

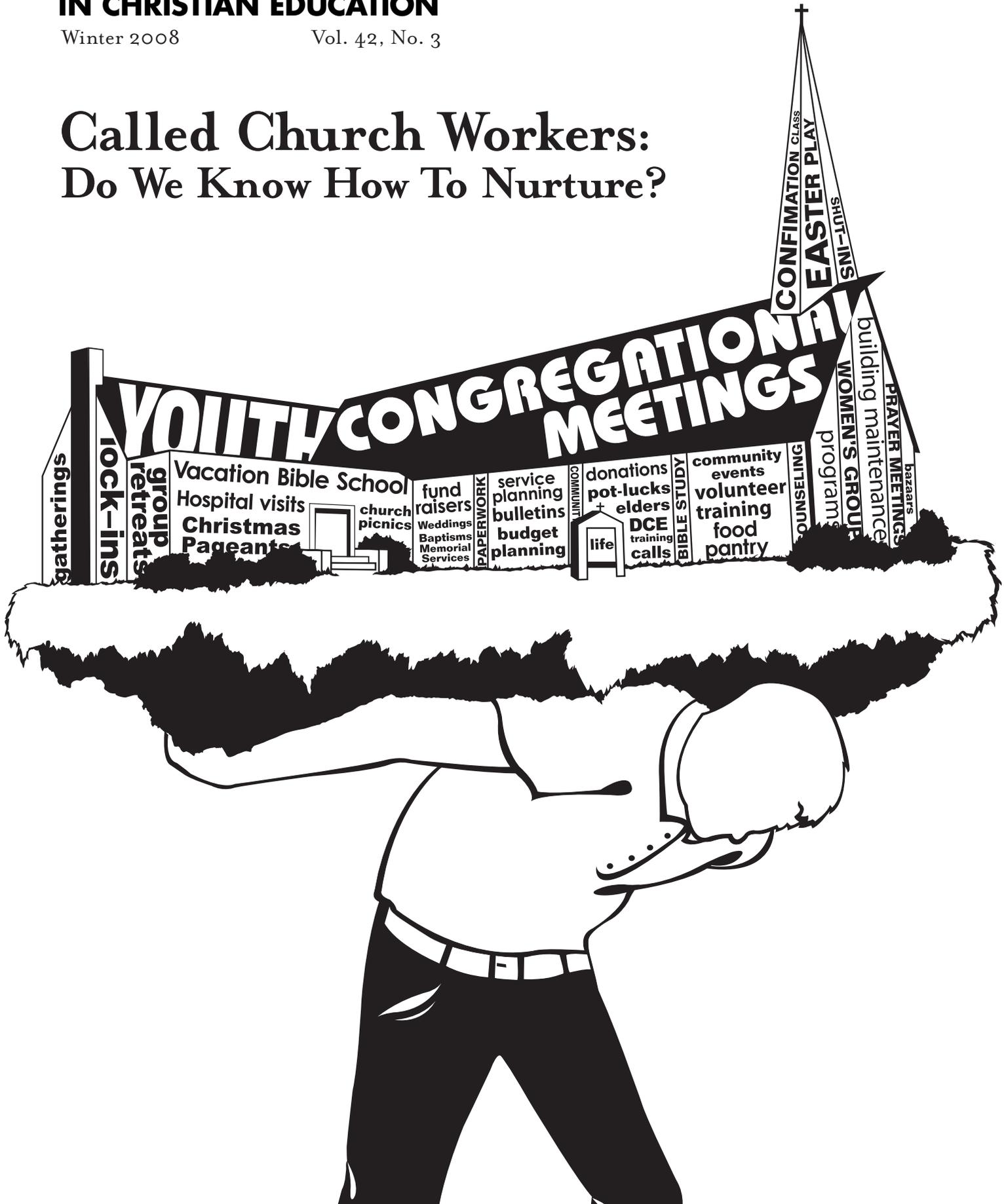
ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Winter 2008

Vol. 42, No. 3

Called Church Workers: Do We Know How To Nurture?



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reflections

This is a must-read edition of *Issues*. It is my hope and prayer it will be read by every pastor and church professional in your congregation. I also hope it will be shared with boards of elders and other congregational leaders charged with caring for the workers called to be in ministry within your congregation. Caring for those called to proclaim and practice the love of Jesus Christ in our midst is a must. And, when done well, ministry flourishes. Let me share two examples I experienced during my travels this summer.

The first example is a congregation in northeast Nebraska where I preached for a Concordia Sunday. Highlights included: Seeing a projector and screen in this traditional, small town Nebraska church and having both pastor and members tell me how easy it was to get the equipment installed and how helpful it has been because folks can “see so well and don’t have to shuffle paper and books, and sermons are easier to follow through an outline and pictures which appear on the screen”; after worship a woman apologized for the noise of children in the service and then said: “I hope you didn’t mind. Before Pastor came there weren’t any children in church. Now we have young people and children again.” (I assured her I did not mind the joyful noise!); an announcement after the worship service that following the first of three meetings to raise support for *Fan Into Flame* the congregation had raised more than \$8,000 of its \$10,000 goal. The elder who made the announcement was shocked and humbled. He didn’t think that there was any chance that they would get close to \$10,000, but with two more meetings planned, they would exceed the goal.

The second is a congregation in Lincoln, Nebraska, where I was asked to preach for the celebration of the pastor’s 25th anniversary in the Holy Ministry and his 25th year of service to the congregation. The church was full, the choir and brass were outstanding, the front of the sanctuary was filled with children of a variety of races for the children’s message (on a beautiful summer Sunday), the basement overflowed for the potluck dinner following worship, and great emotion and love were evident between pastor and people. The congregation gave the pastor and family a trip to Hawaii and raised nearly double the amount of money they originally intended to raise for the trip. This dynamic congregation supports two missionaries, operates a daycare center, significantly underwrites tuition for students to attend Lutheran elementary and high schools and supports Concordia University.

These congregations model the encouragement, love and nurture Dr. Schroeder identifies as characteristics of healthy Christians and healthy churches. Both congregations seek by God’s grace and power to assist their called workers to have the kind of healthy stress Rev. Rockenbach describes. It is my prayer that congregations and workers will read, reflect and act on suggestions and prescriptions in this edition so that more people may know Jesus Christ, the one and only Savior of the world, and grow in faith, love and obedience to Him.

Brian L. Friedrich, President



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A Student + Faculty Design Collaborative

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Titles set in 22 point Mrs. Eaves Roman (Emigre of Sacramento). Tracking normal.
Subheads set in 13/13 point Mrs. Eaves bold.
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Growing in Christ's Love

In the midst of a presidential election, we are reminded of how much attention is given to the intricate details of the politicians' lives and the lives of their families. We have certain expectations of these individuals who desire to run our country of how they should behave. We formulate opinions based on what the media can drum up and publish in the latest forum. We take the focus off our own lives and look at these individuals in order to escape reality and distract ourselves from our own flaws. Growing up as a pastor's kid, there were times when I felt as though our lives, actions and behaviors were the focus of the parishioners and the communities in which we lived.

"WHAT IS IT LIKE TO GROW UP AS A PK?" My initial response is that we are human, too! Labels of pastors' kids are either the goody-goody or the rebel. Admittedly, there are pieces of my past in which I played both of those roles. I recall times I compromised my father's role and ministry due to my own poor decision-making. Yet I suggest that each of us carries these attributes based on our sinful nature to rebel from God.

A pastors' family is held to high expectations to live according to God's commandments, being good examples of what God ordains. A pastor's family should reflect these standards. All Christian families should aspire to do so. Yet we also recognize that the pastor's family is confronted with the various forms of sin that every human faces. We ride the pendulum of human behavior from good to bad.

The pastor and his family are imperfect. This reality does not give any of us any excuse (as Romans 1 reminds us). Rather, we recognize our sin, admit it, and by God's grace learn to change it. Having experienced a gamut of life issues within my family and personal life, I have come to regard the pastor's family as a vessel to the congregation, sharing our common hurts, pains, and disappointments as a congregation of the redeemed. Relating to one another as sinner to sinner, we grow in Christ's love. Our behavior whether it be labeled "goody-goody" or the "rebellious" is the process of normal growth and development in the Christian life. It is important to emphasize that we are those in need of a perfect God who sent the perfect Son—to love us with all our imperfections.

"What else does your dad do besides preach on Sundays?" I was taken aback when in high school a classmate asked me this question. I suppose my shock was associated with

those times when Dad wasn't there to tuck me in at night because he was at a council meeting. Or, he would be called away from some family event because of an emergency. I am sensitive to this question because it has always made me realize that the role of the pastor is similar to many other professions. Congregational demands and expectations of the pastor regarding church growth, how worship should or should not be conducted, public relations in the community, counseling, visiting those who are ill, funerals, and weddings are issues the pastor faces in order to achieve success in his role. The toll of these expectations can create physical, spiritual and emotional tornados hovering to touch down and cause devastation in the pastoral family at any moment.

I write this to bring understanding and perspective. I write this as a request of church members to bring encouragement to your church workers and their families through prayer and loving actions. Congregations can be watching the radar which focuses attention on the pastor and family, not with criticism, but with protection and care. I encourage members of congregations to practice patience and love, not haste and hatred, in the activities of your congregation.

Synod, districts, and researchers try to pinpoint why sometimes we have shortages in young men entering the ministry. Meanwhile we, the parishioners, can guard against the burnout pastors and their families may be experiencing—by loving them the way Christ first loved us. In doing so, we can limit the heartache of having to close church doors because there are not enough ministers to fill them.

Barb Hoier

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Caring for Others and Self

Do we know how to nurture called church workers? I keep trying to reframe this question because I believe the issues are more than the caring for and the nurturing of church workers. The other side of my reflective coin is whether church workers always know how to care for and nurture those that we are called to serve.

