

Resignation From The Parish Ministry: Causes And Remedies

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Introductory Remarks

The subject of resignation from the parish ministry is apparently a popular topic. Quite a number of articles and papers have been written on this subject in recent years. This topic received the most votes in the poll taken by our Steering Committee at our District Pastoral Conference last spring.

Many church bodies are reporting a large exodus of clergy the last several years. In our own WELS we have experienced a fair count of resignations from the ministry the last few years. In a survey which I conducted of our 12 District Presidents, it was revealed that we have had 24 resignations in the past 2 years (1983 and 1984). That appears to me to be a large number, even with our increased number of clergy, and should be a concern to all of us. Thus this paper is timely. It also is timely for this conference, since each one of us as pastors experiences the pressures of the ministry and those moments of weakness when Satan assails us with doubts regarding the viability of continuing in our office.

Please note that this paper will deal specifically with the *parish* ministry, since that is the calling that most directly applies to most all of us here. Obviously, there are many features of this paper which will also apply quite well to the teaching ministry and other ministries in our synod. I will explore the various causes of resignation from the parish ministry and will offer many remedies to consider as “preventative medicine.” Hopefully this paper will reinforce for each of us the privilege we enjoy in serving our Lord in this special office and will cause all of us to look at ourselves in close retrospect.

The Ministry is a Privilege

Whereas every Christian is a priest before God (1 Pet. 2:8), the public ministry is a particular necessity and privilege. The public ministry is a “divine institution” (Acts 14:23; 20:28) and is established for the sake of good order in the Church (1 Cor. 14:40). Christian congregations call ministers to administer the Keys. The called minister functions on behalf of the entire congregation. He has the distinct privilege of preaching and teaching God’s Word and administering the Sacraments to the flock entrusted to his care. And he has the privilege of pronouncing the Absolution. He is an ambassador for Christ in a very special sense.

He also has the privilege of serving a position established by a divine call. He is not simply “hired” for his job, as in the secular world. When a pastor realizes that God has appointed him to his office (1 Cor. 12:28), through the medium of the call, he understands the dignity and high responsibility of his office. He then should be inclined to use his talents, to the best of his ability to serve his Lord and the people he has been called to serve. He also will not take his office lightly and will want to continue to serve in the ministry as long as the Lord wills. Whereas the Lord may direct him to another field of service and will eventually signal to him that it is time to retire from the ministry, resignation should remain the farthest thing from his mind and certainly a “last resort.”

Luther often called the public ministry the highest office in the Church. He states, “For the office of preaching the Gospel is the highest among them all; for it is the true Apostolic office, laying the foundation of all other offices.” And again he remarks, “To whomever the office of preaching is committed, to him the highest office in Christendom is committed.” The ministry affords the wonderful privilege of publicly proclaiming God’s grace. It is a calling that should be cherished and treasured both by those who are called and by those who call.

Removal for Cause

Not all resignations from the ministry are voluntary. We should recognize that the church (or calling body)-who calls a pastor into its service also has the right to terminate a pastor’s call. If there are grounds for dismissal, a congregation should first ask the pastor to submit his resignation. This also happens in other fields. For example, in -the field of sports, a coach is usually’ asked to hand in his resignation-before he is fired. It

looks better and is less grievous. If a pastor refuses to resign, he can be removed from his office. This is often called “removal for cause.”

I will list the valid reasons for removing a pastor from his office, but will not go into great detail to explain them, since that is not the main scope of this paper:

- (1) False doctrine.. Congregational members must “test the spirits to see whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1.). This, of course, has to involve more than just one “slip of the tongue.” It pertains to *persistent* adherence to false doctrine.
- (2) Scandalous life. The pastor must have “a good reputation” (1 Tim. 3:7).. If he consistently and impenitently continues in the works of the flesh, he is causing an offense to his congregation and the community.
- (3) Neglect of duty,. Above all, a pastor is to be faithful to his calling (1 Cor. 4:2). A pastor who is unfaithful in carrying out his duties (e.g., negligent in preparing his sermons, calling on the sick, etc.) is not fulfilling his call.
- (4) Incompetence. A pastor must be “able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2). If he lacks the necessary gifts for preaching and teaching God’s Word; he will only do a disservice to the ministry of the Gospel. It should be noted that this incompetence will be apparent in some men from the inception of their ministry and in other cases it may occur later in their ministry due to illness or the effects of aging.

It should be pointed out that the removal of a pastor from his office is a congregational matter. He does not “get kicked out by the synod.” The congregation is the body that called him to serve. Certainly the congregation will seek the advice and help of the synod officials, most notably the CP and DP. All dealings should proceed according to good order, following the advice of Matt. 18, and should be handled with great care and honesty.

Voluntary Resignation

The pastor’s call is permanent. It is not to be thought of as temporary. However, this does not mean that he is “locked into” a particular congregation for the rest of his life. And he is not to feel that he must serve in the ministry until the Lord calls him home. The Lord may direct him to another field of service through the medium of the call. Or factors may occur which cause him to realize that it is time to retire or time to resign from the ministry.

A note of- warning is in place here. Although we as pastors might realize that we have the option to resign from the ministry, we should also realize that resignation is a last resort. It can be a “cop-out” of responsibility and a concession to the flesh. And thoughts of resignation can be a temptation to unfaithfulness, temptations which the Devil sends our way. The real reason that there are resignations from the ministry is that Satan is attacking the Church in these last days by pressuring and tempting God’s workers. What better approach can he take in assaulting the Gospel than by discouraging the called workers and causing them to stop their soul-saving work. We must remember that we are called not only by our congregation, but also by the Lord, and we should be faithful to that calling. And the Lord says, “No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62).

Unfortunately, thoughts of resignation do arise in the pastor’s mind rather easily. This is especially true in the early years of the ministry. Satan may sow seeds of doubt in the pastor’s mind regarding his own abilities and dedication. But we have a great power on our side - the Lord of the Church. We should pray to Him for strength and guidance, that we might continue to “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Tim. 6:12). Also when thoughts of resignation do arise, it is wise to consult with trusted colleagues, including the CP and DP, who can offer advice and encouragement.

However, we are living in a sinful world and we are but “earthen vessels” There may be a time when a pastor succumbs to the weaknesses of the flesh and must consider resignation from the ministry. His resignation

might be in the best interest of the kingdom. It is better to voluntarily resign than stubbornly force the congregation to remove him for cause. It should be noted that resignation from the ministry and resignation from a particular call are one and the same thing. The call places the pastor into the ministry. Resignation from that call takes him out of the ministry. Thus a pastor who resigns is no longer a “Rev.” and is not eligible to preach or perform other pastoral acts. Should he at a later date desire to re-enter the ministry, he would have to go through the proper channels, which includes a waiting period, consultation with the DP, and approval by the COP.

CAUSES

Illness

Among the many causes of resignation from the ministry, one of the first that comes to mind is illness. Severe illness can bring a pastor’s ministry to an end. Illness may prevent him from carrying out his duties as effectively as they deserve to be carried out. If the illness is of a temporary nature, he might consider asking for a “leave of absence,” until he sufficiently recovers and can resume his duties. If his illness is a result of the climate in which he lives, he might inform his DP of his dilemma and the Lord may choose to direct him to a church in a different area. (No, this does not mean that a pastor who suffers a back ache from shoveling snow in Minnesota should put in for a call to Arizona.) However, when a pastor’s illness appears to be permanent and definitely detracts from his ministry, he should consider resigning. Here it is important to secure competent medical advice as well as the advice of brothers in the ministry.

Another factor to consider is the health of the pastor’s family. If the pastor’s wife or one of his children are stricken with a severe illness and this interferes with his ministry, he may be compelled to resign. Here again, if the illness is a result of a particular climate, the situation might be solved by accepting a call to another locale.

However, a pastor must be on guard, so that he does not overestimate how much his illness detracts from his work.. Sometimes illness is overplayed and a man is filled with self-pity, when he should really rise above that. The Devil can use the pastor’s feeling of weakness to suggest to him that he is unfit to continue in the ministry. There is a certain amount of suffering that we have to willingly bear. St. Paul had to live with his “messenger of Satan” and many pastors also have to put up with their “thorn in the flesh.” One can learn to cope, with the strength and help that God gives.

Old Age

Pastors are human. Their physical and mental prowess will eventually wane as they advance in age. This will be noticeable in such areas as memory, hearing, sight and physical strength. A pastor should not be too proud to admit this nor too naive to notice it. Usually he begins to slip gradually, so he will want to carefully listen to constructive criticism rendered by his wife, his parishioners and his fellow pastors. He will want to carefully examine himself and determine whether he can still carry the full load of pastoral responsibility. A warning is in place here. There is no award given out for longevity of service. There is no badge of nobility awarded to the pastor who serves right up until his last days on earth. The pastor who boldly asserts, “I’m going to die with my boots on,” or more pointedly, “I’m going to die with my robe on,” is allowing the subjective pride of his human heart to overcome his objective concern for the needs of his parish. There is no shame in retiring from the ministry. But it is shameful to place a congregation in the difficult position of being forced to ask for a pastor’s resignation after years of faithful service due to debility caused by advancing age.

