

# Peer learning

by Christopher Ingram, First, Elizabeth City

The raft of recent research in clergy health and wholeness paints a discouraging picture. We're learning that a great many pastors are prone to leave health concerns untreated, experience compassion fatigue, burnout, and a creeping sense of isolation from church, family, self and faith. I often wonder if there isn't a leadership corollary to the Biblical maxim of "reaping what we sow." Ask yourself what such a pastor can sow in ministry. As importantly, what is reaped congregationally?

When I relocated to a far-flung corner of the state, isolation weighed heavily on me. Our excited "Yes!" to a remarkable congregation also obligated me and my family to plant ourselves in unfamiliar soil. I was grateful to receive personal contact, even before arriving, from the convener of a CBFNC peer-learning group in that region. He invited me to visit and see if participation would help me in my transition and ministry there. My yes to that call was equally enthusiastic!

No one in the group is nearby. I'm an hour or more from any of them, but that community is an important supporting and sustaining presence for me. **I find that I am a more competent – and complete – husband, father and pastor because of this circle of colleagues.** We meet monthly, sharing a meal together and focusing on pressing leadership questions. We read good books and discuss our insights. We embark on annual retreats to focus on spiritual formation. Our families gather for a semiannual cookout or holiday feast. Through it all, we don't seek to fix, save, or even advise one another. Instead, we share a goal to seek and sustain excellence in ministry to our congregations and with them.

Consider the gift given a pastor who can participate in a collegial community that fosters personal spiritual formation, ongoing professional development, and confidential care for church or domestic conundrums. Now apply the maxim again. What might he or she sow into the congregation? What might be cultivated in the congregation ... or out in the world?

Thanks to CBF of NC for sowing leadership resources in this special way. I can only imagine a greater harvest.



*Christopher Ingram is married to Jeanell Cox, a CBF-endorsed healthcare chaplain, and father to three young sons. A graduate of Duke Divinity School, he served in ministries in the Virginia prison system, two congregations in Germany, and as an educator and pastor to congregations in Raleigh and Smithfield before his call to be the senior pastor of the First Baptist Church of Elizabeth City. He served on the Missions Council of CBF of NC for six years and is now a representative on the CBF national coordinating council.*

**For additional information on peer learning groups, please contact CBFNC Leadership Development Coordinator Ka'thy Gore Chappell at [kchappell@cbfnc.org](mailto:kchappell@cbfnc.org).**