We become church workers for all sorts of different reasons, and we remain on

these church worker journeys for many different reasons. How do we equip church workers to go on these journeys? Is this the responsibility of the colleges and/or the seminaries? Should the LCMS take on this responsibility? How responsible should the church worker and the church be for self-care and nurturing one another?

I believe that church workers and the churches we serve are in a constant state of flux in this day and age. There are no easy answers. There is no such thing as one size fits all in our society anymore. Nor can we make anyone else responsible for our actions. There is no one simple program that meets all our needs. No two churches and schools are exactly alike.

The personality of the church worker is reflected in the church. Sometimes churches get stuck in patterns developed with earlier church workers. Sometimes we church workers lose ourselves in the churches that we serve. Sometimes church workers feel like they never really became a part of the church. At other times, the church worker gets stuck in an earlier situation in his or her life that we keep repeating the same or similar actions.

The question once more is, "How do we care for and nurture our church workers?" There are many programs out there for the church worker and the church. I believe that the process starts with us as people that can be nurtured, or before we can nurture someone else. We need to know who we are, and how we function with others. We are on life journeys that can lead us in so many different directions but to one ultimate place in God's Kingdom.

Another crucial issue is how we as church workers have a shared vision with our churches and schools. This shared vision means that we as church workers are in constant conversations among the three most important families in our lives: our birth family, the family we marry into, and the virtual family we work with in our congregations. Sometimes these families overlap. At other times, these families are at odds with one another. The most important thing for us as people of God is to be in conversation with our three families.

These conversations are also key for multiple staffs and schools as we nurture and care for one another. What is our shared mission and vision? How do we have the conversations that matter to us on our spiritual journeys? Are we open enough to one another and do we trust each other enough to work together?

As we take our life-long spiritual journeys, we then turn to others who can assist us with our self-care as well as the care of our churches and schools. As I grow older, I have come to realize more each day that my health and all that I have are gifts from God. I am a steward of those gifts, and I am on a journey with the cross of Christ always in front of me.

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The Theology of Rest

As I consider the unique stresses of the called worker, how to nurture ministries and people, layers of expectations, and above all, keeping Christ at the center of life, I am stressed. Like too many plates spinning on one too many sticks, something has to give.

I can just feel it. I'm tired, I'm a bit irritable, and I don't feel like writing one more thing. I do not want to face one more meeting or visit. I'm not at the edge, but I can see it approaching. I need some time off. Maybe more than time, I need a fresh frame of reference to liberate me for a few days as I unwind and let go, while my brain decompresses.

About this time some well-meaning person wants to help me with spiritual disciplines. Don't get me wrong; I've got nothing against reading the Scriptures, praying, solitude and silence—although fasting does not work for me. My main issue here is with the word "discipline." That word alone causes me stress. Now even the main area of relief, my spiritual life, is giving me stress. It reaches a point that if someone mentions something about spiritual disciplines at this moment, that person may wind up finding out exactly what Paul meant by a "living sacrifice."

I'm going to change the name from spiritual disciplines to spiritual connecting points, relief, renewal, or some word that is much less stressful. Then I can add to the list. How about spiritual activities like napping, fishing, golfing, resting, reading, movies and hanging out with my wife. Now these are "disciplines" I can sink my teeth into. Plus, when I do these I add a whole lot of space in my life, and the Holy Spirit seems to seep in and renew my soul. I guess that's why they call it recreation or re-creation.

That brings up another interesting dilemma—am I working so I can rest or do I take rest so I can work? It seems to me that is the point of the Sabbath rest. After all, Jesus did point out that Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. So what do I do?

Often I find myself in another version of Romans 7. The rest I know that I need I do not take, no rather the work I need to rest from is what I do. Who will save me from this body stress? Sweet relief is that the answer is the same: Thanks be to God for the victory in Jesus Christ.

If God's glory and the proclamation of the Good News is the point of my vocation, how come it wears me out? Besides, for someone who can preach the Gospel in a sermon, how come I lead such a Law-oriented life? Think about it. Living up to unrealistic expectations, and then actually accepting that as the measure of personal worth, add to that the guilt that follows when everything doesn't get done! Sure sounds like Law to me. The Law always accuses.

Interesting that Luther points out that in a regenerate person everything that he or she does is God's work. Even when that involves the treating of oneself to a great meal, walks around the block or sleeps, all of it is doing a good work and God-pleasing work at that! It's not just hard stressful labor that pleases God, but our rest pleases Him, too. Walther goes so far as to say that if Adam had remained in the state of innocence in which he had been created, he could have spent his life doing anything he pleased: fishing for trout (I need to stop here; Walther has a list of activities, but my eye can never get past the trout part of blessed activities). All his doings would have been good and holy works, and there would have been no sin in them.

Think about it: God is as pleased with me when I fly fish as when I preach the Gospel, each a holy work. So how do you view your rest? Does guilt gnaw at your soul and in your brain when you're on vacation, reminding you of what you didn't get done and whom you forgot? When you take two days off next week instead of one to read or walk or golf or bike, does this seem unholy to you? Or, can you respond to those special requests with a simple, "Sorry, I'm doing holy, God-pleasing work for the week; it will have to wait."

Rest is a part of God's good and gracious plan for you and me. Rest is yet another gift of re-creation from the cross. Maybe it's time to reexamine your list of disciplines

and see if there is room for a few more restful ones. Yours may be different than mine, but I know what they have in common: space, recreation, renewal, connection with God and connection with friends, and they all make God smile.

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MARK ROCKENBACH

Stress in the Lives of Church Workers



Stress is the amount of pressure that is exerted against an entity. Too much pressure will crush you, and no pressure at all means you are dead. Consider your blood pressure. Blood pressure is the force applied against the walls of the arteries as the heart pumps blood through the body. If the heart pumps with too much force exerting too much pressure against the vessel walls, you have high blood pressure or hypertension. High blood pressure increases the risk of developing heart disease, kidney disease, eye damage and stroke (brain damage). A diagnosis of high blood pressure requires treatment that will help normalize blood pressure and prevent complications.

In healthy people, especially athletes, low blood pressure is something that is desired. However, low blood pressure (hypotension) may cause inadequate blood flow to vital organs such as the brain, heart and kidneys. Those with low blood pressure typically experience dizziness, lightheadedness, chronic fainting spells, nausea, fatigue and clammy skin. When symptoms of low blood pressure begin to interfere with daily function, lifestyle changes can help correct the problem.

As you can see, stress against the walls of the arteries impacts the overall health of the person. Too much pressure (stress), or too little, can result in difficulties. But not all

stress is destructive. In fact, research has discovered that stress is actually good for you.

Acute Stress

Acute stress will strengthen the immune system, protect against certain diseases and help you meet environmental challenges (Segerstrom & Miller, 620). Bruce McEwen notes that "Stressful events and the accompanying release of stress hormones can enhance the immune system" (McEwen, 97). The stress hormone which is most significant in this process is called "cortisol." It is a steroid hormone made from cholesterol (McEwen, 24). It is a major player in our response to stress. Small amounts of it give a quick burst of energy, increase memory and strengthen the immune system. Cortisol is very important to help us deal with acute stressors, sometimes referred to as the *fight or flight* response.

An increase in blood pressure in times when you are under stress will help you deal with life around you. When you get up in the morning there is an extra boost of stress hormones (cortisol) to help get you going. Bruce McEwen says, "Ideally, the tide of cortisol is highest in the early morning, ebbing in the afternoon and reaching a low at night" (McEwen, 26).

Acute stress (eustress) gives you a feeling of fulfillment and achievement rather than anxiety. Eustress gives you a competitive edge

and focus. It stimulates you and gives a sense of accomplishment. When I get into the pulpit to preach or stand before large groups to give a presentation, I have a healthy amount of stress that puts me in the zone. Athletes encounter the same thing when they compete. Without the acute stress response, we would not have the focus and alertness needed to perform under great pressure. Therefore, pressure (stress) is imperative in helping us perform and be productive. Without it we would not be motivated to do anything.

Chronic Stress

However, too much cortisol impairs cognitive performance and increases risk factors of high blood pressure which results in lower immunity (McEwen, 24; Segerstrom & Miller 618).

While acute stress is beneficial to the immune system, chronic stress has the potential to be damaging to the immune system. At Ohio State University, they discovered a connection among chronic stress, loneliness and social support. They found that loneliness, bereavement and lack of a social system had a negative impact upon the immune system (McEwen, 93).

Too much pressure (stress) over a long period of time is called chronic stress. While acute stress can be thrilling, exciting and healthy, chronic stress interferes with living. Chronic stress will result in either distress or burnout. Dr. Archibald Hart describes distress and burnout this way: "Burnout may never kill you, but your long life may not seem worth living. Stress (distress) may kill you prematurely, and you won't have enough time to finish what you started" (Hart, 5).

Both distress and burnout are the result of chronic stress. Too much pressure over a long period of time that is not properly dealt with is devastating. And pressure is typically felt from many different directions. Stress in one area of life can result in stress in another. While we are told to leave work at the office, it is easier said than done. Sleepless nights, poor eating habits, limited physical activity, and poor attitude toward those we have conflict with, all make their way home.

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And the stresses of home also make their way to work. When the pressures around us become too intense and last too long, it becomes chronic stress. One of the worst aspects of chronic stress is when people get accustomed to it. This can be a particular problem for church workers. They begin to tell themselves that this is normal and even expected.

Stress Reaction

The stress reaction diagram (page 9) is a work in progress that I have been developing. Ultimately, a person wants to be in the middle where the stressors of life are in healthy balance. However, as stress accumulates and our responses become ineffective, we will soar into distress or dive into burnout. Dr. Hart has developed symptoms for distress and burnout that I have included in the diagram. The trigger for either distress or burnout is chronic stress. But each has very different symptoms and results.

