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# THE CIRCLE OF SEVEN

**WHEN HIS SERVANTS ARE WEAK**

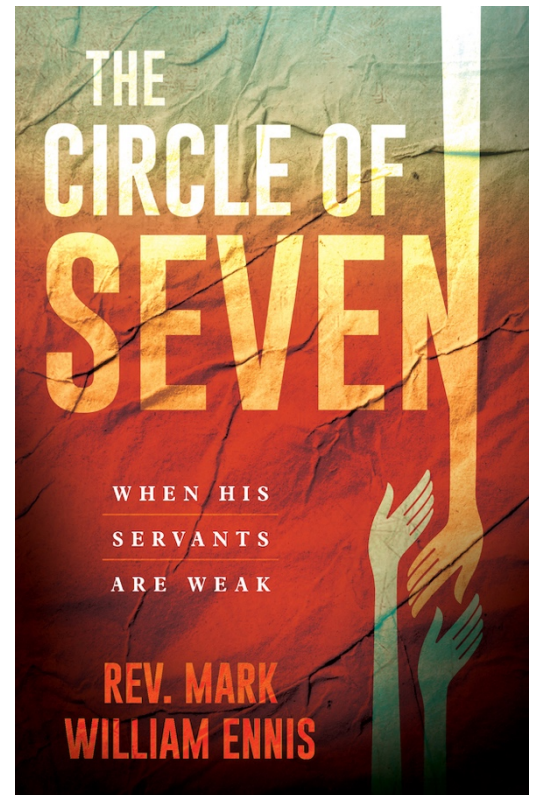
**REV. MARK WILLIAM ENNIS**

**When a traumatized minister has nothing left to give and is on the brink of despair, how can he find the strength to go on? Who is going to minister to his wounded and broken spirit?**

Along the path to hope and healing, Reverend William de Plore learns that true ministry is universally challenging, pastoral care is intense, and no one is immune to human limitations. Can restoration be found in a circle of seven ministers?

*The Circle of Seven: When His Servants Are Weak* is for ministers who have been wounded by the giving of intense pastoral care. It is also for Christians who care for ministers and wish to help and support them. Ennis takes the reader out of the clean sanctuaries and into the dirty streets where pastoral care can be messy, bloody, and traumatizing. Readers are shown the genuine struggles of ministers as they seek to be Jesus to those who have been victims of the evils of a fallen world.

The stories presented here are real. They are not clean and pretty, but they are filled with faithful people in difficult circumstances finding their wounds healed by God's grace. While specific details have been necessarily fictionalized, the reality of the traumatizing wounding and the restorative healing is entirely factual and based upon actual events.



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# About the Author

## REV. MARK WILLIAM ENNIS



After thirty-four years of pastoral ministry, six years as a volunteer hospital chaplain, five years as a disaster chaplain, including a deployment for the opening of the National 9/11 museum in New York City, and two years as a crisis counselor, Rev. Mark William Ennis has acquired a lot of stories born out of tragedy. He has been a Reformed Church in America pastor for thirty-four years. He is also married to a minister, is the father of a minister, and is the son-in-law of a minister. When he is not indulging in ministerial activities, he can be found writing books or reading them. He lives in Bergenfield, New Jersey, with his wife, Pamela. Mark pastors the Clinton Avenue Reformed Church and has two grown daughters and four grand-cats.

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# *What Others Are Saying About* **The Circle of Seven**

This slim novella carries a hefty wallop. Drawing on decades as a parish pastor, author Ennis invites his readers into the heart-wrenching world of contemporary ministry. It is a pain-filled world which demands superhuman responses from fragile, breakable humans. He asks the penetrating question: Who ministers to ministers in their times of anguish? His answer is to look to the presence of the divine in the midst of a circle of fragile, broken, and re-formed peers.