There may be situations where a pastor can reduce the load of his ministry as he advances in years. He might step back into a less responsible role in his parish and allow his associate to assume the bulk of administrative work and other “heavy” responsibilities. Or he might simply become a “Visitation Pastor,” limiting his work to calling on the shut-ins, preaching occasionally, and other duties that would not be too

demanding. Also today our synod has opened up a number of “semi-retirement” calls, where a pastor can serve a small congregation and can receive part of his salary from the congregation and part from Social Security. For some pastors this part-time ministry can serve for a nice transition to full-time retirement.

It is inexcusable for a pastor to fail to financially plan for his retirement and then “hang on” in the ministry for a number of years beyond when he should retire, simply because he can’t afford to quit. I have great respect for those men who plan for their retirement and then retire on schedule (whatever age it may be in their case), even though they may still be blessed with good health. I recall an aging pastor in our conference a couple of years’ ago who announced his retirement and was told, “Why you’re still in good shape. Why should you retire?” His response was, “Because it is time (I believe he was 67) and because I want to open a pulpit for one of our young men to serve.” Here was a man who was not only showing a concern for his own church, but also for the church-at-large. Commendable:

False Doctrine

One of the key requirements for a pastor is that he teach sound doctrine. As Paul urged Titus, “You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine” (Tit. 2:1). Not only does a pastor have a commission from Christ to teach everything He has commanded us (Matt. 28:20), but he also has been entrusted with the promotion of sound doctrine by the congregation who has called him. They trust him to preach and teach God’s Word in its truth and purity and in accord with the confessional position of our synod. These people need that sound doctrine for guidance and inspiration. By the same token, a congregation is told to “test the spirits” and to “beware of false prophets.” They cannot tolerate false doctrine. This is especially true, since there is a danger that a pastor who persists in error might mislead a congregation or a portion of it to support that same error.

The Lord says, “Let the one who has My Word spread it faithfully” (Jer. 23:28). If a pastor has an unsure or changing theology, he cannot possibly serve God’s people faithfully. In an era when sound, Biblical theology is often scoffed at, a pastor can be tempted to compromise the truth. There is also the danger of outside influences, in particular, books and-articles written by prominent liberal theologians. And there are the people in the pew who sometimes have “itching ears” and it is tempting to water down the solid truth of God’s Word to please them.

A pastor who has difficulty accepting and teaching the doctrines and practices of our WELS is going to become increasingly uncomfortable serving in our synod’s ministry. He also will probably receive some “heat” from his own members and from district officials. This will naturally lead him to consider resigning from his ministry and perhaps seeking a call into the ministry of a church body not in fellowship with us. It is interesting to note that of the 24 WELS pastors *who* resigned in the past 2 years, 10 applied for a call into another church body, most notably the LC-MS.

Loss of Confidence

When a pastor accepts a call into a congregation, it is vital that he receive and retain the trust and confidence of the congregation. Should he cause them to lose confidence in him and his ministry, he is in big trouble. This loss of confidence may be evoked by causing offense, by his personality, by his lack of tact, by legalistic actions, by negligence in his work or other factors. The ministry involves showing concern for people and those pastors who fail to project that concern are going to cause their people to lose confidence in them. This can become a cause for accepting a call elsewhere or for resignation.

At the same-time there may be situations where a congregation stubbornly sets themselves against the pastor for reasons that are not valid. Perhaps they refuse to accept some of the doctrines and practices which he is faithfully promoting. He may need the aid of district officials to deal with this matter. Or perhaps his differences with the congregation he serves are simply a “personality clash.” Certain men aren’t cut out for certain places. If that proves to be the case a call to a different parish may be the answer.

Misfit in the Ministry

Periodically someone who is incompetent gets into the public ministry of our synod. In spite of the training he has received in the past and the advice he receives at the present he just “doesn’t have it.” He lacks the particular gifts and qualifications which God lays down for His public servants. In particular he is not “able to teach.” He may know the Word of God, but he is not able to effectively communicate that Word to his people: In fact, he probably has difficulty communicating with people in general. We have come to refer to such a person as a “misfit in the ministry.” This kind of person creates an intolerable situation.. Neither he nor his congregation are happy. The kingdom work suffers. It would be best if he resign from the ministry.

Attitude

One of the reasons cited by a DP as a major cause of resignation from the parish ministry was “unacceptable attitude and practices.” It is unfortunate that Satan sows seeds of negativism in the minds of some pastors. This will produce an attitude that is less than wholesome and practices that will reflect that. It is all too easy to develop a negative attitude and spend too much time wallowing in self-pity over all the problems you are unable to solve, all the mundane tasks you are expected to complete, the many hours demanded of your time and the apparent lack of cooperation from the members you serve. It is also easy to become negative in your dealings with people and project a spirit of harshness and legalism. This obviously does a disservice to the spirit of the Gospel, which is very positive in nature. And it does set one up as a prime candidate for resignation.

Sometimes “the shoe is on the other foot.” It is not the pastor who has an attitude problem, but the people he serves. A recent editorial in our *Northwestern Lutheran* cited as one of the reasons for declining enrollment in our synodical schools the fact that any number of our pastors and their families are treated with disrespect, anger, impatience and dishonor by members of their own congregation. The writer implied that this can lead to increased stress, family problems, resignations and early retirements. And our young people who observe this kind of situation certainly aren’t going to be encouraged to study for the ministry.

Another attitude that is less than wholesome on the part of the pastor is false ambition. Someone may feel that he is a budding “superstar” in the ministry, the WELS’s answer to Robert Schuler. He might become disenchanted serving a small flock of 150 communicants. He may feel his superb talents are being wasted and he impatiently waits for a call to a large congregation. He is jealous of prominent evangelists who preach to thousands of people. And he is frustrated, when his name is not placed in nomination for prestigious district or synodical offices or boards. Obviously a person like this is vain and self-serving and probably will not last long in the-ministry.

There are other pastors who may go the other extreme and may be totally lacking in self-confidence and have a low level of self-esteem. They will probably be super-sensitive to criticism. There are always going to be criticisms aimed at the pastor. It’s unavoidable. You can’t please all of your members all of the time. But a pastor who can’t take the “pot-shots” and takes every criticism personally is going to become unhappy and lacking in confidence. This can eventually develop into bitterness and thoughts of “hanging up his robe.”

Legalism

As alluded to previously, a spirit of legalism develops rather naturally in those who approach their ministry with a negative attitude. This spirit of legalism also produces many legalistic practices. For some pastors there is a natural tendency to enforce the letter of the-Law and not the spirit of the Law. One of the DP’s suggested legalism as a major cause of resignation from the ministry. Perhaps legalism is an inherent tendency in a church body like ours, which adheres to a fairly rigid body of doctrine and practice. And it’s fine to be rigid where God’s Word clearly speaks. However, some fail to remember that God’s Word does not clearly speak on every situation we deal with in our ministry. Everything is not black and white. There are certain gray areas of adiaphora where we must apply Biblical principles, good common sense and a spirit of Christian love in our

counsel to our people. Those who operate in a consistently legalistic manner are not only going to upset their members, but will also set themselves up as candidates for resignation from the ministry.

A natural spin-off of legalism is a propensity for dictatorship. A pastor can begin to think of himself as the “Head Honcho,” the “Big Cheese”; the one who must rule in every case, the one whose advice must be followed with unquestioning adherence. He “lords it over God’s heritage” and treats his flock as though they belong to him and not to the Good Shepherd. How quickly such a one forgets the humbling words of Scripture for “minister.” He is to be a ὑπηρέτης, a galley-slave, and a διάκονος, a table-waiter: Ministers are servants of God and servants of the congregation that has called them.. They are not to lord it over their flock. Those who do and who legalistically set up a dictatorship are doing a disservice to their calling as ministers of Christ.

Misunderstanding of the Ministry

Several of the DP’s I surveyed cited as reasons for resignation such things as failure to cope, sensitivity to criticism and inability to withstand the demands of the ministry. This may be more pronounced today, since the pastoral ministry is more sophisticated than in the past and the problems we are asked to deal with are much more diverse and complex than in the past. There also is a temptation today to think of the ministry as a “profession” rather than a “calling,” which can lead a pastor to make comparisons to the way people in the business world operate.

Whereas anyone can be prone to this tendency, it would appear that younger pastors entering the ministry can be most prone to misunderstand what the ministry involves. In spite of the fine training he receives at Sem and a year of vicaring, a young man can enter the ministry with some very idealistic notions of what the ministry should entail. The first few weeks of the ministry can be a real shock to his system; as he is forced to lay many of his ideologies to rest. If he is unable to make the necessary adjustments in his views and practices, he could become disillusioned and a candidate for resignation.

Marital Problems

A pastor is to be the husband of one wife and one who rules his own family well (1 Tim. 3:2,4). Therefore if his own family life erodes through a breakdown of his marriage, it will be difficult for him to carry out an effective ministry to his people. His parishioners look to him as an example, and his marriage certainly should stand, as a wholesome example to others. 4 of the DP’s cited marital problems as a major cause of resignation from the ministry in their respective districts.