First, I draw your attention to the middle of the diagram that is identified as *healthy homeostasis*. Homeostasis literally means "to stay the same." Every system needs balance in order to function properly. When the body is subjected to major change, it will react to maintain homeostasis and create health. If there remains a chronic imbalance in the system and homeostasis can't be achieved, there is illness. Eustress is healthy homeostasis that is good for your immune system and life functioning. Remember, the only person who is without stress is a dead person. So if you live, breathe and are reading this article, you have stress. Eustress (acute stress) will enhance the immune system and give you the strength to meet each new day. Yet, if you experience chronic stress, and the tide of cortisol continues without ceasing, the stress is no longer eustress or acute, but chronic stress.

Chronic stress gives way to two options. You will become distressed or burned out. Each option is the result of too much pressure that has not been dealt with in a healthy way and becomes unhealthy stress. From my experience it is common for professional church workers to become distressed and then become burned out.

Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon use the illustration of a rocket. When the church worker is in distress, it is like a rocket soaring "skyward on a huge burst of energy, then it 'burns out' and falls

to the earth” (248). The teacher who sits at her desk while the kids run wild in the classroom is burned out. The pastor who stays in bed until noon and dreads going to the office is burned out. Burnout leads to lack of motivation and loss of calling and purpose.

Initially, burnout is your body’s way of blowing a fuse before the whole system blows up. When chronic stress puts you into a distressed state, your body will slow you down (symptoms of burnout) and produce a state of lethargy and disengagement in order to protect you from total destruction.

Recently, I was making a visit on a pastor in the hospital. It was my last visit of a very long day. In the midst of the visit I began to sweat and became clammy. I felt dizzy, sick to my stomach and was unable to concentrate upon the conversation. I was determined to finish the visit, but eventually it became evident that this was not possible. I quickly excused myself and sat in the hospital waiting room for about 45 minutes trying to recover. What happened? I had been dealing with chronic stress, and I had been living in a state of distress. I was over-engaged, leaving early and coming home late in order to satisfy the pressures of my vocation. But there, in a hospital room, an internal fuse blew. My body was attempting to protect me from total destruction.

Rowland Croucher identifies four categories of stressors:

- *Bio-ecological factors*—poor diet and exercise. Consumption of caffeine, alcohol or drugs. He also indicates the contribution of noise and air pollution.
- *Vocational factors*—lack of identity, too many expectations and poor time management. Poor boundaries, not taking time away from work.
- *Psychological factors*—loss of loved one, transitional issues, relating to social environment. Key elements relate to conflict and loss.
- *Spiritual factors*—questioning one’s faith, living under the Law and no deliverance of the Gospel. Immoral living: According to *Focus on the Family*, one in five pastors has a problem in the area of pornography. (www.focusonthefamily.com)

Expectations

The pressures which professional church workers face are typically the result of expectations from

others and themselves. With each expectation they are faced with fears, desires and judgments (Sande & Kober). The fears, desires and judgments can fall into three categories: real, imagined or threatened.

For example, Pastor Jack believes that his sermons, member visits and leading of worship all need to be high quality. His *fear* is that he will be rejected by his peers and those he is called to serve if his work is not high quality. This *self-imposed expectation* has created in him an *imagined fear*. As a result, the fear of rejection puts a lot of pressure on him to do everything perfectly.

Pastor Jack’s congregation also has *expectations* of him. They want (*desire*) their pastor to resurrect the youth group, increase church attendance, resolve the budget shortfall, and reach out to inactives and unchurched. They want this so much that they told him his raise will depend upon progress in these areas. This is a *threatened expectation* that has been imposed upon Pastor Jack. As a result, the *desires* of his congregation put a lot of pressure on him to do everything perfectly.

These expectations of both pastor and congregation are unrealistic. Yet, both have a tendency to look at ministry idealistically. Pastors will spend hours at the office or visiting members and prospects. Teachers take papers home to be graded, and they volunteer to coach sports or raise funds for school activities. Directors of Christian Education spend weekends on youth retreats and evenings in meetings or lock-ins. Some will spend their own money for ministry projects which the church will not support. They think they can solve any and all problems that come their way. They honestly believe they are God.

But it takes a lot of energy to be something you are not.

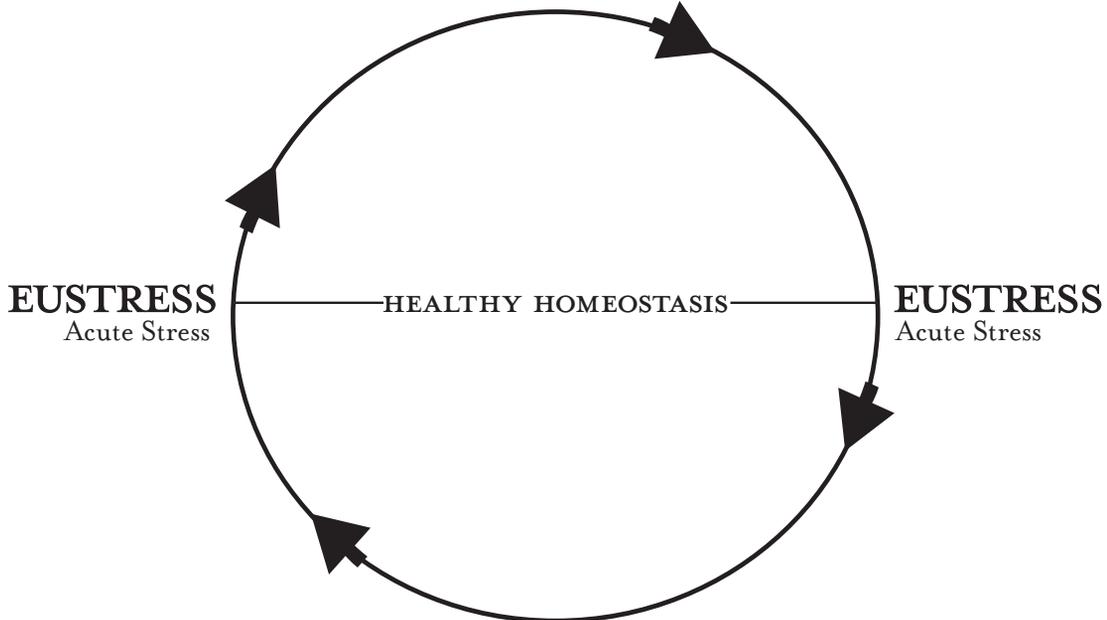
Identity

The demands of the church worker may not be that different or greater than other professional vocations. After all, each vocation has its own unique set of stressors. But how the church worker responds to stress is important. How they respond to the pressures of ministry will say a lot about who they are. It is at this critical time that they will either cling to the cross or cling to themselves.

Distress and burnout many times are the result when church workers cling to themselves rather than to the cross. They believe that they can handle the



DISTRESS
Impaired Functioning
Chronic Stress



BURNOUT
Decreased Motivation
Chronic Stress

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF BURNOUT

- Disengagement
- Emotions blunted
- Emotional damage primary
- Affects motivation/drive
- Sense of helplessness/hopelessness
- Loss of motivation/hope
- Produces paranoia, depersonalization/detachment/depression

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DISTRESS

- Over-engagement
- Emotions over-reactive
- Physical damage primary
- Affects physical energy
- Sense of urgency/hyperactivity
- Loss of feul/energy
- Produces panic, anxiety disorders



pressures that are put upon them, without the help of God. They think that if only they try harder, work longer, give in more often, sacrifice more of their own family time, they can be all things to all people. But when they are faced with the reality that they can't do it all, that they can't be God, they fall into distress or burnout (First Commandment issues).

It is my observation that distress and burnout among professional workers many times takes place when they lose sight of Christ. Like Adam and Eve, they desire something more than God. They want to be God (Genesis 3:4-5). But Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 4:5, "For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." Paul is clear that he does not preach about himself but about Christ. This makes all the difference in the world. God expects us to fear, love and trust in Him. This expectation is not imagined or threatened, but it is real. Paul faced persecution and suffering (which probably caused him stress) with confidence because his hope in Christ helped him to be realistic about what he was facing.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 1:8-10:

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardship we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure (stress), far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we set our hope that he will continue to deliver us.

God does deliver us from our sins. When unrealistic self-imposed expectations or outside expectations drive us to sin against the first commandment, there is forgiveness. Isaiah assures us: "But you have burdened me with your sins and wearied me with your offenses. I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more" (Isaiah 43:24b-25).

One of the most significant things you can do is change how you respond to stress. And this begins by remembering who you are. Most importantly, you are not God. When you face pressure (stress)

far beyond your ability to endure, don't rely on yourself. Only God can deliver you and give you the strength to endure such hardship; and He does so through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Paul Tripp says, "Our deepest problem is that we seek to find our identity outside the story of redemption . . . Only as we see our story enfolded in the larger story of redemption will we begin to live God-honoring lives. Lasting change begins when our identity, purpose, and sense of direction are defined by God's story" (27-28). The good news is not that we will be without pain, suffering, or stress. The Good News is that Christ comes to us in the midst of pain, suffering and stress. Gene Veith says it well: "But when we realize just how lost we are, then we cling to the cross, trusting Christ to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves" (60). In response, we can say with the Psalmist, "Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens" (Psalm 68:19).

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RANDALL SCHROEDER

Ways of Nurturing Church Workers in High Stress Environments



ENCOURAGING, NURTURING AND LOVING others characterize both a healthy Christian and a healthy church. Just as servants of the Lord strive to manifest a genuine love for those under their care, the people of God need to have a deep love for the professional church worker. The way a church nurtures its workers speaks volumes about the Christ-centeredness of the congregation. Churches can—and must—do much to help pastors and called workers weather the stress inherent in their ministries.

