



Notes on working in the Christian ministerial community:

The categories of community:

The Christian community is not a single community, but a variety. It ranges from ecclesiastical, ecumenical, evangelical, expressionist, to entrepreneurial. It ranges within racial groups with extra variety. The Christian congregations even with the same denomination spread based on racial heritage. A Black evangelical congregation tends to be socially and economically liberal while a White evangelical congregation tends to be socially and economically conservative. Both will be pro-life. Both will be pro-family in traditional sense. Black denominations mix and work with each other. White churches tend to work alone or solely within their denomination. Hispanic congregations tend to be antagonistic to each other. Hispanic congregations are further spread by country of origin.

Disclaimer: This is not written from my personal perspective but in an attempt to represent voices and discussions I've had working across multiple faith organizations. I've tried to put some answers that address the staunch stance of some and get to smoothed out understandings. This thing that we are doing is at times a work of reconciliation of broken relationships and communications between faiths and government, We are seeking a respectful network acknowledging differences and taking advantage of strengths. If you want my personal faith-based approach you should get a copy of the Book, BY GRACE, <https://a.co/d/b3JpgBd>

Finding common ground and trust

It has been my experience the best way to find entrance and voice in the community is to attend and participate in services in that community with zero agenda but learning. That takes time and silence.

Leadership

“Every pastor is a king in his own kingdom.” Sage advice from a mentor who has led other ministers for six decades. I remember it in every conversation.

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Pastors are gatherers. It is their nature and why they pastor. They gather people to their spot, community, services. Help them gather others and you help them fulfill their call. Ask them to have their congregants go elsewhere and they will distrust you.

Address as pastor if they are a pastor even if they tell you they are okay with not being called pastor.

Ask permission.

Recognize the hierarchy. Acknowledge and respect all. Deacon and Board and Elder led congregations have a different political pecking order. The pastor much manage this, but you must give him/her what they need to manage it, not go around him/her.

Questions ministers will have and answers they will want to hear. Not all ministers will have these questions or opinions, but they should be acknowledged when they rise.

1. *What is Mental Health?* I have a definition I use from years of Biblical, Psychological research. Mental Wealth is wisdom and well-being body, mind, emotion, desire, spirit, relationships, and resources that exhibits itself in a free and joyful involvement in family, work, community, and congregation. I like to avoid using Mental Health too much as it immediately evokes visions of mental illness and disturbance not health.
2. *What is the Biblical basis of working with mental health?*
 - a. John said, “Be in health and prosper even as the soul prospers.” This is quoted massively. Maybe as much as John 3:16, the salvation code. The soul or psyche is the mind, the will, and the emotions. This is what we address in mental health and resiliency. So John was tying all health and life stability to mental health.
 - i. 3 John 1² Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul (psyche in Greek) prospers.
 - The Good Samaritan story speaks of man being physically robbed. However, extend that to anyone traumatized. You can rob with



rape, sexual assault, physical violence, abuse, neglect, bullying, etc..
All need a good Samaritan.

- Luke 10: **The Parable of the Good Samaritan**
- ²⁵ And behold, a certain [Ⓜ]lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"
- ²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading *of it?*"
- ²⁷ So he answered and said, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.' "
- ²⁸ And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live."
- ²⁹ But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"
- ³⁰ Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain *man* went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among [Ⓜ]thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded *him*, and departed, leaving *him* half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. ³³ But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ So he went to *him* and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ On the next day, [Ⓜ]when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave *them* to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' ³⁶ So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"
- ³⁷ And he said, "He who showed mercy on him."
- Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."



- b. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians tells us to comfort even as we have been comforted. Here is a special note to peer specialist and community chaplaincy and training folks to be able to be Samaritans. The story tells of two religious specialists that walked by the needs of the broken one. They did not know what to do. The Samaritan took a first aid approach and did what he could and left the follow-up in the hands of another. We can all train to be Good Samaritans with right Mental Health First Aid training.
 - i. 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 New King James Version Comfort in Suffering
3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any [a]trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our [b]consolation also abounds through Christ.
- c. Jesus's mission statement given in the gospel of Luke and taken from Isaiah shows His focus.
 - i. Anointed with the Holy Spirit
 - ii. To take good news to the poor
 - iii. Heal the brokenhearted (depressed and anxious and suicidal)
 - iv. Preach liberty to the captive (again release folks from limiting mental and emotional trauma)
 - v. The acceptable year of the Lord – a place free of stigma
 - 1. **Luke 4:** ¹⁶ So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. ¹⁷ And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me



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To preach the gospel to *the* poor;
He has sent Me ^{to} heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to *the* captives
And recovery of sight to *the* blind,
To set at liberty those who are ^{to} oppressed;
¹⁹ To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.”

²⁰ Then He closed the book, and gave *it* back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. ²¹ And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” ²² So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, “Is this not Joseph’s son?”