There appears to be a fair number of marital problems in today’s parsonages. That is unfortunate. And perhaps it is symptomatic of our times, an era when one out of two marriages fail, a time when the sanctity of marriage is not appreciated as well as it should be. Certainly the pastor and his wife are not immune to the pressures and problems and temptations that today’s society exudes. Hopefully they would be able to rise above this through their joint dependence on God and His blessings and would continually renew their commitment to each other and to Him.

A noted sociologist once stated that the one “rival” that will most often stand between a wife and her husband is their children. He also noted that the one “rival” that will most often stand between a husband and his wife is his job. That can easily occur in the parish ministry. We pastors are also, in a sense, married to the church. We take our call seriously. We are dedicated in our work. And thus it is easy to become so consumed in our work that there is little available free time for our families. Some pastors’ wives have been known to write their name in their husband’s schedule book so that they are guaranteed a time slot to talk to him: Pastors who pride themselves in working 70 or 80 hours a week and forget about their mate at home are inviting marital problems.

Many pastors’ wives today are not cut out of the same mold as pastors’ wives of the yesteryear. They aren’t always willing to concede the amount of time absorbed by their husband doing “church work.” My wife occasionally recounts the advice she received from one of the Seminary faculty wives at a “Sem Gems”

meeting. She was told, “When you marry a pastor, don’t expect to see a lot of him. The church always comes first. You don’t.” My wife, being of a humble nature and far from demanding, was willing to accept that advice. But not all pastors’ wives do. Nor should they be expected to. They have a right to enjoy some of their husband’s time and attention too.

However, there is also another side to this. Some wives are not willing to make the sacrifices that life with a servant of the Word calls for. They view the church as a “rival marriage” and may even grow to resent the church. That doesn’t do much for their faith. Some wives have a poor understanding of and attitude toward the ministry. Some pastors’ wives are making undue demands on their husband’s time. They are expecting him to take more time off from his work than he should, so that he can escort her to the nearest shopping malls or baby-sit the children or do the laundry or other “domestic” duties. There are also more working wives than ever before in today’s pastorates. I’m not knocking that, because it can have both economic and therapeutic value. But it also can create some new problems for the pastor-wife relation and the stewardship of time. It also appears to me that many of the young wives first entering the parish have a less than ideal view of the ministry. Perhaps this is due to their background. Perhaps it is due to the influence of friends. Our young men have to exercise great care in choosing a mate.

The National Council of Churches Division of Christian Life and Mission recently authorized a task force to research the question of why pastors leave the ministry. Among their findings this one caught my eye: “There is considerable evidence both in this study and elsewhere that marital crisis and divorce represent nearly insurmountable obstacles to continuing in church positions, and that the quality of relationship between husband and wife have a tremendous bearing upon a minister’s performance and upon his persistence in church employment.” An interesting comment. And it suggests an interesting question Can a divorced pastor continue in his ministry? That is a difficult question. There are some who would claim that if he has “made peace” with God and his congregation, he should be allowed to continue to serve. Most would not hold that against him. But some might. And that’s the problem. He is to be a “model” to his people and not present even “the appearance of evil.” Also some members might be hesitant to come to him for marital counseling, since his own marriage had failed. Resignation may not be the answer, if he is the so-called “innocent party.” But a call to another congregation would likely be in place.

Family Problems

It has been stated that children can bring many gray hairs to their parents’ heads. That is doubly true in a pastor’s family. The parsonage is a “glass house” and when the pastor’s children become unruly or get into some kind of trouble, it is no secret to the critical eyes of the congregational members. In fact “the preacher’s wild children” make an excellent subject for gossip at the local hang-outs. This can have an adverse effect on a pastor’s ministry in that congregation and may at times lead to resignation. This is especially true, when he weighs the words of Paul to Timothy: “He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?) (1 Tim. 3:4-5) And the Apostle’s words- to Titus convey a similar admonition, “An elder must be ... a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.” (Tit. 1:6). That’s plain enough. If the pastor can’t handle his own kids, how can he possibly handle the church?

Sometimes the situation is reversed. It is not the children who are causing problems for the pastor. It is the pastor who is causing problems for his children. This is particularly true of the pastor who is a “workaholic” and who doesn’t know how to handle his stress. He comes home from a “hard day at the office” and takes it out on his family: Cases of physical violence are rare in a pastor’s home, but there is a lot of verbal abuse that is dished out. Often pastors allow their frustrations to build up and when they do come out, it’s measurable on the Richter Scale. Usually it’s the wife who has to bear-the brunt of her husband’s emotional release.- And she’d better have big shoulders for him to “cry on”: But sometimes the children too have to “pay” for their father’s bad day. One 11 year old PK once said. “I stay out of Dad’s way, when he gets home from meetings. If he just

sees me, I'll get it." And a pastor I know once told me that when he comes home from a difficult Church Council meeting, even the dog knows where to hide. This doesn't do much for family relationships.

Sexual Impurity

Although none of the DP's cited sexual impurity as a specific cause of resignation from the parish ministry, one man did note that 3 teachers from his district were forced to resign, because of sexual improprieties. But this is certainly not something that is just confined to the teaching ministry. We pastors are certainly not above the temptations of the flesh.

Morally, pastors are to be above reproach, with their personal lives in good order, with sound marriages free of scandalous problems, having nothing to do sexually with women other than their wife, innocent of sexual promiscuity or of anything that even hints of inappropriate sexual behavior.

We are living in days of blatant sexual immorality. X-rated movies, pornography, child abuse and promiscuity are all too common. "The man of the cloth" is not immune to this. In fact, there are tremendous temptations for the pastor in this area. Temptations could come on a church outing. They could come when he is making calls. They could come when he is counseling. Or it could be the church secretary who tempts the pastor to revoke his chastity. Young, attractive widows or divorcees may turn to the pastor for sympathy and affection. The relationship can easily become too close. A pastor can fall into the trap of fornication. I recall, attending a pastoral counseling seminar and being told by the presenter, "Be careful how you handle the young widows or divorcees. If she approaches you for some physical sign of support, such as a hug, don't yield to it. If you do, the next thing you know you'll be in bed with her."

Alcoholism

Although we belong to a church body which does not legalistically prohibit the use of alcohol, we are aware of the Scriptural prohibition against the abuse of alcohol: "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). Pastors in particular should be cognizant of the need to be filled with the Spirit, not only as part of their sanctified life, but also as part of their calling. It is the Spirit that leads them to accept a particular call and it is that same Spirit who provides the necessary guidance for a fruitful, ministry.

To be filled with the spirits of alcohol is another matter, however. Not only is it sinful, it can be addictive. You lose control. Instead of having self-control and Spirit-control in your life, you have alcohol-control. And that makes it very difficult to carry out an effective ministry. Of course, there are the many pressures and problems that can "drive you to drink." That becomes a natural excuse for the alcoholic pastor and it becomes very convenient to "escape" to the bottle when things get rough in the parish work. After a tense voters meeting or a difficult counseling session it is tempting for a pastor to relieve his tension by having a drink or 2 or 3 or 4. Too frequently this pattern can continue, until he falls under the control of this stimulant. And it eventually will have a negative effect on his ministry. It is estimated that 30% of all Roman Catholic priests are alcoholics. Thankfully it's, not nearly that high in our own circles (in spite of our roots in the Wisconsin "brew" country). Nonetheless, 2 of the resignations cited by -the DP's included alcohol-related problems.

A pastor may seek and receive treatment for an alcoholic problem. More importantly, he can receive assurance of God's forgiveness, as he approaches Him in penitence. But even if his alcoholic problem is conquered, it would appear unlikely that he could continue to serve that congregation. Too much damage would already be done and the confidence lost through his drinking would be very difficult for the "Recovering Alcoholic" to recover. Some would argue that since he is now a recovering alcoholic, he could work well with the other recovering alcoholics and the hardened alcoholics in his parish. "He's been there himself." That may be true, but not all of his members are alcoholics. I'm afraid that the offense caused by his abuse of alcohol

should lead him to seek another field of service or possibly resignation, since he will always be in danger of “falling off the wagon.”

Economic Problems

Although the ideal for the pastor is that he be “not a lover of money” (1 Tim. 3:3), nonetheless he may face economic difficulties that will have a negative effect on his ministry. The wage scale of our WELS clergy is not high, to say the least. I have heard more than one story of congregations-that have conducted salary surveys of other churches in their community and have reported (with red faces) that a vicar in another church body was drawing a larger salary than their pastor. And according to information I have received, a “rookie” in at least 2 other Lutheran church bodies receives a larger starting salary than our veterans receive. Most of our pastors’ children qualify for free milk in school, some qualify for free hot lunches, and some may even qualify for food stamps, because of their low income. Granted, we should not place too much stress on material things and we should budget wisely and trust the Lord to properly provide for us, but living in today’s high-priced world can put some economic stress on a pastor with a low income.

Another side to this is the pastor who is a poor steward, a poor manager of his money. He spends more than he should, buying impulsively. He doesn’t budget well. He uses a wallet full of credit cards and is constantly in debt. He is creating economic problems for himself. And sometimes his wife is to blame. Perhaps she is the one who wants lobster and salmon. Or maybe she insists on elegant furnishings for the house, so she can keep up with the neighbors. And the children must have the best of clothes. Even if it’s blue jeans and tennis shoes, the names have to be Gloria Vanderbilt and Brooks. Whether it is the pastor or his wife or his children that causes economic stress, it definitely can develop into a strain that will deter from his pastoral work.