Spiritual Nurture

Nurture begins by remembering what the Bible teaches. Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35). Peter echoed that commandment, urging that we "love one another deeply from the heart" (1 Peter 1:22). The apostle Paul offered

similar instruction, reminding us that one's "love must be sincere ... honor one another above yourselves" (Romans 12:9-10).

Yet the reality is that congregations do not always view professional church workers through caring, understanding eyes. Congregations often want their church workers to be perfect—not the sinner-saints that they, like all Christians, are. Nurturing church workers in high-demand ministries requires congregations to adopt a Christ-like attitude in three significant areas: realistic expectations, a compassionate heart, and a forgiving spirit.

NURTURE SPIRITUALLY THROUGH A HEALTHY LOWERING OF EXPECTATIONS. Heroes of our faith—Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob—all manifested imperfections and character flaws. Only our Lord Jesus provides a model for the perfect Christian. Thus, congregations need to refrain from placing unreasonably high expectations on church workers. Serving the Lord is not a ministry of perfection—it is a ministry of service to God's children, all of whom are broken with sin.

Not every sermon a pastor preaches will be awe-inspiring. Not every subject a teacher presents will be riveting. Not every meeting a youth group director conducts will be

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engaging. Parishioners must realize that expecting perfection from church workers is crippling and destructive—to the workers and the church. Frustration, bitterness, and resentment smolder, sapping workers of their energy and creativity. In contrast, reasonable expectations allow church workers to grow and flourish. Workers can feel free to be themselves, confident that any misstep will not unleash the congregation's wholesale condemnation.

NURTURE SPIRITUALLY WITH A COMPASSIONATE HEART. Throughout the Old and New Testament, our loving, merciful God is spoken of in numerous passages as compassionate. The Psalmist stated, "The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion" (Psalm 116:5). In Zechariah 7:9, we read, "This is what the Lord Almighty says: Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another.

Jesus demonstrated a compassionate heart throughout the Gospels. Wherever He went, He cared for children, women, the lame, and the lonely. For example, Matthew 14:14 reads, "When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them and healed their sick." Christian compassion is the ultimate goal for all believers in Christ. But it is not enough for parishioners to just talk about compassion. They must nurture one another, starting with the very people they called to serve their church.

Compassion happens in a variety of ways. Demonstrate Christ-like care by asking church workers what to pray for in their ministries and in their families. Express appreciation in writing with cards or notes. Recognize that workers have private lives and honor their personal and family time. Place a note in the church newsletter reminding members to encourage workers.

NURTURE SPIRITUALLY WITH A FORGIVING SPIRIT. In the Lord's Prayer, we are reminded how important it is to forgive others because God in Christ forgives us. The Bible itself has nearly 125 references to the importance of forgiveness. Yet believers frequently struggle to forgive others, and

forgiving church workers can sometimes be the hardest task of all.

But church workers need to receive forgiveness—again and again. Congregations are enhanced when Christians understand the vitality of forgiveness for all relationships. Forgiveness cleanses, clearing the way for parishioners to see opportunities to nurture. Our Christ-likeness is in direct proportion to the forgiveness demonstrated toward others, including workers.

Nurture through Encouragement of Self-Care

Working long hours, serving others all day, being involved in emotionally demanding situations, especially after many years of service, can lead to compassion fatigue. At greatest risk are servants overflowing with selflessness and filled with an idealistic vision that they are the "savior" rather than one pointing parishioners to our Savior Jesus Christ. When compassion fatigue overwhelms, ministers become distant and detached from parishioners and co-workers.

Church workers need to focus on self-care to be faithful servants and to model healthy behavior for their parishioners. When self-care is absent, congregational leaders and parishioners must encourage professional church workers to seek balance by focusing on their spiritual, emotional and physical health.

Most church workers understand the importance of seeking to know God better through daily Bible reading, prayer, and a devotional life. But job demands and pressures can interfere with devotional life. Like all Christians, servants need to be reminded to maintain daily habits that increase trust in the promises of God's Word.

Laughter and a sense of humor are important components of self-care. Laughter combats negative emotions and helps people manage anxiety. Smiling and laughing actually have a positive impact on physiology. An appropriate use of humor by parishioners can lighten the load and positively nurture faithful servants. Regular exercise helps, too. Exercise

distracts the mind, reduces muscular tension and diminishes emotional strain. Parishioners who encourage church workers to exercise with them greatly assist in self-care. Congregations should even consider giving health club memberships, thereby increasing workers' opportunities to exercise. The payoff from such investments can be rewarding. Exercise gives workers an emotional "lift," and it increases the physical energy needed to serve the Lord.

MODEL QUALITY WORKERS. Some church workers connect with those struggling in both ministry and life. Bonding with another distressed, unhealthy worker often leads to a downward spiral of difficulties. Servants need to be encouraged to associate with those who accentuate the positive, possess an attitude of gratitude, and maintain a cheerful spirit. Persuade them to seek the wisdom of faithful servants who have been "successful" in the ways of the Lord and to learn from those wise in earthly matters as well. Promote consultation with mentors who have achieved "well done" service in kingdom work. By connecting with excellent workers and modeling healthy behaviors, coping skills are learned, hope prevails and growth occurs.

ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNER. Church workers need to assume personal responsibility for their wellness. One method for achieving this goal is to have an accountability person, a confidant, or perhaps a confessor. A close relationship with at least one other person creates a safe haven for support. The confidant-mentor may be another church worker within the congregation. However, a better choice is someone more removed. One Synod official shared that his "best friend" or accountability partner is more than 1,000 miles away.

Church workers should look for confidants who are Christ-centered, trustworthy, good listeners, compassionate, and nonjudgmental. The professional church worker needs to speak with the accountability partner on a regular basis. Topics may include disappointments in

ministry, frustrations with parishioners, tension in co-worker relationships, and struggles with temptations.

Nurture through Encouragement of Support Outside the Congregation

In church work, pastors and church workers can easily feel alone. Sometimes, the more successful a church worker becomes in ministry, the more likely he or she is to experience overwhelming feelings of isolation. Their "success" creates a withdrawal in order to hide human frailties and shortcomings. The confidential nature of ministry may cause disassociation from family members, leading to distressed relationships at home and church.

Given all this, congregations should purposefully encourage outside relationships that can contribute to the inner peace and fulfillment of church workers. To build a support network, consider the following:

SUPPORT GROUPS. For pastors, circuit meetings can be a safe haven where friendships are developed and support obtained. Likewise, workers may find a safe haven elsewhere in their community. For instance, a number of years ago a district pastoral executive shared that his support group was Christian men he worked out with three times a week at the local YMCA.

When support groups do not exist, church workers should be encouraged to start their own—perhaps to meet biweekly for Bible study, encouragement and consultation. Meeting regularly with workers from outside one's circuit to discuss health and wellness themes and how to handle challenges in ministry can be immensely beneficial.

POST-SEMINARY APPLIED LEARNING AND SUPPORT. PALS is a LCMS program where five to 12 recent seminary graduates meet with an experienced pastor during their first three years of ministry. In these meetings, the new pastors worship, study and discuss their experiences as well as gain skills to deal with ministry challenges. The goal is to help pastors and wives transition from seminary life to parish ministry. A detailed

description of the program can be found at the LCMS website under "Ministerial Growth and Support." Congregational leaders should promote the importance of PALS to new pastors.

Nurture from the Body of Believers

Congregations need to be proactive in supporting workers at many levels so as to guard against ministry burnout and marital/family discord. In 1997, the Inter-Lutheran Coordinating Committee on Ministerial Health and Wellness of the ELCA and the LCMS developed a wellness wheel to guide congregational leaders in nurturing church workers. The guide can be obtained from Wheatridge Ministries. In addition, parishioners—working as a body of believers—should consider the following:

CONGREGATIONAL SUPPORT TEAM.

Healthy churches establish some type of congregational support team for pastors and workers. Team members pray for church workers, listen to concerns, and ask appropriate questions about the worker's spiritual, relational, financial, and emotional needs. The team seeks to learn how it could assist workers to serve more faithfully. This support group guards against the spread of rumors and gossip and attends to the general welfare of workers and their families.

SALARY. Healthy congregations have a committee to annually review district salary guidelines. At a minimum, congregations must consistently strive to provide a salary based upon district guidelines. Church workers deserve to have a salary commensurate with training, experience, and assigned responsibilities.

In addition, healthy congregations remain alert to the stress pastors and church workers undergo and, when appropriate, provide more vacation time or a paid weekend mini-vacation. Parishioners may treat the worker and/or their family to a lunch or dinner at a restaurant. Perhaps gift certificates for a movie or a spa treatment can be provided. Further, parishioners can show their commitment to nurturing church workers

by providing special gifts on holidays, anniversaries, birthdays—or whenever the time seems right.

RECOGNITION OF MINISTRY SERVICE.

Congregations should always be thankful for the dedication and service of the ministry staff. Thus, they should honor workers for every five years of ministry service and recognize every five years of service to a particular congregation or institution. They should also organize an appreciation dinner and/or reception on a Sunday morning to express congratulations for ministry service.

SABBATICAL. Some congregations are now recognizing the tremendous renewal power of sabbaticals by providing church workers with time off and financial support. During a sabbatical, professional church workers are absent from ministry responsibilities for roughly three to 12 months to rest and recharge. The Commission on Ministerial Growth and Support has detailed information regarding the benefits and process of sabbaticals. So does Wheatridge Ministries on its website under *Ministry Sabbatical Resource Center*. In addition, the Alban Institute has published a useful pamphlet titled *Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning*.

The Eli Lilly Foundation website, www.resourcingchristianity.org/grantsinfo, describes the 2008 National Clergy Renewal Program, whereby pastors can receive funding for their sabbaticals. This program, established in 1999, has allowed more than 1,000 pastors to take breaks from their congregations and engage in pursuits ranging from biblical studies to spending time in different cultural contexts. This year the Lilly Endowment fund anticipates awarding as many as 120 grants of up to \$45,000 each to Christian congregations to support pastor renewal. As much as \$15,000 of the grant may be used for congregational expenses such as paying for interim pastors.

