

# *Executive Summary*

## *Introduction*

Using a list provided by The Upper Room Ministries, Doble Research contacted 356 pastors who graduated from the Academy for Spiritual Formation since 1983-1985. A total of 241 pastors returned a questionnaire, an astonishingly high response rate of 68 percent which indicates the importance of the Academy to these pastors. By way of comparison, a high response rate for a normal survey conducted through the mail is about four percent. A response rate of about 15 to 20 percent would be considered high for a mail survey of the membership of an active service organization such as the Kiwanis.

### *I The Importance of the Academy*

Using a scale of 1 to 10 where 1, 2, and 3 mean “not important at all” and 8, 9, and 10 mean “extremely important,” a remarkable 91 percent said the Academy experience had been an extremely important part of their lives. The pastors were then given a list of 13 aspects of their Academy experience and asked to indicate how important each was to them. Perhaps the best gauge of how the pastors feel about their experience at the Academy is demonstrated by the fact that a majority said all 13 aspects were important to them, and 80 percent or more said 8 were *extremely* important. These eight extremely important aspects in rank order were:

1. The rhythm of gathering every three months for two years;
2. Being part of a spiritual community for two years;
3. The rhythm of the day;
4. The daily Eucharist;
5. The periods of silence;
6. Worship three times a day;
7. The emphasis on a holistic spirituality; and
8. The faculty

While a fair number of pastors did not remember enough about any particular course to talk about it at length, many were comfortable talking about the importance or helpfulness of the courses as a whole. As many as 70 percent said the course on Spiritual Disciplines was very helpful while 69 percent felt that way about The Place of Scripture in Spiritual Formation. Majorities also said these courses were very helpful: Discernment and Ways of Prayer, Spirituality in the Psalms, and Orthodox Spirituality.

### *II After the Academy*

The pastors were asked whether being at the Academy led to any changes in their attitudes or behavior. Nearly four in five, 79 percent, said the Academy deepened their hunger for God. More than seven of 10 also said the Academy helped them increase their compassion for themselves and shaped their practice of pastoral ministry.

The pastors were asked to detail any behavioral changes they made in their lives as a result of their Academy experience. Upwards of 80 percent reported these changes: taking more time for prayer, reflection and meditation; reading scripture more meditatively; and more readily seeking spiritual friendships and the counsel of others. About three in four said they go on retreats on a regular or occasional basis. Sizable numbers said they have made other changes as a result of the Academy, including: seeing a spiritual director (52 percent); receiving and celebrating Holy Communion more often (45 percent); journaling regularly (43 percent); improving their diet (42 percent); and exercising more (41 percent).

Huge numbers attributed a host of attitudinal changes to the Academy. About 90 percent said they now have a deeper, richer understanding of themselves, have grown in awareness of different people's spiritual journeys, and gained a much deeper appreciation for Christian spirituality.

### *III Suggestions for Change*

When the pastors were asked what if anything should be changed about the Academy, the pastors most frequently mentioned reducing the costs (40 percent). About three in ten also wanted more emphasis on helping Academy graduates apply what they learned and greater racial and ethnic diversity among participants.

### *IV The Practice of Ministry*

The pastors were asked how if at all the Academy experience changed their pastoral ministry or personal identity. As many as 81 percent said they now focus more on their role as a spiritual guide to their congregation. Large numbers said the Academy influenced their pastoral ministry or personal identity in other ways: 71 percent see more need to offer healing ministries; 65 percent take more risks with their congregation in worship leadership; and 64 percent said they are more open and vulnerable in their preaching. Sizable majorities said the Academy led them to incorporate silence into worship (60 percent) and to add more time for spiritual formation in meetings (58 percent). A number of pastors also said that as a result of their Academy experience they now offer these new ministries: small groups (66 percent); retreats (55 percent); adult classes (51 percent); and healing services (47 percent).

The pastors were asked what they found about their Academy experience to be most helpful in their ministry. Sabbath time/having a break from pastoral responsibilities, named by 49 percent, was mentioned most often. Sizable minorities also named having a safe place to explore my spiritual journey (38 percent) and participating in worship rather than leading it (28 percent). When they were asked what was not helpful in the Academy, one pastor in four mentioned the lack of support afterwards.