The desire for an increase in earnings can be a temptation to leave the ministry. There are many positions in the secular world that offer more financial security. In fact, many pastors entering the ministry today come from homes where their parents had greater income than that of a church worker. And some pastors and wives were able to “bank” money by holding down excellent jobs during the last year or 2 at Sem. It may take some financial adjustments, when first settling down in the ministry. But no matter what his age or tenure in the ministry, because his sinful nature is in love with the material things of this world, there is a real temptation for a poorly-paid pastor to become discouraged enough to quit.

In a self-study conducted by the CHE in 1981 one of the responses was this concern, “One attitude which worries us in a relatively small but growing number of candidates is undue concern for material things, resulting in time being spent on retirement concerns and plans and on other material concerns in the first years of the ministry.” The respondent saw this as a result of the socio-economic attitudes of our day. And certainly we should be concerned about those who are materialistic, but at the same time we should want our pastors to carefully plan for their future financial needs too. That’s part of good stewardship.

Giving Offense

A pastor is in the lime-light. He is not only to provide his people with nourishment and direction from God’s Word through his preaching, teaching, and counseling, but he is also to provide them a model of Christian living. The pastoral Epistles abound in admonition directing the pastor to be a good example to his flock. For example, “Since an overseer is entrusted with God’s work, he must be blameless - not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to much wine, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.” (Tit. 1:7-8) This makes it very clear that a pastor is to be a model believer, one who is above reproach:

There are some who might argue with that. They might say, “A pastor is a human being like anyone else. He should be expected to sin too, like everyone else. Why expect him to live such a perfect life?” The answer to that question is that we are in the public eye. That’s why Peter states that we are to be “examples to

the flock..”(1 Pet. 5:3) We are trusted with dispensing the means of grace and we do not want to allow any of our inappropriate or sinful actions to put a slur on our administration of those means.

I am reminded of the time when our chaplain at the Lutheran Home was preaching a sermon on the subject of sin. He stated rather pointedly, “All have sinned. There is no one living who does not sin.” Then he added in very dramatic fashion, “I too have sinned:” Immediately an elderly, lady in the front row nudged her wheel chair forward a bit and asked in a cackling voice, “What did you do, Reverend, what did you do?” The point is, our members, according to their Old Adam, might rejoice in our sins, if they become public, in order to excuse their own weaknesses.

The pastor is not to give offense to his members by his conduct. As the Apostle urges, “Do not cause anyone to stumble” (1 Cor. 10:32). In particular, those who are weak in the faith could easily have a stumbling block placed in front of them by the pastor’s misconduct. Thus the pastor who drinks too much at the anniversary gathering, who dances and flirts with all the ‘young ladies at the wedding dance, who cusses out the ref.’s at his grade school’s basketball game, and who punches out the “alligator” on his Church Council who has been nothing but a “thorn in the flesh,” is, not only going to displease God, but also may cause many of his people to stumble.

Along this same line, it should be pointed out that there are many areas of adiaphora in our ministry and in our personal conduct that should be handled with great care. There are areas where it may not be sinful to act in a certain way, but it may be expedient to refrain. Paul spoke of that. As an example: “I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good, but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as, I follow the example of Christ.” (1 Cor. 10:33–11:1) Paul actually invited people to follow his example. How many of us would do that? In this area of adiaphora we cannot charge a pastor with sin when he automatically serves wine to everyone who comes to his house, when he makes calls in an old sweat shirt and faded blue jeans, or when he booms out loud jokes at the funeral reception, but we could criticize him for inappropriate conduct and for giving offense to his people.

There is an added dimension to this. The Lord’s list of-qualifications for the pastorate also includes this piece of advice, “He must also-have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the Devil’s trap.” (1 Tim. 3:7) Even though we are not called to serve the community-at-large, we should be of good report in our community. That will enhance our Gospel outreach and the reputation of our church.. Conversely, if we cause offense to people in the community by our sinful or inappropriate conduct, we will tarnish our church’s reputation, will place an obstacle in the way of our evangelism efforts, and will do a disservice to Christ.

What about the pastor who causes severe offense through committing some sin,.. repents of his sin, and is assured by the congregation that he has the Lord’s forgiveness and is to be looked on as a brother in Christ? Can he continue to serve in that congregation? Should he resign from the ministry? It would appear to me that if he has caused severe offense and has lost his good report both in the church and community he can no longer serve there effectively. And it might be questionable whether he could serve anywhere, since he may well lapse into this sin again and because it is difficult to hide a tarnished reputation.

The Pressures of the Ministry

It’s no secret that the ministry involves a lot of tension and pressure. We knew that before we ever entered the ministry. But did we know the extent and the complexity of the pressures? Probably not. As servants of God we should be able to grow in our ability to meet the demands and pressures of our office through the grace and strength that God supplies. In fact, we should learn to look upon these demands and pressures as privileges. They come with the office.

However, there are times when the pressures seem to be more than one can take. Perhaps you’ve had a day like this: You couldn’t get your sermon finished, because you were interrupted by a domestic problem you were asked to deal with. Your chairman of the. Board of Elders called to inform you that his neighbor is threatening to quit the church, because he didn’t get his way at the last voters’ meeting. You were informed that

one of your young men has taken up residence with his Catholic girl friend. Your Ladies-Aid president called and wondered why you wouldn't approve their latest gala plan for a fund-raiser. Your custodian asked you to come downstairs and see why the toilets wouldn't flush. And that was all before lunch: When you got home for lunch, you may have been inclined to say to your wife, "I can't take it anymore:"

We all have days like that. And on those "down"-days we are tempted to think that selling AAL insurance wouldn't be so bad or maybe Uncle till has an opening in his department store. Somehow we rise above that. We reach-down for that little extra strength which only God can give and He sees us through: But some don't. Some-pastors are driven to the brink of despair by the pressures of the ministry and start seriously considering resignation.

Rev. Neil Paylor of Pittsburgh has been a clergy counselor for nearly 25 years. He states that "the major stress for clergy comes from the fact that they are representatives of love. Whoever represents love knows how hard that is." It's hard to be kind and caring all the time. Yet that's what our members expect of us, and rightly so. Paylor also said that ministers tend to downplay their own interests and problems. He said, "They tend not; to look at their own needs. It's a dangerous course."

Some view the ministry as a glamour position. They note the pastor's Sunday morning experience, dressed in hip robe, leading the congregation in worship, preaching, and receiving handshakes at the door. They don't always realize some of the non-glamorous, frustrating, stress-filled work that takes place during the week. The work is never done. And among those whom he serves are not only the loving, the kind and the gentle, but also the vengeful, the stubborn, the indifferent, the proud and the fallen. It places a heavy burden upon a man and upon his time, talents patience, and yes, even his faith. For those who can't cope with it all, resignation seems to be the most logical step.

The pastoral ministry today has become very complex. There are a lot of demands placed on the pastor and his time. One of these demands is counseling. People today seek counseling for just about anything. The parent whose child won't talk to them, the middle-aged lady who's depressed, because she's losing her hair, the man who can't hold down a job and is in financial arrears, all may be inclined to "go see the preacher." Also today there are more committees, boards, auxiliaries, and organizations than ever before. Most of them expect the pastor to support their group, and to participate in some way. It can be a real drain on time and energy. Another "pressure of the ministry" can be staff problems. These strike very, close to a pastor's heart. If a pastor has difficulty communicating with his school principle or other teachers in his school, it can cause many sleepless nights. Or how about the pastor in a dual pastorate? It is imperative that he, and his associate treat one another as brothers and operate as a team. However, if togetherness and communication are lacking, the left hand will not know what the right hand is doing, there will be a lot of friction, which in turn means more stress. Unfortunately, this happens easily enough. Many pastors are ruggedly independent and find it very difficult to work with someone else. They are better off in a single pastorate. Also in a dual pastorate personality differences may appear and if they do, they will soon be magnified.

Burn-Out

Clergy burn-out is a term you hear quite often today., You hear about it in many fields of work. Technically Webster defines burn-out as, "To fail, wear out, or become exhausted by making excessive demands on energy, strength, -or resources." It is often pictured as a candle burning low and finally sputtering out, its wick being consumed. Or it is pictured as a once beautiful building, now gutted by fire, its walls still standing, its interior stripped of those things which made it functional prior to the burn-out. There are many definitions of burn-out, but one that might suffice best is this one: "Someone in a state of fatigue or frustration, brought about by a devotion to a cause, way of life, or relationship that failed to produce the expected reward or result." This latter definition could very well apply to clergy.

The DP's cited 2 cases of clergy burn-out in their districts. I also posed the question to them, "Is burn-out in the ministry a misnomer or should it be a real cause of concern in our circles?" The replies were split down the middle. 5 felt that the term "burn-out" is a misnomer in our circles. 5 felt that it was a real problem to

contend with. 2 preferred to not comment. I personally feel clergy burn-out is real. It can happen. It does happen. We should all be aware of what it is and should take the necessary steps to guard against it.

