



PARAGRAPHS FOR PARTNERS

2019 – Issue #4



From the Executive Minister
Rev. Dr. James Kelsey

Is Regional Ministry in the Bible?

IS THIS BIBLICAL?

Well not by name, but Paul does counsel cooperation and mutual support among his churches. His writings assume this is the common practice. This web of relationships can take its modern form in Baptist Associations, Regional Ministry, and even the broader denomination.

Let me begin by establishing: I am a Baptist. This means I am a high trust, low control person. I trust local congregations to follow what they believe to be the leadership of the Holy Spirit and would defend them from outside control.

Sometimes churches will choose to be independent and disconnected from other congregations, claiming this to be the “biblical” model. Even as a Baptist, this strikes me as erroneous. My discomfort is not with churches choosing isolation from other congregations; that is their prerogative. Rather, my discomfort is with their labeling isolation as the **biblical** model.

Whenever we add the adjective **biblical** to something, we need to have done our homework – **biblically**, that is.

We all read the Bible through the lens of our experiences, culture and loyalties. It is not possible to read otherwise. The danger is we may label something that is more a product of the lens through which we read than a product of the text itself as the single biblical mandate. It is often wise to clarify a statement as *our* reading of Scripture.

My reading of the biblical text leads me to conclude that isolation and disconnection were not the practices Paul instituted in his churches. I would defend a church’s prerogative to choose detachment from and irresponsibility toward from other congregations, but I would argue that it is not a move toward the practice of churches in the New Testament.

CONNECTED CLUSTERS OF CONGREGATIONS

The relationships between the churches in the New Testament are not crystal clear. It appears that, typically, there were multiple communities in an urban area; but such groups were not seen as independent churches disconnected from one another (see Abraham J. Mahlerbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity*).

Paul seems to have known of at least three churches in Rome (Romans 16:5, 15, 16), yet he sends a single letter to be shared (Romans 1:7). There may have been more than one worshipping congregation in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 5:27) and in Laodicea as well (Colossians 4:15).

The church in Corinth seemed to be composed of multiple worshipping groups; but, again, Paul sends a single letter. His greetings and conclusions in his letters suggest that various congregations were in close contact with one another. Paul wrote one letter to an area, expecting the letter to be passed around.

It appears that Luke thought of the multiple groups in Jerusalem as one church as he authored the book of Acts. He writes the "whole church" (15:22), which gives the impression that it was constituted of smaller congregations who gathered together in this case.

Clearly, local worshipping Pauline communities were organically connected to one another. Paul and his coworkers were not simply trying to foster a sense of connection with the church universal at all times and in all places. Rather, they were trying to engender cooperative bonds between flesh and blood congregations in specific locations.

CONNECTEDNESS FOSTERS HEALTH

I would argue that voluntary connectedness among congregations enriches the life of a church and can, on occasion, prevent a church from becoming captive to the unchecked idiosyncrasies of a leader(s) who wishes to exercise a level of control that is unhealthy. In some cases leaders want to exercise control uninformed or influenced by anyone over whom they do not have control.

When congregations become disconnected from other churches, sometimes they go off the rails organizationally and theologically.

The believers in Corinth, a church that had gone off the rails, benefited from connectedness as Paul guides them through a tough problem in 1 Corinthians 5; this is one of several issues Paul addresses in this letter with a view to help them have a richer church life. Sometimes a helpful word from somewhere else can help congregations find their way back to health.

Community spawns health. Independence and isolation, when left unchecked, have the potential for pathology.

THE JERUSALEM COLLECTION

Paul's multiple references to the "Jerusalem collection" in his letters show that churches took responsibility for supporting one another (see Acts 11:27-30; Galatians 2:10; Romans 15:25-27; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15 & 9:12-15). This collection for the saints in Jerusalem is woven throughout Paul's letters, promoting a sense of connection and mutual care. The model here is not independence and isolation but connection and shared support.

