

# **Creating Healthy Congregations: The Role of the Minister From a Systems Perspective**

Syllabus

July 14 –18, 2008

Instructor: Kenneth Reeves, M.Div., Ph.D.

## **Course Introduction:**

Effective ministerial leadership not only promotes a congregation's vibrant programs and provides pastoral care, but can also support the development of that congregation's health. Unfortunately, though, a congregation's illness can interact with the minister's psychological vulnerabilities to trip up that ministry and maintain the congregation's dysfunction. How a minister asserts leadership and handles pressure in a congregation indicates whether that ministry will provide a therapeutic influence or be sabotaged by the congregation's weaknesses.

This course will examine the psychology of ministerial leadership and look at how such leadership can support the development of congregational health. This course will offer psychological and group dynamic theories, and a repertoire of tools and techniques, with which to intervene in a congregational system.

This course recognizes that the work of congregational healing can embroil a minister in tension and pressure, which demands a clarity of presence and a personal tenacity beyond tools and techniques. Therefore this course will look at psychological issues that can trip up a ministry and support the development of your personal health and immunity to congregational sabotage. I hope that all aspects of this course support the development of both your knowledge base and your personal capacity, with which you may become the effective minister you wish to be.

In the end, a healthy congregation is like a rising tide in which all boats float. Such a system supports people's spiritual journeys and supports healthy relationships and families. It offers a healthy context in which to grieve through losses, and to celebrate triumphs. It helps keep some people out of psychiatric hospitals. It keeps you in a job and, in the long run, makes your professional life more satisfying.

## **Course Goals:**

1. Develop awareness of the congregation as a system and the role of the minister in intervening on behalf of the health of that system.
2. Develop a model for assessing systemic illness and health, and apply that model to diagnose congregations.
3. Given the possible diagnoses, develop a repertoire of interventions. Distinguish insight-oriented leadership interventions from interventions that do not depend on the congregation's insight.

4. Distinguish content from process in a system, and support the use of healthy processes.
5. Examine systemic and individual anxiety, and develop ways to moderate your own anxiety in the midst of systemic anxiety.

### **About the Instructor**

The Rev. Dr. Ken Reeves is a graduate of the Starr King School for the Ministry, in Berkeley, CA, and has served congregations in Ohio and Delaware. He has also earned a Masters in Pastoral Counseling and a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology. He has served on the Ministerial Fellowship Committee and as a C.E.N.T.E.R. presenter for the UUMA. He is currently a clinical psychologist with a therapy practice, a consulting psychologist with the Center for Career Development and Ministry, in Dedham, MA, and an adjunct professor at Andover Newton Theological School.

### **Course Requirements**

1. Attend class.
2. Complete the assigned readings:

Never Call Them Jerks, by Boers

Creating a Healthier Church, by Richardson

Leading Change in the Congregation, by Rendle,

Generation to Generation, by Friedman, p. 1-64, 193-249

Global Assessment of Relational Functioning, in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV), from the American Psychiatric Association

Chapter 2: "Identity," in Handbook of Congregational Studies, by Carroll et al.,  
"Differentiation" handout

"Identifying key characteristics of outstanding Episcopal clergy," by McClelland et al.

"Part One," p. 3-88, in Primal leadership, by Goleman et al.,

"Stages of Community Making," in The Different Drum, by M. Scott Peck

"The Power of Birth Order," by Jeffrey Kluger

Chapter 1, in Psychodynamic Psychiatry in Clinical Practice, by Gabbard,

Chapters 4 and 5 in Doing Psychotherapy, by Basch,

Selected verses, in Tao Te Ching,

Preface, Chapters 1,4, and 5 in Will and Spirit, by May,

"Flirting with Leadership," by Crumley

Handouts:

"Empathy"

"Conflict"

"Differentiation"

"Handling Complaint and Criticism"

Optional Readings:

Chapter 2: Church Growth and Factors within the Control of the Congregation, in The Inviting Church, by Oswald and Leas

“Bowen Theory and Therapy,” by Friedman

3. Complete 10 of the 16 self-definition exercises on page 6 of this syllabus. You will be asked to articulate one self-definition at each of the morning and afternoon meetings of each class.

