



The Kremlin, Moscow

Running the Race....

With all the societal upheaval of the last couple years we are now seeing the economic fallout reflected in the shortage of labor, the challenge in the distribution of goods, as well as the host of longer term mental and emotional health issues, which are becoming more and more evident. In our ministry of focusing of leadership development, we are also beginning to see the fallout among leaders who have not only had to navigate these challenges personally, but also have had to deal with the added responsibility of helping others through these times.

One of the results in North America is that we are now seeing the impact on pastoral/leadership in the form of burnout. A Barna Group survey (*Christianity Today* Nov. 2021) found that 38 percent of pastors (in USA) are seriously considering leaving full-time ministry, up from 29 percent in January 2021. In addition to this sobering statistic, is the reality that many are also dealing with mental and emotional healthy issues all the while struggling to lead others during these times.

A lot of pastors are saying, "Is this really what I signed up for? Is this what I was called into?" Dan White states that "Prior to COVID-19, burnout was a silent epidemic in ministry leaders. . . The stats testify to this, but now I might say burnout is endemic." Perhaps this indicates a wrong motivation or expectation of the reality of ministry, but nonetheless it is something a generation of leaders is dealing with.

Of course leaders in the past were not exempt from such pressures, and even greater ones that included persecution and martyrdom. Paul in 2 Cor. 1:8 reveals that he and his team ". . . were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself." Many pastors are ashamed of these feelings or admitting them as the Apostle Paul did. However, if a giant of faith as the Apostle went through this, it is likely none of us are exempt.



Alexey (far left) & Phil with pastors in Siberia, 2015

As an international ministry we deal with leaders in a variety of cultural and societal contexts. Recently we asked our various teams how the pastors and leaders in their countries are navigating these same challenges. Alexey, our MCNet coach in Russia responded with the following email:

Greetings,

Rarely pastors discuss these issues here in Russia. In our post soviet culture in general these themes are less discussed then in the West. However, I've seen over the last two years that several prominent church leaders have raised the issues of burn out. But we do not really have statistics about it.

There is one pastor from Siberia whom I know quite well, who is also an overseer of group of churches and one of prominent evangelical leaders in his city and region. When he started sharing openly experience of his burn out and medical treatment for depression it was felt by many as a bombshell. "Pastors are spiritual people, therefore they do not burn out" – is the general understanding among evangelical churches here.

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Running the Race....

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Since many churches were started in the 1990s and 2000s, the current decade is the time when the leadership baton is being passed as church founders face the reality that they will not live forever on earth and that they themselves will not reach all the dreams and visions they have had. Since many of pentecostal and charismatic churches are first generation churches, issues of passing the baton and finishing the race well are not part of church culture. I think the situation is a bit better in Baptist churches which were connected to churches which existed in Soviet times. I think in these traditions over several generation of Christians have had to deal with issues of what today is called burnout. The pressure put on churches and ministers during Soviet times created a culture of survival and a certain resilience.

Another general cultural difference from the West in our context, is that many people in Russia live in "survival mode" since the collapse of Soviet economy in 90s. So the crisis of COVID is just another crisis. For many Russian people, especially those outside of the mega cities, the crisis of the 1990s is still not over. So there is a much higher tolerance on a cultural level to such pressures and changes. Yet, as everywhere, these pressures influence churches and ministers.

Alexey
Moscow, Russia



Alexey's comments confirm what we as a ministry have experienced over the years working in various other countries. Besides the realities in Russia and Ukraine, those in countries such as Cuba and China also experience additional pressures due to persecution (overt and subtle). The reality of the last couple years have merely exacerbated this. As a ministry called to come along side of pastors and church leaders how can we help?

To begin with, it is important that leaders (and all of us) are able to evaluate and be honest regarding where they are at spiritually, emotionally and mentally. They then need a context in which they can share this with others

and realize that they are not alone in their struggles. Phil has completed a spiritual journey workbook, "Finishing the Race" which is designed to help a leader go through Scriptures and deal with the



various issues they are processing that are potential obstacles to finishing well. It is intended to be studied in a retreat setting over several days so that leaders can discuss these issues with others who are going through similar challenges. He will be facilitating this with our core team at our regional meeting in Turkey in June.

