

**American Baptist Churches of New York State  
Lay Study Program**

**MINISTRY THROUGH THE SMALL CHURCH**

**STUDENT GUIDE**

Curriculum Committee  
of the  
ABC/NYS Lay Study Team

November 2002



## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course, Ministry in the Small Church, will introduce the student to three major areas of study. First, the student will learn about the nature of the small church including its general characteristics, worship and education, and get a glimpse into future possibilities. The student will then learn about some of the major challenges/issues in the small church, including caring, leadership, growth, and dealing with church conflict.

It is crucial that pastors and other church leaders are able to deal with many personal issues in their work. The last section deals with the nature of such issues, how pastors care for themselves and pastoral expectations and perspectives.

Because this course is designed around the practice of ministry, most classes rely upon the active involvement of the students. The course combines classroom study with outside research and reporting in order to deepen understanding of small church life, to develop or reinforce leadership skills, and to motivate participants in their spiritual development.

If there are enough students in the class, the class itself has the potential to develop into a small church; otherwise, the class has the potential to develop into a small group of leaders within a church, much like a church council or diaconate. Bonding among students and between the student and the instructor will naturally be a by-product of this course.

While each session can stand alone, each class gathering builds on the knowledge gained from previous sessions. In addition to being educational, each class has the potential for fun built into it because of the nature of the material and the high level of participation that the course promotes.

## **GENERAL TEXTS**

The Curriculum Committee allows the instructor to choose any one text from the following list or a combination of several texts or other sources whether they are from the list or not. The instructor also may elect to not use any text but to rely on collateral reading and/or handouts. Instructors should please keep in mind the cost to the students of these materials and their availability.

The Curriculum Committee group that constructed this syllabus has recommended the following texts:

Bierly, Steve R., *How To Thrive as a Small-Church Pastor*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998; 187 pages.

Burt, Steven E. and Hazel Ann Roper, *The Little Church That Could: Raising Small Church Esteem*, Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2000; 111 pages.

Pappas, Anthony G., *Entering The World of The Small Church*, Alban Institute, 2000; 142 pages.

Ray, David R., *The Big Small Church Book*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1992; 241 pages.

## **SCRIPTURES**

The use of any standard Bible is recommended. Among such recommended scriptures are: The King James Version (KJV), The New International Version (NIV), Revised Standard Version (RSV), New King James Version (NKJV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), New Living Translation (NLT), 21<sup>st</sup> Century King James, NIV formatted, or the Amplified (AMP).

## **STUDY TOOLS**

These web sites are available on the Internet.

Bible Gateway: <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible>

Bible Study Tools: <http://crosswalk.com>

Blue Letter Bible: <http://www.blueletterbible.org>

Multiple search engines such as: [http:// www.dogpile.com](http://www.dogpile.com)

## **OTHER REFERENCE MATERIAL**

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *Life Together*, New York: Harper and Row, 1981; 128 pages.

Burt, Steve, *Activating Leadership in the Small Church*, Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1988;

Halverstadt, Hugh F., *Managing Church Conflict*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991; 223 pages.

Ray, David R., *Wonderful Worship in Smaller Churches*, New York: Pilgrim Press, 2000; 192 pages.

The prices listed and availability status were current as of June 2002 from Amazon.com. We suggest that you check this site and other sources for current availability and price so that you will be able to purchase the book(s) at the most reasonable cost.

Rev. William Harrel and Dr. Joseph Perry of the Curriculum Committee of the Lay Study Team wrote this syllabus. The authors have also referenced Rev. Dr. Hazel Roper's earlier course by the same title (1995). Barbara Harrel and Lucille Dintrone were instrumental in its thought development and formatting.

# **LESSON SCHEDULE, OBJECTIVES, ASSIGNMENTS & ACTIVITIES**

## **General Course Objectives**

Often when courses are offered covering subjects related to ministry in the local congregation there is minimal emphasis on a particular size church. Because of this students may come away with an understanding of "how things are" in a generic setting, leaving them unprepared to deal with issues unique to the particular place they are called. This course's concentration on the small church is especially relevant in our day given the fact that the majority of churches in need of pastoral leadership fall into this category.

The purpose of this course is to enable the participants to realize the unique value and ministry of the small church. Participants will become familiar with some dynamics of the small church and the opportunities for ministry which small churches are especially qualified to offer.

While there is more than enough material presented for each class, there is room for flexibility to address the particular issues of concern that relate to the purpose of the course, a particular class session or a specific group of students.

