

PRESBYTERIAN LEADERSHIP FORUM

SUPPORTING EXCELLENCE IN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

SPRING 2015



OMAHA
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THE FOUNDATION FOR PRESBYTERIAN LEADERSHIP



“Four Months Into a First Call”

– by John Molacek

The Reverend John Molacek, a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary, is a 2011 recipient of an Apollos Scholarship from OPSE. His reflections about starting out in ministry illustrate how seminary training prepared him for service.

Fear and trembling. That’s the best way I can describe the process of discernment and approach to the pastorate.

Throughout my last year of seminary, I frequently asked myself variations of the question, “Can I do this?” Should I do this? May I do this (is God actually giving the “go-ahead”)? I wish I could say that after I sent out my PIF these questions changed, but if anything, they intensified. And added to them were others: Am I really willing to go anywhere God leads? Can I set aside my own pride and focus on my call, instead of engaging in the dangerous games of comparison with the calls of my classmates?

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FROM THE PRESIDENT...

“Why Train Ministers?”

There is a famous sermon by Gilbert Tennent, a pious Scots-Irish Presbyterian pastor in the 18th century, entitled, “On the Danger of an Unconverted Ministry.” Tennent was concerned about clergy who resisted the revivals and enthusiasm of the Great Awakening. He compared them, rather unflatteringly, with the Pharisees.

A similar concern for our times could be called, “On the Danger of an Untrained Ministry.” Specifically, will the church have well-trained leaders for the future or not? The cost of seminary education is high. New technologies and innovative approaches to theological education can help to reduce seminarian debt. Our Presbyterian seminaries are proactively engaging new models alongside traditional methods for training tomorrow’s clergy. This Foundation is continuing to increase the amount of financial assistance that we provide to Presbyterian seminarians. Even so, the financial burden that students assume when they choose to attend a theological school can be daunting.



Does it really matter whether we train our future ministers and church leaders, including our Commissioned Ruling Elders? One denominational leader who has spent many years in theological education recently wrote:

“Saying we can no longer afford an educated clergy is like saying hospitals can no longer afford doctors, schools can no longer afford teachers, or construction companies can no longer afford engineers. Highly skilled, educated, formed leaders in all of these fields are essential to the mission of their organizations and institutions. The same is true about churches; without well-educated pastors and other leaders, the whole project begins to crumble, ministry becomes obsolete, and the church fails to accomplish its mission.”

Our mission at the Foundation is to contribute to the formation of excellence in ministry for future generations. Perhaps some of Pastor Tennent’s zeal for spiritual awakening might be applied to the admittedly difficult, but no less important task, of readying Presbyterian pastors and lay leaders for the church and world that our Risen Lord is bringing into being.

Grace and peace,

The Rev. Dr. Gary S. Eller
President

“Come away... and rest for a while.” – Mark 6:31

Winter Pastors’ School combines continuing education combined and welcome rest.

Animals hibernate during winter months when resources are scarce. They enter a state of “suspended animation”. Their breathing and heart rates slow and their body temperature drops until they appear to be asleep.



Presenter Dr. Mark Sundby

During the winter, pastors may recognize that the level of their resources is low, but few can afford to hibernate. Early winter finds many church leaders involved in nearly frenetic activity, guiding parishioners through the liturgical seasons of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. But, just like the animals, pastors and CREs need to slow down and rest during times when personal resources are depleted. And, as leaders, they need new resources to supply them with energy to resume their duties.

This year, some area pastors—45 to be exact—took a hint from scripture (Mark 6:31) and a flyer from the Omaha Presbyterian Seminary Foundation guide them to the Winter Pastors’ School in Hastings, Nebraska. The time of continuing education, fellowship and rest was a welcome respite. What they found was freedom from activity and anxiety, a safe place to explore new ideas with colleagues, and a presentation that sparked conversation and invited personal growth. The Winter Pastors’ School is an event sponsored by the Quad Presbyteries of Central Nebraska, Homestead, Prospect Hill, and Missouri River Valley and administered by the Foundation.