Connections with a broader family of churches can remind congregations that the Kingdom of God is broader and more majestic than their own immediate challenges and context. They are connected to believers the world over and are the richer for it.

CHURCH LEADERSHIP

The New Testament letters talk about elders and bishops with respect to cities, not individual churches. The implication seems to be that there were multiple congregations in a city, for whom these leaders cared.

In Acts 20:17, Paul makes contact with the elders from Ephesus; they are identified with the city itself. In Acts 14:23, Paul appoints leaders "church by church:" given that a series of cities is listed in verses 21-22, the implication is that these leaders were a common link for the congregations in each region.

At a minimum, the appointment of elders by respected leaders in the broader Christian family indicates a strong connective network among congregations (see Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5). These are not independent isolated fellowships.

Although Paul asserts an authority bestowed on him directly by Jesus Christ, he does point out that he received the endorsement of the Jerusalem leaders (Galatians 2:1-9). Apparently, he feels this strengthens his hand among the believers in the province of Galatia. This suggests something other than a mentality of willful indifference to those outside of their individual churches on the part of these congregations.

These strong leadership links between churches, although accepted in the early days of the church, would make me a nervous in our day. As a Baptist, I am not comfortable with outsiders dictating to local churches what they must and must not do and whom they may and may not call as leaders. As a Regional Executive Minister, I spend not a small amount of time explaining to congregations that I cannot and will not dictate practices to them or make their decisions for them. There are some search committees that, I get the feeling, wish the Region would just "send" them a pastor. We don't appoint pastors; that is a choice best left to the congregation.

THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

Furthermore, the leaders in the Jerusalem church decide the issue of direct Gentile admission to the churches throughout the Roman Empire and what practices believing Gentiles must observe. This judgement is then communicated and, presumably, practiced, throughout the New Testament churches (Acts 15:1-35 and 16:4-5). These are not "Lone Ranger" congregations acting independently of one another.

IN SUMMARY

Freedom is core to Baptist practice and identity. I am content being a low control, high trust Baptist. Nonetheless, I affirm the New Testament values of connectedness and cooperation and mutual care among churches, as was the practice in those earliest Christian congregations.

Individualism and independence are marked characteristics of U.S. culture, which inevitably influence our thinking and, therefore, our congregations. The biblical texts nudge us in a different direction, toward community and cooperation.

If a congregation wishes to become isolated and independent, I wish them all the best. Their error is to claim that the Bible values individualism and isolation over community, cooperation and mutual support. The texts of the New Testament indicate otherwise.

Blessings, Jim



Help us be better communicators. Let us know if you'd like to receive Paragraphs for Partners by postal mail or if you'd like to be notified when it's posted on the Region web site. Complete the survey below and return to: Mary Schwarz, ABC of New York State, 3218 James St., Syracuse NY 13206. Or fax it (315.295.2651). Or scan & email it (Mschwarz@abc-nys.org). Thank you!



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2019 ABY Mission Project: Birthdays for Brazil

Goal: \$6,000

Organization: Hope Unlimited for Children



ABY has partnered with Hope Unlimited for Children in Brazil to bring birthdays to all their residential adolescents..With our goal of \$6,000 we will be able to provide each child with a birthday celebration during their birthday month. Hope Unlimited provides residential care for adolescents who have nowhere else to turn. Hope Unlimited is their last resort. These kids come from the worlds of sex trafficking, drug running, incarceration, and life on the streets. Often at Hope Unlimited, it is the first time someone has celebrated their birth. Will you help us provide Birthdays for Brazil?

More information about Hope Unlimited: <https://hopeunlimited.org/>

Not joining us for ABY Convention 2019, but still want to donate? You can donate via our website here: <http://www.abc-nys.org/aby-mission-project.html>

Rev. Stephanie Schneider
ABY Program Director
518-832-9792

VICK AND PATHFINDER CAMP AND CONFERENCE MINISTRIES has an immediate opening for an Administrative Assistant. The position is 18-20 hours per week. These may be established for various schedules. The position includes paid time off during the year.

