

by Barbara A. Chaapel

Actor Martin Sheen, who plays president Josiah Bartlet on NBC's Emmy Award-winning *The West Wing* and is a national spokesperson for Mentoring USA, credits the Reverend Alfred Drapp, assistant pastor of his boyhood parish in Dayton, Ohio, with being his first mentor. "Although my journey took me far away, and at times I became lost, Father Al was always there like an anchor," Sheen says, "reminding me to continually ask two key questions: Who are you? and Why are you here?"

Ministers of the gospel often serve as mentors for the young and the not so young in their congregations, asking them these same two questions at critical life stages.

But who mentors the ministers? Who supports their calling as it forms, and helps them discern direction and learn the questions to ask of their vocation?

The Lilly Endowment, Inc., a longtime supporter of efforts to strengthen pastoral leadership, decided to try to provide an answer. Two years ago the endowment's religion division launched an invitational grants program to encourage congregations and practicing pastors to intentionally guide new seminary graduates into ministry. They called it Transition into Ministry.

The program was modeled after a residency program at the Second Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, that was the dream of now-deceased members Tom and Marjorie Lake, who funded it, and the church's pastor, Bill Enright.

"They had a vision to address the impending crisis in church leadership," says Baron Mullis, a recent pastoral resident at Second Church and a 2000 PTS grad.

As a seminary senior, Mullis, now an associate pastor at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, hadn't expected to participate in a residency program. "[PTS placement director] Dean Foose suggested that I apply; I told him I'd be wasting the postage it would

take to send them my dossier," Mullis laughs, "but he sent it anyway. Bill Enright called me for an interview, so I went to Indianapolis partly to give it a fair shake, and partly for the experience of interviewing."

After his weekend there ("As a Charlotte boy, I went to Indiana kicking and screaming!"), he was convinced that what Second Church could offer was exactly what he needed to learn: practical experience of the daily life of a parish minister.

Loosely based on medical residencies, the pastoral residencies at Second, and now at other large congregations in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and other denominations, offer seminary graduates the opportunity to work for two years in full-time, salaried positions under the tutelage of veteran pastors.

Previously headed toward Ph.D. work and the life of the scholar, Mullis found in the residency a chance to dive into "the more churchly end of ministry." He valued the program's four-rotation structure, where he and fellow PTS classmate and Second Church resident Christina Starace spent from four to five months in each of four focus areas: mission, Christian education, pastoral care, and evangelism.

For Mullis, that meant leading summer mission trips to Alaska and to a wildlife refuge in Michigan, visiting parishioners in the hospital, and teaching. But what gave him the most satisfaction, he discovered, was preaching. "I preached six times each year and I loved it," he says. "I had an inkling at Princeton that I liked to preach, but in the residency I could really spend time in the process of writing a sermon, then preaching it, and then receiving feedback from Bill Enright and my colleagues."

The Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church in suburban Philadelphia began its Lilly residency program in 2001, following a similar rotation model, though the rotations designed by the congregation and head of staff Gene Bay (PTS Class of 1962) varied the theme of Second's program. The first three Bryn Mawr residents (Jacqueline Cho, Steve Jungkeit, and Sonya McAuley), who will complete their two years in June, rotated between pastoral care, senior adult ministry, youth ministry, singles and young adult ministries, and urban-suburban partnership (a partnership between Bryn Mawr and several small African American churches in West Philadelphia).

McAuley's journey through ministry at Bryn Mawr gave her the gift of confidence. "I was clear that I wanted to go into parish ministry when I graduated from Johnson C. Smith Seminary," she explains, "but I wasn't sure I could manage a solo pastorate. I lacked confidence in a pastoral setting. After 'shadowing' the Bryn Mawr staff and trying my hand at almost everything, I find that I love both senior adult ministry and youth ministry, and I know I can do this!"

Cho is amazed at the sheer variety of daily ministerial activities. "I did at least three to five tasks each day, from one-on-one counseling, to leading small groups, to preaching and visitation," she says. "And there were always meetings and more meetings! It has been kind of hard to switch gears all the time, but that's part of ministry. I think I've done almost everything here but teach a class on religion and science."

Jungkeit's biggest surprise was discovering how much he liked parish ministry. As a student at Yale Divinity School, he was planning to pursue teaching, not pastoral work. "Now I can imagine being a pastor," he says. "This church is a very nurturing community of people."

What Jungkeit has coveted most in his residency has been the time for reflection—reading, writing, and theological conversation with Bay and his fellow residents. Lilly would be glad to hear that—reflection on pastoral identity is at the core of the program.

"I've thrived on reading and staying informed," he says. "I've developed the discipline of taking time to read and think, and we're accountable for that because we meet for dinner every week at Gene's home and talk about the books we've read together." Among those the Bryn Mawr residents have read are Niebuhr's *Notebooks of a Tamed Cynic*, Kierkegaard's *Attack Upon Christendom*, and Allen Lewis's *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday*, plus books on church management and "a few surprises," says Jungkeit.

