

Preface

We all know the verses—*And he appointed twelve that they should be **with** him, and he sent them out to preach* (Mark 3:14). *And when they saw the courage of Peter and John, and recognized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and took note that these men had been **with** Jesus* (Acts 4:13).

And we understand the concept—the Christian faith is more caught than taught, and ministry effectiveness is best learned contextually from role models.

But for many of us the race and pace of pastoral work keeps us isolated within our own ministries. We lose sight of our mentors. *Doing* crowds out *being*. And the last thing we take time for is personal reflection. Preach your best sermon, and another one is due in seven days. In fact, the better the message was last week, the higher you raised the bar for next week. Do a good job of counseling, and more parishioners await your advice. Teach well, and more people need instruction. Warmly welcome visitors, and more will arrive desiring personal care. Implement a significant change, and another challenge is before you. The bottom line for clergy is that the loop never closes.

But we don't have to be victims. We can take time, even daily, for reflecting on our service . . . for reassessing priorities . . . and for focusing on significance.

So I invite you to spend some quality time **with** a team of pastoral mentors. These seasoned ministry colleagues offer insights into our inner lives, our relationships and our Christian service.

These leadership letters have been collected over the past decade. And since transitions are a common reality of pastoral life, a number have made significant contextual changes since their letters were originally penned. A few have relocated to new congregations. Three have become denominational executives. Two have moved into teaching. Several have retired from parish work, yet remain active in writing, teaching, interim work and missions. Surprisingly, two senior ministers—

Gene Apple (from Central Christian Church in Las Vegas) and Randy Frazee (from Pantego Bible church in Arlington, TX) transitioned into the same new congregation—Willow Creek Community Church (South Barrington, IL).

No doubt, some of you will pick up this volume and read it cover to cover. Perhaps others will first go to a specific topic or particular author. But the collective counsel is best digested in small bites. I suggest you read each letter several times—jotting down your thoughts and reflections.

Better yet, invite two or three ministry colleagues to also read the letters and meet every two weeks to share your reflections with one another. The ongoing accountability, encouragement and prayer can draw you closer together as pastors and friends.

May God continue to receive great honor through your faithful Kingdom service.

God's Best!

John R. Cionca