One note of caution is in place here. We hear the term “burn-out” so often today that it can become a crutch. If a pastor feels things aren’t going his way and he’s been working too hard and he feels depressed, he might claim that he is burned out, when really he isn’t according to the definitions listed above. In other words, a pastor can become super-sensitive to burn-out to the point that he does not attack his work as positively as he should nor does he trust in God’s boundless supply of strength and guidance as fully as he should. For those who contrive the term “burn-out” merely to cover-up their inability or unwillingness to cope with the challenges of the ministry the -term “burn-out” is indeed a misnomer.

It is important to distinguish between burn-out and a couple of other maladies that may have some similar characteristics or effects. For example, burn-out is not rust-out. The person who is inactive, uninvolved and unengaged will never suffer burn-out. But he may suffer rust-out. Also burn-out is not cop-out either. Pleading burn-out because you have exceeded 40 hours a week or have had to put out more than 2 sermons in a week’s time is a cop-out. It is not burn-out.

Symptoms of burn-out include the following:

- (1) Progressive loss of idealism, energy and purpose (a lot of apathy);
- (2) Negative work-related attitudes and behaviors (increased feelings of discouragement and pessimism);
- (3) A decline in self-esteem and motivation (things become a drag and he says, “I’m so stupid:);
- (4) Frequent irritability (anger turned inward) and tendency to blame others. (anger turned outward);
- (5) Resistance to change, rigidity, and loss of creativity;
- (6) Anxiety (including an inability to leave “work” at the “office”);
- (7) Chronic fatigue, for which there seems to be no physical basis (always tired);
- (8) Frequent physical problems - colds, headaches, gastrointestinal disorders, ulcers, etc.

Hans Selye, the father of stress research, has theorized that each person has a certain amount of adaptive energy and that each individual must learn to conserve this supply of energy before it is depleted. Those who must cope with too much stress for too long a time deplete their supply of energy and wear out. Such persons will grow old before their time. They may burn out.

It has been observed by experts that burn-out is most likely to occur in the “helping” professions. This would include doctors, nurses, teachers, lawyers, counselors and pastors. Pastors can certainly be susceptible to burn-out, because of the qualities they possess and the conditions they work under. They are “on fire.” They are Spirit-fired. Their lives are devoted to serving people. They are committed to a cause - building the Kingdom. They are idealists in the sense that they promote the ideal principles of God’s Word. These are wonderful qualities. But psychologists will note that it is these same qualities that can set you up for burn-out, especially when things don’t go as well as you would like. The church isn’t growing, very few are showing up for Bible classes; etc.

Rev. Roy Oswald, Manager of the Alban Institute in Washington D.C., a resource center for clergy, has studied the subject of pastoral burn-out. “The stress the average minister or priest has to bear,” he said, “would bring many people to their knees.” He estimated that at least 1 in 4 clergy becomes burned out to some extent. His estimate is supported by a 1983 Gallup Poll which indicated that nearly 1/3 of the clergy in the country have “often” or “occasionally” been so frustrated or disappointed in the ministry that they have considered quitting. 2 San Francisco doctors did a 10 year study in which they learned that a certain type of personality was 3 times more likely to suffer heart attacks. They reported their findings on these stress-prone and burn-out-prone individuals in a book entitled, *Type A Behavior and Your Heart*. You are a “Type A” person, if you have the following characteristics:

- (1) Tendency to overplan - a chronic sense of time urgency;
- (2) Multiple thoughts and actions - often involved in more than 1 thought or action at the same time;
- (3) Need to win - highly competitive, even in social activities;
- (4) Desire for recognition;
- (5) Always feeling guilty - usually because of over-scheduling and not getting everything done;
- (6) Impatient with delays and interruptions;
- (7) Overextend themselves - workaholics. Many pastors are Type A personalities.

A clear Scriptural example of burn-out is the prophet Elijah. He had just had a “peak” experience on Mt. Carmel, as he and God triumphed over the prophets of Baal. Then his life was threatened. He tried to “get away from it all” by journeying alone into the wilderness. As he sat down under the broom tree, he expressed extreme depression, “I have had enough, Lord. Take my life. I am no better than my ancestors”(1 Kings 19:4). The man who had-: previously displayed great energy was now totally exhausted (physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually). He stretched out under the broom tree and slept. In his subsequent dialogue with God on Mt. Horeb Elijah displayed other characteristics of burn-out. He expressed bitterness over the lack of appreciation for his work. He expressed a feeling of indispensability, “I, even I only, am left.” He expressed feelings of self-pity. Fortunately God boosted his morale through the still, small voice of the Gospel, assured him there were still 7,000 left in Israel, promised him His protection, and immediately put him back to work.

Burn-out Creates very serious consequences for the pastor. One man coined this description of clergy burn-out. He said, “When a called worker begins to burn out, what was once a ‘calling’ becomes merely a job.” And the most coin reaction of a person experiencing burn-out is an attempt to “get out.” In his attempts to get out, he can be laden with fear, guilt and panic. I heard of 1 pastor who spent 4 days in bed with the covers over his head. He was escaping. That’s tragic: Ultimately the burned out clergyman becomes detached and alone.

Isolation

A pastor sometimes builds walls around himself. He either does this consciously, because he is afraid of criticism, or he does it subconsciously, because he is so engrossed in his work: I interviewed a clinical psychologist who does some counseling with clergy from the LCA and he stated that one of the greatest single factors in clergy burn-out was isolation. He had observed that many pastors do not have enough support people to offer counsel and encouragement. They too often “go it alone.”

I would see this problem of isolation to be particularly applicable to our pastors in congregations that are far removed from other WELS churches, such as many of our mission churches. They would have little personal contact with fellow pastors who could offer advice and support. The same would hold true for pastors’ wives in these situations. They would be without the fellowship and comradeship of fellow pastors’ wives. Isolated pastors can become frustrated and can become easy prey for Satan’s temptations to resign from the ministry.

REMEDIES

A Weeding-Out Process

One of the questions I posed to the DP’s in my survey was, “What sort of remedies would you propose as ‘preventative medicine’ to cut down the number of resignations from the ministry?” One man responded by indicating that a certain number of resignations should take place, that certain men prove themselves unfit for the parish ministry and it is best that they get out. He called this “the Lord’s weeding out process.” I would agree with him on this point, that there are certain resignations that should take place. It is best for the Kingdom work that certain individuals leave the ministry. But I would hope that we would be able to reduce the number

of cases of that nature. Therefore the main scope of this section of the paper will be to analyze various remedies that might prevent resignation from the parish ministry.

Closer Screening at Seminary

It would seem to me that when we talk about remedies for preventing resignation from the ministry, we should first look at the very beginning, before men even begin their ministry. Many attitude problems and other problems should be dealt with already before a young man enters the ministry. This takes us back to the Seminary and, yes, even to Northwestern College. Concerted efforts need to be made to counsel and encourage prospective candidates for the ministry and to weed out those who would appear to be destined for the title “misfit in the ministry.”

4 DPs indicated that they would like to see a more careful analysis of the character and ability and attitude of pastoral candidates by the Sem faculty and, also by the “bishops” under whom they vicar. Honest counsel should be given and those who are missing some particular gifts for the ministry should be informed of that. It would be interesting to be able to get the Sem students’ views on their own class-mates. History shows that class-mates were able to predict those who would do well in the ministry and those who would fail. This is obviously a touchy matter and would have to be handled with great care. But it would appear that more effort should be made in screening candidates.

Call Activity

Many times a pastor may reach “the end of the rope” at a particular parish, but still could serve effectively somewhere in the Lord’s Kingdom.. Perhaps he has lost the confidence of his people. Perhaps there are certain problem cases that have blossomed to a point where he can no longer deal with them objectively. Perhaps he has a special skill which was able to serve a special need at his present locale, but now that need has expired. Perhaps he has just gone stale and needs a change in ministry. At times like this a call to a different parish may be the answer. It would give him a fresh start and it would give “new blood” to the congregation he is presently serving.

The problem is, the last few years we have seen a limited number of calls in circulation. In fact, we have had some difficulty placing all of our candidates. This presents a practical problem. We need more call activity. Although I didn’t ask them, I’m sure the DP’s would agree that there are some men in their districts who should seriously consider a call to another parish. Hopefully more calls will be available not only this year, but in the years to come, as we open up more new missions and as churches expand their pastoral staffs. We pray that this will be the case, as the Lord moves our people to generously support our synod’s budget, so that our mission outreach may continue. We also are hearing some fairly disturbing predictions that in about 6 years we will have very small classes graduating from the Seminary. That will create a serious shortage of candidates. That’s not good. Yet there is a positive side to this too, and that is that there will be more call activity in the field. In his paper on this subject President Carl Mischke cautions that the one disadvantage of a lot of call activity is that it is quite easy to simply move the problem pastor around every few years. In the past this even led to facetious remarks among DPs such as, “It must be about your turn; because you haven’t had him in your district yet.” And more and more it’s becoming the rule that a pastor can’t run from his troubles. He has to face his problem(s) at the place where it occurs. Either he makes it there or he doesn’t make it in the ministry, That’s not all bad.

But I’d still like to see more call activity in the field. Not only does a call offer a pastor a new challenge, a new opportunity for ministry in a fresh setting, it also forces him and his congregation to look at his ministry in close retrospect. And that’s always healthy. A pastor needs to analyze his own strengths and weaknesses and a call helps you do that. A congregation needs to analyze their opinion and support of their pastor and his ministry and a call helps them do that. God accomplishes many blessed purposes through the call.

