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The mission of Central Plains Mennonite Conference is to create settings for our congregations and partners to grow in holistic witness to God's reconciling mission in the world by developing leadership, encouraging fellowship and promoting lifelong discipleship.

# Across the Fence

Sharing best practices pastor to pastor



## Spiritual Rhythms for Leadership

by Tim Detweiler, Conference Minister for Ministerial Leadership

As we begin this newsletter of Best Practices, I encourage you to look at your practice of managing the spiritual rhythms of work, rest, ministry and Sabbath. In her book, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, Ruth Haley Barton writes, "There is nothing more crucial to the staying power of the leader than establishing rhythms that keep us replenished – body, mind and soul."

Barton continues, "There is something about establishing rhythms that are gracious and accepting of our human limits that enable us to be gracious and accepting with others. There is an energy that comes from being rested that is different from the energy that comes from being driven. There is a wisdom that comes from silent listening that is different from what comes from talking things to death. There is right action that comes from waiting on God that is utterly different from reactivity. There is a renewed engagement in battle that is different from slogging through life with unremitting and stoic resolve. All of these rhythms create space for God, fostering an ability to bring something truer to the world than all of our doing."

Paying attention to the spiritual rhythms of life is what Moses did when he told the people of Israel trapped at the Red Sea – "Don't be afraid. Stand firm (be still, wait) and watch God do his work of salvation for you today." (Ex. 14:13)

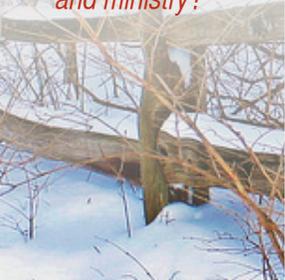
This is what Jesus did when he was pressured by the Pharisees to condemn the woman caught in adultery – he knelt down and wrote in the ground, waiting for God to give him a word and a way to respond. (John 8:6-7) This is what Jesus taught his disciples following their mission trip in Mark 6. They came back all excited to report to Jesus all they had done. Jesus' response was to say, "come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." (Mark 6:30,31)

And yet, we all face temptations – to cut corners; the pressure to perform; the list of things on our "to-do-list." Our work is never finished – one more person we should visit; one more email to respond to; one more meeting to arrange; one more sermon to prepare; one more book to read; one more issue to debate; etc.

Are you "running on empty"? What rhythms help you replenish body, mind and soul? What rhythms are missing in your life and what result might that bring to your household and ministry?

I offer you the book by Ruth Haley Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*. This book will lead you to a quiet place in God's presence, giving you opportunity for prayer and honest communication with God through guided meditations and prayers from the life of Moses—not 'just another book.' Jesus says to us as he did to his disciples, "Come with me—by yourself—to a quiet place and get some rest." ■

Are you "running on empty"? What rhythms help you replenish body, mind and soul? What rhythms are missing in your life and what result might that bring to your household and ministry?



## Spiritual Rhythms

by Darrell Zook

A pastor's spiritual rhythm may be out-of-whack by the time the sermon is written, after the emergency hospital visit, the program planning meeting is done and the to-do list has check-marks beside most lines. Instead of wallowing in guilt, what may I learn from other pastors?

Mag Richer Smith is co-pastor of First Mennonite Church in Iowa City, Iowa. First, she names the challenge, "I've been thinking about Jesus' words that his 'yoke is easy and his burden is light,' but I've been asking Jesus how he could have said that as some days our lives and ministry are not easy or light."

In the midst of hectic times, Mag finds Thomas Keating's *Welcoming Prayer* helpful as a way of centering again in the larger desires of God:

*Okay God, Welcome into this!*

*I let go of my desire for control and power.*

*I let go of my desire for affection and esteem.*

*I let go of my desire for security.*

*I let go of my desire for change."*

Mag says, "This prayer helps me release my desires into God's hands, and God's desires include rest, time for dates with my spouse, time for laughter with children and friends, time to sit at the table with others, and time to read a good novel!"