## **Student Requirements and Assessment**

The students are expected to read the material as assigned. Each student will complete one (1) oral presentation assignment and one (1) written assignment, topics to be provided and approved by the instructor. It is important that the student receive constructive feedback from the instructor (and possibly the other students) at the end of the presentation.

The instructor's assessment of the student's work in the class will consist of his/her evaluation of the student's oral presentation, written paper, and the quality and degree of the student's participation in the class discussions.

## ***Session One: General Characteristics of the Small Church***

### **Preliminary**

After preliminary bookkeeping activities about the Lay Study Program, course registrations, greetings and introductions, course assignments, procedures and expectations, the instructor may begin the presentation.

## **Premise**

Small churches have identifiable and unique characteristics that require attitudes and leadership styles that may differ greatly from much larger churches. Leaders need to be prepared to deal with the needs of various size congregations in every aspect of church life – from education and preaching to administration duties such as business meetings and supervising personnel.

## **Specific Goals for the First Session**

The students will study a general overview of the major traits or characteristics of the small church. They will gain an understanding of how “experts” see the small church as distinguished from large (even mega) churches. This understanding provides the basis for strategies that can be directed at increasing and maintaining more fruitful and effective ministries.

During the Discussion Questions time in each session the instructor can ascertain the student’s knowledge, understanding and articulation skills by drawing out individual student participation in the discussions.

## **Assignments for First Session**

The student should complete the first reading assignments as given by the instructor prior to the first class.

## ***Session Two: Worship and Education***

### **Premise**

Worshipping God and educating God’s people are to be thought of not as an individual’s option but rather as God’s directive to us. This is to be an activity done in community. Scriptures teach that we are to be a “unified body” coming together to glorify God and edify each other. To do this with proper reverence and in Christ-like humility is a privilege as well as a responsibility.

### **Specific Goals for the Second Session**

To learn about our worship and education tradition and to understand the extent of clergy and laity involvement. It is important to know what materials are available for worship and education and to have a procedure in place to ensure prayerful consideration of choices.

## **Assignment for Second Session**

The student should complete the reading assignments as assigned by the instructor prior to the class.

Bible: I Cor. 14:26  
Psalm 29:2; 96:8  
I Chron. 16:29  
Ephesians 4:11-13

## ***Session Three: Future of the Small Church***

### **Pending Action Learning Projects**

Begin session three with any oral presentations that might be pending.

### **Premise**

Pastors and other church leaders need to take a realistic and faith-based view of where God may be leading the church in terms of where we worship and how we serve.

### **Specific Goals for the Third Session**

To gain an appreciation for some of the proposals that stress a need for growth of the local, small church.

To weigh benefits of new church plantings versus "old" church renewal.

To develop informal, well-thought out views of what may be the most realistic way to deal with the issue of church effectiveness in doing God's work.

## **Assignment for Third Session**

The student should complete the reading assignments as assigned by the instructor prior to the class.

## ***Session Four: Caring in the Small Church***

### **Pending Action Learning Projects**

Begin session four with any oral presentations that might be pending.

### **Premise**

If a church is going to care effectively, it must plan to care. It must identify caring strategies that fit its gifts and its "personality" and must learn to implement such caring strategies.

### **Specific Goals for the Fourth Session**

To identify the needs that are common to humanity and understand the ways in which the body of Christ is called on to help meet these needs. Especially as the church, we must learn that "edification" works best when we keep focused on matching our available resources with revealed needs.

### **Assignment for Fourth Session**

The student should complete the reading assignments as assigned by the instructor prior to the class.

Bible: Luke 10: 15: 3-6  
John 13: 1-15

## ***Session Five: Leadership in the Small Church***

### **Pending Action Learning Projects**

Begin session five with any oral presentations that might be pending.

### **Premise**

The nature of leadership in God's church differs markedly from that so often practiced in the secular realm. We are called to lead in a way that reflects a Biblical model - one that is based on respect for the freedom of the individual and our common status as God's people.

### **Specific Goals for the Fifth Session**

To become familiar with the leadership models given in Scripture and to understand which ones fit our own personality and church situation. We will learn how leadership in the church may call for innovative techniques and that leadership "success" may be difficult to measure by popular secular standards.

### **Assignment for Fifth Session**

The student should complete the reading assignments as assigned by the instructor prior to the class.



## ***Session Six: Growth in the Small Church***

### **Pending Action Learning Projects**

Begin session six with any oral presentations that might be pending.

### **Premise**

Church growth is often at the top of the list for church visions and goals. It is vital that God's people examine themselves and their current context to determine the type of growth to which they are called (membership, attendance, spirituality, service, etc.). Pursuing unrealistic goals, not based on God's direction, can lead to frustration and a sense of low self-esteem and failure.