— **Donald A. Luidens, PhD, Senior Research Fellow, Van Raalte Institute; Professor of Sociology, Emeritus, Hope College**

This book is a moving, raw, authentic primer on the realities of pastoral care in both church and society, and the critical need for clergy to guard against isolation, guilt, and shame. Rev. Ennis brings to vibrant, emotive life the redemptive power of sharing our stories with supportive, like-minded colleagues and the ongoing healing work that results. Beyond the case studies, *Circle of Seven* offers a model for creating sacred, vulnerable space together that will spark the imagination of emerging and established ministry leaders alike who are seeking to build circles of trust and healing in their own unique contexts.

— **Rev. Elizabeth Testa, Women's Transformation and Leadership, Reformed Church in America**

*The Circle of Seven* is an engaging and moving story. While a work of fiction, it clearly draws on Mark Ennis's lifetime of pastoral care for parishioners, counselees, and colleagues; he clearly understands the feelings of people in crisis. This book could be used as a textbook for pastors and those training for ministry in how to care for one another and the true meaning of "covenant community." It could also be a primer for those not in ministry, giving them a glimpse of the pain and humanity with which people in ministry—in any faith tradition—grapple each and every day.

— **James Hard Brumm, General Editor, *The Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America***

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Reading *The Circle of Seven* will take you on a journey toward your own healing. The author skillfully draws the reader to reflect on our own need for support and affirmation. This book is must reading, especially for caregivers.

— **Rev. Willard Walden Christopher Ashley Sr., MDiv., DMin., SCP; Vice President for Strategic Institutional Initiatives, Associate Professor of Practical Theology, New Brunswick Theological Seminary**

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# Suggested Interview Questions

For Rev. Mark William Ennis, author of  
*The Circle of Seven*  
*When His Servants Are Weak*

**Q: Rev. Ennis, you have been a minister for over thirty years and have been writing for decades. When did you know that you were called to ministry?**

**A:** God must have had his finger on me from an early age. When I was preschool age, I would have communion services with my stuffed animals. We used Ritz Crackers and milk. I also baptized my stuffed tiger in the sink. Even at that age I was intrigued with ministers, I enjoyed going to church, and somehow, I knew that something very special was happening during sacraments. I knew internally that God wanted me to be doing this and was telling me to do this.

**Q: When did you feel compelled to become an author?**

**A:** I was in love with books for as long as I can remember. I would never go to sleep before my parents read *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* to me. When I learned to read on my own, my favorite books were Dr. Seuss's *Green Eggs and Ham* as well as *Mike Mulligan and the Steam Shovel*. It was not long before I was trying to do my own writing. I wrote a little "newspaper" and would put copies in the mailboxes of neighbors. That was my first foray into writing.

I began writing in earnest, as time would allow, in the 1980s. I was influenced a lot by Andrew Greeley. I appreciated how he was able to tell modern parables that involved stories of God's grace. I hope to be able to do the same thing in my writings; to give the secular world a taste of Christ and his grace.

**Q: Much of what you write involves hospital settings. Did you leave the parish at some point to become a hospital chaplain?**

**A:** No. I never left the parish. To improve my pastoral care skills, I took two units of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). The second one was taught at Albany Medical Center. Following the training, I volunteered once a month to be an overnight

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chaplain at the hospital. I did this for six years and I did enjoy the intensity of this type of ministry. Some of these stories come from those monthly overnight experiences that I had over the course of six years.

It seems somehow that in doing this chaplaincy work I joined my family's medical heritage. I did volunteer work in a hospital in high school. My sister is an RN. My mother was an RN. My brother-in-law is a doctor, and a close friend, who is more like a sister to me, is a nurse practitioner who does robotic surgery. I had to do my stint at hospital work.

**Q: Have you considered doing full-time chaplaincy and not doing work in a congregational setting?**

**A:** I would not want to do chaplaincy work full time. Your relationships with patients are short term. I prefer the long-term relationships that come in parish settings. Also, there is more variety of tasks in the parish and I enjoy that variety. Maybe someday in the future when I retire, I might consider doing chaplaincy work but for the time being I believe that God is telling me to stay put in the parish. I could, perhaps, after I retire, volunteer as a hospice chaplain. I have helped dozens of older parishioners enter God's nearer presence. Retirement, however, is at least a decade away.

