

The Wonderful Work of the Ministry

by Victor Prange

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The story is told of a pastor's son who went to the barbershop. As he was getting his hair cut, the barber tried making a little conversation with the boy. He asked, "Son, what kind of work does your father do?" Innocently the boy replied, "Oh, my dad doesn't work; he's a pastor."

Those of us who are pastors know that we do work. The ministry is work. The ministry is wonderful work. Yet there are many among the 246,000 clergymen in the United States who are not at all sure that the ministry is such wonderful work. It seems that some aren't even sure any more what the work of the ministry is. In 1969 the Lutheran Church in America released a study in which this observation is made: "The clergy today are functioning unemployed. They are looking for a job description, looking for a proper role they should play in a changing and complex society."¹

There is no doubt that we are living in a changing and complex society. This kind of society certainly has an effect also upon the work of the ministry. Though I would not wish to characterize the clergy of our synod as "functioning unemployed" and "looking for a job description," yet we dare not close our eyes to the fact that even though we have a wonderful ministry, we are at times discouraged, disheartened, perplexed, and anxious. We don't always appreciate the fact that we have wonderful work to do. My purpose is to help us again see that the work of the ministry is wonderful, to look at some of the problems of our work, and to suggest some steps which will lead us to experience a more wonderful ministry.

I. The Ministry Is Wonderful

The word "wonderful" has three basic meanings according to the dictionary. First, the word is used to describe something amazing, surprising, marvelous, and out of the ordinary. We speak of the space explorations as being "wonderful" in this sense. A second meaning of the word, which is actually the most original, grows out of this first meaning. The word "wonderful" may mean "dreadful, fearful." Something amazing may also frighten us a little. The root of the word "wonder" is the Teutonic base "wand," meaning wind or turn. Out of tremendous awe we turn away from something that is wonderful. The third meaning of wonderful is "something which we don't totally understand, a mysterious thing." We wonder about it.

In the Bible the word "wonder" is most often used to describe the reaction of people who are confronted with God and His wonderful works. God is a truly wonderful person. He is like no person we have ever met: present everywhere, eternal, almighty, holy. No one is able to see God. The Psalms are full of praise to God for His wonderful works. When we think about God and His works, we are filled with wonder. We are surprised and amazed about such a being, someone so great and powerful. When we think of God in all His majesty, we are also filled with fear and dread. This fear is heightened when we are conscious of our sin: God sees and God has the power to destroy us. Finally we also wonder about God, we don't understand, we are confronted with mystery. God is wonderful.

Our ministry is wonderful because of the amazing and surprising fact that God himself, the wonderful God, has called us to this ministry. To be called to serve such a wonderful God puts us into the company of all the prophets and apostles. Even Jesus Christ did not exalt Himself to the priesthood but as the writer to the Hebrews says, "He was appointed by him who said to him, 'Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee' " (Heb. 5:5). John the Baptist was appointed by God to be the voice crying in the wilderness. God called St. Paul

¹ *Pastoral Psychology*, May 1969, p. 5.

before he was even ready, as one prematurely born, to be the apostle to the Gentiles. Of himself Paul writes, “I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am” (I Corinthians 15:9,10).

In calling disciples it was Jesus who always took the initiative. And those whom He called did not seem to be likely candidates for the ministry. When we acknowledge that God also takes the initiative in calling us and confess that we are also unlikely candidates for the ministry, then we will come to appreciate the fact that to preach and teach the Gospel as one’s life work is not something natural—it is something supernatural; it is something wonderful. It is amazing; it is dreadful; it is difficult to understand.

You and I have a wonderful ministry because it is God himself who calls us and gives us the strength to do His work. The more highly we regard ourselves, the more we exalt ourselves, the more we feel we are doing God a big favor by enduring the ministry and consenting to serve, the less will we appreciate how wonderful the ministry really is. It is when we see ourselves as nobodies, as weak and sinful creatures, as people with many failings and faults, it is then that we can appreciate the wonder of God’s calling us for this work.

Our ministry is wonderful also because of the message that we have to proclaim. What St. Peter says about every Christian applies in full measure to every pastor and teacher: “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (I Peter 2:9). God’s wonderful deeds begin with the creation, with the wonderful gifts of body and soul, eyes, ears, reason, senses, and the preservation of this creation. We speak about the wonders of nature and the many wonderful things about our bodies. This is for us in the ministry to declare: the wonderful works of our creating God.

We declare the wonders of God’s love that He sent His only-begotten Son into the world to die on the cross for sinful man. At his birth the angels announced this wonderful news to the shepherds. All who heard the report of the shepherds wondered at what was said. And we can only be amazed and wonder also at the tremendous love of God for rebellious and stubborn sinners. We declare the wonderful Gospel of our redemption in the pulpit, in the classroom, at the sickbed, in our contacts with all kinds of people. We tell of God’s love. We have a wonderful ministry.