Mathew Swora is pastor of Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. "What the congregation needs most from us is not productivity but deep love and integrity which are gifts and evidences of God. In ministry, there's always more to be done. Sometimes, God does as much through our weaknesses and inadequacies as through our skills and preparation."

Mathew echoes Mag's suggestion that God *wants* pastors to be rested and in a Godly rhythm. "Increasingly, spirituality is about techniques. As I read the Bible and prayers of saints like Augustine and Menno Simons however, Christian spirituality is about holy maladjustment to the world, about 'hearing a different drummer,' not so much about doing or succeeding."

Even so, we need practice at gaining and staying in rhythm amid the clamor—or boredom—of pastoral ministry. We asked Mag and Mathew about the disciplines and practices that are meaningful to them.

Mathew says, "A two-year-read-through-the-Bible program helps keep the big picture in mind, while daily morning prayers begin with a recitation of Bible passages chosen to invite dependence upon God, including Lamentations 3:22-27, Matthew 11:28-30 and John 6:68-69."

He also makes intentional plans for ongoing cultivation by scheduling a 24-hour retreat every quarter and seeing a spiritual director every 6-8 weeks.

Mag says her two most helpful rhythms are daily morning prayer time and meeting once a month with a spiritual director.

"I've had three spiritual guides over the last 22 years and have met with my current guide for over 10 years. I find this practice an essential part of my spiritual journey. The conversation centers on where I have experienced God and discerning what God may be saying. This conversation always includes confession so that I am encouraged to walk more faithfully and honestly because of these monthly visits."

And, Mag's morning ritual includes reading from the Bible and from a prayer book and writing prayers, praises and petitions in a journal.

"Sometimes when I arrive at church, this prayer time is extended to include a walk around the sanctuary lifting up the people who sit in the different places around the room."

And yet, Mag and Mathew both share cautions about trying to build personal rhythms based on 'bullet points' from someone else—or that cultivating these rhythms is a solution for everything.

Mag says, "Spiritual disciplines are no guarantee of anything, but they do keep me humbled before the greatness of God." And Mathew notes, "As soon as we start comparing our lives to those of others, we have missed the narrative of true Christian spirituality. For if anything, spiritual disciplines may lead us to see how we are 'the chief of sinners' but how gracious and forgiving God is."

What are take-away thoughts from Mag and Mathew? First, we may be comforted to realize God is waiting for us to care for ourselves! Then, we are equipped with deep love and integrity instead of efficiency with which to bless the congregation. Finally, one of Mathew's favorite prayers from St. Basil the Great reinforces the truth that competent ministry begins within oneself; "Grant me now, dear Lord, to love you as fervently as I once loved sin itself." ■

## Favorites noted by Mag & Mathew

*People's Companion to the Breviary* by Carmelite Sisters of Indianapolis . . . two volume set with readings for three times per day. (Mag)

*An Everyday Book of Hours* by William G. Storey contains a four-week cycle of morning and evening prayers, mostly using Psalms and Epistles. (Mag)

*Take our Moments and our Days: An Anabaptist Prayer Book* by Arthur Paul Boers, et.al. I especially like using this prayer book with groups and like the inclusion of Gospel readings in this book. (Mag)

*Sounds of the Eternal* by Philip Newell. A Celtic Psalter with a one week cycle of prayers, compact size for traveling. (Mag)

*Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals* by Shane Claiborne, Jonathan Wilson Hartgrove, Enuma Okoro. Has a reading and a Psalm for everyday of the year.

*The Book of Common Prayer* (Mathew)

*The Benedictine Prayer Book* (Mathew)

## Other favorites:

Prayers and Bible reading schedules of the Fellowship of St. James (Mathew)

Reading the Bible in French or Spanish to keep the words 'new.' (Mathew)

*Awed to Heaven, Rooted to Earth* by Walter Brueggemann (Mag)

*Prayer Plainly Spoken* by Stanley Hauerwas (Mag)



## Across the Fence

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