CONTINUING EDUCATION. Medical doctors, nurses, mental health counselors, and others in helping professions are required to earn a certain number of continuing education hours

annually. Although continuing education is not a requirement for ministry, professional church workers benefit from attending conferences and one-day seminars. Church workers should be encouraged to take courses in key ministry areas to enhance their knowledge and foster insight. One of the most neglected components of the ministry, continuing education should occur during regular ministry hours—not as part of vacation time.

BOOK ALLOWANCE. Congregations should not hesitate to provide money for books, journals, and other resources for church workers. Church budgets should include a continuing education and book allowance and allow church workers to select how to spend the money to enhance their ministry.

VACATION TIME. Along with providing vacation time, congregations should encourage church workers to use all their allotted days off. Equally important, congregations should convince church workers to take their designated days off each week. Regular times of rest, renewal and recreation are essential and must be strongly encouraged by the body of believers.

FAMILY MEMBERS OF CHURCH WORKERS. Ministry impacts church workers' spouses and children, often leaving them feeling neglected by and disconnected from parishioners. Congregations need to be aware of the unique needs of spouses and children, especially during periods of high stress. Surprise the worker's family with a special day or evening of their choice paid for by the members. Or, in church newsletters, remind parishioners to tell family members how special and valued they are to the congregation. Suggested books, magazines and websites to encourage spouses are listed at www.lcms.org (category "Post-Seminary Applied Learning and Support," section "Wives Resources").

PASTOR/PROFESSIONAL CHURCH WORKER APPRECIATION SUNDAY/MONTH.

Congregations should set aside a month, usually October, to recognize the faithful service of pastor and staff, including deaconesses, DCEs, and DCOs. The website www.parsonage.org has a *Clergy Appreciation Month Planning Guide* that offers exciting celebration suggestions and step-

by-step instructions. If an entire month is not workable, set aside one Sunday to show special appreciation.

TEACHER APPRECIATION DAY/WEEK.

Teachers deserve a special day or week of recognition, separate from pastor and staff. The website www.teacher-appreciation.info provides students and parents with suggestions to thank teachers for their nurture, care and support. In addition, www.parsonage.org lists more than 40 articles and websites containing suggestions for appreciating teachers. Check under the section, "Frequently Asked Questions," and then click on "*What can parents do to improve public schools?*" The suggestions are applicable to all teachers, including church workers.

LCMS Commission on Ministerial Growth and Support

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has a national commission that advocates for church workers and their families.

A detailed description of this commission—the Commission on Ministerial Growth and Support—is listed on the LCMS website. To assist congregations and workers, the commission offers two valuable tools titled *Paths to Growth* and *Let's Talk It Over: 10 Conversations on Supporting Church Workers*.

Paths to Growth is an educational DVD designed to spark conversations on ministry struggles and to focus on finding growth opportunities for church workers. *Let's Talk It Over: 10 Conversations on Supporting Church Workers* includes a DVD and workbook to investigate areas pertinent to the life of a worker as he/she seeks to serve a congregation. Topics touch on everything from pay and benefits to vocational development, from proper boundaries to spiritual warfare. District and circuit leaders would do well to share these programs with congregations. Annual study sessions by congregation leaders and workers are recommended.

District Ministerial Health Commissions

Most districts have a ministerial commission for the health of church workers. For example, the Indiana District Ministerial Health Commission has as its mission: "To assist

professional church workers for overall health and wellness by 1) serving as an advocate for them, 2) connecting them with appropriate care, and 3) encouraging their participation in preventive and enrichment opportunities.” Recently, the Indiana commission prepared a one-page “Ten Tips for a Healthy Professional Church Worker” with specific actions that the lay leadership of a congregation might take to enhance a worker’s health.

Nurture through Outside Assistance

When emotional struggles or relationship difficulties stall a church worker’s ministry, leaders can initiate assistance through websites, phone assistance, consultants, district officials or counseling. When church workers have interpersonal problems with members, enlisting outside help usually begins with the circuit counselor. If needed, a district reconciler and even the district president may become involved.

PARSONAGE.ORG. A website of *Focus on the Family*, this resource is primarily for pastors. However, all church workers have access to the many useful products, websites and articles available at www.parsonage.org.

PASTORAL CARE LINE. Where can a church worker turn if his/her accountability partner is unavailable? *Focus on the Family* provides assistance for church workers through the “Care Line,” a service available 9 AM to 4 PM Mountain Time at a toll-free number (877-233-4455). Callers can speak to an individual trained to listen to concerns and is willing, if needed, to offer some practical wisdom.

AMBASSADORS OF RECONCILIATION. As mentioned earlier, forgiveness is at the heart of healthy relationships. An organization that explains forgiveness and reconciliation is Ambassadors of Reconciliation, a non-profit group and a Recognized Service Organization of the LCMS. Ambassadors assists congregations and church workers in resolving disagreements in a loving Christ-like manner. One of Ambassadors’ main goals is to equip churches for living, proclaiming and cultivating lifestyles of reconciliation.

Ted Kober, founder and president of Ambassadors, wrote *Confession & Forgiveness: Professing Faith as Ambassadors of Reconciliation*, to educate leaders, parishioners and workers with a thorough understanding of peacemaker principles. Repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation construct a ministry of nurture for the whole church.

CONCORDIA PLAN SERVICES. Concordia Plan Services provides an excellent employee assistance program (EAP) for church workers and family members exhibiting emotional distress. Most districts have the names and addresses of good counselors to contact when workers need counseling.

Each calendar year a worker receives five free-of-charge counseling sessions through the employee assistance program. A co-pay of \$20 kicks in with the sixth session. Congregations should encourage workers to seek help through the EAP program and, if further sessions are necessary, perhaps assist financially with co-pays. The district office or the district ministerial health commission may cover co-pays in serious situations.

CAREER COUNSELING. For church workers struggling in ministry, some districts provide career counseling to help them identify their God-given gifts and find where they can best serve the Lord. At times, a congregation’s offer for career counseling demonstrates its ultimate support and nurture of workers.

Congregations with a Track Record of Minimal Nurture

Church workers today often command less respect, while enduring more demands, from parishioners. Unfortunately, nurture is a low priority for some congregations. When such congregations are unwilling to address their track record of neglect, they may benefit from a lengthy vacancy with an interim pastor.

Inspiring congregational leaders to actively support their workers and correct unhealthy patterns is a demanding task. A starting point for improvement might be a Saturday workshop where leaders and members draw upon biblical principles and learn nurturing skills. Wheatridge Ministries provides “Healthy

Teams Workshops” to energize parishioners to seek a healthy Christian lifestyle.

Nurture from District Personnel

When necessary, congregations should turn to district personnel to provide guidance on nurturing church workers. Such personnel often have the most up-to-date resources. For example, President Dan May, Indiana District, developed a booklet for nurturing new pastors that was shared with all Indiana District congregations in the Fall of 2008. Ideally, district executives would remind congregations at least twice a year of appropriate district resources and strategies for nurturing professional workers.

Nurture through Growth Assessments

Too many pastors and church workers have been “blindsided” by congregations because oversight boards failed to conduct annual performance reviews. These hurting church workers had no idea their performance was unsatisfactory until they were asked to resign.

Nurturing congregations seek to help church workers constantly grow. They schedule annual review meetings at which church leaders detail areas of praise and offer practical advice for ministry growth. To help with the review, churches should use reputable assessment tools. The Indiana District Ministerial Health Commission has prepared an “Effective Pastoral Growth” instrument that can be used annually by both pastor and church leadership for a face-to-face review. Similar formal assessments should be available for educators and all church workers through district offices. The goal of assessments is to identify areas where pastors deserve praise and to provide specific suggestions for improvement.

Nurture through Retreats

Retreats provide opportunities for people to relax and to recharge emotionally, spiritually and physically. Congregations nurture workers by encouraging them to attend retreats and by budgeting monies and allocating time for the getaways. President Keith Kohlmeier, Kansas District, reports that his district has invested in a complete Worker Retreat Center on a lake near

Herrington, Kansas, with the theme, “A place for the worker to reconnect with God, him (her) self, and his (her) family.”

PASTORS’ WIVES RETREATS. Wives need support as much as their husbands, which is why the Indiana District sponsors a three-day “Katie Retreat” weekend for pastors’ wives every February. President Dan May describes the “Katie Retreat” as “an important time-away to talk and pray and worship and rest and laugh and think as you share and celebrate your faith in Christ.” Organizing retreats for spouses of all commissioned workers should be an important goal in every congregation.

GRACE PLACE RETREATS. In 2000, Dr. John Eckrich organized Grace Place Retreats, now a Recognized Service Organization of the LCMS, to provide all church workers with health education at weeklong retreats at resorts and other locations across the country. Focused in Christ, these retreats teach physical, emotional, relational, spiritual and fiscal skills for maintaining and enhancing the health and ministry service of workers. More than 20 retreats are offered yearly. More information and a list of retreat locations are available at www.graceplaceretreats.org.

Retreat information can also be found at www.parsonage.org. Under the category of Pastoral-Caregiving Ministries, one can find listings for camps and retreat centers available to clergy and church workers, free or at a greatly reduced cost.

Conclusion

Congregations that grasp the essentials of nurturing church workers do more than please our heavenly Father. They motivate workers in a positive ministerial direction with sharing the Gospel. Even small gestures of nurture increase the enjoyment of serving fellow believers in Christ. Just as Jesus wholeheartedly nurtured his disciples and followers, let every parishioner be encouraged to show kindness and care to others. And let that nurturing begin where it should, in the house of the Lord among fellow believers.

RICK MARRS

What Does a Congregation's Call and Promise of Supporting a Church Worker Mean?