Our message is also a declaration of God’s sanctifying gift of the Holy Spirit. By our own reason and strength not one person, not one of us, would come to faith in Jesus Christ and trust His love. But by the grace of God we have been called to faith. This is the wonderful message, which we have to proclaim: the Spirit is still at work today in Word and Sacrament calling men to faith in Jesus Christ and giving them the promise of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Our ministry is wonderful because of the wonderful works of God, which we have to proclaim.

Our ministry is also wonderful because we work with people for their eternal good. God has called us to have to do with people, to preach to them, teach them, lead them in worship, guide them in Christian living, counsel and comfort them, and come in contact with them at the crisis moments of their lives. One writer on the ministry points this out with these words, “The pastor moves from one crisis to another with those whom he shepherds. In a single day he may visit the mother of a newborn baby, give guidance to a person who is becoming a Christian, talk with a high school or college graduate about his lifework, unite a couple in marriage, comfort a person who is bereaved, call upon a person who is confronting a serious operation, and listen to the last words of a patient who is dying. Two thousand years of Christian ministry have conditioned Christians to expect their pastors to be with them at these times of crisis.”² We don’t work with machines. We work with people.

Martin Luther praises this aspect of the work of the ministry with these words: “Who can tell all the glory and the virtue that a real and faithful pastor has in the eyes of God? There is no dearer treasure, nor any more precious thing on earth or in this life than a real and faithful pastor or preacher. Reckon for yourself the profit that the preaching office and the care of souls produces... So many souls are daily taught by him, converted, baptized, and brought to Christ and saved, redeemed from sins, death, hell, and the devil, and

² Wayne Oates, *The Christian Pastor* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), p. 1.

through him come to everlasting righteousness, to everlasting life and heaven.”³ The ministry is wonderful. It is wonderful because a wonderful God has called us weak and sinful men to do this work; it is wonderful because of the message we have to proclaim; it is wonderful because we are working for the eternal welfare of people.

II. The Ministry Is Work

For a number of years our Synod has observed Manpower Sunday. Special bulletin inserts are prepared to encourage young men and women to enter the preaching and teaching ministry. On one of these inserts were the words, “The call to service—full-time exciting service as a pastor, teacher, missionary—awaits young men and women in training at our Synod’s schools.” This sentence makes the ministry sound like a very wonderful work. And from the first part of our paper we have seen that the ministry is indeed wonderful. And yet how often don’t we become discouraged and depressed, feel down in the dumps and very unexcited about the work we are doing. Evidently this feeling of wishing at times that we were doing some other kind of work affects clergymen in all denominations.

Recently I saw a cartoon, which showed a priest on a psychiatrist’s couch telling his troubles. In a contemplative mood he related the difficulties he was encountering: “I studied Latin for eight years and they changed it to English. I went abroad to master classical church music and they got the guitar mass. I’ve spent a lifetime learning the art of public speaking and they threw out the sermon for dialog. I...” The number of priests that leave the Catholic Church witnesses to the unrest among the clergy. A private research report circulated within the curia estimated that between 15 and 20 percent of priests ordained as of 1964 had quit and were “living in sin” outside the church. In the United States one clerical organization keeping count said that in 1968 Catholic priests resigned at the rate of 51 a month—a 31 percent increase over 1967. As to why so many intelligent and talented men are steadily renouncing solemn and lifelong commitments to the priesthood, 73 percent listed enforced celibacy as the major reason, with 63 percent citing “the irrelevancy of church work” as a second reason.⁴

It is not only in the Catholic Church where there are rumblings from the clergy and men leaving the ministry. The Rev. David Poling, a Presbyterian minister and president of the Christian Herald Association, recently made the statement: “We are watching the collapse of a historic profession—the clergy.” He continued, “It is a very rapid collapse.” The Christian Herald Association is considering setting up a placement bureau, which would attempt to find dignified employment for those who leave the ministry.⁵ It is not our purpose to examine all of the causes of the unrest among the clergy. One very important factor is no doubt the loss of the wonderful message of the Gospel that Jesus sent his disciples into the world to proclaim.

These rumblings of discontent should alert us to the fact that also among us there may be increasing feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction. The ministry is wonderful, but we do not always experience this in actual practice. Why not? Because the ministry is work and all work is cursed as a result of sin. This includes also the work of the ministry. When God cast Adam out of the Garden of Eden, He said of the soil: “Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you.” This curse is fulfilled also in the parable of the sower that Jesus told. The sower distributes the seed of the Word. But most of his labor seems to be in vain. The seed falls on hard ground, and is overcome by the thorns and thistles (the cares and troubles of this world), and the devil takes some of the seed away. Only a fractional part of the seeds actually produces fruit. Much of the work of the sower seems to be in vain. He could easily become discouraged.

