

Peer Learning Groups

by Amy McClure, Minister of Congregational Care at First Baptist Church, Winston-Salem

The journey of theological education is full of moments that challenge and grow us as ministers. Some of the most beautiful parts of the journey are not necessarily earning good grades, but rather the moments spent with our peers – our friends who become like family. In our ministerial roles, we have moments where we become overwhelmed or feel like nobody understands. In those times, we look to our left and right and realize there are amazing ministry friends who walk the journey with us.

About a year before graduating from Campbell University Divinity School, I realized how much value I placed on these relationships. I knew that after graduation, maintaining strong and healthy ministry relationships would be necessary for my spiritual, emotional, and mental health. Conversations emerged around the concept of Peer Learning Groups (PLG). Through our journey at Campbell Divinity School, several of us knew we wanted to be in the same PLG.

Our purpose is simple: we commit to the intentionality of being healthy ministers. We do this in a variety of ways, but we are grateful for the people at Campbell University Divinity School who modeled for us what it means to maintain a healthy lifestyle as a minister and taught us how to foster healthy relationships with other ministers.

We began our journey together at a local restaurant talking about our goals and desires for the group. Caitlin Estes, minister and writer at More Than Millennial, wrote a covenant that our group read and agreed to follow. This covenant was an important first step in recognizing the responsibility that we all have to hold our time as a group as something sacred and special. Our PLG serves as a space where we know that each member will be treated with grace, dignity, and respect. After a few meetings, Caitlin says “Our PLG is so encouraging and strengthening to all of us, whether we are currently working in churches, continuing our education, or seeking our next church in which to minister. Our PLG is a place to acknowledge that we are all ministers called to a task that requires community and fellowship. We are not called to do this alone, but together.”

During our time at Campbell Divinity School, we learned how to have healthy and respectful ecumenical conversations. This continues to be a priority for our group as we navigate ministry in our different settings. Each of our members brings a unique perspective in how we relate to our world and each other. One of our members, Nola Boezeman, was recently part of the Reformed Church in America and is now serving as a Baptist pastor. Her journey to Baptist life has been encouraging: “One of my concerns about leaving the RCA and becoming Baptist was that a congregational polity might not provide me with the same kind of denominational support. Instead, I have found that one of the best things about being a Baptist pastor is the support that surrounds me from all sides -- from the CBF, from BWIM, from



my former professors at CUDS, and from the ministers in my PLG.” Another member, Chris Walk, is active in the Anglican Church and provides a much needed perspective. He says “As someone who enjoys good theological discussion, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss theological issues with people I trust. We don’t simply talk about theology in the abstract, but how it affects the people we are called to lead.” Lacey Davis, who serves as a minister in a local Baptist church, spent five years involved in a non-denominational congregation. The rest of us come from a variety of Baptist backgrounds, and together our group explores what it means to be effective as the Body of Christ.

Our conversations prove lively and beneficial – always building each other up while challenging one another to consider different viewpoints. Because some of our conversations merit further discussion between our monthly meetings, we established a private Facebook group along with an email group. These are simple ways that we can continue our conversations, and they also allow the PLG to share personal happenings and prayer requests.

One of the big goals for our group is to have fun. We are excited about future opportunities to go to amusement parks or ball-games, and we are always grateful for group members who host meals where we can all come together for faithful fellowship. We are eager about planning spiritual formation retreats that will challenge us to continue to grow in our spiritual journey.

We are grateful for the overwhelming support and encouragement we have received from CBF and CBFNC and look forward to connecting with everyone at the upcoming gatherings. We feel incredibly blessed by these ministry partnerships, and we are excited for the future of the Church. Our prayer is that many other ministers will see the need and benefit of being involved in a Peer Learning Group, understanding that self-care and healthy relationships with other ministers ultimately affect the way we allow God to use us to share the Gospel.