Expanded Staffs

It is expected that the ministers of the Gospel provide maximum service to the sheep and lambs of the Lord's flock who are placed under their care. To do this effectively it may become necessary for a church to "beef up" its staff. Many of our congregations are understaffed. The ministry today is much more complex and much more demanding of a pastor's time than it was years ago. In many cases it would be of great benefit both to a pastor and his congregation, if help were attained for him by expanding the church staff.

This could be done in several ways. Most ideally it could be done by calling an associate pastor to share the responsibilities of the pastorate. In very large congregations it might involve calling a third pastor. In medium-size congregations it might be wise to consider calling a vicar. Not only does he serve the congregation and aid the pastor, but the congregation also is able to perform a cooperative service for our Seminary training program. Another option to consider is calling a Minister of Education. Our congregation has been served by a Minister of Education for the past 10 years. I would personally vouch for it as a very viable form of ministry. The advantages it has over the vicaring program are that you have a man for more than one year and the Minister of Education is able to specialize in certain areas of ministry, thus freeing up the pastor for those duties most necessary for him to carry out. It is my feeling that any congregation over 500 communicants should be served by more than 1 man. Not only does that relieve pressure from a pastor, but more importantly allows for more efficient service to the Lord's flock of believers.

Realistic Attitude

We often refer to the fact that as Christians we are not of the world. In fact we dwell on that a great deal in our preaching and teaching. But we also must teach the truth that we are in the world. That's unavoidable. And it does include pastors. Pastors have to realize that they aren't perfect and their congregations aren't perfect. There are going to be some problems. The view of too many pastors is like a highlight film of the past basketball season. You see the fast breaks and the slam dunks, but you don't see the bad passes and the lane violations. Certainly you want to accentuate the positive, but you have to at least admit that the negative is also there. Don't imagine that the ministry is all cake and ice cream. There is a little garlic sprinkled in from time to time. Realize that. Don't have unrealistic expectations. You aren't serving a church in heaven.

The pastor's attitude toward handling the problems of the ministry should also be realistic. He should not fall into the trap of thinking that he must be able to produce an instant solution for every problem he faces. The alcoholic's serenity prayer needs some application to the ministry: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." A pastor also should realize his own limitations. He can't do more than God has given him the potential to do. If a room only needs a 60 watt light bulb, there's no sense trying to put a 200 watt flood lamp into the socket. God places a pastor in a field of service where his potential can be used at that time. He should not envy the pastor of a large congregation and lay awake at night dreaming of a larger challenge. He should not make unrealistic expectations of himself, but should bide his time and serve well where he is at. Perhaps the Lord will someday see fit to direct him to a bigger challenge. Perhaps not.

Handling People

The ministry involves dealing with people, either in small groups or large groups or one-on-one. We are called to serve God's people. How we handle people is vitally important. A pastor might be a rabble-rouser or a jellyfish, both of which are beneath the dignity of a man called by God to feed and nurture His flock. A pastor has to discard both his brass and his cowardice and exercise a blend of meekness and firmness. God didn't intend His servants to be either brow-beaters or door-mats. He didn't intend his preachers to ride high horses or to clean up after the horses. Somewhere in between these 2 extremes is a path that God would want us to follow.

Since the ministry involves dealing with people, it is imperative that a pastor exercise a great deal of common sense in his judgments. I recall an aged Seminary professor once advising his class, “Men, there are 3 things you need to be successful in the ministry - a knowledge of Scripture, love for the Lord, and common sense.” How true that is: The pastor who uses common sense will avoid many of the pitfalls that might entrap him.

Another necessary trait in dealing with people is the use of tact. A pastor cannot be “a bull in a china shop.” He will often be challenged by his people to deal with sticky situations and he will have to employ a lot of tact in working with them. Even in seemingly unimportant matters the pastor who uses tact will get along handsomely with his members. I am reminded of the pastor who was given a mince pie for Christmas by a parishioner who was very devoted, but also a very poor cook. The pie was dry and over-spiced and had to be thrown out. The next Sunday the kindhearted lady approached him and asked him, “How did you like the pie?” The pastor thought for a moment and then said, “Mrs. Nelson, we appreciated your gift, and let me assure that a mince pie like yours never lasts long at our house.” That’s tact!

Time Off

Although all of us are expected to dedicate our lives and our work to the glory of God and are to serve our Lord and our people to the best of our abilities, we are not expected to render “non-stop” service. We cannot work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We are frail human beings. We have physical and emotional limitations. We can’t “keep our nose to the grindstone” all the time. We need some time off to refresh our minds and our bodies.

Everyone’s adaptation to a schedule is different. Some may be able to take a particular day of the week off for, rest and relaxation. Others may prefer to take portions of certain days off. But there should be an allowance made for some time off each week. Not only does the pastor need this time off for his own personal enjoyment, but his family also needs him to spend some of his time with them. It may be practical to schedule your time off in your appointment book. And then don’t break that appointment except for cases of emergency. Those who work relentlessly day after day without a break may think that they are doing the Lord and their people a special favor. But they aren’t. They’re only wearing themselves down and whereas they may be rendering a quantity of service, the quality will soon suffer, if they don’t take some time off. They also will become strangers in their own homes and that will have an adverse effect on them personally and on their ministry.

It is my feeling that a pastor and his family should take at least one vacation a year. I’ve heard of men who bypass a vacation on a particular year, because “there’s too much going on at church this year” or “I’ve got too many weddings this summer.” Take your vacation: The church can exist without you for 2 weeks. And you should book your vacation time well in advance, then those planning wedding dates will have to work around your schedule: You and your family need that time off. It also is advisable to spend that time off away from your community, so that you are not available to your members: This way you can unwind and can concentrate on something else for awhile. Not only do you escape from stress for a time, but you are also able to sit at a distance and objectively measure your work and formulate some strategy for the future. Hopefully you will then return from your vacation refreshed and invigorated and ready to resume rendering effective service to God and His people.

For pastors who are on the verge of burn-out it might be wise to consider a leave of absence. Jean McMurdie, a registered nurse and the wife of ELS pastor William McMurdie, wrote a treatise on burn-out, since her husband suffered a burn-out. He took some extended time off and then returned to the ministry.. Mrs. McMurdie equates burn-out with what we used to call a “nervous breakdown.” She suggested that pastors suffering from burn-out take a lengthy “sabbatical” as well: as seeking professional counseling. She also recommends as preventative medicine, that pastors: seek and receive a sabbatical on a regular basis. She endorses a sabbatical program similar to that of the Southern California UCC, which offers a 3 month sabbatical

with pay after 4 years and 9 months of service and every 6 years thereafter. This is in addition to the regular vacation a pastor may receive each year.

Relaxation

A psychologist who deals professionally with pastors has noted that depression can often set in after a peak day. He states that the pastor who uses a lot of adrenaline on Sunday morning is going to experience a significant drop of that adrenaline when the demand diminishes, resulting in what is called “post-adrenaline depression.” Now you know why it’s hard to get going many Monday mornings.

The same doctor suggests that a pastor can counter this by reducing some of the drain on adrenaline ahead of time and getting some good relaxation toward the end of the week. The day, before a heavy engagement like Sunday morning he should be relaxed. This obviously would imply that it’s not wise to put your sermon preparation off until Saturday. It would appear preferable to do a little more work in the beginning of the week, so you can take a little time off on Friday and Saturday to relax instead of frantically trying to complete your sermon and your Bible Class material for Sunday morning.

Another suggestion made is that the pastor who has a “heavy” day Sunday should plan for a low level of routine activity on the day following the peak demand. He doesn’t advocate taking Monday off, because of the pastor’s low-grade adrenaline system at that time, unless he wants to spend the day just lying around. He contends that he would enjoy relaxation activity a lot more, if he waited until a little later in the week, when his adrenaline flow has improved. Monday should be a day of doing office work and calls that have a minimum of pressure, so that he can slowly recover from his big Sunday.

An obvious type of relaxation is a good night’s sleep. Some pastors try to project a “macho” image by “pretending” to complain about all the hours they put in and how they only get 3 or 4 hours of sleep a night. The response they wish to hear is this, “Oh, you poor man: How can you take it?” The “macho” pastor loves to hear this. But you don’t have to be ashamed or feel guilty of getting 8 hours of sleep. Lay aside the “macho” image. Doctors will tell you that your body and mind need rest on a regular basis: Even if you can’t get 8 hours of sleep, 5 or 6 or 7 good hours of sleep may well do the trick. Each individual’s requirement varies.

