

Mission Moment

We Are Called to Be Good Stewards of Ourselves

by Deacon Vicki Hanrahan

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Mark 1:35

We as Lutherans take caring for our neighbor seriously and put forth much energy in doing so; so sometimes it's good to be reminded that caring for our neighbor also includes caring for ourselves. It's like being reminded by the flight attendant that we must first put on our own oxygen mask before we can take care of others. God wants us to serve from a place of renewed strength, not depleted energy. Jesus modelled this for us many times!

Our synod's ASSIST program is in place to care for our leaders and is supported by your generosity. Assistance is offered through the Samaritan Counseling Center whose director is called by our synod council to provide this service. Dr. Dan Feaster is the Director of the center and our synod's psychotherapist. This week's mission moment serves to thank you for your offerings to the church that help to provide the spiritual care and mental wellness assistance for our rostered ministers (Pastors & Deacons) in our synod and their families. We must first take care of ourselves so that we can be stronger leaders to serve you.

This week, Feb. 2, our bishop has invited Dan Feaster to join us for the weekly conversation with the bishop. Our theme is "The Groundhog Effect." (See the invitation following this for details.) What does it mean for our mental well being to live through this time of the pandemic? Dr. Dan will be with us.

The following interview with him will provide a little more insight into his passion and calling for this ministry and give you an idea of how your offerings come back to support the congregations in the form of healthy leaders.

Why did you want to serve in this role in our synod as our Psychotherapist?

Dr. Dan: "I've always had a love and passion for working with clergy because it is a challenging role, especially in these times. I've led a clergy leadership group for many years and have pastors from many faith traditions and denominations; even though our polity may be different, the issues are the same. As the church is changing, we are asking new questions: What is the form that Christianity will take and what does it mean to be a Christian today? Our church will be around, but it will be taking new directions. Pastors who have been out of seminary for a while are saying that what they were trained for in seminary is not necessarily preparing them for what they are experiencing in church life today. There are very unique challenges in these times where there is a shortage of clergy and more flexibility is required.

Why is it important to have healthy leaders in the congregation?

Dr. Dan: They set the pulse for the congregation. If the pastor is not healthy, there tends to be more unhealth in the congregation. If there has been a trauma in the congregation for example from an unhealthy boundary-keeping situation and those issues aren't dealt with, they become toxic to the health of the congregation.

What is the importance of sabbath taking for our leaders?

Dr. Dan: It's all about stewardship and looking at mind, body and spirit integration. Part of being a healthy person and sabbath-taking is focussing on our spirituality and asking, "How is my relationship with God?" Sabbath taking is also about taking care of ourselves physically and emotionally: "Am I exercising? Am I eating well? Am I taking care of myself emotionally? Do I have any stressors?"

Tell us about the importance of including family members in the ASSIST program.

Dr. Dan: That's all part of being a pastor or religious leader. If they are struggling with family issues, they have a hard time focussing on being a leader, and that happens a lot. At the same time, there are many family members that suffer and struggle because of tension going on in the church. Some pastors tend to be workaholics and spouses and children can suffer from that. As a pastor, if they feel like their home life is doing okay, they are better able to handle stressors in the congregation. I have had pastors bring in their whole families. I have had pastors use their three complimentary visits and choose to extend their sessions beyond the synod's ASSIST offering.

Clergy come to see me for a number of reasons: their own personal mental health, such as depression or anxiety for example. A second reason is from tension or struggles in the church and the third most common is to address transitional times in their lives; ie. getting ready to transition from one church to another or transitioning into retirement. Transition issues become discernment issues.

How does what you do overlap with spiritual direction or how is it different?

Dr. Dan: It is not the same in the formal sense but certainly there is overlap especially in the discernment process when we're talking about our faith and asking the question, "What is God calling me to do?" Many pastors have both a counselor and a spiritual director.

Thank you Dr. Feaster for your commitment to the health of our ministers and our congregations. And thank you to our members for your mission support that you give to the larger church through your offerings. Stories in these mission moments are reflections of your love for this church and the ways that we come together in this part of God's kingdom to be the body of Christ.



If you wish to make a special offering to support ministries such as this, you may make an offering through the synod's on-line giving platform. Choose "**Synod Ministries Where Needed Most.**" First time giving through Tithe.ly? Creating an account is easy...just follow the simple steps. We are grateful!

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