

EMI Helps Church in Transition

Finding Hope in Chaos

Transitions are hard. Transitions by nature are unstable. Some things get dropped. Other things get broken. Fear, hurt and anger surface. Too often, relationships become casualties. How can the Lord bring hope into so much pain and chaos?

Victory Christian Family Center in Sarasota, Florida, entered the stormy waters of transition when Senior Pastor Sherman Owens, their much loved founding pastor, announced that major heart surgery forced him to step down.

Pastor Sherman was the only senior pastor the church had known. Who would lead the congregation? The church tried to navigate through loyalties, grief and confusion. Things that had been easy for years were suddenly intense. Basic communication became difficult. People struggled.

After a brief period the church board asked Ron and Donna Kutinsky to be their pastors for a one-year trial period. They had attended the church for thirteen years and served in leadership. The last two years they were in ministry elsewhere. Now they were being asked to come back and to take over the reins of a church in a storm. "The Lord told me the first year would be difficult," Ron said. "But as long as I knew the Lord was with me, I was willing."

Ron said, "A couple months into this new role I started thinking -- For me, this just may not work. I was devastated by that thought because I love this church -- her people. And now, 5 months down the road, I'm beginning to see healthier communication and people being more real. "There is light at the end of the tunnel. Now I'm thinking -- for me, this may work!" Donna adds, "We're actually hearing from some staff that they are enjoying staff meetings!"

It's been five months since Ron and Donna took on the role of pastors. They've learned a lot about how to lead during times of transition, how to cope with change, how to calm the flutter of worries folks have about the future.

Hope in Process

At about this time, Pastor Mary Owens had been talking to Karen Woods, a long time friend in Cincinnati. For over ten years she knew Karen in the context of Heart of the Matter, her worship and music ministry. When Mary shared with Karen about some of the challenges the leadership was facing, Karen was eager to explain how Equipping Ministries International trainings had impacted her -- so much so, that she had pursued becoming an EMI certified trainer. Mary soon grasped a vision for equipping her church leaders in listening with respect and speaking the truth in love.



**Mary and Sherman
Owens**

Mary invited Karen to lead a staff retreat to give them a vision for relating in healthier ways. Trust was being rebuilt. The retreat was immediately followed by a weekend training in EMI's **Listening for Heaven's Sake**, with Karen partnering as teacher with another EMI trainer, Luanne Puckett.

The results of the seminar were immediate. "I've become aware as a listener," Mary said. "I'm better able to understand and empathize with people I pastor and work with. And I'm better able to express myself because of what EMI taught us."

"Leaders aren't often the best listeners," Donna said. "They are often quick to give opinions and judge. But after the EMI training, our leaders are now more patient."

Mary and Donna came to Cincinnati LIFE Seminar in July; both have decided to pursue certification. The church is bringing an EMI team back this Fall for the next relationship / ministry skill course, **Speaking the Truth in Love**.

Ron explained how the EMI training helped him. "Last night I met with a couple who've been



Donna and Ron Kutinsky

particularly troubled by how the transition has been handled. In the past, I wouldn't have listened so well. But now, after taking the listening course, I was able to really listen and not react." Ron went on to say that although he wasn't a bad listener in the past, the EMI seminars have given him more tools to work with.

Asked what impact she sees EMI's training having, Mary says, "We're all growing. None of us are perfect. We are definitely experiencing a fresh excitement for our future."

Can you hear the hope in their words?