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Guest Editors' Introduction: Psychology and the Church

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It is surprising and paradoxical that the Church—an institution with a long and rich history of soul care—represents a relatively new area of scientific and professional interest for psychology, a discipline whose name literally means the study of the soul (psyche). The individualist, modernist, and anti-religious origins of psychology may have contributed to the long-standing gulf between psychology and the Church, as well as the anti-psychology and anti-science sentiments shrouding many Christian congregations since the fundamentalist/social gospel split of the early 20th century. Undoubtedly, both psychology and the Church have contributed to the distance between the two institutions. Whatever the causes of the rift, it is clear that psychologists know quite little about working with clergy and religious institutions (Weaver et al., 1997).

But today's psychology—with greater openness to spirituality, multiple ways of knowing, cultural diversity, and community emphases—provides a promising context for studying the Church. And today's Church—with increasing reliance on technology and science, growing engagement with contemporary culture, and a willingness to elevate various Christian psychologists to a near-prophetic role—may be more open to the influence of psychology than ever before. Establishing and evaluating partnerships between psychology and the Church is the nature of our work at the Center for Church-Psychology Collaboration (McMinn, Meek, Canning, & Pozzi, 2001), so we were delighted to

be asked to co-edit this special issue of *The Journal of Psychology and Christianity*.

Establishing a new research area in psychology, like promoting greater openness to social science within the Church, is an arduous and slow task. Our initial efforts have been twofold: national survey projects and in-depth interviews to assess clergy and psychologists' perceptions of one another (Chaddock & McMinn, 1999; McMinn, Chaddock, Edwards, Lim, & Campbell, 1998; McMinn, Aikins, & Lish, 2003), and studying exemplars who are already blending the strengths of the Church with the skills of psychology in applied settings (Benes, Walsh, McMinn, Dominguez, & Aikins, 2000; Edwards, Lim, McMinn, & Dominguez, 1999). Though not bound within the strict constraints of scientific inquiry, we find this second method particularly useful in promoting awareness of how psychology and the Church can work together. Thus, most of this special issue is devoted to exemplars—those who are already doing what we wish to study.

We begin the special issue with a word of introduction by Larry Crabb—a psychologist who has written widely about the importance of the Church in promoting spiritual and emotional health. This is followed with an article by R. Allen Lish and colleagues looking at clergy openness to innovative forms of collaboration, and then we present a collection of vignettes illustrating innovative ways that mental health professionals are partnering with clergy and church communities. These vignettes are divided thematically into three areas: clinically-focused collaboration, research-focused collaboration, and community-focused collaboration. We end the special issue with a cordial dialog between two scholars with interests in predominantly

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African American congregations, Thom Moore and J. Derek McNeil, both of whom are committed to community-based psychology and to the work of the Church.

We appreciate this opportunity to highlight the work of psychologists and other mental health professionals who are already collaborating with the Church, and we hope this special issue will encourage continued exploration and innovation in church-psychology collaboration.

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