The pastors were given some ideas for improving the capacity of the Academy to resource pastors for ministry and were asked whether they thought each was needed. Majorities called for two resources after the Academy: more retreats (64 percent), and more small group resources (57 percent) to help pastors serve as spiritual guides to their congregations. Majorities also wanted two resources *during* the Academy: more talk about how to bring about what one has learned (58 percent) and improving the course, Spiritual Formation and the Local Church (52 percent).

### *V Further Resources for Pastoral Formation*

Graduates were asked what beyond the Academy helped them most in their pastoral ministry. By far the most frequently mentioned resource, named by 55 percent, was a supportive spouse, family, or friends. The central importance of relationships is underscored by the fact that each of the following was said to be most helpful in terms of pastoral ministry: colleagues in ministry, named by 40 percent; a spiritual director, 35 percent; a wise pastor or mentor(s), 33 percent; and a small group with other pastors, 24 percent.

Far smaller percentages said that instruction or training were most helpful. For example, only 14 percent said seminary classes were most helpful while 11 percent named the Alban Institute or similar training and 9 percent said denominational resources or training.

Pastors were asked to indicate how helpful various resources other than the Academy had been in terms of their work in pastoral ministry. *Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants*, edited by Rueben Job and Jacob Shawchuck, was very highly rated, with as many as 50 percent calling it “extremely helpful.” *Companions in Christ* by Job, Thompson, Hinson, Gonzalez, Scott Dawson, and Wright was also quite well regarded, with 41 percent calling it extremely helpful. Indeed, this volume actually had the highest mean or average score of any resource, with graduates giving it an exceptionally high overall rating of 8.5 on a scale of 1 to 10.

When asked which programs and events had been most helpful in their work in pastoral ministry, graduates were most inclined to cite the Five Day Academy, with 51 percent calling it “extremely helpful.” Large numbers also said several other programs and events had been helpful in their work in ministry, especially *Walk to Emmaus*, which was named as extremely helpful by 32 percent.

When asked which periodicals had been most helpful, Academy graduates were most inclined to name *Weavings*, with a majority, 52 percent, calling it extremely helpful. Compared to *Weavings*, *Alive Now!* and the *Upper Room Daily Devotional* were said to be helpful by significant but somewhat smaller numbers.

The pastors were asked what issues the Upper Room Ministries should keep in mind as it develops new resources for pastors committed to spiritual formation. Solid

majorities singled out two issues as particularly important: how to integrate spirituality into the systems of the local church, and how to help the congregation learn to pray and practice the presence of God in their daily lives.

Significant numbers named three other issues as being among the most important: “How to receive the nourishment I need;” how to develop intervention strategies for bringing about changes in unhealthy churches; and how to strengthen the connection between spiritual formation and worship and preaching.

## *VI Companions in Ministry*

No matter how it was presented, it was difficult to briefly explain the original conception of Companions in Ministry. We provided the pastors with several different encapsulated summaries of the new program; in each case, their initial reactions were marked by questions and confusion. We therefore conclude that The Upper Room may find it a real challenge to briefly explain what Companions in Ministry or any similar program is and is not, and we strongly recommend that inordinate care be taken in developing a written description of any new program like Companions and that a broad range of reactions to any draft be solicited and carefully considered before a final version is decided on.

Regardless of their initial reactions, however, the pastors’ reactions to the overall concept were overwhelmingly positive *after they learned more about Companions and had a chance to consider or deliberate about it*. That is, the more the pastors learned about Companions and the more they talked about it, the more favorable their views became. In addition to responding favorably to the overall concept, the pastors responded positively to many of Companions’ elements when they learned more about them.

However, while the pastors’ overall reactions to the concept of Companions and its components were positive, some voiced concerns about certain specifics or wanted to tweak or adjust certain aspects of the program.

In sum, it would be a serious mistake for The Upper Room to conclude that the pastors’ initial reactions to the descriptions of Companions, which were often marked by doubts and confusion, represent their true, deeper feelings about the idea. When they learned more about Companions and had a chance to think and talk about the idea, they became increasingly enthusiastic about it and saw a real need for the program.