The person needs to be competent with various computer programs and is responsible for communications of the ministry, registrations for camps, phone calls, and organizational duties, as well as some marketing production. Hourly rate depending on experience. Office is located in Manlius New York.

For more information, or to apply, send a cover letter and resume to John Buskey at VPCC Ministries, P.O. Box 559, Manlius NY 13104, or email to Jr.Buskey@gmail.com.



LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS

John Helgeson to Interim, Masonville Fed Ch

Judy Travis from Trout Creek Comm BC to Retirement 9/30/19

Ray Merritt to Interim, United Ch of Auburn 9/1/19

Kenneth Comer to Pastor, FBC Mumford

Nate Watkins to Pastor, FBC Walton 8/25/19

Bruce Allen from FBC Newburgh to Retirement 11/17/19

David Ashby from The United Ch Canandaigua 7/1/19

John Tharp to Interim, The United Ch Canandaigua 8/1/19

Za Bik to Pastor, Albany Chin Christian Ch 8/15/19

Kathy Brown from FBC Penn Yan 11/1/19

Robert Teachout from Oneida BC 10/31/19

Johnson Din, Emmanuel BC Albany, Ordination Recognized 8/6/19

Mary Lou Graves, Kingsbury BC, Certified Lay Pastor 8/1/19

Adam Svareika, Hannibal Comm Ch, Ordained 10/13/19



Friends in Christ,

American Baptist Men New York State's vision is to empower leaders of the American Baptist Churches by providing training through our annual conference, assisting at our camps and reaching out through activities such as the Bigger Breakfast and Annual prayer breakfast. Without your support AB Men would not have the financial means to plan and carry out these events. Some men and boys could not attend the events without your support. Thus, the **Mission to Men**

Offering was born. Your gift to **Mission to Men** will advance the ministry of the American Baptist Men enabling us to grow, develop new ministries and assist with training events.

Mission Statement

The AB MEN program exists to cooperate with local churches to equip and encourage men in the state of New York to become influencers in their world for the cause of Christ. We will accomplish this goal by providing:

1. Training for leaders to help develop the AB Men Program locally
2. Annual conferences to motivate men to greater spiritual commitment
3. Opportunities for ministry and missions experiences domestically and internationally
4. Sectional breakout conferences throughout the year for continued training for leadership
5. Opportunities to be involved in disaster relief work
6. Launching new ministries such as Faith Works! The mission of Faith Works (based on James 2:14-17) is to partner with churches and American Baptist affiliated organizations to assist in local projects as needs arise. If your men's group, church or Association is in need of assistance, send us an email at abmnys@gmail.com, so the AB Men board can evaluate the project and determine if we are able to help.

Please send your tax-deductible gift to Karl A. Hanson (Acting Treasurer), 17 Linden Court, Clifton Park, NY 12065. Please make the check out to AB Men NYS and write 2019 Mission to Men on the memo line.

Your brother in Christ,

Leroy Woodruff
AB Men NYS President

"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." Luke 12:48 (NIV)

Changes to New York Baptist Annual 2019

- Page 11 **Main Street Baptist Church:** Remove
- Page 21 **Almond Union of Churches:** Remove
- Page 33 **ABC of Rochester/Genesee Region:** New address, phone, & email: 1230 Long Pond Rd., Rochester NY 14626, 585.216.1231, office@abcgrg.org

DATES TO REMEMBER

November 1-3, 2019 -- ABY Convention @ Holiday Inn Liverpool/Syracuse

The Region office will be closed November 28 & 29, 2019.

