



In almost forty years of ministry, I suppose that I've answered the telephone (now smartphone) thousands of times. Almost inevitably the caller wanted something from me or wanted me to do something for her/him. That's the nature of ministry in the congregation. Very seldom has the caller wanted to do something *for* me with few, if any, strings attached.

Peer Learning Groups (PLGs), supported by CBF Global and CBFNC, are shining exceptions. They do not exist to further the CBF "brand." They have no agenda or ulterior motive other than to encourage excellence in ministry. They exist solely for the spiritual, emotional, vocational, relational, and even moral well-being of the participants.

What does a PLG look like? Well, it's all over the map. A PLG consists of five or more ministers facilitated by a volunteer convener. They may meet weekly, monthly, even quarterly. The groups that meet less frequently tend to meet for longer periods of time when they do meet. Every group decides when and how often they meet as well as what the focus of their group will be. The group may read and discuss a book, they may go on retreat, attend a conference, and discuss challenges in their ministry settings in an open and confidential way. Ministry can be a lonely profession. Having a trusted group where challenging issues can be processed with appropriate confidentiality is an incredible gift. Continuing to learn and be challenged to grow in faith and ministry is a biblical expectation. PLGs also provide a place to celebrate and give thanks for good things that happen in one's congregational setting.

When I started ministry many years ago, I was blessed to have a peer group (long before PLGs existed in their current form) of four or five other fledgling ministers. We

met for retreats, called each other, encouraged each other, and blessed each other in ministry. Sometimes we traveled many miles to meet in some café to listen, challenge, and encourage each other to not give up and to keep the faith. I don't believe that I would have survived in congregational ministry without them. Several of them remain to this day what Carlyle Marney called "*friends of the long road.*"

Those CBF-related ministers serving in North Carolina are most fortunate. CBF Global and CBFNC have partnered to provide strong support for PLGs. You may ask, "How can I take advantage of this ministry encouraging opportunity?" Perhaps you would like to join one. Perhaps you would like to form a new PLG for youth ministers, children's ministers, associate pastors, pastors, or even a mixed group of ministers. Well, I'm glad you asked. It's not complicated. Go to www.cbf.net/plg/, where you'll find lots of information about PLGs.

CBFNC and CBF Global have partnered to provide resources and support for PLGs in North Carolina. I work with Ka'thy Gore Chappell, CBFNC Leadership Development Coordinator, to make this ministry available to as many CBF ministers as possible in NC. CBF Global receives the initial proposal for a PLG. Once approved, it goes to CBFNC for consideration. Both CBF Global and CBFNC offer grants up to \$500 annually to support a PLG. Additionally, CBF Global is now offering a \$250 financial literacy grant to groups that apply. Information about that grant can also be found on the website.

Don't miss out on this opportunity to strengthen and bless your ministry. You will be glad you did.

shining examples

by Layne Smith, CBF Region 4 PLG Director

Contact Layne at lsmith@cbf.net or Ka'thy at kchappell@cbfnc.org.