

Pastoral Leadership Revitalization Omaha Presbyterian Seminary Foundation

The Lilly-funded Pastoral Leadership Revitalization (PLR) program is reaching its second year milestone. PLR is a combination of monthly coaching and a variety of retreats to stem the attrition rate of newly ordained clergy and to strengthen the ministry of pastors in isolated settings. Since January 2019, one retreat was held to train pastors in three presbyteries to be coaching mentors, three retreats have been held for pastors and CPs, one retreat was held for pastors and their spouses, and one retreat was held for single pastors. We have 13 coaching mentors and 43 pastors/CPs receiving coaching in three cohorts across Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas and Missouri.

Three pastors have shared their experiences. Regarding a retreat setting, Dale Stone of Missouri Union shared, "At the second retreat ... I was made deeply aware of God's love and grace for all people. It was a profound sensitivity from which I have not yet recovered. I looked at those who were in the room with me and my heart was filled with a love for each ... Judgmentalism turned immediately into a warmth that wanted to get to know each one of them. The next morning at breakfast, the conversation turned to criticism of others who "Just didn't get it." Tears welled up in my eyes as I saw the decades of criticism that had resided in my own heart. The love that God has placed in my heart will no longer permit me to be involved in any "us vs. them" discussion. ... I do not think it would have happened except for the retreat where I was allowed to spend much-needed time alone in prayer and meditation."

Kirwin Stewart, a coaching mentor shared, "What I have gained from this coaching experience is a new approach to doing counseling. For much of the 27 years I have been a minister, the art of counseling has been trial and error. I believe much of what I felt while counseling was to 'fix the problem.' In fact, a great deal of my energy was spent during counseling sessions, preparing to give some profound insight into the church members problem and to give a concise solution that would solve the problem. ... The coaching training has provided me with some really good tools to help others. ... The biggest take away has been taking the problem solving away from me and putting it onto the client. ... I find myself listening better, as now I am not the answer man, and asking more direct questions. I also find myself more comfortable asking the client, 'So what do you need to do? What do you think will be the outcome of this action or that action?' I do truly believe it has strengthened my ministry and more importantly, I think I am more effective as a pastor."

Jill Boyd, who is receiving coaching, shared that "... the monthly sessions with my coach have been invaluable. The questions she asks prompt me to do a lot of thinking, and the way she sometimes reframes things helps me look at situations and experience in a different light. During this pandemic, I have found her to be a great support and she has validated many of the ways I have handled or approached things. Through our work together, she has helped me recognize some spiritual disciplines that feed my spirit, and she has helped me explore different ways of praying. All this has helped me learn to offer myself better self-care and maintain a level of balance that has been healthy and freeing. That, in turn, has helped me be more authentic in my ministry. I am so grateful for the coaching and consider it a great gift."

PLR is having a beneficial and positive impact on pastors in multiple ways!

Becky Balestri
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