

Gratitude to Alban

By [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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I was at a clergy meeting this week and someone said, “Alban was right about family-sized churches...” and everyone in the room shook their heads. We didn’t need any explanation. We all knew that the pastor was referring to [Roy Oswald](#) and [Alice Mann's](#) work.

For a good generation, Alban has been creating books and resources that slip into our common clergy vernacular. When we think of [applying of family systems theories](#), [navigating size transitions](#), [being a blessed church](#), [re-imagining faith](#), [creating open-source communities](#), or (if I may dare to add my work to the Alban classics) [reframing hope](#), we often refer to Alban. Alban had a three-pronged mission: publishing, consulting, and education. I've had a finger in each pie, at different times.

It began when I started as a small-church pastor. Serving out in the middle of the Cajun swamps of Louisiana, I didn’t have many professional educational opportunities. So I picked up on those code words in our clergy gatherings, and began to read Alban books. [The Once and Future Church](#) and [The Practicing Congregation](#) became go-to books in my ministry.

When I moved to DC, I felt a shift in my calling. I knew that I was supposed to be doing something beyond the walls of our congregation. I wasn’t sure what the shift was exactly. Like a person navigating in the dark, I tried to figure out what God was calling me to. Then on a whim, I wrote an inquiry to Alban’s Director of Publishing, Richard Bass. He responded with an invitation to visit Alban. From that day forward, Richard and Diana Butler Bass have been mentors and guides as I navigated the tricky world of publishing. Alban published [Tribal Church](#) and [Reframing Hope](#).

This week, the [Alban board](#) announced that they would be closing. I have so much gratitude toward the years of excellent work that Alban provided. But, it feels like a brutal blow. Many people are wondering how to pick up the pieces. As far as my personal work is concerned, Alban books will [still be available through Rowman and](#)

[Littlefield](#). I'm not sure what will happen to Alban's niche in providing excellent resources for pastors in the future, but the existing books may get a wider distribution. Most of Alban's consultants have gone to [Congregational Consulting](#).

Personally, when I had time to expand my consulting work, I anticipated there would be some transitions ahead for Alban (they had already stopped many of their education opportunities and downsized a few times), so I began consulting and coaching with [The Center for Progressive Renewal](#). We have an amazing team, including Bruce Reyes-Chow, Cameron Trimble and Doug Pagitt.

As I look at all of it, the scattered pieces, I feel a lot of gratitude and a lot of grief. Joni Mitchell is singing a soundtrack in my head: "Don't it always seem to go, that you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone."

Alban was not just my publisher, but it was a wide network of wisdom. In this sad time, I am incredibly grateful that I had a part in their legacy.