### **Specific Goals for the Sixth Session**

To develop a vision of the various types of growth which are appropriate in our local small church.

To appreciate the need to be servants of God who are ready to be blessed with growth.

To understand that we will only move ahead in the Lord's service as we employ a methodology based on spiritual principles.

At the end of this session, students are expected to be conversant with specific types of growth, growth strategies, and their related successes/failures.

### **Assignment for Sixth Session**

The student should complete the reading assignments as assigned by the instructor prior to the class.

## ***Session Seven: Conflict in the Small Church***

### **Pending Action Learning Projects**

Begin session seven with any oral presentations that might be pending.

### **Premise**

Conflicts among thinking people are part of the human predicament and are to be expected even in the most faithful Christian Church. We need to recognize, accept and work together in a fair-minded attempt to bring about reasonable resolution. It is not realistic or even desirable to treat all church conflicts as signs of poor discipleship.

### **Specific Goals for the Seventh Session**

To learn what constitutes legitimate conflict, how to recognize it and what role, as leaders, we are to play in resolution.

To understand what types of conflict are positive and which are destructive.

To learn some ground rules that fit the church setting.

### **Assignment for Seventh Session**

The student should complete the reading assignments as assigned by the instructor prior to the class.

Bible: Genesis 31: 44-53

I Corinthians 5 and 6

## ***Session Eight: Pastoral Challenges***

### **Pending Action Learning Projects**

Begin session eight with any oral presentations that might be pending.

### **Premise**

Special issues and circumstances exist in the small church that can cause a pastor to have a distorted view of what really can be accomplished. Prior training in church administration may conflict with reality of day-to-day operations. Pastors need to be prepared for coping with such issues, and especially be ready to take a balanced view of advantages and disadvantages.

### **Specific Goals for the Eighth Session**

Students come away with understanding of some of the issues that are particularly heavy for the small-church pastor. They will have a better grasp of roles expected, and learn of some new ways of facing the personal, one-on-one relationships, that will inevitably come.

### **Assignment for Eighth Session**

The student should complete the reading assignments as assigned by the instructor prior to the class.

Bible: Ecclesiastes 7:2-4

Matthew 25:31-46

Romans 5:6-8

Acts 15:36-40

2 Corinthians 10:1-11

Galatians 4:12-16

## ***Session Nine: Pastoring Yourself and Family***

### **Pending Action Learning Projects**

Begin session nine with any oral presentations that might be pending.

### **Premise**

Emotional balance – time for work and a time for recreation are essential to maintain one's emotional balance. It's acceptable to set boundaries for your time and to stick with them. There should be an up-front understanding between pastor and congregation regarding mutual expectations for availability and total on-the-job hours.

### **Specific Goals for the Ninth Session**

The student should come to appreciate what is reasonable to expect of him/herself regarding allocation of time and effort between church work and personal emotional well-being. Too much on-the-job stress is not only disabling, but also not God's desire for our lives.

Students should complete this section feeling empowered by God to take a stand for the balanced life essential to doing God's work while also giving proper allegiance to family and friend covenants.

### **Assignment for Ninth Session**

The student should complete the reading assignments as assigned by the instructor prior to the class.

Bible: Psalm 104:14-15  
I Timothy 4:3-4; 3:1-13  
Acts Chapter 20  
Psalm 127:1

## ***Session Ten: Personal Pastoral Perspective in the Small Church***

### **Pending Action Learning Projects**

Begin session ten with any oral presentations that might be pending

### **Premise**

God may have quite a different view of church and pastoral success than we do. We must always seek His will in planning and evaluating the quality and quantity of our personal efforts in doing God's work. Personal desire for achievement, even if "God-based", may be a far cry from what God wants for us.

### **Specific Goals for the Tenth Session**

In this last session students will concentrate on what it means to be successful in the church. They will be exposed to different methods of evaluating their performance. Understanding the difference between efficiency and effectiveness is a critical component of this evaluation process, as is the need to remember that we are to be open to God working through us. Examples from Scripture will be discussed to show that even the most famous of God's people have looked like failures in specific circumstances-yet they were not abandoned by God. The student should end this session with motivation to be faithful in service, leaving it to God to use and bless us as He chooses.

### **Assignment for Tenth Session**

The student should complete the reading assignments as assigned by the instructor prior to the class.

Bible: Romans 8:28  
James 3:1, 13-15, 17  
Matthew 5:3-6  
I Peter 5:2-7  
Matthew 11:28-30  
Revelations 2 and 3

### **Capsule Review of Course**