4. Research your own family’s process dynamics. As scheduled in the syllabus, have three conversations with three family members in which you obtain one piece of information about that person, or your family, that you had not yet known. These facts can be trivial -- your mother spent the day at the mall -- or profound -- your mother is an uncover agent for the CIA. As you note the piece of information, or the content of the conversation, pay attention also to the process dynamics occurring. Write one page or less reporting (1) whom you consulted, (2) the fact you learned, (3) the process you observed, (4) your reflections on how this process dynamic affects you, (5) how you go along with or resist the process dynamic, (6) what this process reveals about the whole family system, and (7) what you learned from your family process that you bring to your current relationships. You will be asked to prepare this and hand in your papers three times as scheduled in the syllabus.

5. Write one of three possible papers:

(A) Create a theory of preaching mindful of systems theory. Describe your preaching in terms of its process dynamics and how that preaching would offer health of your congregational system.

(B) Describe what for you would be a difficult leadership challenge occurring in your congregation. Offer some possible diagnoses to explain the problem and its origin. Offer some possibly helpful interventions.

© Create your own paper topic. Feel free to take up an area of interest from this class and write about it. Propose your topic in writing to me before the class ends.

Five-page limit, 250-300 words per page. You may refer to any writings (include citations). You may confer with other students, or whomever. You may turn in your paper within 10 days of the conclusion of class, July 28.

## Course Schedule:

### **July 14**

#### **Morning: A model for diagnosing systems**

Exercise:

Complete one self-definition to present to class.

#### **Afternoon: Interventions that involve insight and organization, or How to do church**

Exercise:

Complete one self-definition to present to class.

### **July 15**

#### **Morning: Systems theory and process dynamics**

Exercise:

Complete one self-definition to present to class.

#### **Afternoon: More on systems theory and process dynamics**

Exercise:

Complete one self-definition to present to class.

### **July 16**

#### **Morning: Presence in leadership**

Exercises:

Complete one self-definition to present to class.

Hand in family process paper #1

#### **Afternoon: Conflict and other dangers**

Exercise:

Complete one self-definition to present to class.

### **July 17**

#### **Morning: Difficult people, complaint, and criticism**

Exercises:

Complete one self-definition to present to class.

Hand in family process paper #2

**Afternoon: The unconscious in ministry**

Exercise:

Complete one self-definition to present to class.

**July 18**

**Morning: Spirituality and leadership**

Exercise:

Complete one self-definition to present to class.

Hand in family process paper #3

**Afternoon: Congregational case situations examined from a systems perspective**

Exercise:

Complete one self-definition to present to class.

## Self Definition Exercises

1. Write a one-sentence definition of the congregation.
2. Write a one-sentence statement of religious belief, or a personal credo.  
Complete the sentence: "I believe..."
3. Write fifty sentences that begin with the words: "I like..." Phrase each "like" in a complete sentence as an exercise in making forthright personal statements.
4. List your wants, completing the sentence that begins with "I want..." as many times as you want.
5. Write a statement describing your values.
6. Describe a time in which you felt at peace or in awe.
7. Write a one-sentence definition of your ministry.
8. List the key principles that guide your ministry.
9. Distill the message of all your sermons into one sentence.
10. Write a one-sentence autobiography. Carl Jung begins his autobiography, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, with the sentence: "My life has been the story of the self-realization of the unconscious." How would your sentence read?
11. Write your visions for your congregation.
12. List what you would want people in your congregation to experience.
13. Present a symbol of yourself as a leader.
14. What Biblical or historical figure do you hold as a model for leadership?  
What about that figure's leadership do you emulate?
15. Name your personal gifts for leadership. List what gifts are needed from other people to balance, complete, or complement your own.
16. Fill in the blanks: "As a minister I want to \_\_\_\_\_ (verb) \_\_\_\_\_ (subject of the verb), because that would \_\_\_\_\_, (the ultimate effect of that action on the subject) and it would \_\_\_\_\_ (the ultimate effect on that action on yourself)." (For example, "As a minister I want to change the world, because that would bring peace to others, and it would bring fulfillment to myself.")