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Bloomfield minister authors guide for ministers

By: Frederick A. Hesketh, Correspondent 01/25/2007

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To the average man or woman on the street, a life in ministry looks like a breeze with a full workday only on Sundays and part-time assignments the rest of the week.

Those in the ministry know and experience a very different life. There is the ongoing tension of ministry and family. Members bring their problems and stresses to religious leaders for advice and counseling. The counselor at times feels the need to be all things to all people. It can be more stressful if those seeking help and guidance look on their minister as omni-competent in meeting their needs and expectations

How should ministers handle these feelings? Bloomfield resident Mae Williams has recently authored a book written to guide ministers in their vocation. The book "Becoming: Meditations for the Ministry Minded" is for and about ministers and potential ministers on the rewards, trials and pressures in God's service and the extension of that service to others. Williams, the daughter of a minister, lived part of her youth in Bloomfield, later married and moved out of Bloomfield only to return five years ago with her husband and three daughters to live in town once again.

She earned a bachelor's degree in elementary and special education, a master's degree in educational leadership and a doctorate in special education. For 11 years she was a teacher for children with disabilities and is presently assistant professor at Saint Joseph College in West Hartford.

William's father remains in God's service today at the Church of the Living God as its general overseer. Her brother is pastor of the First Church of the Living God in Hartford.

Williams explained that she watched how the ministry impacted her father's life. She also watched other ministers and observed how their ministries impacted their lives. "I want this book to be a memorial to those I have watched," she said, adding, "I have become increasingly sensitive to their weariness."

Various researchers have indicated that pastoral ministry can be stressful due to a combination of factors: the disparity between expectations and reality, time management problems, inability to produce "win-win" situations in resolving conflicts between church members, too many administrative duties, in addition to the myriad problems associated with all professions.

Yet they continue. Researcher John C. LaRue Jr. reported the results of his 1996 study: "Nearly nine out of 10 pastors (86 percent) would choose a ministry career if they had to do it all over again. Only 4 percent say they would not enter ministry if given a second chance. Another 10 percent are undecided."

Still, there is the need to remain a leader. Williams said, "Ministers must stay intimately connected to God even during their most trying times," she said. "Ministers are often so busy helping others that they forget about themselves. They



have to slow down," she said.

Williams explained, "The book is meant to help those who are in the throes of doing so much in the name of Christ that they are in danger of losing touch with the One for whom they work so hard."

The book, with narratives, poetry and questions for the reader to ponder, encourages just such a "slow down" so busy ministers can "spend time in the presence of God for their own spiritually uplifting experience and so they can go on ministering from the heart of God," said Williams.

Williams addresses recent controversies regarding the serious shortcomings of some in the ministry, but explains, "Instead of condemning ministries, the book admits our human frailties, encouraging us not to give up on ministry, not to forget our own need for God for the sake of the people."

The Rev. Dr. Robert S. Henderson, a pastoral psychotherapist in Glastonbury, said upon the book's publication that Williams "has brought forth a wonderfully helpful book for those of us in ministry, combining personal examples with insightful reflections of many biblical stories. She has blessed us with ideas and questions to ponder as we reflect on our ministries."

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