



Ministerial Development Community News

Pastoral Health *Rev. Dr. Gary Brown*

As the point person for the pastoral health arm of the Ministerial Development Community, this is a statement of the vision for member care for pastors. It was written jointly by myself, Rev. Dr. Gary Brown; and Rev. Dr. Ken Schira and Rev. Dr. Robert Santucci. We presented this to the Ministerial Development Community and then to the Conference Network Team. It is our hope that our connectional system will develop healthy networks of pastors, who are able then to monitor and maintain their own health.

A Vision for Member Care of EC Pastors to Encourage their own Self Care *September 2021*

THE GOAL STATEMENT

The goal of the pastoral health arm of the Ministerial Development Community is to develop and implement member care strategies which equip EC pastors toward caring for themselves, spiritually, physically and emotionally.

THE VISION STATEMENT

A Biblical View of Ministerial Member-Care Leading to Self-Care

Paul to Timothy: In his own version of “member care” for his ministry team, Paul says to Timothy, “Keep a close watch on yourself and on your teaching.” (1 Timothy 4:16a). Paul nearly always worked in a team. The members are well-known to us through his letters and Luke’s description of their travels in Acts.

The Galatians to the Galatians: Paul had earlier urged believers in Galatia to, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2), emphasizing that we are our brothers’ keepers in spiritual matters, sort of “member care” among members of a local congregation. The goal of this Biblical vision was self-care, as described in Galatians 6:5, “For each will have to bear his own load.”

Jonathan to David: Perhaps Paul was remembering the special relationship between David and Jonathan in our previous passage. When David was running for his life from King Saul, Jonathan, David’s friend and Saul’s own son and heir, found David in hiding (1 Samuel 23:16). Jonathan “strengthened David’s hand in God.” On the strength of his friend’s encouragement, David went on to escape and gather a band of men around him. Years later, David was alone and under pressure from his own men who had lost their families when David led them to help the Philistines in battle. In 1 Samuel 30:6, we read how “David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.” This is an Old Testament model for the ongoing investment of resources by mission agencies, churches and other mission organizations for the nurture and development of missionary personnel of “member care.” The encouragement that David received from Jonathan empowered him to care for himself in God when he was facing trouble alone.

An EC Church View of Member-Care Leading to Personal Self-Care.

The term “member care” is borrowed from the world of global missions. The following definition, although broader in scope, expresses the values of member-care by the National Conference of the EC church for its pastors. The Evangelical Alliance Mission (TEAM) definition of member-care is, “the ongoing investment of resources by mission agencies, churches and other mission organizations for the nurture and development of missionary personnel.”

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THE VISION STATEMENT

A Biblical View of Ministerial Member-Care Leading to Self-Care

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A possible revised view of member-care/self-care: The ongoing investment of resources shared denominationally through the District Field Directors (DFD's) and driven by the Evangelical Congregational Church for the pastoral development of self-care, and toward a movement of healthy pastors, churches, and their varied ministries.

Our Rationale: The itinerancy is defined by the Evangelical Congregational Church as a "self-disciplining body of ordained elders" ([2016 EC Discipline](#), paragraph 514). Pastors (DFDs) helping local pastors to help themselves. Member-care encourages self-care. District Field Directors can be effective in this way by developing strategies that deliver member care services.

The outcome of producing a culture of pastors, healthy enough and supported enough to care for themselves in their ministries is a connectional byproduct of member-/self-care.

Healthy Pastors: an Emerging Picture of Member-Care

A brainstorming session with the Conference Network Team in October 2020 described what the District Field Directors are currently doing to maintain healthy pastors in their districts. This created a picture of how these men were caring for their pastors. Picture if you will, a DFD meeting regularly, one-on-one and in groups to let the pastors talk. This has helped pastors feel connected and not alone. Lay delegates are also brought into the loop of caring for their own pastors. The local district fellowships of EC Church pastors meet regularly. This provides a place for pastors to be vulnerable. Study days on relevant topics are scheduled, enriching those who participate. Good questions are asked to help bring about creative thinking and problem-solving. The District Field Directors, pastors themselves, "are not seen as threats but as partners with fellow pastors in their local ministries." Pastors benefit from a culture of encouragement. Pastors' wives find fellowship and friendship among each other. Pastoral families have a sense that the EC church cares about them, and, where deemed appropriate, referrals are made to professional counselors. EC Care funds help pay for needed counseling.

A Picture of a Preferred Future

Because it is difficult to give others what you do not have yourself, the sabbath principle is better encouraged. Pastors are asked by their Pastoral Relation Committees (PRC) when and how they take their weekly days off. Generous vacations are offered to pastors and their families. Intentional sabbaticals are regularly sought and practiced among our pastors, resulting in fresh leadership in the churches.

The above are both activities that are currently done to deliver care for members as well as dreams of what it could look like among us. These are visions of a preferred future, to be delivered by the denomination to the men who lead our congregations, who in turn are safe places for the lost to be found by Christ.