

THE VINE

A NEWSLETTER OF THE CATAWBA CLERGY NETWORK

THRIVING THOUGHTS

Shannon Axtell Martin

When I read John 15:1-11 these words stand out: abide, fruit, love, and joy. The images of flourishing in this passage are remarkable. How often do we work as if the entire world relies on us? If we were to rest, replenish, refocus, would the world cease to turn? Sometimes it feels that way. Yes, your role is key, your calling is holy, your presence is meaningful. The demands on our time and the crises of our time are urgent. But Jesus repeats in this passage, "Abide in me. Abide in me." And in case we are unclear about what that looks like he then says, "Abide in my love." We must passionately live out our calling, tending, watering, and pruning, but the fruit does not rely on us. We cannot bring it forth solely by the tenacity of our own grit and willpower. Our role, first, is to abide in the love of God. Why? According to this passage the reason is, "that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." May that joy be fuel for the journey. Amen.

A WORD FROM CATAWBA'S NEW PRESIDENT

"I'm so glad to be a part of the learning community that is Catawba College. I'm especially glad to be a part of a learning community with a commitment to supporting clergy. We want to serve you through the Catawba Clergy Network as you serve people in your local congregations. During these extraordinary times you are called on to care for your people in extraordinary ways. I hope you will find care and support through the Network and I look forward to meeting you in the days ahead." --Dr. David P. Nelson

COP ROUNDTABLE

Rev. Betty Morton

A "clergy community of practice" ("clergy COP") is a small group of ministers intentionally focused on how to do ministry better and thrive as pastors. If you'd like to sign up for a group, please contact Betty Morton bjmorton19@catawba.edu.

Who knew that, in 2020, we would be living in the Twilight Zone?! COVID-19 lurks as an unseen mortal enemy. Divisive politics threaten our democracy. Systemic racism persists. Climate change devastates communities by fire and storm. Isolation agitates. And the result--anxieties are at an all-time high. People of God are yearning to see "the goodness of God in the land of the living" (Ps 27.13), and church leaders are scrambling to help us find our footing again.

And who knew that our ways of doing ministry and relating to others would be so changed? Fortunately, we are rediscovering that we are the Church, not buildings. No matter where we are, we are members of the body of Christ, and with intentionality, we can remain connected to and supported by the body of Christ.



Above: Catawba has welcomed a new President, Dr. Nelson.

But it's taking a while to figure out all the details of just how to be Church together in this time of physical isolation. That's where our clergy "communities of practice" (COPs) have made a meaningful difference in the lives of our clergy and specialized ministers, who themselves need the same self-care, support and learning opportunities they offer others. Coming together, now virtually, they are helping themselves thrive. And when our leaders thrive, our churches and those they support are also more likely to thrive.

Last year, as a part of its "Thriving in Ministry" programming funded by the Lilly Endowment, the Catawba Clergy Network (CCN) reintroduced clergy "communities of practice" (COPs) to the Southern Conference (SOC). A clergy COP is a small group of ministers who meet monthly for mutual learning and support. Figuratively, our ministers come to a round table, a table of equals where every voice is valued. COPs focus both on self-care and the support and wisdom gained when experienced peers offer new perspectives and resources. In this strange new world, clergy COPs have proved vital to our church leaders' health and wellbeing and their ability to thrive in ministry.

Last year, CCN convened twelve COP groups, with seventy pastors in North Carolina and Virginia, including SOC ministers and their local clergy colleagues. This year, despite having to meet virtually due to COVID-19, all these groups are continuing into this new cohort year (with a few shifts in membership). That says a lot about the value of COPs! And this year, we've added seven new COPs.

As well, when surveyed, the overwhelming majority of comments about our COPs were very positive. Here are a few of those comments:

"Each month, I was able to grow from experiencing the ministries of my sisters, sharing our stories, inspiring and encouraging each other. I was confident that our exchanges were confidential and was able to relax as we prayed together and helped each other in nonjudgmental environment." ~ Rev. Dian J-D, North Carolina

"This group was life-giving to me. I felt supported in my ministry in so many ways. This was a safe place to share our joys and frustrations, hopes and fears. I looked forward to our gatherings and made sure I would not miss them. Especially important was this group during the pandemic, as suddenly we were all forced to do ministry in some very different and creative ways. We encouraged one another and shared ideas, resources, and best practices. All of this was so helpful to me." ~ Rev. Mindy D, ENCA Ecumenical Cohort

"The cohort was absolutely refreshing and needed. Ministry can be difficult as it has many challenges and having a safe space to vent and find support is necessary and needed. Burnout in ministry is an unfortunate reality when safe spaces are absent in the life of clergy... Our relationships have deepened, our stressors, potential for burnout are laid bare within our cohort community and as a result we are able to thrive in our respective ministry context." ~ Rev. Jerome D, EVA

We will use this "COP Roundtable" space to keep you up to date on CCN COPs and to discuss ideas for thriving in ministry. Together, we can find ways to thrive despite this strange new world in which we find ourselves.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Catawba Clergy Days is moving online! Read about last years event and register for future events [here](#).

- **Clergy Days** will begin with sharing lunch (virtually) with the Catawba Clergy Network, November 5, 12-1pm on Zoom, followed by an afternoon of Continuing Education and conversation featuring alums Rev. Kristin Gerner Vaughn, Rev. Alex Will, and more. Register [here](#) (register by 10/28 if possible so we can send you materials!).
- **Mental Health First Aid Training** will take place in January virtually! Space will be limited. Registration info will be on our website soon.



Left: Clergy participate in a session on Sanctuary during the first Catawba Clergy Days in October 2019. Photo by C. Stumb.



Right: Clergy gathered along with Catawba students and staff for Mental Health First Aid Training in January 2020.



RESOURCES, RESEARCH, & READINGS

- The Rev. Dr. Joanne Braxton, an ordained minister in the Eastern Virginia Association of the UCC and a Catawba Clergy Network Thriving Grant Recipient, was featured in Sojourners in June: <https://sojo.net/articles/covid-19-unevenly-culls-humanity>.
- From *Faith and Leadership*, "Intentional self-care, a church's ethos of care and congregational openness to new approaches are notable factors that contribute to the thriving of Black clergywomen, a researcher has found." Find the full article here: <https://faithandleadership.com/alexis-carter-thomas-how-can-congregations-help-black-clergywomen-flourish>

CATAWBA CLERGY NETWORK STAFF

The Catawba Clergy Network brought on an additional staff person in June, Hannah Hutchens, who graduated from Catawba in May with a BA in Religion. She worked with our inaugural Catawba Clergy Days and MHFA training in her role as an intern with Campus Ministry and the Catawba Clergy Network last year. Welcome, Hannah!

When you contact the Catawba Clergy Network, you will likely talk with Betty if it is about COPs, Shannon if it is about Grants, or Hannah if it is about our Facebook page or any or all of the above. We look forward to connecting with you and fostering Thriving together!



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Rev. Betty Morton, JD,
MA, MDiv, PCC



Hannah Hutchens, '20

CONNECT WITH US

Please follow us on Facebook: Catawba Clergy Network. (<https://www.facebook.com/catawbaclergy/>)

We also have a private group on Facebook, which allows you to connect with other members of the network. To join this group, please visit the following link: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/835469520163571/>

*Here's to
thriving!*

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