Dr. Mark Sundby, presenter at this event and Executive Director of the North Central Ministry Development Center in New Brighton, Minnesota, offered the following sessions:

- Proven Strategies to Dial Down Your Stress Thermostat*
- Brain and Body: the Biology of Stress and Happiness*
- The Friendship Challenge in Ministry*
- Mindfulness: Spirituality of the Present Moment, and*
- The ABCs of Happiness.*

Here’s what participants had to say about their experiences at Winter Pastors’ School:

Susan K. Lockwood, La Vista wrote:

Winter Pastors’ School this year was delightful, positive, informative and impactful. Some of the special gems I took away include:

- The fact that meditation physiologically stimulates brain growth in a variety of regions, thereby facilitating a multitude of good outcomes;
- In every congregation, 20% of the people will love the pastor while 60% will be ambivalent, and 20% will dislike the pastor a lot;
- There is a genetic set point that accounts for 50% of our happiness;
- Happiness and loneliness are both contagious;
- Social support is a key factor in determining happiness;
- The belief that “It is an absolute necessity for an adult to have love and approval from peers, family and friends” is irrational and “probably the single greatest cause of unhappiness.”



As a result of attending this School, I intend to remember the insights and to apply the therapeutic lifestyle changes in my own life one by one.



Joyce Dean, Beaver City, Nebraska

Winter Pastor's School is an awesome experience. The seminar instructor (Dr. Sundby) was outstanding. Not only was his information pertinent to ministry, but he had many **helpful techniques** that could be used in our personal lives. One example involved breathing during meditation. My husband and I began using those techniques right away, and I know we will continue. We were also given helpful tools to assess where we are "relevant" and not merely "theoretical."

Besides the beneficial continuing education, Winter Pastor's School is a place where we can visit colleagues, **develop new relationships, and rekindle existing ones.**

Rev. Kati Collins, Saint Paul, Nebraska

This year's Winter Pastors' School was very refreshing! Every year I look forward to this week of reflection on my personal faith journey and the journey with my congregation. I enjoy the gathering of colleagues as we get to exchange ideas and talk through our challenges and joys in ministry. I have always appreciated our speakers, and this year's presenter, Mark Sundby, captured our attention and kept the energy going despite the snow storm which swirled through Hastings that week.

The workshop provided a variety of information on ways to cultivate happiness in our ministry and in our personal lives. As an overactive (and easily distracted) student, I enjoyed his use of videos, meditations, conversation, statistical information, and power point. I took home great tools to add to my spiritual practice and pastoral ministry. Plus I found plenty of **time to rest** through reading, spending time with friends (new and old), and connecting with God.

Kevin Freese, Battle Creek, Iowa

Each year the WPS is top-notch and this year was no exception. Through presenter Mark Sundby's lectures, visuals and various discussion groups, I was brought to a place of self-evaluation and then introduced to new ways of finding happiness not only in ministry but daily living. His lectures along with helpful statistics, presented from a pastor's perspective to pastors active in ministry, provided a very relevant look at how we do ministry and how the stresses of the occupation can lead us to unhealthy lifestyles and burnout.

This particular School helped me evaluate my patterns of ministry and lifestyle, prompting me to introduce and jump-start plans for a return to healthier living. In addition to a great program, I appreciate the WPS schedule which allows for ample rest, relaxation and renewal.

2015 Winter Pastors' School photos were taken by first year participant, the Rev. Larry Langer, who joined the participants from Vincennes, Indiana.



Continued from pages 2 & 3 – “Come Away...And Rest”

As Kevin pointed out, there is value in “rest, relaxation and renewal”. Rest in the presence of colleagues peppered with new learning is more beneficial to pastors and CREs than hibernation, and it follows a practice established by the Lord, reviving the spirit not in months or a full season of the year, but in a few days or even hours – as reflected in scripture:

Jesus sent out his disciples two by two to preach, drive out demons, and heal the sick. When they returned, they reported to him all they had done and taught. “Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.’”

— Mark 6:31

Watch for announcements about the next Winter Pastors’ School which is being planned and coordinated for February 1-2, 2016 in Hastings.



