

THE SOWER

CENTER FOR CLERGY EXCELLENCE: JULY 2016

BROADER FIELDS OF VISION

By John W Nupp

Good questions crop up in the most unlikely places. As I pulled up to the drive-thru window at a local fast-food restaurant one night, I was asked the puzzling question, "Are you an environmentalist?" Needless to say, I was caught off-guard. So I shook my head and smiled, drove away and started eating my fries.

Then I started to wonder about that question and the person who asked it. Had I missed an opportunity to treat someone like a human being instead of some human equivalent of a vending machine? In short, had I just somehow ignored the word of God?

Over the past few months, the guiding metaphor for my transition from pastoral ministry into a new field of ministry has come from the parable of the Sower and the Soils (see Mark 4:1-20). Maybe it's because I have

served in four different appointments, or because my wife and I have four children. Maybe it's because of the four regions in our Conference, or maybe because God is speaking clearly enough for even me to hear. Who knows, but the four soils have been very much on my mind. I worry, like you, about the things that hinder us. I wonder

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about all the ways we as clergy try to be fruitful. When does

God's living word get snatched away from our hardened hearts? What makes our joy so quickly pass away?

All these questions cause me to think back to that strange question in the drive-thru that night: "Are you an environmentalist?" Has God called me, called each of us and all of us in Christian service, to tend to the growth that comes by grace? If so, what does it look like to broaden our field of vision?

The Sower has been working in many fields and in many lives for generations. Consider again your own call to ministry, your

FOR REFLECTION

Do you have a guiding verse or Bible story or passage for this season in your ministry? What is it? How have you shared this with other colleagues? With other leaders in your ministry setting? What does it mean for you to be called into God's own field and not to work for human beings, or even for your own earthly kingdom? What is the story of your call to ministry? Who did God work through to call you, and to confirm that call? Do you have a new story to tell? Who will you tell? When? What is your prayer to the Lord of the Harvest?

own story of navigating the process of commissioning and ordination and your own desire for continued growth. Consider the ways God may be calling you to share the grace you have found with others. When growth occurs, we praise God for the increase. But the reality is that God has been busy in many places where growth has not occurred, granting abundant grace in hope of receptive hearts.

When I received a call this past spring, asking me to consider a move from 22 years of pastoral ministry into Extension Ministry, God had already been preparing the soil of my heart. For some time, the Board of Ordained Ministry had been in discussion with the Bishop and the Cabinet about the creation of a new staff position at the conference level. As we work through the transition in episcopal leadership, the position description and the job title, "Director of the Center for Clergy Excellence," are still under discussion. However, we can affirm several basic ways that this new position can broaden our field of vision as clergy colleagues and as a conference. These familiar rhythms of grace we learned from John Wesley guide us in our work of following the Sower from field to field:

Prevenient

Just as many of us experience the joy of leading others to discover the grace of God that has been there "all along," so those who are called by God into set-apart ministry can experience the joy of recognizing the emergence of that call in the life of another. I am blessed to work alongside our eight District Committees for Ordained Ministry and the Board of Ordained Ministry's Culture of Call to develop support for those experiencing an awakening to God's call.

The new staff position exists to encourage persons as this "prevenient" movement of grace begins to take shape in the pursuit of a local pastor's license or the first steps along the path to ordination for Elder or Deacon candidates.

Justifying

You may have wondered where to go with questions and concerns about the many ways to direct someone trying to pursue a call to ministry. My office acts as the clearinghouse for those who are navigating the steps of the formal "justification" process toward recognition of orders or licensing requirements. I am here to serve as the point of continuity in our conference, along with counterparts in some

53 other annual conferences who have developed similar positions to assist the work of the Board of Ordained Ministry.

Sanctifying

Finally, the "sanctification" portion of our work together provides continuing education and ongoing development for clergy. I like to think that this brings each of us, even those who have been serving for 20 or 30 or 40 years, back to those good questions about our own call to ministry. As we continue to serve, God challenges us to re-examine those key questions that got us started in the first place.

Let us listen and share the story of our call from God. Let us encourage the next generation that God is raising up to lead the Church in serving the World. For in all these fields, we sense the faithful footsteps of the Sower. The Lord of the Harvest has been here all along, in the joy and in the weeds, in the times of great emptiness as well as in the fruitfulness. Our dear and gracious God has been sowing all along, through times of our own ignorance and our overconfidence! Let us praise our Savior and Sower, who perseveres to produce good fruit in us for the sake of the world.
Grace Be with You