn Malone, VPCCMinistries, Interim CEO



SPRING YOUTH RETREAT
MAY 17-19, 2024
PATHFINDER LODGE, COOPERSTOWN NY

Created by our late friend Keith Griffin and the Adirondack Association of American Baptist Churches NYS, the annual Spring Retreat has been held at Pathfinder Lodge for years. Open to all youth, youth groups, youth organizations and campus clubs, this weekend retreat is designed to refresh the Spirit and help youth grow in faith together.

Grades 7-College Level are invited with their leaders to join us for worship, music, campfires, Bible studies and fun.

Theme: Emerge Uncharted: An expedition into identity, purpose and belonging.

Registration: \$125 per youth, \$75 adult. (For every 7 youth in a youth group, 1 adult's registration is free!). All meals and lodging included in registration cost.

For more information or to register: <mailto:vpccministries@gmail.com>, hailiemcasey@gmail.com

"So that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" -- Ephesians 4:14-15

2024 ABCNYS Biennial
Rev. Dr. Leon Runner
Chairperson, Biennial Planning Committee

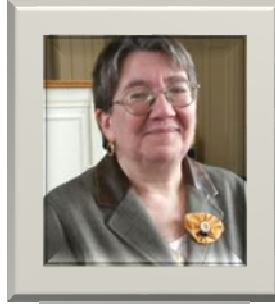
"Shepherds of God's Mysteries" is the theme of our **2024 biennial gathering**. We will meet together as our New York State American Baptist family on October 11th and 12th at Tabernacle Baptist Church in Utica. The details that I can confirm for you will include a pre-biennial service project on Friday afternoon. Specific details are coming soon, but why not plan to come early and make your presence felt in the Utica community? Our opening worship Friday evening will be highlighted by a message from our Executive Minister, Dr. Jim Kelsey.

Saturday will be a day filled with workshops, worship, and (of course) a business meeting. The workshops will include "The Mystery of Being", "The Mystery of Church Transitions: When a Pastor Leaves" "The Mystery of Inclusion", and "The Mystery of Civility". (More workshops are being proposed—keep checking for updates.)

Our Scriptural foundation is 1 Corinthians 4:1 *"Think of us this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries."*

See you in Utica on October 11th!





Forty Four Years to Celebrate!

Mary Schwarz began serving with American Baptist Churches of New York State 44 years ago; now she is retiring...and we are throwing a party!



WHEN: Saturday, August 10th, from 3:00 to 6:00 pm

WHERE: Theodore's Restaurant, 3231 Seneca Turnpike, Canastota NY

WHO: Anyone who has appreciated and enjoyed Mary's ministry among us in the Region

COST: \$30 per person buffet.
(Please include additional funds if you would like to make a gift to Mary)

PROGRAM: Formal remarks will begin about 4:30 pm.

- We are collecting photos to create a photo montage. If you have pictures of Mary and her time at ABCNYS, please send them **by July 15th** to:
Laura Palada
PO Box 216
Gilbertsville NY 13776
Email: laurapalada65@gmail.com
Cell phone: 607-287-5484
- We are collecting video greetings to share with Mary as well. Please send a digital video of no more than 2-1/2 minutes in mp4 file format **by July 15th** to Jerrod Hugenot at:
jhugenot@abc-nys.org
Cell phone: 518.380-4510

Register online at <https://www.abc-nys.org/retirement-celebration.html>

Or **reservations** can be sent to:
Lillian Cabral
4002 NYS Rte. 370
Cato NY 13033
cabral.ld45@yahoo.com

Payment (payable to ABCNYS)
should be sent to:
ABCNYS/Party
3218 James Street
Syracuse NY

GROWTH POINTS

With Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D.

Know Your Strengths

Do you hope to be a better leader this year? If so, you must first lead yourself. More and more ministry leaders must learn to lead themselves if they plan to lead their church, ministry, or organization well.

So, where do you start?

A common question is “Should I work on my weaknesses or work from my strengths?”

It’s a difficult question since most of us know our weaknesses more than our strengths. We realize what we’re not good at more than what we’re good at doing.

While it’s tempting to work on our weaknesses, the best results come from knowing and working from our strengths.

To discover your strengths, try the following.

Obtain Feedback

Feed back comes from two sources: results and outside observers.

First, analyze past results.

Look back over the last year or two and ask yourself several questions: “Where have I found joy? What have I done that produced expected results? Where have I observed myself as competent? Incompetent?” An honest appraisal of your leadership will show where you have strengths and weaknesses.

Second, seek other opinions.

Ask those with whom you work to tell you what you do well and not so well. If they have safety to be honest with you, listen to what they say. Their feedback will affirm what you’ve already found. In all cases the views of others will help clarify strengths and weaknesses in your own mind.

Take Action

Home in on your strengths by doing the following.

1. Direct your work toward your strengths.

As far as possible, place yourself where your strengths can shine. In some cases this is as simple as redirecting your time or actions so your strengths are better utilized. In other situations it may mean changing jobs or roles.

2. Improve your strengths.

If you put time into improving your weaknesses, you'll only become good enough to "not be incompetent," but your weaknesses will never become your strengths.

In most situations it's best to staff against your weaknesses by obtaining help from others, while working to improve your already known strengths.

3. Learn how you work.

Your strengths and weaknesses can be modified, but they are not likely to change.