"But the trick is to take this commitment into full-time ministry, to educate the congregation that this reflection is part of who I am and what I need to do," he says.

Cho says Gene Bay is a wonderful model. "Discovering how to use time, to set aside time for reading and prayer and personal enrichment, is essential," she says, "and Gene has set a good example for us. There are times each day when he closes his door and we know he is reading and studying and preparing for his ministry."

The residency programs are designed to give residents a lot of time with the pastor/head of staff of their congregations. Kevin Doty, PTS Class of 2002 and a resident this year at Second Church, Indianapolis, along with his classmate Kirianne Weaver, says the best part of his experience is the time with Enright. "He has helped me form my pastoral identity," Doty says. "He models what it means to be a pastor—his reading and study, his wisdom in difficult pastoral situations, how he handles staffing and budget.

"He's very honest and open with us. He encourages us to ask him questions like, 'Why did you do something *this* way?' He's very serious about us residents, and our future in ministry."

Mullis agrees. "Bill helped us think through our actions, unpack our experiences," he says. "We had lengthy discussions over dinner, talking about authors we've read, and more importantly about us. Sometimes we talked until almost eleven o'clock."

The Lilly Endowment also pays to bring scholars and practitioners to ministry sites for daylong colloquia with residents. Tom Long (on preaching), Dorothy Bass (on spiritual practices), and Carl Dudley (on church growth) have visited Indianapolis; former PTS speech professor Bill Beeners spent a day at Bryn Mawr working with the residents on public speaking in worship. "That helps keep the program tied to the academy," says Mullis, another of Lilly's goals.

From the supervisor's side, Bay thinks the opportunity to engage in theological reflection while doing ministry is key. "They talk with me and with our entire pastoral staff," he says, "but they also reflect on their experiences with the laity of the church. Each resident is assigned a support group of six to eight laypeople to provide basic support and to reflect on ministry from the lay point of view. We urge the residents to have in-depth conversations with the laypeople they visit, to ask them not only how they came to the Bryn Mawr church, but also how they came to faith. They talk together about vocation, and write up their reflections on these conversations, and then we discuss them at our dinner meetings."

Bay says his congregation has responded enthusiastically to the program. "The members have taken in these residents and loved them and listened to them and received their ministry. They have been open, and available, and patient."

John Cairns, PTS Class of 1964, supervises the Lilly residents at the Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago, including Victoria Decker Millar, who graduated in 2001. "The strength of the program is that it enables people to start ministry with a strong mentoring component," Cairns says. "We tend to overlook the fact that ministry as a vocation has no provision for 'start-up' mentoring, like the law or medicine have. In the church, one day you're a student, the next you're the pastor of a church."

Cairns has appreciated the "freshness, enthusiasm, and energy" of the residents (Fourth has had five to date and is in the process of hiring two more). "And there's a real sense of pride in our congregation as they take part in shaping these people for ministry. They have the sense that they are doing something important for the kingdom."

Steve Runholt, PTS Class of 2000, was in the first group of residents at Fourth, and took the position because he believed he needed the supervision that seminary did not provide. "I think ministry in a contemporary context is more complicated than it was 20 or 30 years ago," he says. "Today it's important for ministers to learn to negotiate and manage boundaries, using good judgment as they apply the gospel to today's world and hold together contradictory versions of truth. That just takes experience, and working and talking with a good supervisor about these issues."

Runholt is grateful to Cairns and the residency experience for teaching him to manage boundaries and his own personal and social needs within his profession. "Ministry is not all about the *Book of Order* and theology," he says. "It's also about knowing your own needs for validation and recognition so they don't get in the way of your effectiveness. I learned by making mistakes and then correcting them; John could help me with damage control, and the other residents and I supported each other, helped each other get perspective."

Leading worship in a large congregation with a formal liturgy was a huge benefit to Runholt, now an associate pastor at Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church in Asheville, North Carolina. "The chance to lead worship where the standards are so high and to get feedback from the other residents and the congregation was unique. I preached at Sunday night vespers, and members of my lay support group came to hear me and we talked about the sermon together, which was pretty difficult and also very valuable."

Sonya McAuley also appreciated the worship experience at Bryn Mawr. "The style and size of the congregation was so different from the 100-member rural African American church where I grew up," she says. "I didn't know I'd fit in so well in a 3,500-member church in the suburbs of a big city. But I love it!"

While he might not use the word "love" to describe the residency experience, it is clear that Gene Bay finds it a vibrant and vital part of his ministry as he looks toward retirement.

"The church is much different than when I was young and beginning in ministry," he says. "Then, there was still support in the culture for the church, and high respect for ministers. Today, a great deal of the world care less about the church, and it's no wonder that young people are not considering ministry as a calling.

"So it's astonishing and wonderful for me to see these bright, committed young people wanting to be part of this institution. It gives me great hope as I prepare to leave the church in their hands." ■

Mentoring the Newest Ministers



Baron Mullis



Steve Jungkeit



Kevin Doty



Jacqueline Cho



Gene Bay



John Cairns



Steve Runholt



Sonya McAuley