And when you “hit the sack,” get your mind off your work. Don’t lay there worrying about the upcoming voters’ meeting or the “brat” in Confirmation Class or the latest pregnant teen-ager. If you do, you’ll have to break out the sleeping pills. You know the cliché, “Count your blessings instead of sheep.” Focus on the Lord’s blessings to you. They are manifold. Focus on some of the positive things you enjoy doing. And it doesn’t always have to be spiritual thoughts. It may be therapeutic to fantasize about that perfect cabinet you’re going to build or that hole-in-one you’re going to score or that trophy-size walleye you’re going to catch. Exercise is a form of relaxation. Too many pastors get little or no physical exercise. About the only exercise they get is getting out of their chair to answer the telephone. They don’t even walk into McDonald’s. They take the “Drive-Thru.” Exercise is healthy. It not only tones up a flabby body, but also makes sharp a dull mind. A mind that is not clouded by the fog of inactivity is able to function more effectively. Also physical exercise is relaxation. It is an “out.” It relieves stress. Whether it’s hiking, biking, jogging, swimming, golf, tennis, racquetball or whatever, it is worth taking time for on a regular basis.

Hobbies are also a good form of relaxation. A hobby should be more than just something you do to kill time. It should be something you enjoy doing, something that will take your mind off your work for awhile. For the artistically inclined it might be painting or wood-working. For the outdoorsman it might be fishing or hunting or gardening. For the studious it might be reading books or magazines. For the athletically inclined it might be golf or tennis or bowling. Some of these hobbies can be enjoyed alone, others *together* with family members or friends. And having hobbies helps you to prepare for your retirement days, so that when you retire you have something to do instead of just sitting around in a rocking chair, reading your old sermons and dozing off.

Salary Improvements

I should point out that a pastor is not to be a lover of money. He is to resist temptations to mope and complain, because he can't enjoy all the luxuries that some other people do; And he-is to be a wise steward of the material blessings. God has given him. By the same token, I feel that there is a lot of room for improvement in our synod's salary structure. Mission code is low and needs to be raised. Many self-supporting congregations have a vast misunderstanding-of mission code: Some feel it is a "canonical law" that applies to all congregations, when in reality they should be well above mission code in their salary structure. But-many hesitate to go above that mark and some are even below mission code.

There is also a mentality among our lay people on salary matters that is unfortunate. There is a feeling among some of them that "the preacher" has to have a lots salary: It's always been that way. It's part of his calling. 'It keeps him" humble it prevents him from becoming materialistic. This mentality was exposed at our recent Church Councilman's Workshop in Belle Plaine. One of the sessions I attended was on the topic of the pastor owning his own home. In the course of discussion the pastor's salary was referred to. One layman implied that some pastors are getting paid too much. "Why, some of them even earn more money than some of our lay people:" he said. Is that really wrong? Does the pastor have to be at the bottom of the totem pole? I think not: Especially when you consider, that Scripture says, "The worker deserves his wages." (1 Tim. 5:18) and when you consider that a pastor is a professional who has an educational background similar to that of a lawyer or a doctor. If you really want some interesting comparisons in salary, start comparing with those: We can't do that. Nor do I want to imply that pastors have to be "in the gravy." But there is a lot of room for improvement in our circles in the area of salaries. Here are a few suggestions to help remedy this:

- (1) Each CP should take special note of a pastor's salary when conducting a call meeting.. I would venture to say that in most cases the congregation's suggested salary figure is too low. This is an excellent time to suggest an improved salary.
- (2) Encourage each congregation to establish 4 Salary Review Committee, which will meet with the pastor annually to discuss his needs and- will make recommendations to the Church Council and voters assembly.
- (3) Conduct a survey similar to the one that was taken a few years ago out of St. Louis. Only this survey should include not only what the men in our district are being paid, but also what other Lutheran pastors in a similar environment (city or country) or of similar size are being paid.
- (4) Make congregations fully aware of tax savings that are available to pastors. Many are ignorant of this.
- (5) Conduct seminars on this topic at Church Councilman's Workshops, Delegate Conferences, and the like. Somehow our church leaders have to be made aware of the problems in this area.

Study of the Word

The Savior told us, "You diligently study the Scriptures." (John 5:39) That's good advice. We pastors do study the Scriptures frequently. We have to, if we are going to carry out our office. There are sermons to prepare. There are Bible Classes to study for. And Sunday School Teachers and Confirmation Class and Ladies Aid topics and the list goes on. It is very important that we study not only for the benefit of our people, but also for ourselves. Apply the Word of God to yourself as you study. Don't just study it "professionally." It is also wise to schedule time for your own personal reading and study of God's Word and other literature related to it. This will not only increase your knowledge of God's Word and help in your ministry, but it also will enhance your personal faith.

The regular study of God's Word will also serve as an antidote for one of the reasons for some resignations – false doctrine. Doubts about doctrine are dangerous. The Devil can easily cause them to pop into our head. But if we regularly and prayerfully study God's Word, we will be fortified against the Devil's attacks and kept on the right course doctrinally. We need the Word for guidance both for our members and for ourselves. We who work with the Word must be in the Word.

One of our pastors recently informed me that the LCMS in our area has appointed a special commission to study the matter of pastoral resignations and burn-out. A spokesman for this commission noted that pastors who are not involved in continuing education and who are not seeking to improve their knowledge of Scripture in specific areas are the ones most likely to become discontented in the ministry and perhaps burn out. Their commission is planning to organize synod-wide and encourage each pastor to set goals for his own personal growth – prayer, Bible study, personality growth, etc. The commission has also developed a pastor's self-evaluation form and a lay evaluation form, so that both pastor and congregation can carefully evaluate his work and pin-point strengths and weaknesses. The first 5 categories on the evaluation form include these headings: Word and Sacrament, Pastoral Care, Education, Administration, and Outreach. The 6th category is the following:

- Spiritual and Personal Growth
 - A. Prayer and devotional life
 - B. Reading and study
 - C. Marriage and family

Stress Management

“Stress” is a word we often hear., Stress is a fact of life. Everybody has it to some degree. And certainly pastors have it to a large degree. What is stress? The man who “discovered” stress is Dr. Hans Selye of the Institute of Experimental. Medicine and Surgery at the University of Montreal. Dr. Selye, who brought the concept of stress to public attention, gives this definition, “Stress is the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it.” *He also* calls it “the wear and tear caused by life.” It is estimated that 25 million Americans have high blood pressure; 1 million have heart attacks each year; 8 million suffer stomach ulcers; 12 million are alcoholics, and more than 230 million prescriptions are filled annually for tranquilizers, according to Keith Sehnert, a Minneapolis doctor and health consultant. Much of this is caused by stress. But not all stress is bad. In fact, experts will tell you that it is good to have some stress in your life. It gives you challenges and stimulation. Life would be very boring without stress. Consider, for example, many elderly people. They experience stress “underload,” which produces a stagnated, lonely life. Many others experience stress “overload” and that can cause some serious health problems. Some medical authorities estimate that as high as 80% of all illness is stress related. Thus it is very important for us to learn how to manage our stress.

An important part of stress management is careful budgeting of energy. Don't spend \$10 worth of adrenaline on a \$10 problem. This will deplete your energy reserve too quickly. By the same token; don't spend \$.10 of adrenaline on a \$10 problem. Then you could allow things to get out of hand. You need to pray for God's guidance to help you budget your energy-wisely. Here are some practical hints for managing-stress:

- (1) Establish the right priorities. Budget your time wisely. Expend the most energy on the most urgent tasks.
- (2) Live one day at a time. Don't worry so much about tomorrow. As Jesus said, “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.” (Mt. 6:34)
- (3) Find ways to laugh each day. It helps reduce, tension and relaxes you. Someone once said, “You should never go through a day without at least 4 good laughs.”
- (4) Exercise regularly. A strong body can have a positive influence on the mind and spirit.

- (5) Learn to relax. For some this might be simply stretching or deep-breathing or day-dreaming. Or maybe a 20 minute “cat-nap” will be “Just what the doctor ordered.”
- (6) Develop a network of support people around you. These support people can include friends, family and peers. More on this later.
- (7) Nurture your faith. Use Scripture and apply it to yourself. Pray and meditate, so that you will stay in close contact with the Lord, who is your ultimate Source of strength, the one who can help you cope with stress.

It is interesting to note that the city of St. Paul conducts a special stress management program for its police officers. As you might expect, police officers are under a great deal of stress. The approach this program takes is the “holistic” method, a balanced method which provides services that link spirit, mind and body. There is a physical fitness program. There are medical evaluations. There are counseling seminars. And each officer is encouraged to take care of his/her spiritual needs. When I interviewed the counselor for clergy of the ALC Minnesota SE District, he suggested that to prevent resignation from the ministry it is important for a pastor to take care of himself. He contended that a pastor must take care of his own physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

Support Structure

“No man is an island.” Pastors cannot serve in their ministry or live their lives in isolation. Of course the Lord is with them each day to provide strength and guidance, and pastors need that first and foremost. But pastors also need the advice and encouragement of people. This kind of support may be available from some of the members. A pastor should not hesitate to consult with his trusted members and particularly his church officers, when there, are specific problems he needs to air and discuss.

But often a pastor is not comfortable discussing many of his concerns and situations with members of his parish. The people he is likely to be most comfortable with are his peers, his fellow pastors. Thus the pastors in his area would qualify as his “support group.” He may see them individually or he may see them at social functions (dedications, installations, farewells, “winkels,” etc.). He also may be able to “rub elbows” with them at conferences and study clubs: These pastoral meetings are very beneficial. Not only do they strengthen us in our bond of fellowship and provide for our growth in God’s Word, but they also provide a social contact and a “release” which all pastors need. It would be helpful for each conference or circuit to meet periodically strictly on a social basis.