Burnout in our western context may be due to unrealistic or false expectations. Burleson, who also facilitates such spiritual retreats, explains that this process is "...forcing pastors to find their identity in Christ and not in the perfection of their ministry, and I think that's a good thing." Having doubts about what we are doing and having to receive our purpose from Christ is not a new thing or limited to "leaders." Biblical figures such as David, Moses, Joshua, Peter and many others all had questions and doubts at times in their lives.

The global events of the last couple years have merely highlighted something that most were able to keep under the surface. In serving leaders we want to help them come back to a place of a deeper relationship with Jesus and to come out the other side more resilient. This will enable them to then fulfill the purpose that God has for their lives. Though Paul had very real struggles he was able to say at the end of his life, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." Our goal is to help all the leaders we serve be able to also have this as their testimony.

Let's Talk Turkey. . .

. . . Well, the country that is. Thank you for those who were able to respond to our last newsletter to partner with us to provide a spiritual and physical retreat for our Eurasia core team leaders in Turkey this June. Ministry Coaches (and their spouses) from our MCNet (Ministry Coaching Network) family from Ukraine/Russia/Europe have been invited. As funds allow, we are also hoping to have two couples from Latin America join us.

As mentioned previously, we want to support these leaders in order to combat the burnout, depression and other effects of serving through the last couple difficult years. Meeting in a third country will accomplish several goals, such as helping us meet with those who cannot get to each other's countries due to geopolitical realities. In addition to the spiritual rejuvenation aspect of the meeting, we also will be able to strategize the implementation of the CLI program throughout our network.

The New MCNet *Christian Leadership Institute (CLI)*

The Launch

After a couple years of development, based upon over twenty years of leadership materials which we have used in churches, we have launched the new MCNet Christian Leadership Institute (initially in Latin America, the Dominican Rep.) This new program will use some of our existing materials as well as new leadership courses we have written to equip leaders who feel a calling to serve the Church (not necessarily within a church building).

The program will take a total of four years

exam. Instead of a one-size-fits-all approach, a competency centered focus ensures that the program is much more tailored to the candidate, while at the same time assessing key areas that are necessary to be effective in ministry over a lifetime.

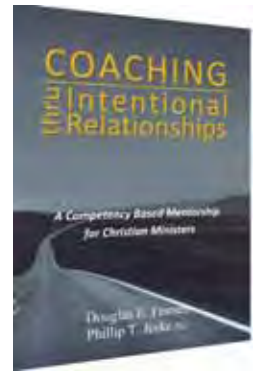
Mentorship Based

Another key component to the program is that every candidate spends time with a mentor who guides them through the learning process. Some existing seminaries and schools have attempted this approach but have encountered the challenge of retooling “professors” to be mentors or finding enough mentors to scale up the program. The advantage we have is that for at least the last twenty years our

becoming more common in the marketplace. Rather than looking for academic degrees and time spent in college, employers are looking for those who have the necessary competencies to accomplish the tasks required for a particular job. It would seem that this is a much more holistic approach for those training for the practical task of ministry.

Timing is everything and it seems that the pandemic has accelerated the changes that were already being made in the field of education. Not only from a technological point of view, but also leaders being more open to a relational approach. A new website/database has also been created (mcnetcli.org) so that each candidate and mentor will be able to access all our materials, as well as track their progress. Translation into Spanish has begun and later this year we anticipate beginning the Russian translation.

In January Carlos and Raydel enrolled candidates in the program in the DR and we are hoping to do the same in our Eurasia Region (Europe/Ukraine/Russia) later this year. Thank you for your prayers as we initiate this new exciting way to train the next generation of leaders.



Raydel (standing) with CLI Candidates



to complete, with candidates earning two certificates (Christian Leadership Certificate & Christian Ministry Cert.). However, it is actually a completely different way of developing leaders for ministry than a typical seminary or bible school. It focuses on assessing competencies within the context of a mentoring relationship.

