

Ministering to Ministers

You'd be hard-pressed to find someone who cares more about the spiritual health of pastors than Tom Wilson. For some 37 years, Tom has been personally involved in God's work in one way or another. And for much of that time, his focus has been on equipping and leading other ministers.

Currently, Tom is the CEO of Leadership Network, a Dallas-based non-profit that helps some of the largest and most innovative churches in the country multiply and extend their work. Prior to that, he directed hundreds of paid staff and thousands of volunteers working with high school students through the ministry of Young Life.

And for the past five years, Tom has brought his energy, expertise and ideas to Pastors Retreat Network by serving on this ministry's Board of Directors.

PAST AND PRESENT

While Tom is an expert when it comes to strategy and organization, he knows that at its core, effective ministry is largely a matter of the heart. To truly serve God, a pastor has to be spiritually healthy.

That's why Tom cares so deeply about protecting the hearts of ministers.

Tom describes his perspective this way:

"I just have a passion for making sure ministers are ministered to. Over the past 37 years, I've seen so many men and women that are out of gas, yet trudging

along. I've also seen the fallout from those that have cratered—and every time, it just breaks my heart. We simply have to make sure that our spiritual leaders maintain a strong foundation."

In Tom's view, author Eugene Peterson perfectly captured the need and the challenge in his 1994 book, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*. As Peterson puts it:

"Spiritual leadership vocations in America are badly undercapitalized."

In other words, too often pastors' spiritual bank accounts are not large enough to sustain their Kingdom work. If that spiritual shortfall isn't directly addressed, the result will be a kind of spiritual bankruptcy—causing lasting damage to both their ministry and their heart.

THE PERFECT INVESTMENT

Tom sees Pastors Retreat Network as an "investment" that can bring back a healthy spiritual life and a fruitful ministry. What makes a Pastors Retreat Network experience so special? Tom finds three aspects especially exciting:

1. A Couple-Centered Approach

Ministry is a "team sport." And that team is composed of both husband and wife. True, only one spouse may be on the church's payroll. But both spouses contribute and must deal with demanding expectations. Sadly, in too many cases, the marriage itself pays a heavy price.



Tom Wilson, Board member
Pastors Retreat Network

From the very beginning, Pastors Retreat Network has recognized that a pastor's marriage comes first. Every effort is made to ensure that both spouses attend the retreat. Whatever the situation—a difficult trial, an impending decision, a hurt that needs to heal, or a need for time to focus on the marriage—Pastors Retreat Network knows that both spouses should be involved, even if only one is a "professional Christian."

2. Restoration of the Broken

Some pastors are in real trouble when they arrive for their retreat. They need something—or some *One*—to pull them out of a ditch. Tom thrills when a pastor on the verge of leaving the ministry or facing a personal crisis finds restoration and renewal on retreat.



As CEO of Leadership Network, Tom works closely with church leaders from around the nation. Here, he's addressing leaders who participate in Leadership Network's Recovery Ministry.

ONE LITTLE STORY

Not surprisingly, Tom finds it a special joy when pastors he knows personally experience a Pastors Retreat Network retreat.

As an example, just days before the interview for this story, Tom heard from an old Young Life staff member he had once supervised. Now working in an inner-city church, this friend had just returned from a retreat at Pastors Retreat Network's Texas center. His letter to Tom says it all:

"This place is amazing. The time here has placed me exactly where I wanted and needed to be in life, church, marriage and service."

Just one little story—but a story that perfectly describes the experience of so many thousands of others. Pastors Retreat Network helps pastors find their place, renew their faith and fulfill their calling.

Is it any wonder Tom is committed to helping Pastors Retreat Network in any way he can? 🌿

Thanks to Pastor Retreat Network's self-guided format, no guest is forced into a formulaic, one-size-fits-all structure. Rather God speaks to each individual at his or her point of need—a challenge here, a celebration there and sometimes a kick in the seat of the pants.

Pastors Retreat Network sets the environment. And God does the work in each individual's heart.

3. Maintaining the Healthy

But it's not just the "walking wounded" that need renewal. Tom sees the retreat as the perfect place for healthy pastors

to reinforce their spiritual foundation and guard against burnout or fallout.

As Tom says, "Success can be dangerous and seductive. When things are going well, it's easy to fall into a false sense of security, to feel like you're invulnerable. Over time, some pastors become more concerned with the growth of their church than the state of their heart, more interested in numbers than in depth. Our retreats help many guests step back and focus again on the true foundation that will support and sustain their work—a heart that is rooted in God."

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

➤ As a Board member, Tom does more than celebrate the present. He also prays about the future.

One of those prayers is that over time, the work of Pastors Retreat Network will be more out in the open. In Tom's opinion, pastors whose lives are transformed by a retreat need to share this good news with their congregations.

Sure, it's a little risky to "be real" in front of a congregation. But the benefits are enormous. Parishioners will see that struggles and challenges are a part of everyone's life—pastors included. Pastors who share—at an appropriate level—the growth they experienced on retreat can open the door to a new level of honesty and love and spirituality in their congregation. At a minimum, they will encourage those they lead to pursue their own renewal experience. A very good thing, indeed.