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## **THE ROLE OF THE PASTOR IN MINISTRY**

By Rev. Arno Meyer

When Rev. Gary Rueter asked me to address this topic for this convocation, my first instinct was to ask, Why me? I do not consider myself to be a profound theological thinker. Plus, I can think of a whole host of others who could do a better job. However, after further conversation with Gary (and after hearing from Concordia Plan Services that I had 41.83 years of plan participation at the time of my retirement), I said yes. So, what you are about to get are some thoughts and insights that come out of a fairly long and varied ministry.

Perhaps a brief review of my background and experience would be helpful. I vicared at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Perryville, MO. That was a unique experience in itself in that I had four different bishops or supervising pastors during that year, thus giving me early on four different perspectives on pastoral ministry. I graduated from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and went with my young family to serve as missionary in the China Evangelical Lutheran Church (Taiwan) for nine years. In the early years I served with five Taiwanese-speaking evangelists. The latter years I worked in two Mandarin-speaking congregations.

Upon returning to the states, I served St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Alta Vista, KS. This was a wonderful place to readjust to state-side living and state-side pastoring. The people in our small towns and rural parishes are some of the greatest.

Five years passed until I accepted the call from St. Andrew's, Wichita. At that time they were worshipping in a store-front but under God's blessing and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, over ten years we moved through two capital projects to become a congregation of 600.

I was then called by the KS District to serve as mission developer in Southwest Topeka. Again, under God's blessing, and with a good location, mission-minded people, a great preschool, and an excellent staff, I was able to (semi) retire from Prince of Peace after 41.83 years of ministry.

That's who I am and the experience from which I will now draw to address the topic of Church and Ministry.

The church part I think we have got down pretty well. Article VII of the Augsburg Confession tells us that "the one holy Christian church is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel." Lutherans know how to do church. Our Concordias have trained us well.

It's the ministry part where ideas and opinions differ. I would suggest that there are as many different understandings of ministry and how it should be carried out as there are people in this room. Times have changed. Ministry has changed. Take my father for example. He graduated from Concordia, St. Louis in 1929. In the early 40's we lived in Okawville, IL. He was called to preach, teach, call on the sick and shut-ins, marry and bury. He was also the teacher of a one-room school. And he was "required" to spend two weeks helping with harvest in the community. Oh, the good old days.

What about today? I would refer you to a sheet out of the self-study materials given to a calling congregation. It asks members to rate on a scale of 1 to 9 what they deem most important in the new pastor. The areas are as follows: Preaching and Worship; Teaching; Calling; Counseling; Equipping; Studying; Managing (Parish Administration - meetings/preparation/office); Church and Community; and, last but not least, Janitorial.

An aside. I was asked once while at St. Andrew's, "What does it take to become a pastor?" I answered, "If a person can't do anything else, he should become a pastor." It took me a while to explain but I think you know what I mean – knowing God has called you to the exclusion of doing anything else. My original answer was well-intended but very poorly worded.

However, taking another look at that sheet, those nine areas are further subdivided into 92 areas. That would lead me to say that a pastor today has to be equipped to do virtually everything else.

So what is the role of the pastor in ministry? Put simply, I would say it is to FEED and LEAD. We feed the people through the powerful preaching of the Gospel and the teaching of the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. We have some marvelous tools to accomplish this feeding – preaching, adult and junior confirmation classes, straight Bible study, Crossways (Read through the Bible with understanding), Bethel, Stephen Ministry, and a catalog full of materials from CPH. Keep in mind, though, our commission is to "make disciples!" I remember John Maxwell saying, "Too many of our people are educated well beyond their level of obedience."

But what about our being leaders? I think a pastor does well to use the hyphenated word – Servant-leader. That would be the model that our Lord provided. "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:43-45) Christ paid the ransom! But now he calls on us to serve his people as his under-shepherds.

That would leave no room for a tyrannical pastor. My wife has been known to say, "Listen, I might have faults but being wrong isn't one of them." Not a good attitude for a pastor. St. Paul gave counsel to Timothy and Titus that pastors should "set an example for the believers in speech, life, love, faith, and purity." (1 Timothy 4:12) That sounds like a servant-leader to me.

So what might leadership look like? Rev. David Schmidt of Capital Funding Services shared the following in a training session for a capital project we did at Prince of Peace. To provide leadership is to challenge, inspire, enable, model, encourage. (He also made the comment, “If you are a leader and no one is following you, you're just out for a walk.”) So let's look at this view of leadership.

Challenge - God has given us some gifted people. Too often we let those gifts not only go unnoticed, but unused. I am reminded of a statement made by Rev. Charles Mueller some years ago. “When someone comes to you with an idea, don't say 'Why?', rather say 'Why not?' Challenge them with a mission and ministry that will bring glory to God and will build his church.

Inspire - We have the greatest privilege in the world – to be a part of God's plan for time and for eternity. Just knowing one is a child of God and an heir of heaven should inspire everyone, pastor and lay person alike, to attempt great things for God.

Enable - Paul said it to the church in Ephesus. “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Eph. 4:11-13)

Model - My sainted friend Dave Taylor once said, “There are three things you cannot teach your children with words – morals, attitude and lifestyle. Whatever you model is what you teach.” So also for the pastor. I pray that was true for me, especially after the death of our daughter. My good friend and then colleague Rev. Neil Buono said to me, “Arno, you are a sermon in shoes.” Few comments have I appreciated more.

Encourage - Life is hard. Ministry is hard. St. Paul said, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” (I Thess. 5:11)

To this point I have said that the role of the pastor in ministry is to feed and lead. I would now add a third element – Love.

When I was asked by Professor Bill Danker to prayerfully consider a call to a mission field, I went to see Rev. A. M. Lohman, former pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Perryville, MO where I had vicared. He had served there faithfully for thirty-three years. I asked him, “What does it take to be a good pastor or missionary?” His five word answer had a profound effect on my life and ministry. His answer was, “Love Jesus and love people.”

That seems to be current thinking also. The secretary at St. Paul, Clay Center (where I have served now as interim pastor for 20 months) gave me this note when told of the topic of this presentation. “What is the most important duty of a pastor? – It is to love his congregation and with that everything else will take its place.”

Or like that little penciled note in my Bible - "Love is the answer, ... no matter what the question."

St. Paul seemed to have the same idea. He lists a whole array of gifts in I Corinthians 12 – workers of miracles, gifts of healing, administration, speaking in tongues, interpreting, but goes on to say, "And now I will show you the most excellent way." It is to love. Without love we are like a "resounding gong or a clanging cymbal." And don't we know, there is already too much noise in the church and world already!

To conclude. As I see it the role of the pastor in ministry is to feed his people, lead his people, and love his people. May you find great joy in serving God and His people. Oh, one last thought. Throw in a dash of humor and you are on the way to a long and satisfying ministry. Thank you and may God bless you one and all.