**Q: Did you experience all the events in the book yourself?**

**A:** There are two that I did not personally experience. One of these stories was shared by a student colleague from one of my CPE classes. The other was told to me by another pastor during a Veterans Stand Down that I participated in at the Stratton VA Medical Center in Albany, NY. I simply felt that these two stories were too powerful not to include, even though I personally did not live them. I simply counseled those folks who have been involved in those pastoral care interventions.

**Q: If these are your stories, where did your characters come from?**

**A:** The characters who received pastoral care are, of course, based on the real recipients of the care. I have made changes to descriptions so that the anonymity of these people will be protected. I developed characters who are mosaics of

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different ministers that I know. Using these characters, instead of putting myself in all of these roles, is simply a literary device. I wish to tell the stories accurately, but I also need to protect the identity of everyone who is involved.

**Q: In your book, there are some very intense, sad events. Why would a person want to read about these?**

**A:** Yes, these stories are horrible and painful. To be authentic to the Gospel, we must explore these painful parts of life as much as we need to tell faith stories of happier events. If we read the Bible that we claim to read, and claim to be important, we will read stories of rather significant horror. There are child deaths in Egypt. There are stories of rapes and murders. The story of Jesus' crucifixion is about as horrible and painful as any story can be. Yet, these should not be avoided. These stories are also about God's grace in the middle of such tragic circumstances. We cannot avoid talking about tragedies, but we must not leave out the grace either.

Why would a person wish to read such stories? Perhaps as a reminder that God's grace abounds even in hard times. Perhaps a person going through hard times needs a reminder that others are going through similar times. Perhaps a person believes that God has cursed him or her and that is why such bad things are happening. They need a reminder that both the just and the unjust suffer the hurts of a fallen world. I hope and pray that all people going through tragedies will find this book and be comforted by it.

**Q: Who did you really write this book for?**

**A:** I wrote this book mainly for ministers who have been a part of such tragedies. One of roles that I have taken on at my age is that young ministers will come to me, share their problems, and ask my advice. At times I have shared with them some of these stories so that they know that they are not the only ones who have had hardships while doing pastoral care. Many have been relieved that others have gone through tough times as well. There is a comfort in knowing that others have survived.

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A secondary audience is the people who love and support ministers but have no idea what ministers encounter in ministry. Many people only see the minister engaging in the more glamorous sides of ministry: baptisms, weddings, preaching, where the minister is a star and is complimented. They don't know about the dark side of doing ministry and the pains that can become a part of a minister's life.

**Q: What do you wish that each reader takes away from reading your book?**

**A:** I wish that each reader would take away that although leading a Christian life and being a Christian minister can be painful, the pain need not be forever. Wounds are healed by the power of Jesus and the support of one another. Some people are suffering horrible memories and experiences. They feel that the wounds and pains will last forever. They don't have to be permanent. There is healing in Jesus. This healing stream of the risen Lord can we tapped if we develop deep relationships with him and with other devoted Christians. If you are wounded, don't despair. There is Jesus.

**Q: Do you have plans to write any more books?**

**A:** Yes, I am working on two projects currently. One is documenting my work with a Christian woman who was living in severe abuse. She compared her life to the people of Israel living in bondage. Her faith was deep, and she kept her faith until, finally, she saw justice done. This documents one of the most troubled families that I have ever worked with, and yet the grace of Christ wins out.

Another book that I am still writing is a book about a Christian police officer who tries to find balance in being a justice fighter and at the same time is a beacon of Christ's grace. It is a difficult path for her, especially in the secular society that she lives in. I would love for this book to grow into a series of books that highlight this woman and the ethical/moral balance in which she walks.

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