AMERICAN BAPTIST MISSION SUPPORT

UPDATE

AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES OF NEW YORK STATE THROUGH SEPTEMBER 2019 & 2018

	United Mission	Annual Offerings	Institutions, Specifics & Targeted	Total ABMS
Received 2019	194,980	139,115	137,045	471,140
Received 2018	215,597	159,423	149,769	524,789
\$ Ahead (Behind)	(20,617)	(20,308)	(12,724)	(53,649)
% Ahead (Behind)	(9.56)	(12.74)	(8.50)	(10.22)

For listing of church-by-church giving, go to <http://www.abc-nys.org/abms-summary-reports.html>.

Annual High School Youth Leadership Forum sponsored by the New York State Council of Churches **Tuesday-Friday, February 18-21, 2020**

Visit the Nation's Capital, Washington DC



The Youth Leadership Forum has a new focus: National Events. Visit the National Museum of African American History & Culture, followed by a seminar tailored to reflect our experience involving the museum specifically and discrimination in general. An evening bus tour of Washington DC, and other fun and inspiring activities are also included.

Cost \$450 (Limited scholarship assistance is available.)

Included: Train transportation to & from Washington DC, Lodging for 3 nights, Three breakfasts & Three lunches

For more information, contact Christy D'Ambrosio, Youth Director, First Presbyterian Church, Albany, NY christy@firstpresalbany.org or 518-423-4763



New Denominational Locations and Mailing Addresses

Office of the General Secretary

Location: 1015 W. Ninth Ave., King of Prussia PA 19406

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 851, Valley Forge PA 19482-0851

American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS)

American Baptist Extension Corporation

American Baptist Women's Ministries

Location & Mailing Address: 1075 First Ave., King of Prussia PA 19406

International Ministries

Location & Mailing Address: 1003 W. Ninth Ave., Suite A, King of Prussia PA 19406

Ministers Council

Location & Mailing Address: 221 So. High St., West Chester PA 19382

GROWTH POINTS

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

Impact of Culture

A church's corporate culture can be both an asset and a liability. It is an asset with it guides a church to higher levels of mission attainment; It is a liability when it moves a church away from its mission. It is an asset when it improves cooperation and communication; It is a liability when it stymies cooperation and communication. It is an asset when it improves decision-making; It is a liability when it interferes with proper decisions.

A Closer Look

Several processes are at the heart of any church. Together they demonstrate how cultural realities impact behavior and justification of behavior in churches.

Decision-making

Corporate culture guides a church's decision-making process since the shared assumptions give the leaders and congregation a clear set of preferences. Having a clear understanding of a church's culture allows for fewer disagreements, particularly when constructive dissent is one of the shared assumptions.

Cooperation

Cooperation cannot be mandated in any volunteer organization. A corporate culture that encourages goodwill, mutual trust, and personal involvement is a solid foundation for overall cooperation. Some churches place more emphasis on using personal gifts, while others stress being a team player. In both situations true cooperation is strongly influenced by shared assumptions.

Control

The ability to take action to accomplish the church's mission is the essence of control. It is most often seen in the areas of leadership and followership. Strategies and plans that are supported by the corporate culture are more likely to be followed by the members. The shared assumptions of values and beliefs provide a organizational compass to everyone.

For help identifying your corporate culture and how to change it,
Email cgnet@earthlink.net
for full details on coaching,
consulting, and leadership
training events.

Commitment

Commitment to a church is empowered when people experience some emotional attachment to it. While a variety of issues affect a person's feelings, when they identify strongly with the core corporate assumptions, it fosters strong commitment. This is especially true when multiple values and beliefs are shared.

Communication

A clear understanding of corporate culture improves communication in two major ways. First, when everyone knows the culture, certain things don't need to be said. Second, in situations where communication is not entirely clear, the shared assumptions provide clues for proper interpretation.

Behavior Justification

People in a church justify their behavior by referring to the expectations of the prevailing corporate culture. This is good when their behavior is an asset for fulfilling the church's mission. But, it is a liability when the behavior is negative.

