



CWS Restore and Renew Supports Faith Leaders to Build Resilience, Community During Challenging Times

Like many clergy, Rev. Liz Testa found herself stretched thin during the pandemic and a time of increasing divisiveness in our country. She learned about Restore and Renew, a new pilot program for clergy offered by Church World Service, and decided to apply.

"Like so many of us, the pandemic was a really high stress time, and there were so many pressing needs of ministry," said Testa, who serves more than 20,000 annually in her role as director of Equity-Based Hospitality and Women's Transformation and Leadership for the Reformed Church of America. "I was finding myself really fatigued when I found out about this program."

Testa joined 13 other clergy in 2024 for the inaugural year of Restore and Renew, a yearlong program that provides counseling, coaching and ecumenical community support to help clergy build resilience and thrive in their ministry. The program was inspired in part by high levels of clergy burnout and feelings of isolation that increased during the pandemic.

"In 2023, we started seeing numbers from the Barna Christian research firm showing increased unhappiness among clergy and clergy burnout being at its highest point, and from my own personal experience as a clergy woman, I noticed a lot of people leaving ministry," said CWS Restore and Renew founder Rev. Rebekah Belase. "They were stressed, their congregations were divided,

and they didn't feel equipped to handle the challenges they were facing.

Belase said that the idea for Restore and Renew ties directly into CWS mission to "transform communities around the globe through just and sustainable responses to hunger, poverty, displacement and disaster.

Clergy have always been on the front lines in our work to transform communities, and it was evident that we need to reinvest in faith leaders so they can continue their important work in their churches and their communities."

- REV. REBEKAH BELASE

The Restore and Renew program provides three unique cohorts to serve faith leaders:

Restore Clergy, led by Rev. Kinsie Tate, LPC, LPCC, provides online group coaching every three weeks in addition to opening and closing retreats. The cohort develops community, connection and healing for clergy by taking them through a six-step framework that delves into the underlying causes of ministry challenges. It offers insights and strategies that build resilience and lead to enduring transformation in their ministry.

Chrysalis Counseling for Clergy, led by Rev. Dr. Kelly Jackson Brooks, LPCC, provides in-person retreats, including two in northern New Mexico, and offers three online sessions. Chrysalis' holistic approach seeks to equip faith leaders to obtain and sustain optimal mental, spiritual and physical health. The program is led by a team of licensed mental health professionals and offers speakers on a variety of clergy wellness topics, covenant groups and individual counseling.



Middle Judicatory Leader Coaching, launched in 2025, is led by Rev. Gregg Sealey, CPP, PCC, a certified life and leadership coach. This program is tailored to the unique needs of leaders such as District Superintendents, Executive Presbyters, Bishops and Regional Ministers. This project-based program focuses on personal and professional growth, enhanced leadership and building a deep sense of community.

Among the participants in the new Middle Judicatory Leader cohort is Rev. Dr. Alexander Ruth, associate regional minister for the Disciples of Christ Church in Illinois and Wisconsin. He is excited to experience a more integrated way of doing ministry. "I have not done an effective job of caring for myself over the 20-plus years of my ministry, and I would like to minister from a place of rest for the next 15-plus years of my career and model a healthy ministerial life for my colleagues."

As Restore and Renew develops, Belase hopes to launch additional cohorts that meet faith leaders' unique needs and to engage program alumni in sustainable leadership efforts in their communities and beyond. A new cohort is being developed this year that will serve refugee and immigrant faith leaders.

Testa says the strategies she learned in Restore and Renew have been a game-changer that will have ripple effects throughout her ministry and help her model healthy self-care to those she serves.

"I am now refreshed and ready for the next season of my ministry," she said. "I am so grateful to Church World Service and Rebekah Belase and her team for creating this program. It is so evident looking out at all the people CWS serves alongside of – leaders in ministry – that they need this opportunity to step away for restoration and renewal."

What Clergy Are Saying About CWS Restore and Renew



"I've learned some new tools that were not in my toolbelt, and I've established a new community of faith leaders, who have bonded in such a beautiful way."

– **BISHOP GWENDOLYN PHILLIPS COATES**, God Answers Prayers Ministry, Federal Way, WA



"I am in a much better place to lead because of this program and to help my congregation understand and live into their full calling and potential."

– **REV. AMANDA GOSIK**, Central Christian Church, Great Falls, MT



"In this season of chaos, the Restore and Renew program has been a gift to my ministry and well-being. I'm especially grateful for the opportunity to build relationships with clergy from different denominations, engaging in play, creativity, and shared prayer. I look forward to deepening these connections and continuing this journey with my cohort in the year ahead."

– **REV. MELISSA HINNEN**, Park Slope UMC, Brooklyn, NY



"It was a great chance to meet fellow clergy with similar hopes and challenges for ministry, and was definitely a needed time of renewal."

– **REV. ERIC VOGT**, St. Paul's UMC, Lenexa, KS



"I'm feeling more present, less exhausted, and I'm able to bring my full self to ministry... so I can show up healthier for my congregation, our mission partners, and the world."

– **REV. MEGAN THOMAS**, McLean Baptist Church, Falls Church, VA



Restore and Renew By The Numbers 2024-25

STATES REPRESENTED

22

Plus Ontario,
Canada

Ten states represented in
2024 and sixteen states
represented in 2025.

TOTAL IMPACTED BY MINISTRY

77,650

26,925 in 2024 and
50,725 in 2025

DENOMINATIONS REPRESENTED

9

Represented denominations
include African Methodist Episcopal,
Cooperative Baptist, Disciples of Christ,
Pentecostal, Presbyterian Church USA,
Reformed Church of America, United
Church of Canada, United Church of
Christ, and the United Methodist Church.

FAITH LEADERS SERVED

36

14 served in 2024, 22
served in 2025

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