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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU TAKE  
AWAY THE TITLE?

By **Natalie Hart**



In many churches, people in leadership are never called by their first names. They are Pastor So-and-So, Elder So-and-So, First Lady, Minister, Prophet, etc. Even in general conversation, church leaders often just refer to each other as *Pastor*.

So what happens when they can't use those titles anymore?

Students in the Leading Community-Based Ministry

(<https://www.gatheringsofhope.org/family-leadership>)(LCBM) course, a partnership between Gatherings of Hope and Grand Rapids Theological Seminary, find out quickly. That is one of the rules that the professor, Khary Bridgewater, establishes early on: **they must call each other by their first names.**

Khary says this is tough at first, but that it's important: "Once they get there, it does half the work. They're re-humanized as people." As the instructor, he is intentional about asking them more about *themse/ves* than about their ministries. This helps prepare them for the very personal questions they'll be asked to wrestle with in the course:

Who am I becoming?

What brings me delight?

What can make me grow?

How can I figure out how to be a balanced person?

What personal barriers are in my way?

What is the breakthrough I need to go through to the next level in my ministry, in my relationships, in my spiritual life?

Dorothy Jenkins was in the first cohort of the course, and has been a Teaching Assistant for a few years. She loved that part of the course: "We got to strip the title and just be who we are. So many of us think we've got to *be* that title."

The course becomes a place where, at least for a while, leaders can shed the weight of their title and really talk about their experiences. Khary ensures they address their pressures head-on: “Churches are full of expectations and cultural norms and we confront them. We confront these ideas about what pastors *should* do.”

Letting that pressure go was a relief to Dorothy. It made it possible for her to answer, “yes,” when she asked herself, “Could I really be truthful? Do I really want to share this?”

In the beginning of the course, students have to be regularly reminded to call each other by their first names. But as each cohort goes on, and as they do more of what Khary characterizes as, “plain, honest talk among leaders,” the students become more vulnerable, more courageous, and more connected with their fellow leaders – which leaves them more able to put into practice what they learned about themselves and about ministry.



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