• Illustration by Charlotte Kaeding •

ISSUES

In C.S. Lewis' classic book, *The Screwtape Letters*, a more experienced demon is instructing a novice on how to tempt the man for which he is responsible. Early in their correspondence (the second letter actually), Screwtape writes to Wormwood: "One of our great allies at present is the Church itself. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean the Church as we see her spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners. That, I confess, is a spectacle which makes our boldest tempters uneasy. But fortunately it is quite invisible to these humans. All your patient sees is the half-finished, sham Gothic erection on the new building estate. When he goes inside, he sees the local barber with rather an oily expression on his face bustling up to offer him one shiny little book containing a liturgy which neither of them understands ... When he gets to his pew and looks around him, he sees just that selection of his neighbors whom he has hitherto avoided."

Are we tempted to view "Church" through worldly eyes? Do we see people we would normally like to avoid? Do we think of church as a club of like-minded people who happen to come together to sing and do religious things? Do we see carpeting that we would not have chosen or dust that the janitor missed again this week? We Americans so easily fall into the mindset that our faith is individualistic, that it is just between "me and Jesus," that we forget that the people around us are members of the Body of Christ, fellow digits of His hands here on earth. We believe in His forgiveness for us as individuals, but do we regularly seek to "forgive those who trespass against us"? Do we see and appreciate the Church invisible "spread out through all time and space" that puts fear into the boldest demons?

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How are we tempted to view our pastors and other church professionals? Screwtape doesn't bother to describe how limited the local church's pastor or teachers might be (at least not until Letter XVI). Do we feel like we are listening to an underwhelming motivational speaker? When a baby is being baptized or the Lord's Supper is being distributed, do our minds drift away to "more important matters" of home or business? Do we ponder "How much are we paying this pastor to do what seems to be a mediocre job of motivating this congregation (or classroom) to perform more efficiently and enthusiastically? How expensive are their benefits?" If these thoughts are wandering through our minds more than just occasionally, we should stop to consider whether someone like Wormwood is excitedly writing to his superior about his latest success. Whenever we find ourselves distracted from the wonderful and powerful, yet often invisible, Gospel of Jesus Christ by the visible issues of church kitchens, carpeting or workers' salaries, we may want to go to the church's sanctuary and/or pastor for confession (and, of course, absolution).

What Does "Support" Mean?

Foundationally, a congregation's call and promise of supporting a church worker should start from a spiritual and theological basis. Many of our congregations' members and leaders come from the mindset of their own vocations, be that of large corporations, small businesses, farms, government or military work experience. All of those experiences have their own stresses, including competition, weather, limited funding, even bombs exploding nearby for some of our military. All of these vocations have their temptations (but we won't review all of Screwtape's strategies here). Pastors and other church workers have many of the same stressors that come with those other vocations (we pray that exploding bombs will not soon be a stressor in our American churches, but they are in other parts of the world). But church workers have the additional stress (with accompanying joy) of striving

to remember that what they are doing will have and does have eternal consequences—and that whole hosts of demons, worldly temptations, and sinful flesh (both our own and that of others) are working behind the scenes to undermine our vocations. I often told my former parishioners, church leaders and shut-ins that I coveted their prayers. I knew that if they were praying for me, they were interceding in powerful ways (James 5:16b: “The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working”), AND that they were remembering that my vocation had stressors that were invisible to them—and to me. We need to ask, “How can laity consider that the treatment of their church workers is an integral part of ‘hallowing God’s name among us’?”

Using Scripture and Catechism as our Guide for Understanding “Support”

Scripture should always guide us to know what God’s will is for our good works. But which Scripture should guide us when considering what supporting a church worker means?

Luther wrote *The Small Catechism* early in the Reformation. In the preface to *The Small Catechism*, Luther very undiplomatically rails against the pastors in the region for not attending to their duties. He had made visitations to the surrounding villages and found “deplorable, miserable conditions” in which the pastors/bishops had not even taught the parishioners “the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments.” He strongly admonishes the pastors: “Oh, you bishops! How will you ever answer to Christ for letting the people carry on so disgracefully and not attending to the duties of your office even for a moment.” Unless Luther was speaking only in hyperbole, it appears that the spiritual condition of the churches around Wittenberg was worse than any LCMS congregation I’m aware of. In this admonishment Luther does not threaten to have the princes boot them out of office or reduce their salaries. He instead writes the *Small* and *Large Catechisms* and exhorts that they teach, pointing them to the scriptural teachings that they should hold central.

The “Six Chief Parts” made up the first version of *The Small Catechism*, but over the years other parts were added. Some of these additions may have been written by Luther himself, but it is also possible that he delegated these sections to others during his lifetime (Luther, like other pastors, did not have to do *everything*). They include sections on prayer, questions to prepare for the Lord’s Supper, and the “Table of Duties: Certain Passages of Scripture for Various Holy Orders and Positions, Admonishing Them about Their Duties and Responsibilities.” *The Small Catechism’s* Table of Duties lists 13 different “holy orders and positions”: Pastors, hearers (laity), civil government, citizens, husbands, wives, parents, children, workers, masters/supervisors, youth, widows, and “everyone.” The section titled “What Christians ought to do for their teachers and pastors” appears to have been added around 1540. While this particular section was not included in the *Book of Concord*, these verses have been included in our German and English version catechisms for many years and are part of our Lutheran ethos. Let us use them as the central scriptural teachings to guide our considerations of what a congregation’s call and promise of supporting a church worker means.

Support as Income

The first two passages in the section, “What Christians Ought to Do for their Teachers and Pastors,” are:

- *1 Corinthians 9:14*. In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.
- *Galatians 6:6-7*. One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches. Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

These two verses emphasized by the catechism focus on the need for church workers to be fairly recompensed for their efforts to proclaim the Gospel. Ironically, the context of the *1 Corinthians 9* passage is Paul’s emphasis that he personally does not receive material support from the Corinthians or other congregations. However, he emphasizes

that normally an officially recognized Gospel “proclaimer” should be supported in heralding the Gospel. The Lord commanded that this is their right, even if Paul opts not to claim that right. While we do not have these explicit words of our Lord Jesus Christ recorded in the Gospels, we do know that He made similar statements (cf. Luke 10:7; Matthew 10:10).

The Galatians 6 text has a similar essential message as the 1 Corinthians 9 passage, but Paul ratchets up the force in Galatians. In English, if we desire to speak in the imperative mood (“Do this”), we can essentially say this only in the “second person” (“You do this!”). In Greek, there is a “third person” version of the imperative. Many common translations into English soften this emphasis with phrases like “Let the one who is taught share ...” (NASB). The ESV more closely matches the force of the passage with “One who is taught must share.” Paul is effectively saying, “Share what you have with your catechists,” but he is doing so in the third person. He ties this statement with strong words of admonition: “God is not mocked.” Writing to all of the Galatians at once (the Greek also has a second person plural, “you all,” that we use only in colloquial southern English), Paul warns them that they will be deceived and be treating God with contempt if they do not adequately share their income and belongings with their pastors and teachers!

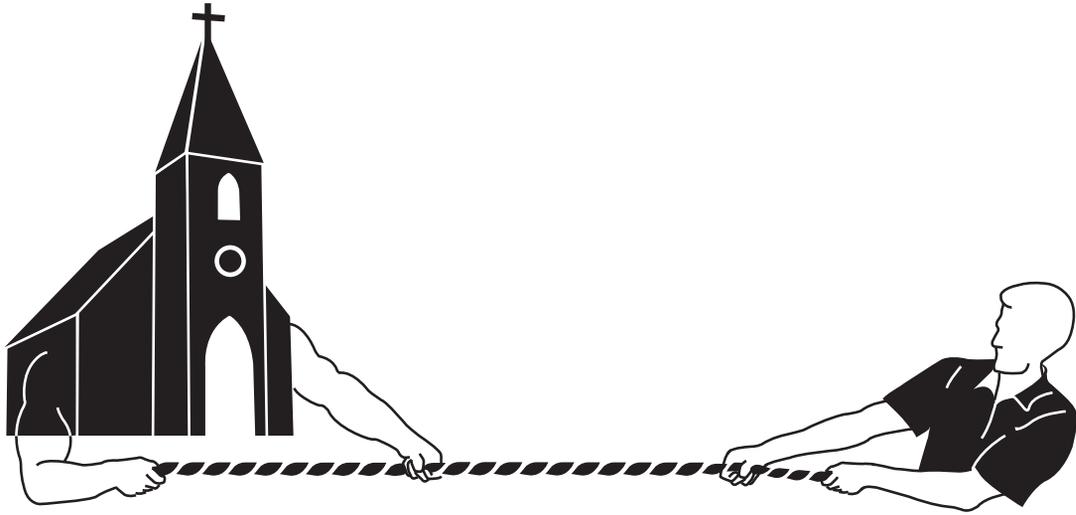
But what is “adequate” sharing? We all know of TV evangelists who live in multiple mansions. You may even know of local (hopefully non-Lutheran) pastors who live lifestyles that are much more extravagant than nearly all of their parishioners. A more normal guideline for LCMS congregations is that the pastor and other church workers should have pay packages somewhere on par with the average of their church leaders. This would seem to be an equitable and faithful way to consider “sharing,” but it would require church leaders to be open with each other about their own incomes. Districts often try to give guidelines to congregations in the form of “District Pay

Scales.” These can also be very helpful, but readers should not get so focused on “District Pay Scales” and the rising costs of “benefit packages” that we fail to consider that pastor and teacher salaries are part of our own faithful response to the Gospel.

