

# TRANSITION TIMES

## A QUARTERLY OF THE INTERIM MINISTRY CONFERENCE

interimministrylcms.org  
Editor, Anne R. Lee

Volume 2, Issue 4—October, 2018

### PREPARING TO LEAVE AS GOOD NEIGHBORS By Martin E. Lee

One of the very first Bible stories is about two brothers, Cain and Abel, one of whom was not a good neighbor. When the Lord asked Cain about Abel's whereabouts, Cain responded, "Am I my brother's keeper?" ([Gen 4:9](#)). The Lord knew the answer to Abel's whereabouts as much as he knew the answer to Adam's whereabouts when He called out: "Where are you?" ([Gen 3:9](#)). Later, a teacher of the law asked Jesus: "Who is my neighbor?" And Jesus makes it ever so clear that everyone in our proximity is our neighbor.

Intentional Interim Pastors (IIPs) leave assignments after living and working in close proximity with congregational neighbors for just long enough to come to know and love them. In preparing to leave, we wonder what it means that we were in each other's proximity during this "between time" and how we should best prepare congregations to be successful neighbors with each other and with the next settled pastor.

Jesus' response to our failure to be our brother's keeper leaves no doubt about our response: He bore it. If we are to be good neighbors, we are to bear with one another ([Eph: 4:2](#)). In particular, we are to bear with one another's differences (while not excusing sin). Differences in our God-given gifts, values, goals, and priorities exist and that's okay. As a matter of fact, it is better than okay: differences allow for creative problem solving and innovation.

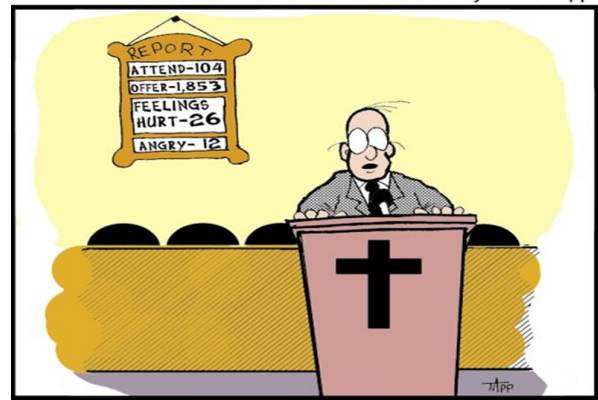
Often what happens in our societal neighborhoods plays out in our churches. We become very polarized. We hang out with people like ourselves: people who think like us, look like us, share our values, and behave like us. Unfortunately, this means we stop sharing space with neighbors who are different from us. And when we stop sharing space we stop being neighborly.

It is fitting that during our IIM journeys we get into proximity with congregational members. We are in each other's face - oops, I mean space! That's what being my brother's keeper is all about. We hang out together with purpose: from cottage meetings, town hall meetings and one-on-one meetings to outdoor services, chapel services,

picnics, Bible studies, focus meetings, voter's meetings, and staff meetings. All of these events afford us a chance to get into each other's space; to get to know one another. And when God comes asking about where our brothers and sisters are, we are able to tell Him.

Congregational systems often discover as they grow up is that problems are not always meant to be solved: they are meant to be *borne*. Often, problems are seen as problems in *others*, whereas bearing with one another allows us to patiently learn about problems in *ourselves*. Part of our time together with our neighbors is just to slow down and allow our thinking to catch up with our emotions. Gilbert Rendle suggests in his book *Behavioral Covenants in Congregations* that sometimes, rather than trying to fix a problem, "this is a time for leaders and members of congrega-

#### CHURCH OF THE COVERED DISH by Thom Tapp



"It's been a better week than usual..."

tions to learn and relearn our own faith commitments and the values of our faith traditions" (24).

The Litany of Farewell is a good way to revisit our faith commitments and traditions, exercise forgiveness, and model the cross-bearing nature of Christian service. The Litany of Farewell is a good note to leave on after modeling the cross-bearing life throughout our assignments.

*Rev. Martin E. Lee has served six IIM assignments in Michigan and the Southeastern District. He serves on the IMC board and as a NALIP trainer.*



# PRACTITIONERS TOOLBOX

## COVENANTING TO LIVE WELL TOGETHER

by Martin E. Lee

Behavioral Covenants leave a congregation committed to the progress that has been accomplished during the IIM assignment.