Welcome! Tim Maxa Joins the Council of Advisors

The Reverend Timothy S. Maxa who serves the Lenox United Presbyterian Church and Sharpsburg Presbyterian Church in southwest Iowa was elected as the newest member of Council of Advisors during the January Board of Directors meeting.

The Council welcomes its newest member who lives in the region served by the Presbytery of Des Moines. Tim has been an active leader of the Southwest Iowa internship program, “Exploring Rural and Small Town Ministry – A Summer Intern Experience.” The internship provides an opportunity to experience the role of a pastor in rural Iowa communities. During two-week intervals in six small parishes, the student observes and participates in various ministerial tasks: preaching, hospital visitations, as well as a variety of family celebrations such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals. Students have also assisted with short mission trips and ecumenical Bible school sessions for the community.

Tim and his wife Sandra have two children – one in high school and one in college; they live in Lenox, Iowa. His leadership is a very welcome addition as a volunteer to the Advisors adding his support to the members.

*“Four Months Into a First Call”
Continued From Page 1*

I’m now four months into my first call at the First Presbyterian Church of Jesup, Iowa, and while there is still fear, it has changed. There was a huge build-up of anxiety prior to the first Sunday sermon I preached, and then it was amazing how things clicked into place, how my spirit found peace, how the Presbytery of North Central Iowa surrounded me with support and encouragement as a new pastor, how I grew to love the people of this church and community so quickly.

There are new struggles now that I have undertaken this work of shepherding. Being intentional about “off-time” and being diligent in my personal devotions. Learning to integrate into the culture of a small town, and find peers who are not connected with the church. And, in a small church, learning to be “all things to all people,” as Paul would say (within reason!).

Yet, with all these new expectations and realities, I find myself filled with more joy and hope than I have experienced for years.

Sometimes it feels like I have already been here for years, and I take a step back and wonder if my people feel the same. This feeling is odd, yet comforting. It seems strange in this age of distrust and disintegration, yet, isn’t it exactly what we should expect in God’s providence as the Spirit moves among God’s people?

I know God’s hand was at work as well through the faithfulness and generosity of generations of saints who have supported the work of the Omaha Presbyterian Seminary Foundation. As an Apollos Scholarship recipient, I received not only valuable monetary assistance during seminary but also, I know, the attendant prayers of all those connected with this valuable institution. For that, I am eternally grateful.

Peace, Rev. John Molacek

“Pastor and Seminarian – A Relationship Made Stronger by the Apollos Program”

The Reverend Jan Tolbert, recipient of a Robert K. Adams Scholarship in 1995, was asked by Rebekah Carpenter, a member of her congregation, to serve as a reference for her Apollos Scholarship application. Each woman tells how their bond grew through the Apollos Program and strengthened their relationship and their ministry.



“Where’s the GPS?” –by Jan Tolbert

I wish there was a way to map out a calling from God, because I am one who depends on navigational devices to get me from point A to point B! When I answered God’s call to prepare for ordained ministry, I so desperately wanted a clear road map for how I would transition from one career into full time seminary education and then hopefully to service in the church. How would I manage the academic work, the spiritual discipline, and the financial demands of seminary?

No clear map ever appeared to me, instead it has been a slow and steady unfolding that continues even today. Having the prayers and support of my family and church family were essential, but having the support of the Omaha Presbyterian Seminary Foundation through the Apollos Scholarship was more affirming than I can adequately express. For me, the scholarship money that I received was part of God’s steady, unfolding purposes for me. Even though it was not a map, it was most definitely a sign post, pointing me in the direction to which I believed God has called me.

After several years of ministry, I have seen members of the congregation I serve respond to God’s calling, looking for that same map that I so badly wanted. Rebekah Carpenter was one of those. She too had experienced God’s call to prepare for ministry to the Church. She too would be ending a successful career to begin her seminary education. She too knew that she could trust the plans that God had for her, but still, she desperately wanted a GPS!

With the strong support of her family and friends, as well as her church family, Rebekah enrolled at Columbia Seminary in the summer 2014. Still it was the support of the Foundation through an Apollos Scholarship that served as her flashing sign, pointing Rebekah toward the realization of serving Christ through His Church.