Competency Based

Altogether, there are about 40 competencies in which each candidate will be assessed. Then according to their level of proficiency in each they will have learning activities assigned for them to complete. Some of the competencies included are: character, gifts, spiritual disciplines, EQ, Team Dynamics, Interpersonal Health, Marriage and so on. Their basic biblical and theology knowledge are also assessed.

This differs from a traditional approach which focuses on writing papers, reading a certain amount of pages, and passing

Ministry Coaches (MCNet) have developed a network of mentors in each of their regions.

For Such a Time

We believe that focusing on competencies, combined with a mentorship, is a more balanced approach and more effectively reflects biblical values, as a way to train future ministers. The events of the last couple years have accelerated the move that was already happening towards this approach to learning and made it even more applicable and desirable.

While this approach is still unique to ministerial training, a competency approach to training employees is



Phil introducing CLI in Ukraine 2021

From My Desk



Phil Jeske, PhD
President



Our Mission

Serving the church by mentoring and coaching ministry teams.

Our Purpose

Our goal is to see another generation equipped so that they may be relevant witnesses in their culture. We accomplish this through mentoring leaders, coaching and consulting with ministry teams, and providing culturally relevant materials that facilitate this process.

Accountability

ICM is an interdenominational non-profit charity registered in both Canada and the USA. It is a faith mission and supported by free-will donations of those of like vision.

ICM adheres to the WEF & Lausanne Covenants statements of faith and takes an evangelical approach to Scripture.

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ICM, CANADA

34181 - 17790 #10 Hwy
Surrey, BC V3S 8C4
604.614-4473

ICM, USA

P.O. Box 129
Monument, CO 80132
661.832-9740

E-mail

office@icmcanada.org

www.icmcanada.org



In light of the latest geo-political developments, I was reflecting on my trip to Ukraine and Russia in 2014. If you recall, at that time Russian annexed Crimea to once again be part of Russia. Within a one week period on that trip I was with leaders in Ukraine and Russia. As you can imagine, there were strong feelings on both sides which eventually affected whole denominations. Denominations and organizations that had been reunited in the 1990s decided to again officially separate due to the geopolitical tensions in the region.

Since we are connected with ministry leaders in both countries, I had the opportunity to share with them what I shared with various other denominational leaders. Namely, the fact that we have a citizenship that supersedes whatever country issues our passport. The reality is that as believers we are citizens of a heavenly, eternal city.

While it may seem that the events on the ground half a world away have little impact on our lives, I believe there is an application for us. As I have observed the events of the last year surrounding the pandemic, I have been reminded that the enemy seeks to bring destruction and disunity everywhere. Just as these leaders struggled to maintain spiritual unity in the face of their temporal realities, that same could happen with us if we are not careful.

As we all know, bringing up any issue surrounding the pandemic and the decisions made by governments to deal with it seems to instantly polarize people. Even in the church there has developed a deep divide and everyone has taken sides on the issues. Yet in the Gospel of John, Jesus clearly states that the world was to know that we were his disciples because of our love for one another, not if can prove our position is the right one.

Now, of course, love for one another does not mean that we will always agree on every issue. Unity does not mean *sameness* and diversity does not necessarily have to lead to division. We can actually experience unity even in the midst of diversity. As I shared with my Ukrainian and Russian colleagues at the time, we need to elevate our perspective to an eternal one, remembering that we are part of something so much bigger than our temporal and flawed earthly cultures and societies.

My hope is that through these times we can experience our common grace and extend that to each other. Though it is not possible to always live at peace with all people, the writer of Hebrews encourages us to "make every effort to live in peace with all men. . ." This season will eventually pass, but will we as the body of Christ (and in our families) have created divisions that will be harder to heal after we are through to the other side of this season? It is my hope and prayer that this will not be the case, for as Jesus taught his first disciples, it is our love and unity that is to be a testimony to the world that we truly are his followers.

Partnering Together

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