The latter suggestion should also include the pastors’ wives. They also need time together with other pastors’ wives. They also need a support structure. Most pastors’ wives are not totally comfortable in the company of church members. They always have to watch what they say. However, in the presence of other pastors’ wives they are more free to “let their hair down” and share mutual concerns with one another. Our wives need contact with one another. It’s good for their outlook. And let’s face it, their outlook is vitally important to our ministry.

Congregational members need to support their pastor. Now by support I mean more than just paying his salary, hospitalization and fuel bill. They should offer verbal support. Even though pastors are not in the ministry to gain the praise of men, they all need to be “stroked” from time to time. Although God is the final and ultimate Judge of a person’s ministry, the congregational members are the most noticeable judges. When they appear critical or apathetic, it conveys a very negative vibration to the pastor and does potential damage to his own confidence. Conversely, when they encourage him and compliment him and volunteer to work alongside of him, it does much to boost his morale and his confidence. So his members can be a type of support structure too.

The Pastor's Pastor

The role of the Circuit Pastor today is rather diverse. He is to be an arm of the District President in supervising doctrine and practice within his circuit and in conducting call meetings., He is to be a representative of the synod in promoting support of the synodical budget and disseminating information. He is to offer counsel to congregations asking for his advice. Not to be forgotten is the fact that he also is “the pastor’s pastor.”

Many of the DP’s cited, in response to my survey, the need for a close contact between the CP and the pastors in his circuit. One of them noted that in 4 instances of resignation in his district the past 2 years there was little or no contact between the troubled pastor and the CP until it was too late. CP’s do not have a degree in counseling, but they are tooled to counsel, because they know the Word of God and they understand the ministry. Since they are in the ministry themselves, they can empathize with the troubled pastor and can offer valuable counsel. A close bond between the CP and the pastors in his circuit is very helpful. A CP who shows concern for his brothers, and pastors in his circuit who have confidence in and share their problems with the CP can make for a wholesome and helpful relationship and could help ward off potential resignations.

Professional Counseling

Even though a pastor may receive very-helpful support and direction from his CP and other fellow pastors, He may require further help in the form of in-depth counseling: Caution is to be advised here, since much of the professional counsel available today is humanistic-based instead of Scripture-based. Great discretion should be taken to secure Christian counseling. –We do have some fine resources available to us in the counseling services offered by the Lutheran Home and by Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Services. Our pastors should not hesitate to use these services, when they see a need to do so. Also I am happy to note that the COP has appointed a special committee to propose and offer counseling workshops for pastors and their wives. These should be of great value. Also it may be advisable to have something on the circuit level for pastors and their wives. These could be more informal than a counseling worship, but could include such things as study, discussions and fellowship. Some of the sessions could be integrated and some could be segregated (pastors and wives meeting separately).

You might be interested in knowing what some of the other Lutheran church bodies offer to their clergy in the area of counseling. I did some research on this. The LCA offers what they call “The Assistance Program for Church Professionals and Their Families.” Various clinical psychologists throughout the country are made available to counsel clergy. The first 2 sessions with one of these counselors is subsidized by the synod, after that the pastor is on his own.

The Minnesota SE District of the ALC, which is the largest district in the ALC, has 5 different full-time assistants to the bishop. One of these has the title, “Assistant to the Bishop for Clergy Care.” His specialty is counseling clergy. Besides offering personal counsel, he may refer some clients to one of the 4 ALC centers around the country which offer intensive care or perhaps he may refer them to Lutheran Social Services.

LCMS pastors in our area, who have problems, are encouraged to go to their CP first, then to the DP. If they want further, in-depth help, they are referred to the McCloskey Clinic in Minneapolis. This clinic is staffed by a team of professionals including medical doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists, nurses and chaplains. D. McCloskey, who is head of the team, has Lutheran background. One of the psychologists on the team is an LCMS pastor. A couple of days of heavy diagnostic work is done first. Then therapy is recommended either as an out-patient or as an in-patient.” Problems such as stress, burn-out, marital difficulties, and alcoholism are dealt’ with. The Concordia Plan picks up the tab for 80% of this rather expensive treatment.

This spring our own church in North St. Paul is attempting a new venture in the area of clergy self-analysis. A “personality: profile” will be offered to their staff and to other interested clergy by a gentleman who has designed a program for a number of major industries and universities. The intent of the program is to help you-test yourself and detect your own weaknesses and strengths. This is done in a group setting. Personal consultation and referencing :are available for those who would desire follow-up counseling.

Full-Time Pastoral Counselor

Should our synod engage a full-time counselor, who would specialize in counseling our pastors and teachers? I posed this question to our DP's and whereas a few of them indicated that this might be a worthwhile position, none of them felt that we should engage a full-time counselor at this time. I would agree with them. Budgetary stringencies would prevent it at the present time. Also there would be some question as to this person's availability on a national basis. And I wonder if enough of our men would use his services to make the position practical. VOW instead favor expanded services by institutions like the Lutheran Home and Wisconsin Child and Family Services.

Strength From God

Pressure; Tension; Exhaustion; Burn-Out. Many people experience that. It's not limited to clergy. And it's not limited to contemporary, pastors either. Even Moses the great prophet of God and patient leader of Israel, had more than he could take. He said, "I am not able to carry all these-people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me..." (Num. 11:14.) Even the great Apostle Paul became mentally and physically exhausted. He also became frustrated and discouraged. But both Moses and Paul knew the remedy for their fatigue and frustration. They turned to-the Lord in prayer, knowing that He would not forsake them. That's a lesson for all of us. When we feel like we can't take it anymore, when we feel like running from our responsibilities, we have someone to turn to for strength. The Lord does not abandon us, His servants. He has promised, "I will never leave you or forsake you." (Heb. 13:8) And we must realize' that God does not promise to exempt us from all the trials and tribulations of this life. But He does promise to be with us. We need to regularly ask Him for strength, patience and courage. When we feel that we are inadequate servants, when we doubt whether we have the knowledge or strength to meet the demands 'of the ministry, when thoughts of resignation pop into our head, let's remember that the Almighty and All-Wise God has called us into His service. He must feel we are qualified. And He will give us aid.

Trying to solve all the problems of your life and ministry on your own, without God, is like trying to get rid of the dandelions in your yard with a shears. The yard may look great for a day or 2, but then those dreadful looking dandelions grow back again. The dandelions must be dealt with at the root level. God will help you to deal with the problems of the ministry at the root level. He alone has the power to penetrate the very heart of man. One reason some pastors burn out or get into serious difficulty is because they take their eyes off the Lord. They are like Peter trying to walk-on the water; focusing 'his eyes and-thoughts on the waves and not on Christ. He sank. And those pastors who take their eyes off the Lord and the strength and direction He gives and instead focus on the stressful circumstances around them will sink. Look to the Lord for strength.

Our Status Before God

As we proclaim the central doctrine of justification to our people and underscore the fact that our sole basis for salvation is Christ's redeeming work, it is vital that we apply this message to ourselves. We must remember our special status before God - not only as pastors, but especially as justified children of God. We must realize the objective and forensic nature of our justification. We must look to the cross and to the Word which proclaims this justification. Pastors who suffer stress and frustration, like any Christian in similar circumstances, may be tempted to subjectively look at their faith as a reason for self-esteem and assurance rather than looking at the only object of faith - Christ and His pardoning Ward. They tend to conclude that their inabilities are due to a weak faith and thus are viewing faith as their act rather than as their reception of God's mercy. They trust too much in the "feeling" of faith.

Pastoral burn-out or nervous exhaustion is not necessarily a sign of a weak faith (although it may be) just like poor mental health does not necessarily denote poor spiritual health. Luther had-periods of deep

depression owing largely but not entirely to physical ailments. But he understood what it meant to be right with God and always looked to His Word of pardon and grace for comfort and strength.

God's providence serves His grace. His Kingdom of Power is in the service of His Kingdom of Grace. Those of us who are the elect of God likely will suffer stress and strain and affliction in this life, but all of these ultimately are blessings in God's gracious economy. The justified sinner is reminded that Christ's atonement has totally removed the guilt and punishment and burden of sin, that the sins of the flesh, which still remain, are continually forgiven for Christ's sake, but that sickness and pain and depression, the results of sin, are nonetheless the predicted and expected portion of every child of God. But He will never give us more than we can bear.

We are not perfect. But we are justified. We are saints, and therefore all that we do to the glory of God is pleasing to Him, even if we don't always please ourselves. We should be able to carry out our calling with great joy, even with all the tensions and failures, knowing that however things turn out God is using us., .We are the "apple of His eye." We can have self-esteem - not in ourselves, but in Christ. In Christ all our work and activity as pastors are pleasing to God. And this same God does promise to be with us and bless us. As He has assured us through the Apostle, "He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all - how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32)

Concluding Remarks

A pastor must always realize that he has been justified before God and that he has a call from God to serve in His Church. With that knowledge, he will not be self-serving, but will do all to the glory of God. And with the confidence that he is called by God, he can be joyful in spite of difficulties. He can be strong, when obstacles are placed in his way. He can be courageous, when he knows his cause is the Lord's. He will be diligent and faithful, knowing that his office is the highest privilege on earth.

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