When Rebekah told me the wonderful news that she would be receiving an Apollos Scholarship, I was powerfully reminded of the goodness of our connectional church in the PCUSA; the faithful vision of those who started the Foundation and the steadfast provision of our loving, calling, and guiding God. Better than any navigation system in the world!



“Rich Conversations” – by Rebekah Carpenter

There are so many ways the Apollos scholarship has been an honor to receive, but probably one of the biggest honors is that my pastor, Jan Tolbert, also received this scholarship. The funding helped me walk through the door to receive an amazing theological education, which has fostered rich

conversations between Jan and myself that remind us both that we are truly on this journey to spread Christ’s love together. Both Jan and I share a deep love for the church as well as a deep burden for its declining numbers.

As I took part in an “Imagination and Resilience” course last semester, I was able to talk to Jan about all the exciting ways seminarians are being trained to embrace new ways of helping the church grow, develop and mobilize around a common vision. Preaching is a passion for Jan, and as I grew in nervousness over my first sermon, she exercised tough love, letting me know that my nerves were okay, and that when you are bringing a word from God it is an honor – being nervous is a sign that you are taking that honor to heart.

Jan and I have shared many conversations about working with the underserved. I will soon gain practical experience working with the homeless, and I know Jan will open the door to our church and community, so I can share what I have learned, broadening the reach of God’s love to those who need the church to be their voice and champion.

The Apollos scholarship has allowed both Jan and myself to live out the potential possible “when two are more are gathered”. The Apollos Program allowed two women in their 40s, with a passionate call from God, to live out that calling and take God’s love to a hurting world.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart. Rebekah Carpenter

“Police, Rain and a Knock at the Door” - By John Harrison

John Harrison is a senior M.Div. student at the Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary (APTS) and recent recipient of a Silas G. Kessler Scholarship from the Apollos Program sponsored by the Omaha Presbyterian Seminary Foundation. He plans to continue his search for a Call to ministry in St. Louis. Last summer he completed a unit of CPE in St. Louis, Missouri.

When I stepped off the bus on S. Lamar, I was carrying a blanket, a jacket, a water bottle and a phone in my backpack, but I had left my wallet at home. Seven other friends from APTS were on their way to Zilker Park with me, carrying backpacks and sleeping bags and getting ready to spend the night on the street with Mobile Loaves and Fishes (ML&F). We would be joining a “street retreat” organized for 50 students and teachers from a local catholic high school. The students were not hard to find, and they played Frisbee in a circle while we stood in the shade waiting for our shepherds to arrive.

After about 20 minutes, a man in his 40s with a red mustache and redder checks approached us and introduced himself. His name was

Ellis. He had spent six and a half years on the streets before he got a job with ML&F and a place of his own. He would be our shepherd for the night. A few minutes later Alan Graham, the founder of Mobile Loaves and Fishes, arrived with the food truck.

Alan called us together for a devotional over supper and read to us from John 20 about Thomas putting his hand into the wounds of the risen Jesus. By going out into the street and spending the night with the street community, we would be sticking our hands into the wounds of Jesus. I began to imagine that the Lord might say to me, “Just as you leave these folks out on the street to fend for themselves, you do it to me. Whatever they have been through, I have already felt their pain. They will triumph with me, but right now I suffer with them.”

After our meal, we set out with Ellis for a walk around town. As we crossed the river, Ellis told us about finds that he and his friends had received just for sleeping – fines as high as \$500. As we crossed Sixth Street, I noticed how different it feels with no money in my pocket.



We stopped at Central Presbyterian's new water fountain to fill up our water bottles. Having nowhere to be, time itself began to feel different. We hung out on the sidewalk and watched flashes of lightning to the southeast, debating about whether they would bring rain.

ML&F had borrowed a church gym to shelter the high school students, but we were looking for a place to sleep outside. With no other leads, we walked seven blocks on a rumor that First Methodist allowed sleeping on their sidewalk. The 20 people sleeping there became alert as we approached, but they relaxed and invited us to join after Ellis explained what we were doing. We accepted.

