



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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New pastors find clarity in their call to ministry

Elkhart, Ind. (AMBS) – Clarifying the Call, a weekend event at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, was intended to address questions and issues that arise for new pastors and lived up to its name, according to the participants.

“I learned that I wasn’t alone in how I felt or what I thought,” Isaac Villegas, pastor of Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship, Durham, N.C., said. “A pastor can live in isolation, but the sessions taught me that we all struggle with the same issues.”

Sharon Shultz, pastor of Eyebrow Mennonite Church, Eyebrow, Sask., said, “I really enjoyed getting together with others pastors—sharing joys, difficulties, struggles.”

Fifteen pastors from Canada and the U.S., who are in the first five years of their first pastorates, gathered at AMBS for the event, March 27–29. Meeting with them were denominational ministry leaders Karen Martens Zimmerly of Mennonite Church Canada and Linford King of Mennonite Church USA, along with several AMBS faculty and administrators.

Lois Siemens, pastor of Superb Mennonite Church, Kerrobert, Sask., said what other participants also reported: “Hearing the stories of other pastors” and “having leaders that shared knowledgeably out of their experience” were the most beneficial features of the weekend.

Clarifying the Call has been organized by Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary four times over the last five years as part of the AMBS Engaging Pastors program. This year’s event was the largest and brought together a more diverse group than previously. Four pastors were from Saskatchewan, three from Ontario, four from the southeast part of the U.S. and four from the central part of the U.S. Only five of the fifteen were AMBS graduates.

Villegas observed that “even though we came from such diverse places—from Atlanta, Ga., to Kerrobert, Sask.—each of our stories resonated with one another and disclosed the unity of Christ.”

Arthur Paul Boers, AMBS associate professor of pastoral theology and one of the event planners, noted that the group was also diverse theologically. In spite of this, “they were surprised how quickly they connected with each other.” Boers explained that “meeting with

others who are going through similar things helps them know they are not alone in what they are dealing with.”

Nina Bartelt Lanctot, associate director of Engaging Pastors, helped to plan and host the event. She notes that in the early years of ministry, pastors start to see that they are good at some things and not good at other things. Clarifying the Call helps newer pastors understand that this is normal, and helps them to think about how to shape their ministry to use their strengths and draw on the congregation in areas that are difficult for them.

The concept of “pastoral identity” was one issue that participants examined. Jeff Linthicum, pastor of Pine Creek Chapel, Arcadia, Fla., noted that newer pastors struggle with being called a *pastor*. “Our theology points out that we are all the same, yet we are treated different.” Although he had previous experience as a youth pastor and missionary to help him claim the title of pastor, he found the discussion about identity helpful.

The weekend included time for worship and recreation as well as input and discussion. Shultz said, “I really enjoyed the worship times. As a pastor I’m usually involved in planning them and leading them. It was so good to sit back and enjoy worshipping God instead of leading.”

At a banquet on the third evening, participants received blessings, requested in advance, from individuals in the congregations they serve and from their conference ministers. This was one of the most significant moments of the event, Lanctot explained. “There is a hunger to hear not only that I am doing OK, but that others can see God’s call in me and they are grateful for it.”

In the final worship service of the weekend, each participant reflected on what they hoped would happen next as a result of their experience in the event. They then presented these hopes in an offering to God.

“Developing a healthy long-term ministry requires consistent reflection on life and vocation,” Siemens summarized. Clarifying the Call provided an opportunity for this kind of reflection for the new pastors, giving them structured time away from responsibilities to learn from each other and from mentors in the denomination and the seminary.

Engaging Pastors, which funded the event, is supported by a grant from Lilly Endowment, with the goal of bringing pastors and professors together for collaboration in order to strengthen both the church and the seminary.