Prevailing Influence

Corporate culture is a major influence on people's behavior in churches. However, most don't recognize it since it operates at an unconscious level. Some aspects are visible, e.g.,

ambiance, words, and actions, but the underlying beliefs and values go unnoticed.

As someone once noted, fish don't recognize the impact that water has on their lives. In a similar way, people in a church don't realize how the prevailing corporate culture affects decision-making, cooperation, control, commitment, and behavior justification.

Cultural Change

A change in the corporate culture can take place either before or after behavioral change.

To see the culture change *before* the behavior does, leaders must demonstrate persistently that one or more of the assumed beliefs and values no longer works, and that new beliefs or values have greater merit. Essentially a leader must get people to buy into new beliefs and values. If the old values and beliefs cannot be invalidated and replaced, the culture will not change.

The other approach to changing the culture is to *socialize* people into a new process, habit, or approach. If the behavior can be changed and maintained for a significant period of time, the culture will gradually change to justify the new approach.

Think About It

Is your church's corporate culture an asset or a liability? What needs to be changed?

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GROWTH POINTS

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

Finishing Well

Dr. J. Robert Clinton conducted foundational research in the field of Christian leadership. Following his study of 300 leaders described in the Bible, he discovered that few leaders finish well.

Of course some leaders in the Bible receive little comment, while others major treatment. About half of the leaders have enough information to know how they finished. Clinton identified four categories of finishes: First, some leaders were cut off early in their lives. They were taken out of leadership in several ways, e.g., assassinated, overthrown, killed in battle, etc. Second, some leaders finished poorly. Such leaders often declined in skill, competence, and/or relationship to God. Third, some leaders finished so-so. They did not accomplish what they could have or should have done. Fourth, some leaders finished well. They continued to walk closely with God, and accomplished his purposes.

The major finding from this research was that only about 30% of leaders described in the Bible finished well. For many of them, there were pivotal times when decisions impacted the rest of their lives and ministries.

Pivot Points

Most leaders face a time (or times) in their lives when they must make decisions that will impact them for the rest of their lives. These choice-points or pivot-points usually take place during a time that God is dealing with them. The leaders response to God's work in their lives often marks their ministry for years to come. Clinton found that the pivot point can . . .

- curtail further use of the leader by God (or at least curtail expansion of the leader's potential);
- limit the eventual use of the leader for ultimate purposes that otherwise could have been accomplished;
- enhance or open up the leader for expansion or contribution to the ultimate purposes of God's kingdom.

Leaders typically face 1-3 major pivot points in their lives. Reflecting on the pivot points of biblical leaders makes us sensitive to the importance of integrity and obedience.

Email cgnet@earthlink.net for full details on coaching, consulting, and leadership training events.

How to Finish Well

Moses reminds us that we should “number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.” Clinton paraphrased this reminder as “teach us to wisely apply ourselves so that our lives count.” Like Moses, Christian leaders should seek to finish well so our life isn’t wasted in spite of our human mistakes.

1. To finish well, we must study biblical leaders to understand how God worked with them toward His purpose in their lives.

The writer of Hebrews reminds us to “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (13:7-8). By accessing the lessons learned from past leaders—positive and negative—we can discover how to finish well.

2. To finish well, we must build renewal experiences into our lives.

Leaders who finish well experience times of renewal. In the USA times of renewal are most important in the mid thirties to mid fifties (often labeled a mid-life crisis). However, I’ve found through my research that pastors need a regular time of renewal every 7-10 years. Without such renewal, Christian

leaders tend to plateau in life and ministry, and there is usually a sense of confusion regarding achievement and future direction. Being open to God’s renewing, and initiating personal times of renewal, are important aspects of finishing well.

3. To finish well, we must guard our inner lives.

At the end of his life, when the Apostle Paul was about 65 to 70 years old, he encouraged Timothy to “train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way” (1 Tim. 4:7-8). Leaders must assess their spiritual lives on a regular basis. Godly habits can shape character and increase the potential of finishing well.