We went to 7/11 to use the bathroom, and when we got back, the police had come. A couple had gotten into a fight, and one of them had called the cops on the other. When the police arrived, their solution for the domestic dispute was to make everyone leave. It was now 11 pm, and we had no place to sleep. We felt the first drops of rain less than ten minutes later.

ML&F's borrowed gym rescued us from a bad storm and flash floods. As we readied our beds again, we paused to hear 50 teenagers say the "Hail Mary". Six inches of pouring rain pounded down on the gym roof and I worried about the people we had left outside. As I laid on the hard floor at the threshold of sleep, the sound of roaring raindrops echoed in my mind, I heard the words of Revelation 3:20: "Listen! I am standing at the door knocking."

The rest of the verse reads, "If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me." This was what ML&F had promised us. The living Lord had opened our ears, and we could hear him knocking.

This article was originally published in Austin Seminary's student magazine Kairos in issue 293 on October 22, 2014, and is reprinted here with permission.

OMAHA GIVES!

a 24-hour charitable challenge

Omaha Gives! is a 24-hour online charitable challenge that focuses community support for local nonprofits. This annual metro-area event begins at midnight on May 20th and ends 24 hours later.

Donors may participate with a contribution (minimum is \$10) to demonstrate your appreciation and support for the Omaha Presbyterian Seminary Foundation's (OPSF) programs for its 60 plus years of Apollos awards and grants, its annual Summer Pastors' School, or one of its unknown Program Grants that supplement retreats and workshops throughout the 13-state service area and are organized by Presbyterian synods and presbyteries for pastors in their regions.

Designed to show off Omaha's spirit of giving, Omaha Gives! raises awareness of the unique nonprofits and celebrates the collective effort that makes our metro-area unique, details are available online at www.omahagives24.org.

The Omaha Community Foundation website has searchable profiles of participating nonprofits including OPSF. Each nonprofit submits an application and is vetted prior to acceptance. The charitable challenge is limited to 501(c)(3) organizations within Douglas, Sarpy and Pottawattamie counties while their service areas may extend beyond those boundaries.

Won't you join the challenge and support the Omaha Presbyterian Seminary Foundation's ongoing mission to support excellence in Christian leadership? The Foundation's profile states:

Trusting God and with commitment to ongoing stewardship, together we boldly move forward seeking, developing and supporting excellence in Christian leadership for the PCUSA.

Serving as a bridge between seminary and church entities, the Foundation offers lifelong-learning opportunities. Providing a mini-seminary sanctuary while restoring fellowship empowers and energizes those actively engaged in ministry. The 59th annual Summer Pastors' School at Hastings College will be in June.

Seminarians seeking their M.Div. degree apply for the Foundation's Apollos scholarships. The current and future challenge is to support outstanding scholars with the rising cost of their education as well as recognition for their call to serve. The Apollos Program also supplements church entities providing grants for student internship opportunities.

Foundation Program Grants support local programs such as workshops or retreats for church leaders on topics relevant to their needs during the year. The grants supplement area needs and provide opportunities for pastors.

Thank You



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E-FOUNDATION

Would you prefer receiving our newsletter and/or event publicity via email? Snowbirds or those with extended travels might wish to provide us with your email address.

If so, please take a minute and request to be placed on the “email only” list by sending a note to: opsf@opsf-omaha.org. Sending reminders via email provides updates quickly and efficiently. While we will continue mailing printed materials, current information is also posted on the Foundation website. We promise not to share your email address with anyone.

Applications for lifelong learning events such as the Summer Pastors’ School, information regarding the Apollos Program awards for seminarians pursuing their master of divinity degrees and requirements for Presbyterian synods and presbyteries which wish to apply for Program Grants to supplement funding for various events like workshops or retreats for pastors in their area.

All information is posted on our website at: www.OmahaPresbyterianSeminaryFoundation.org

Also, if you have a new member in your congregation or a friend who might like to receive the Foundation’s publicity about future events, please share your brochures and/or email information with them.

Supporting Excellence in Christian Leadership