It should be noted that church workers run risks with their salaries, such as unwittingly basing their sense of success or reward on their salaries or size of congregations. Luther’s words in the closing paragraph of the Preface to *The Small Catechism* speak directly to this view. “So look to it, you pastors and preachers. Our ministry today is something else than it was under the pope. It has become a serious and saving responsibility. Consequently it now involves much more trouble and labor, danger and trial, and in addition it brings you little of the world’s gratitude and rewards. But Christ Himself will be our reward if we labor faithfully. The Father of all grace help us to do just that. To Him be praise and thanks forever through Christ our Lord. Amen.” (page 252).

A Note about Debt Load

In our culture students often run heavy debt loads to finance their college and graduate school plans to enter a vocation. In some professions, for example, medical doctors and lawyers, high debt loads are not as critical because their higher incomes allow former students to pay off their debts. But pastors and other church workers will never see those high incomes, and generally they have incomes lower than other “professional” occupations. Congregations, districts and other support agencies should consider how to help church workers manage and pay off their debt. I know of several districts and congregations who have set up specific endowments that are used to pay off indebtedness over a multi-year period such as ten years. Such endowments can be structured to increase each year, therefore financially encouraging new church workers to stay longer in their first congregations. Unfortunately, many of these endowments are underfunded and reimburse workers for only a fraction of their overall indebtedness.



Support as Honor

When, at age 39, I told my parents that I was planning to leave my college teaching position and was contemplating attending a seminary to become a pastor, they were surprised, even though they knew I had considered being a pastor during my teens and early twenties. My mother's response was: "Honey, are you sure you want to do this? You know how many congregations out there are mistreating their pastors." She was concerned for me, my wife and our children. A district vice-president once told me that being a pastor now is a lot like being a high school basketball coach in Indiana. The coach knows that he knows a lot more about what he and his team are doing, but he also knows that everyone in the stands thinks that he or she knows more about what the team should be doing than he does.

In too many congregations in our Synod, the relationships between church workers and congregations are strained. Many may not even understand how the relationships between church worker and congregation should work. Our culture tends to teach us about the relationships in some vocations, such as between boss and worker, owner and employee. In other vocations, the boss is expected to interview, hire the best available candidate, and then communicate job expectations. The boss then evaluates job performance and makes decisions about retaining, promoting or firing the employee.

If the company is doing poorly financially, even well-performing employees may have to be laid off. Often, these performance reviews are thoughtful, objective and well-planned. Sometimes they are capricious. In our representative democracy, we elect some people to their vocations, and those whom we (the "majority") believe will do the best job are placed in office, at least until the next election or until term limits restrict continuing in office.

But in church worker professions, the roles are different than in other vocations. Who is the "boss"? Who is the "employee"? Who does the performance review? On what basis? If this vocation stems from an office that a group of people "elected" them to, can they rightly be recalled from office by casting a ballot?

The problem with asking such questions is that they imply a worldly understanding of how the Church and the local congregations that make up that Church should operate. Most people realize that the Church is not a business or a political party. But is it a "not-for-profit" private agency? Is it a voluntary organization with enough similarities to a business or government agency that it is somehow dependent on our human skills to function?

We Christians must be constantly reminded of how unique the Church is in the world. Our perception of pastors and other church workers will be inextricably tied to our perception of what "church" is.

The Church is *NOT* a volunteer organization of like-minded religious people. The Church is the people of God whom the Holy Spirit has called, gathered, enlightened and sanctified in the one true faith. Our interrelationships, our treatment of each other then must be guided by beliefs and virtues counter to our secular occupational fields.

The final verses in this subsection of *The Small Catechism* emphasize how pastors and other church workers are to be treated within the Church. Three passages from Scripture which are cited are:

- *1 Timothy 5:17-18*. Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and "The laborer deserves his wages."
- *1 Thessalonians 5:12*. We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.
- *Hebrews 13:17*. Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

The emphasis is not on American values like fairness, rights and freedom. The emphases are on the honor, respect, esteem and love that should be shown the worker by the congregation. (By extension, these verses should teach church workers the importance of honoring, respecting, esteeming and loving one another, but perhaps that should be left to another article.) These virtues are what bring honor to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and His life-changing Gospel. When outsiders sense the respect and love that Christians have for their leaders, this will build up their leaders' reputations and the reputation of the Church as a place of love and respect, opening doors to a Gospel witness.

First Timothy 5:17 is another example of the third person imperative in Greek being "under-translated" into English. The force of this grammatical construction is

more like "Be doubly honoring of the elders who rule well, particularly those laboring in preaching and teaching." The meaning of "rule" is also important. The Greek word translated "rule" (*proisteimi*) should not be considered synonymous with "administering." Rather, the Greek carries more of a connotation of "caring for" rather than "efficiently leading." The leaders "rule" over the congregation not as a CEO seeking to make the organization run more efficiently, but as leaders who deeply care for the members as parents do for children (cf. 1 Timothy 3:4, 12). Paul uses similar concepts and some of the same words in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, but near the end of that sentence he ratchets up his persuasiveness even more. This verse can be translated "Esteem them *as earnestly as possible* in love because of their work."

Why Honor Church Workers?

Why do we esteem pastors, teachers and other church workers as earnestly as possible when their work—at an earthly level—may not always seem as polished as the reporters we watch on the nightly news? We esteem them in love because their work is bringing us the good news of the Gospel, which continues to reconnect us week after week with our Savior who gave Himself for us. Lutherans do not see the Gospel as information that changes our lives once and then we are "good to go" for the rest of our lives. Instead, Lutherans understand the need for daily repentance and forgiveness and that the Gospel—Word and Sacraments—is medicine that we constantly need to be protected from ourselves, the world and the devils like Wormwood and Screwtape. The principal way God has chosen to bring us that medicine is through the very flawed voices and hands of those we call to be pastors and teachers of the church.

The last verse listed in *The Small Catechism* subsection being examined is the only passage not written by Paul. However, the author of Hebrews concurs with the apostle. The first word of the verse "obey" (*peitho*) is a commonly used verb in the New Testament,

but in nearly all other contexts it is translated “be persuaded by.” “Be persuaded by your leaders” is perhaps a more clear translation for our American ears that do not like to be told to “obey” laws and rules. But the rationale for this “persuasion” is a bit different than for Paul. The author of Hebrews emphasizes that the reason we should submit and be persuaded is “Because they themselves keep watch over your lives as those who will give an account.” The public ministry is just that, very public. It can be like that Indiana high school basketball coach who knows that he has the whole community looking over his shoulder. At the end of the season the coach probably will have to give an account of his and his team’s performance to the principal or school board (or even the community gathered at the barber shop, as in the movie, “Hoosiers”).

It is probably good that pastors and teachers give an account of their performance to their elders and school boards, seeking their feedback on how their performance could be more God-pleasing. But ultimately they will give an account of their stewardship of God’s gifts to their Lord. Pastors and other church workers know that their Lord is forgiving (or else we would never enter this vocation), but yet we want to respond to His love with a performance that pleases Him. With each worker having particular gift-sets that are stronger or weaker, we should constantly be striving to improve ourselves as preachers, teachers, theologians, administrators, evangelists, and spiritual care-givers. Honor shown to church workers does not come because of their stronger gift-sets, but because of the gift of the Gospel they are bringing to the church.

The author of Hebrews then concludes this section by instructing Christians to behave in ways that bring joy, not groaning, to their leaders. To burden their leaders with grief and grumbling is of no help to the congregation and is even harmful in their mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

October is “Pastor Appreciation Month” in the USA. My heart was made most joyful

several years ago when many of the members participated in a Christian radio station’s “Pastor Appreciation Month” program. Several church leaders took me to an appreciation luncheon sponsored by the station. Many members had written notes to the station about what they appreciated about me as their pastor. I kept many of those notes in a desk drawer, as well as many other thank you notes that came to me through the years. When I was having a tough week, I would open that drawer and read through a few of those notes to be reminded of their appreciation and to have the joy of serving them be revived just a bit. I still keep those notes in a box in my office at the seminary. Parishioners who remember to thank their pastors and teachers, highlighting specific deeds that they have found spiritually helpful, will help increase the joy of their church workers’ vocation.

In Letter XVI from Screwtape to Wormwood, the senior demon describes the one ongoing strength of the ill-equipped pastor in his “patient’s” village: “But I must warn you that he has one fatal defect: he really believes. And this may yet mar all.” May every congregation be blessed with pastors and teachers who “really believe” in Jesus Christ. May that be the “fatal defect” for the demons who are tempting us. May church members also consider how they treat their pastors and other church workers, both financially and personally, not as American employees, but as messengers of the light of God’s grace which they bring to the Church.

ENDNOTE. The author of this article is aware that it is necessary, on rare occasion, to remove professional church workers from their positions. The Synod spells out the following guidelines: “Called ordained or commissioned ministers may be removed from office in Christian and lawful order by a two-thirds majority ballot vote of the voters’ assembly for one of the following reasons: persistent adherence to false doctrine, scandalous life, willful neglect of the duties of office, or the inability to perform those duties.” (from the Guidelines

for Constitutions and Bylaws of Lutheran Congregations, May 2006). If a called worker is released from one's call for one of these reasons, congregations are still called upon to administer church discipline procedures in Christian love in the light of Galatians 6:1: "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted." (NIV)

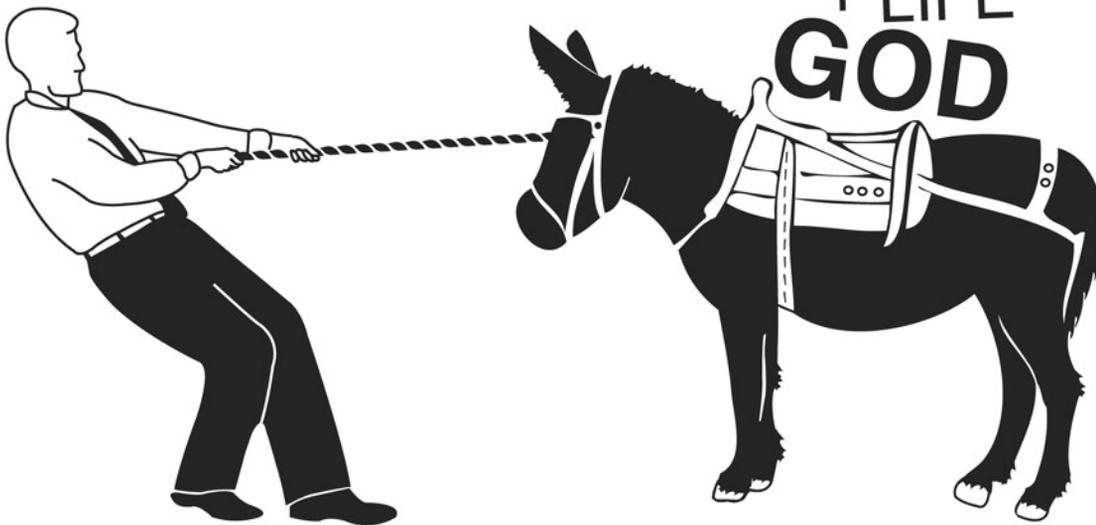
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Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* published by Crossways Bibles, 2003.



book reviews

To Live with Christ.