4. To finish well, we must maintain a learning posture all of our lives.

Paul’s closing words to Timothy were to “bring the books” (2 Tim 4:13). Paul was still learning late in life. Maintaining a learning culture usually involves reading. Of course, participating in other learning activities, will help leaders finish well, too.

5. To finish well, we must establish relationships with mentors.

One of the key discoveries from leaders who finished well is that they normally had mentors who were able to speak into their lives at pivot points of life. Find and meet with a person who can help you finish well.

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GROWTH POINTS

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

Leading is Tough

Leadership is difficult. Anyone who has served in a leadership role knows there are inherent risks. The fact that around one-third of pastors don't finish well is evidence that leading is a challenge.

One of the common challenges to being a pastoral leader is the added stress created by various pressures. Unless you've been a pastor, it's difficult to understand the constant pressures of preparing sermons, attending to people in emotional situations, being misunderstood, hearing criticism of one's work, etc.

Another challenge comes from the amount of work that is required. Being overworked has been an issue of leadership since the days of Moses. In Exodus 18, Jethro told Moses, "What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out" (18:17-18).

One of the most difficult issues in being a leader is dealing with leadership backlash and criticism. Leaders expect criticism from outsiders and others who are enemies. But being criticized by insiders is extremely difficult to process.

The Apostle Paul, Moses, and King David all struggled with accepting criticism, and much of it came from insiders. Aaron and Miriam criticized Moses (Num 12:1-2), David responded in his Psalms to personal attacks (Psalms 27; 31; 35; and 37), and some of Paul's letters were responses to criticism (Galatians and Corinthians).

While leaders must expect criticism of their work, it is difficult when they are regularly under fire. Over time, constant criticism wears leaders down. One particular type of criticism—leadership backlash—is especially difficult.

Leadership backlash occurs when followers turn on a leader and blame him or her for unexpected difficulties. Moses experienced this type of backlash after the Children of Israel ended up starving and thirsty in the desert (Exodus 16:2-3). This type of hurtful criticism is quite common among pastors and church planters. In fact it is so common that a clear pattern is identifiable.

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A Cycle of Backlash

Leadership expert, Robert Clinton, identified a common pattern of leadership backlash.

First, a leader gets a vision (some direction) from God.

Second, some followers are convinced that the new direction is the proper way to go.

Third, the leader and followers decide to move forward in the new direction.

Fourth, as they move in the new direction, hard times—persecution, spiritual warfare, or unexpected consequences—happen.

Fifth, reacting to the hard times, there is a backlash from the followers. They criticize the leader's vision, even though they previously agreed to the new direction, too.

Sixth, at this point, the leader either resigns from discouragement, or is driven to God to reconfirm the original vision.

Seventh, God reconfirms the original vision, and impresses on the leader that He will deliver.

Eighth, God vindicates the leader and himself.

Leaders don't always experience all of the steps in a backlash. Sometimes they resign due to the constant criticism. Other times they pull back into a shell and stop leading. It takes real determination to stay focused on the vision to its fulfillment.

Presence of God

Three observations are clear.

Observation 1: There is no doubt about it; leaders are on display. Anyone aspiring to leadership should do so with their eyes wide open regarding the inherent challenges.

Observation 2: There is no doubt about it; leaders will be criticized. Common statements highlight this fact: "The largest roof catches the most snow;" "The tallest tree catches the most wind;" and my favorite, "The Law of the Whale: whenever you rise to the surface and blow, you get harpooned." Painless leadership is impossible. Leaders must be willing to lead with, and through, pain.

Observation 3: There is no doubt about it; leaders need the presence of God to effectively lead others. There are many principles of leadership, but this one appears to supersede them all. At the burning bush, God told Moses "I will be with you" (Exodus 3:10-12).

Do you wish to be a fruitful leader? Then seek the presence of God in all that you do and say. You'll find He is sufficient.

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