3. *When I am done with you, how do I get rid of you?* The moving forward with faith initiative is about equipping and networking not controlling or interfering. We recognize the freedom of religious expression and value it highly as different than the state agencies but complementary. Anytime you feel uncomfortable with the current or next steps, you have full blessing and authority to do as you need to do.
4. *Do you recognize my authority in this community?* We respect and submit to the authority of church leaders within their congregation and in larger community. We recognize that churches seek to provide safe places for body, mind, emotion, desires, spirit, relationships, and resources to be developed in a faith central focus. Licensed mental health provides address the same but from a state agency centered focus. We are partners in progress.
5. *Do you allow for the sin (choices) definition of addiction and some afflictions or must we conform to the disease definition?* Is there room for differing opinions on this matter or must we conform to the government and other mental health community definitions to be included? We consider ourselves as holistic health providers addressing physical, mental, spiritual, relational, and resource needs



but at times from a different base definition of the issue. We are comfortable working alongside those that adhere to the disease definition but want equal respect, access, and acceptance to our belief stance when it differs.

- a. We recognize that not all mental health professionals adhere to a disease definition of addiction and other mental disorders such as depression and anxiety. The most important understanding is that we work from a position of receiving people as they come to us and offering them compassionate help with the conviction that they can grow and change their present experiences to positive lifestyle that enables them to enjoy community and work productively. Change is a process. The Christian faith community believes in the “sanctification” process of change as progressive with a starting point.
 - i. 2 Corinthians 12:9 And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
 - ii. Romans 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.
6. *Why would we want resources from outside the faith community?* This is not a statement of autocracy but strong belief.
 - a. All of us are set in a community with differing strengths. Just as one would go to a financial institution for monetary advice and resources, so it makes sense to engage mental health institutions for recovery advice and resources. The decisions stay in the hands of the faith community with access to more knowledge and connection and resource. It is the synergy of partnership that helps. Partners power progress.
7. *How will we know when we refer a congregant to a resource that it will be supportive of our faith stance and not conflicting?* I’ve had experience with domestic violence professionals and AA telling people to not listen to any pastor. This is a real problem.



- a. As best as we can, we will identify resources that stand as strongly on their positions that are possibly not faith compatible so you can choose. It is impossible to know all, but we will work on identifying. Help us by alerting us to issues you consider as “red line” that would prevent you from using?
 - i. Abortion
 - ii. Gender orientation
 - iii. Sexual proclivity
 - iv. Divorce
 - v. Demonism
 - vi. New Age
 - vii. Conflicting faith base such as Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Bhudism
8. *How will conflicts be handled between organizations to pursue peace between partners even if agreement can't be reached?* It is common in the political worlds of governments whether church or general or community organizations to choose blackball and dropped communication as a conflict resolution tool. Avoidance is not a good strategy. Tabling an issue until it goes away is not a good strategy.
 - a. Okay, Drew, I'll let you answer this one.

Some stories on how fraught with trepidation some ministers and congregations can become.

During the responses of many Black communities after the George Floyd incident, a northern Texas town split the church participation in community on racial lines. We had 60 congregation of all racial heritage working and praying together. After an extremely successful community vigil, a group of young men and women began protesting a civil war monument. Many church leaders formed a private group to oppose. Pastors came to me and told me they had been warned they would be fired if they met for prayer again with me or any pastor from the Black or Latino communities.



This came from multiple denominational churches, whose elders were actually carrying rifles in the street in opposition to the quiet and peaceful protests.

In Oklahoma City, we joined multiple faith expressions and racial heritage in annual praise and prayer on the National Day of Prayer. The political evangelical wing ostracized the events and even had people show up in the parking lot declaring we would all go to hell for meeting together. This was Oklahoma City at a mega church on the north side of the city.

When you begin to announce partnerships, other pastors will work to undermine and get pastors to disconnect. They are conspiracy trained to be suspicious of any state agency.

While working with folks on probation and parole and some with child protective services involved, the domestic violence state grant supported agency asked if I would meet with them. I thought this was a great way to work together as I had done in Oklahoma with the domestic violence coalition. When they got me in a room with no one but them they began to attack and tell me I was the only pastor in the community who did not refuse to work with families suffering domestic violence and I should desist and once. To ask a pastor to abandon his faith engagement is off limits. Make it clear you will never do this. I had to seek legal counsel to protect the ability to continue ministry.

In another town, the city dispatched a squad car to our parking lot on Sunday morning to dissuade and intimidate and keep people from coming because we were working with people who were “not church people”. That meant folk struggling through mental and emotional issues such as depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and addiction. They sent an officer on campus while I was gone, who beat up a member working through past addictions. At another location, the police set traps on the road leading to our church on Sunday morning and pulled over and strip searched at the local jail folks who had reputations for drug usage. This was “Christian community” pressure to get us to quit working with folks. At one point several members who were currently on



probation were called in individually and told not to be friends with certain other members. It can get sticky. This is Oklahoma.

I tell these stories and leave out quite a few others to alert that there are strong and sometimes angry and potentially violent reactions within the faith community to working across old boundaries of race and government and what “church people” look like. We don’t shrink back but press forward with sensible communication, reassurance, and right connection.

Whew! This is a document born of desire to see more partnerships prosper even when there are specific conflicts that might arise.