Bo Giertz, trans. Richard Wood and Bror Erickson. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008.

The pastoral heart of Rev. Bo H. Giertz (1905–1998) is readily witnessed through this daily devotional volume. Many readers may already know Giertz's main work, *The Hammer of God*, first published in Swedish in 1941 and since translated. Now his devotional text is also available in English through the translating work of Wood and Erickson.

Born and raised in Sweden, Giertz claimed atheism as a youth. It was the grace of Christ that brought him to faith as a young man and then called him as a parish pastor and eventually a bishop in the Church of Sweden. This spiritual path, fraught with struggle, allowed him to mature through the crucible of modern, liberal theological tensions in the Lutheran church in Sweden. This maturity, which is borne out in his devotions, is the same spiritual and pastoral depth which has also earned him the reputation as the "North Star in the Church of Sweden."

To Live with Christ is a daily devotional book which follows a simple outline: brief Scripture reading, one to two pages of commentary or exposition, and a prayer. The reader should allow 15 minutes or so for each devotion.

Giertz follows the church year allowing for a daily liturgical rhythm which will enhance the reader's weekly worship experience. Also included at the back of the book are devotions for special seasons and days such as Thanksgiving Day, St. Michael's and All Angels Day, and even Boxing Day.

Giertz's conservative Lutheran, evangelical style is apparent in each devotion. His love for the Lord and Christ-centered focus is inspiring. This devotional is solidly balanced with attention to Law and Gospel theology. Yet it is the penetratingly reflective style indicative of the author's own personal piety and spiritual journey which draws the reader in. Pastor Giertz addresses, through the Scriptural texts, topics which challenge and encourage life with Christ. Such topics as temptation, confession, faith, the Trinity, doubt, prayer, theology of the cross, Real Presence, the office of public ministry, and stewardship are considered in more than a perfunctory manner. One gains the sense that this author has wrestled with these spiritual themes in the presence of the Lord.

Another notable feature of this text is the particular educational aspect of the devotions. Daily a biblical doctrine is taught and reinforced. This feature caused the translators to conclude, "When you have finished this book, ... you also will have completed a short doctrinal study."

A devotional of this caliber is suitable for the pastor who wants to walk with a brother in the ministry. Certainly DCEs, teachers, and deaconesses will recognize and appreciate a fellow servant who has wrestled with the joys and struggles of walking with others in the journey of life with Christ. Also the devoted adult who is craving spiritual meat on a daily schedule and the spiritually mature teenager will be strengthened by these devotions.

By way of criticism one would only wish for an index of topics and Scriptural references to access more readily the insights and teachings contained within the 830 pages. We hope that more of Pastor Bo Giertz's writings will soon be translated into English.

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The Consolation of Theology.

Edited by Brian S. Rosner. Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008.

Applied theology faces the challenge of dealing with the struggle of human emotions in the face of life's difficulties. *The Consolation of Theology* is an exploration of six Christian theologians selected from the centuries who were chosen for their personal struggle with a specific human emotion. This book contains a set of six essays written for the Conference on the Consolation of Theology in Sydney, Australia, in 2006 at Moore Theological College, where five of the essayists reside. Each essayist begins with a brief biographical sketch of his selected theologian, which outlines a personal emotional struggle. The biographical sketch is followed by an examination of how the essayist found the Christian source of comfort and resolution for his struggle.

In *Lactantius on Anger*, Richard Gibson shows how Lactantius dealt with the problems of anger as he lived through the persecution of Christians in the early fourth century. He observed that anger is placed squarely within the creation of God, and is a normal part of our lives. In the Christian community, anger ought to be directed at sin, with the Word of Christ protecting us from the excess of anger. Lactantius sees anger at sin as part of the nature of God which is propitiated by the death of Jesus Christ.

In *Augustine on Obsessions*, Andrew Cameron observes from Augustine that the obsessed person's sights focus on some tiny corner of God's good world at the expense of all else. From *Augustine's Confessions* we find that a theological consolation to obsession is living a quiet life in Christ, which opens the way for the Spirit to be poured out in aid. It is the Holy Spirit who radically reorients our affections.

In *Luther on Despair*, Mark D. Thompson examines the struggle with doubt and despair in Luther's life. Luther even coined a term for his black periods, calling them his Afechtungen. His periods of despair were not viewed as experiences to be endured, but as opportunities to be embraced. In the face of these attacks of Satan, we have the promise of Christ on which to hold, even in the darkness. Luther often invokes the promise of God in baptism as a shield against despair.

In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership. Henri J. M. Nouwen. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002.

In *Kierkegaard on Anxiety*, Peter G. Bolt shows how Kierkegaard's personal struggle with anxiety formed his concept of angst. The Danish thinker distinguishes ordinary fear, which gives some protection from harm, from an agonizing premonition of evil, which has no objective basis. Bolt explores at length the difference between Kierkegaard's understanding of objective anxiety, which is the result of the fall into sin, and subjective anxiety, which is experienced internally when an individual recognizes his or her freedom and all its various possibilities.

In *Bonhoeffer on Disappointment*, Brian S. Rosner explores how Bonhoeffer handled his disappointments as he moved from a life of privilege and prestige to imprisonment and execution. Rosner gleans eight counsels from Bonhoeffer, which include focusing on people in our lives, embracing Godly optimism, finding comfort in the God who "seeks again what is past," and "walking through our disappointments with God."

In the final essay, *C. S. Lewis on Pain*, Robert Banks shows that the purpose of pain is to bring us to the point of realizing our need for God. "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains." (page 139) This essay explores how Lewis' writings provide a model of grieving as well as an aid to think within and through our feelings when pain and grief come.

This set of essays provides an example of the application of theology to the emotions of life. Many have put great effort into attaining a carefree life, and yet have a sense of being utterly lost emotionally. These essays give examples of the consolation of theology in the midst of human struggle, and would be of value to pastors, teachers and other church workers.

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What is the Christian leader to be like in the 21st century? Drawing on his experience as a Catholic priest, scholar and counselor and using the scriptural accounts of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11) and His post-resurrection breakfast discussion with Peter (John 21:15-19), Henri Nouwen offers his thoughts on this question.

Although some who advise Christian leaders may concentrate on developing teaching or preaching skills, programmatic innovations, and effective leadership habits, Nouwen warns that as leaders develop these abilities they may actually be drawn into temptations similar to those Satan devised to assault Jesus. He specifically states they can be vulnerable to the following temptations: to be relevant (temptation of turning stones to bread), to be spectacular and popular (temptation of jumping from the temple), and to be powerful (offering Jesus the kingdoms of the world).

Nouwen describes how he, as a well-known teacher and scholar at Yale, Harvard and other universities, wrestled with the temptation to be relevant. Although living in a different environment, Christian leaders may wrestle with the desire to define themselves by what they can build, show and accomplish. Nouwen, however, reminds the reader that in John's Gospel Jesus did not ask Peter if he was competent. Instead he asked, "Do you love me?"

The temptation to be spectacular and popular can prompt leaders to a "performance attitude" and a "go-it-alone" approach to leadership that can bring recognition and applause to leaders but can also separate them from those they lead. In contrast, Nouwen states that Christian leadership is to be both communal and mutual. Jesus sent his first disciples out in pairs to support one another and keep each other faithful to their calling. And he cites Jesus' command to Peter to "feed my sheep" as a calling to the role of a caring shepherd whose relationships are based on trust and love.

The third temptation of Jesus is likened to the 21st century's leaders' temptation to be powerful and to rule. Using knowledge, position and other advantages, a leader may force those led into compliance. Nouwen comments that the history of the church

is filled with people "tempted to choose power over love, control over the cross, being a leader over being led" (p. 78).

To counter these temptations Nouwen recommends three Christian disciplines. The first, contemplative prayer, is identified as the central discipline as it brings the leader again and again into the presence of God, roots the leader in an intimate relationship with Jesus, and increases dependence on Him. The second, confession and forgiveness, when shared with community, enables not only the leader to care for his or her people, but allows the people to show how deeply they care for their shepherd. The third, theological reflection, calls on leaders to recognize their powerlessness, to be humble, and to approach the realities of daily life with the mind of Christ.

Although Nouwen's comments initially were presented at a conference primarily for priests, this short book of 80 pages speaks to anyone who desires a return to the Source of understanding Christian leadership and guidance in practicing it. Rather than emphasizing new tools or programs, he emphasizes that leaders first should have a life filled with love of and service to God and others. Crossroad Publishing includes a short study guide that makes the book adaptable for personal devotions, team ministry preparation, school faculty workshops and other areas in which Christians are called to lead and serve "in the name of Jesus."

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