Each person utilizes their strengths in particular ways (i.e., how they work). For example, some work well in groups, while others perform best alone. Some are good with details, while others are better at seeing the big picture. Some prefer noisy rooms, while others appreciate quiet surroundings.

How you work is a strength that is often overlooked. Determining not only your skill strengths, but also your work strengths, will help you become a better leader.

What are you good at doing (skill strengths)?

How are you good at doing them (work strengths)?

If you know and utilize this knowledge, you'll be a better leader this year.

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GROWTH POINTS

With Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D.

Reaching Secular People

For over sixty years, George G. Hunter, III, has studied how to reach secular people with the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. The following is a summary of his major discoveries.

Churches that reach secular people...

1. Know that people who are not disciples are lost.

People who are not following Christ cannot find abundant life by themselves. They are lost and need to be found. As Donald McGavran said, "It's God's will that his lost children be found and enfolded into local churches."

2. Know that lost people matter to God.

"Authentic evangelism," notes one pastor, "flows from a mindset that acknowledges the ultimate value of people—forgotten people, lost people, wondering people. The highest value is to love them, serve them, and reach them."

3. See their church as a mission to lost people rather than a gathered colony of the faithful.

The local church's main business is mission rather than maintenance; not nurturing Christians but discipling non-Christians. The local church is not called to renewal before reaching out but reaches out in obedience to begin renewal.

4. Have high expectations of their members.

Churches that reach secular people expect their people to worship regularly, give generously, study scripture diligently participate in small groups, ministry with their gifts, and share their faith among family and friends.

5. Know what to change and what to preserve.

Churches that reach secular people are slow to change their theology, but they are quick to change the cultural forms and styles that communicate their theology.

6. Understand unchurched people.

The congregation is taught how non-Christians think. People are encouraged to engage in conversation with non-christian friends, family, and associates. They know they must understand unchurched people in order to reach them.

7. Accept unchurched people.

People understand that, just as they were once accepted in their own sinfulness, the church is called to reflect God's posture toward sinners— acceptance and compassion. Acceptance is often a prerequisite before unchurched people will consider a new lifestyle. Secular people desire to belong before they believe.

8. Use music that is S.L.A.M.

Effective evangelistic churches know what music their secular target audience appreciates. They make celebratuvw worship a priority by focusing on making a S.L.A.M. dunk, that is, in the Style, Language, Aesthetics, and Music of the non-Christians they desire to reach.

9. Start new ministries.

No one church or ministry can reach everyone. It takes different churches and different ministries to reach different people. Thus, churches that reach secular people start new programs, groups, and ministries on a regular basis.

10. Are focused on sending their people out in mission.

The church is concerned for people beyond its own ministry area. They support missions and missionaries, send their people on short-term mission trips, and give generously to take the gospel to non-Christian people's around the world.

Questions to Ask and Answer

In which of these ten insights does your church excel?

In which do you find your church struggling?

What is one step you can take this year to position your church to better reach secular people?

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GROWTH POINTS

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Building an Evangelistic Church

Researchers agree that most growing churches in the USA do so from transfer growth. There are, however, churches that are considered High Conversion Rate (HCR) churches.

A HCR church is one that grows at a ratio of 20:1, or 5% per year by conversion growth. These churches see one new adult convert for every twenty people in average attendance.

Insights from HCR Churches for Building an Evangelistic Church

1. Build an evangelistic conscience.

- Preach and teach the Great Commission.
- Share your own passion for reaching the lost.
- Reframe evangelism as a privilege, rather than a duty.

- Reframe evangelism as a ministry of conversation.

- Write your own church's story like the book of Acts. Feature stories of people who came to faith in your church.

- Reinforce evangelism when it happens through interviews, highlights, testimonies, and recognition.

2. Focus on your extended congregation.

- Help others see the unreached people around them.

- Assist church attendees to identify people in their own social networks.

- Encourage prayer and care for the people in their social networks.

- Focus your people on building the relationship before giving an invitation.

- Teach people that they will likely be many links in the chain of relationships and invitations before a person believes. All links in the chain are important, not just the last link!

3. Train your people in stages.

- Train everyone to be involved.
- Train everyone to be an inviter.
- Train 50% of your people in conversational evangelism.
- Train 10% of your people in verdict evangelism.

4. Design safe events for members to bring their friends and family.

- Rethink your public worship service.
- Redesign old events and programs.
- Start new groups and classes.
- Engage in missional opportunities.
- Emphasize BIG days.

5. Develop side-door ministries.

- God's policy is to reach people with troubles, trials, and temptations – recovery groups
- Jesus ministered to zealots, as well as the poor, blind, and lepers (those expressly bared from the temple) – support groups.

- People gather around special interests – affinity groups.

6. Strengthen your connection ministry.

- Evaluate all the stages in your welcome ministry from first engagement with your church to participation in ministry.
- Recruit newcomers to work in your welcome ministry.

- Visit other churches to learn best practices in welcoming and involving newcomers.

7. Reward those who participate in evangelistic activities.

- Remember: What gets rewarded gets done; what gets praised gets repeated.

The good news is that people are receptive to the Gospel. The prediction that people would lose interest in religion and spirituality as a society became more secular has not proven accurate. Secular, post-modern people are more interested in faith and spirituality today.

Putting some of these practices from HCR churches will help you improve your evangelistic outreach.

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