### BEHAVIORAL COVENANT EXERCISE

#### I. Discuss the Problem (5 minutes)

1. Why bother with covenants? Shouldn't we just trust one another?
2. Covenants assist God's people in \_\_\_(living well)\_\_\_ together in the wilderness.
3. A behavioral covenant is a \_\_\_(servant)\_\_\_ to our spiritual life, it should never \_\_\_(replace)\_\_\_ the Word of God in the cross.
4. Much of the \_\_\_(uncivil behavior)\_\_\_ originates in a cultural shift refer to as the rise of individualism. Individuals do not defer to the needs of the \_\_\_(group)\_\_\_.
5. Read Matthew 20:16 – Why does Jesus say this? People's human nature defaults to the \_\_\_("what's in it for me?")\_\_\_ approach. (theology of the great reversal)
6. What are some examples in history of whole organizational systems functioning around this unhealthy approach? \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Organizing around unhealthy behavior in the name of "niceness" or "Christian love" is breaking which commandment? \_\_\_(2nd Commandment)\_\_\_.

#### II. Book Review (5 – 7 minutes)

1. Lord Mouton's Three Domains of Life (Handout)
2. Holy Manners Discussions:
  - Do you think congregations have a role or responsibility to introduce manners, or obedience to the unenforceable?
  - When have we witnessed our congregation practice manners in obedience to the unenforceable?
  - When have we witnessed uncivil, unfaithful, unhealthy, or embarrassing behavior? (This is not a time for blaming).

#### III. Norm Exercise (10 – 15 minutes)

Norms are hidden or silent (not talked about), so we often have little opportunity to change them. Here are several norms that are helpful for leaders to look at: decision-making, information sharing, conflict, complaints, leadership.

*Small Groups: Please work on your assigned set of norms. Answer the question: "What rules do we have about [your assigned topic]?" Review norms with the full group. Identify and prioritize the behaviors and norms that*

*if changed, would enable leaders and members to practice healthy and faithful behaviors and holy manners.*

#### IV. The Solution: God Brings People Together Through Covenants! (10 minutes)

1. Read *Gen. 3:14 – 19; Gen. 9:8 – 17; Gen. 12:1 – 5; Gen. 15:9 – 21; Gen. 28:10 – 22; Jer. 31:31 – 34; Heb. 8:6 – 13; John 13:34; Matthew 22:37.*
2. In the "New Covenant" God operates on \_\_\_(both)\_\_\_ sides of the covenant.
3. Forming a behavioral covenant allows for exploring the \_\_\_(nature)\_\_\_ of relationships and the family or church family system.
4. Covenant formation is \_\_\_(negotiable)\_\_\_, allowing for back-and-forth.
5. Covenant formation provides a way to \_\_\_(describe and address)\_\_\_ the discomfort that separates us.
6. Covenants allow groups to intentionally come together to address the \_\_\_(on-going/adaptive)\_\_\_ challenges (condition).
7. Covenants form and promote acceptable \_\_\_(behavior)\_\_\_.
8. Read I Corinthians 16:13. Groups "\_\_\_(police)\_\_\_" themselves.
9. Covenants can be as brief as one week with a daily \_\_\_(promise)\_\_\_ with a sign off mechanism.
10. Physical touch and geographic space may lend to the \_\_\_(formalizing)\_\_\_ of a covenant.

V. Closing: Remember, God has provided a New Covenant to enable us to live in a holy relationship with Him and one another. Jesus is the Mediator of this New Covenant. God agrees to forgive us our sin and we agree to give it to Him. In so doing "holy manners" are promoted in our faith communities.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### NALIP Basic Education Events

Northeast Ohio Synod

- Phase III — November 5-9, 2018

- Phase I—March 18-22, 2019

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO

- Phase I — April 1-5, 2019

Luther Seminary, Mt Olivet Retreat Center, St. Paul, MN

- Phase III—May 13-17, 2019

Florida-Georgia District Offices- Orlando, FL

- Phase I — February 18-22, 2019

See <http://www.nalip.net/education.asp#Basic>