

FELLOWS AS MINISTERS: CALLING AND PRACTICE NOT MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE



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PASTOR ORLANDO R. RICHMOND, SR., OF THE NORTHSIDE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, ENTERED THE MINISTRY AT AGE 19. BUT HE ALSO IS A FELLOW OF THE COLLEGE WITH NEARLY THIRTY YEARS OF TRIAL EXPERIENCE, INCLUDING MASS TORT LITIGATION INVOLVING PHARMACEUTICAL PRODUCTS. HE IS A PARTNER WITH BUTLER SNOW, IN JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI, AND A MEMBER OF ITS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ON TOP OF EVERYTHING ELSE HE DOES.

Richmond and his wife have been married since he was twenty-years-old, and she was nineteen. He was already in the ministry and so they have spent their entire adult life together in Christian ministry. Under Richmond's leadership, the church has grown tremendously—"Sunday services are high-energy and emphasize praise and worship," he said. He also has "focused on the teaching ministries and ushered in the concept of creative ministry."

The church's 8:00 a.m. Sunday radio broadcast is one of the highest-rated radio programs on Sunday mornings in north Mississippi. The membership is increasingly diverse, and the church describes itself as a "house for all people." Its philosophy is premised on Galatians 6:9, which instructs, "And let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

It was "pretty clear to me early on that I was interested in both the ministry and the practice of law," Richmond said. He was five or six when he was drawn to the ministry and knew by sixth grade he wanted to be a lawyer. No one in his family was a lawyer and "only a handful – and that is stretching it – had graduated from college at that time, so I had no readily available examples."

He was an avid reader, however, "My mother insisted on that." That wide reading "informed my decision to become a lawyer." His call to the ministry arose as he became immersed as a young man in the very small



church of which his stepfather was a pastor. The church only ever had a couple of deacons, and they were not always present. Richmond, who was "academically inclined," consulted commentaries and adult resource materials to help facilitate the Sunday School discussion and weekly devotion. That participation was helpful to his stepfather. But Richmond "felt a personal calling to the ministry even apart from that experience in my stepfather's church."

Although he has not yet secured a seminary degree, he has completed numerous seminary ▶

classes and taught a variety of seminary courses and presented lectures. He was licensed as a Baptist preacher at age nineteen by a local ministry. He attended college and then law school. At age twenty-eight, he was ordained as a Baptist minister.

As a Marine Corps JAG Officer, he was responsible for helping develop and conduct a multi-cultural worship service on a military base at a time when service members, including the chaplains, were being deployed to Somalia. “It had an African-American worship flavor but was attended by hundreds and was multi-cultural...It was enthusiastic worship with contemporary Gospel music and designed for a younger population – 40-ish and younger.”

The lessons learned from that experience carried over when he later entered his ministry in a very rural Mississippi community. He was asked by approximately twenty-seven regular attendees at a church in West Point to serve as Pastor. “I had a very busy law practice but thought I could handle twenty-seven people.” But the church grew to hundreds of people!

The question he is most often asked – and was asked for this article – is how he manages to both practice law and pastor a growing church. “I have developed a system that has me engaged in some aspect of preparation at virtually all times,” he said. Additionally, Richmond is a “habitual note taker of my observations – in an airport, a store, news stories.” He often relies on these observations as illustrations in his sermons. “I see and hear ministry in nearly everything.” He also does very specific and detailed preparation as well. “My weekends are filled with study and writing.”

Richmond and his wife try to organize their time together such that he will also have time to complete his preparation over the weekend for Sunday. “I don’t get a lot of sleep on Fridays and Saturdays.”

Trials are tough because his usually last three to five weeks or longer because of their complexity. Over the years, however, he has

only missed two Sundays in a row on three occasions. His large staff of associate ministers handles things in his absence. His wife – who he describes as “my glue not only for my ministry but my whole life” – is very active in the church and she helps as well, so “I have a good team around me.” And, because of e-mails and cell phones, he “is always in communication with the church.”

Richmond sees a “significant overlap with oral advocacy as a trial lawyer and advocacy as part of preaching...There is no gaping disconnect between these skill sets. Addressing a congregation is the most important advocacy I do and God has allowed me to borrow from that gift to address juries.”

Ministry is the “passion” of his life and about fifteen years ago he seriously considered leaving the practice of law to devote all his time to his ministry. “It is impossible to give enough to God, and I had a growing law practice.” But a trusted fellow pastor urged him to continue to do both as long as he felt he could do both effectively. He was counseled that in his rural community, being a respected African-American professional “can be particularly significant” because it provides access to places, people, and resources that he might not otherwise have.

Richmond ultimately realized that the practice of law provides “yet another avenue for ministry.” He said, “My calling and my practice are not mutually exclusive.” Accordingly, he will continue to try cases in addition to his ministry, to the benefit of our profession as well as community and congregation.

COMBINING LEGAL COUNSELING AND PASTORAL COUNSELING

Louis A. Ruprecht was admitted to the bar in 1963, and has an active trial practice in Westfield, New Jersey, heading his own law firm Ruprecht Hart Weeks & Ricciardulli, LLP. Three of his partners are Fellows, including his wife, **Judy Wahrenberger**. Over the years,