

## A real treat

by **Kate Perry**

I wasn't going to sign up. I had been lured to the mountains one too many times by the promise of renewal in a picturesque setting. But after a dear friend's gentle nudging I registered and thought, "Regardless of how packed the schedule will be, I'll at least see a mountain, and that ought to soothe my soul."

The Alliance of Baptists' CAIRN ([Clergy Affiliate Information & Resource Network](#)) retreat Jan. 28-31 at Lutheridge Conference and Camp Center in Arden, N.C. was all it was marketed to be and more.

There was time for fellowship and friend-making – my favorite – and the large group discussion of Internal Family Systems (IFS) sparked a renewed commitment to self-grace and awareness. We were invited to dive in to ourselves and pour in even a fraction of the care and compassion we so freely give over to those we serve.

Perhaps the most meaningful moments came from my small-group experience. Prior to the retreat we were encouraged to write up an experience of our choosing that had grown out of our ministry context. We shared our stories/stuck places with each other and, using the gentle method of IFS, group members engaged each other. I was in a mixed group of chaplains and clergy and found such great value in voices from outside my norm.

I was so encouraged that the day after the retreat concluded I returned to work and set a meeting with my leadership to share my truth and work to better my situation. (That meeting has since taken place and I feel great! Thanks group!!) I returned with a renewed sense of purpose and call, and a reminder to listen to "my parts" when they come to the surface and learn from what they have to teach me.

Another true gift of the CAIRN retreat was actual free time each afternoon. On the first day it took me about an hour to really settle in and realize I could do whatever I wanted. I chose to do some crafting – a self-care skill I seldom make time for anymore. Once I realized I had my mat in the car, a new friend and I decided to do some spontaneous yoga. Others participated in mentoring conversations, contemplative bodywork practices, hikes, shopping and naps!

We worshipped, studied, played and built community, and every bit of it was beautiful. New friendships were formed and, as is the hope of CAIRN, new networking groups are forming. A ministry colleague is credited with saying, "People will go where they are prepared for and cared for." I have always thought that to be true and the Alliance brought it to life with this retreat. The planning team thought of everything, right down to the popcorn for the movie. They sought to create a space, and what a great gift it was and continues to be. I plan to be at future CAIRN events and hope to meet you there.

*Kate Perry is an Alliance-endorsed, board certified chaplain currently serving full time in the emergency department at Atrium Health University in Charlotte, N.C.*