

Through a Glass Darkly: Pastoral Leadership in Black and White

A Study Guide for Individuals and Groups

The Pastoral Partnerships for Excellence (PPE) project by design grouped pastors from seemingly different settings for the purpose of: 1) building new relationships and strengthening those already in existence, 2) conducting thorough examinations of partner congregations/organizations to discover historic strengths and weaknesses, 3) study styles of pastoral leadership over the history of each church or organization, and 4) write case studies that provide helpful insights that contribute to more effective pastoral leadership and congregational health.

A good way for groups or individuals to engage in thought and/or conversation around the themes present in the PPE material is through the use of questions for thought and reflection:

General Questions Relating to All the Case Studies

1. What is the role of history in understanding present realities?
2. In what ways does context shape and “call forth” particular styles of leadership? What examples of effective pastoral leadership based on context can be identified in the case studies?
3. How can congregations become more effective at the intersection of the gospel and the community? What challenges to such effectiveness can be identified in the case studies?

Questions Relating to Sixteenth Street Baptist Church and Vestavia Hills Baptist Church

1. In what ways are congregational expectations different for African-American pastors and white pastors? Give examples of how congregational expectations have shaped pastoral leadership at both churches.
2. Are there challenges common to both congregations? Identify and discuss these challenges. What transferable concepts can be identified that are relevant for churches in general?
3. How are these two churches similar? How are they different?
4. How has each congregation’s history influenced the chosen leadership style of the pastors?

Questions Relating to Sacred Heart and Our Lady Queen of the Universe Parishes and Baptist Church of the Covenant

1. In what ways are the “life stories” of Father Vernon Huguley and Rev. Sarah Shelton alike?
2. How has the issue of race influenced the histories of these congregations for the better? For the worse? In what ways is the issue of race an ongoing factor in these congregations?
3. In what ways do you think Fr. Vernon and Rev. Shelton have been influenced and shaped by their experiences in ministry? In what ways would you say their leadership styles today are the result of past experiences?
4. What do the models of ministry and pastoral leadership demonstrated by Fr. Vernon and Rev. Shelton communicate about their understandings of God?

Questions Relating to Mission Birmingham and the Greensboro Minister’s Prayer Fellowship

1. What are the roles of language and culture in constructing bridges of understanding among persons from different races?
2. Do you think racial reconciliation is a “point in time” occurrence that results from efforts over a period of time or is it an ongoing experience requiring intentionality? Explain.
3. What appears to be the most obvious challenge to ongoing reconciliation faced by both Mission Birmingham and the Greensboro Ministers’ group?
4. What for you is the most important theological principle to be applied when relating to persons from different races or cultures?