One of the words that the New Testament uses for work is *κόπος*. In secular Greek this word means “beating, weariness as though one had been beaten, exertion, trouble.” In prose it is the proper word for physical tiredness induced by work, exertion, or heat. It is this very word *κόπος* that Paul uses to describe his ministry. Jesus also speaks of the workers in the vineyard grumbling about having to endure the burden and heat of the

³ John Doberstein, *Minister’s Prayer Book* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), p. 184.

⁴ *The New Republic*, March 1, 1969, p. 16.

⁵ Quoted in *The Milwaukee Journal*.

clay. Working in the Lord's vineyard is hard and planting the seed of the Word is not always successful. The ministry is work that is cursed because of sin—our sin, the sins of the members of our congregations, the sins of the world.

From our own ministries we can each relate activities and incidents, which bear out the fact that the ministry is work—at times hard, frustrating, and unrewarding. The work of the ministry calls for a great variety of skills and abilities. One must be a jack-of-all-trades to some extent. The minister must be a public speaker and each week have a sermon prepared, one which will say something to the people who come to be fed. This is a deadline that cannot be put off. The pastor is the leader of the worship and must know something about music and understand and interpret the liturgy. There is the work of an educator: confirmation classes for children and adults, training of teachers, Bible classes, educational programs for societies and organizations. The minister is a pastor and concerned about the individual. Calling on the sick becomes a relatively easy task when compared with various types of pastoral counseling, which the minister is more and more called upon to do. That people come to pastors with their problems is borne out by a report published in 1961 by the federal Commission on Mental Health. The commission reported that 42 percent of the people interviewed went to the clergy with their problems compared with 29 percent to general physicians, 18 percent to psychiatrists or psychologists, and 10 percent to social agencies.⁶ The minister must do much in the way of organization and administration, keeping records and seeking to keep the congregation on an even keel financially. There are many odd jobs that may fall to the pastor: seeing that the church doors are locked, windows closed, heat turned down, lights off. If the kitchen's sink in the church leaks, the pastor may be the first one notified.

The multitude of varied tasks and skills that are required of the pastor easily leads a pastor to become discouraged. He may also begin feeling inadequate and unqualified for some of the demands made on him. He may think of resigning. In March 1969 an article appeared in the magazine *Pastoral Psychology* written by Professor LeRoy Aden of Lutheran Theological Seminary of Philadelphia. The article is entitled, "The Minister's Struggle with Professional Adequacy." Professor Aden makes a number of observations that I wish to quote in this connection. He says that one reason why pastors may feel inadequate today is the changing social context in which we live.

He writes:

Late in the 19th century our country was largely rural, where a relatively simple agrarian life was the rule of the day. Now in the middle of the 20th century, urbanization and specialization with all their complex and technological demands are in full swing. This change has influenced the church and the demands that impinge upon us. It has moved the church from a simple, relatively uncomplicated life where the demands upon us are fairly definite and direct, to a highly complex and scientific world where the demands upon us are intangible and sometimes highly intricate. In the face of this change, we often find ourselves ill-prepared, if not unprepared, to minister in an effective and competent way. We may even feel like amateurs in a world of professionals, especially if we have been reared in a rural situation or have been trained in a seminary where the rural ministry is the basic model... We often labor with a feeling of professional inadequacy, and if we are conscientious at all we long for increased knowledge and skill in order to meet the demands and expectations of our urbanized parishioners. The ministry of pastoral counseling affords a cogent illustration of the point... People will come to him and expect of him a knowledge and competence, which he does not possess. Consequently, he may receive an almost daily reminder of his inadequacy.⁷

Another source of our feeling of inadequacy is the denial of our limitations to solve our own and other people's problems. Quoting Prof. Aden again,

⁶ *Pastoral Psychology*, May 1969, p. 19.

⁷ *Pastoral Psychology*, March 1969, pp. 10-11.

We act as though we are or should be beyond the frailties of human existence. It seems to come to us as a surprise that we should become ill, that we should have doubts, that we should be tempted, that we should have discouragements, or that we should have personal or family problems. In regard to all of these limitations we tend to become troubled and distressed when they become a real and pressing part of our own existential world. We find it hard and very uncomfortable to accept our own claylike existence.

The denial of limitations with a consequent increase in our sense of professional inadequacy reaches a climax in a particular tendency on our part. It is seen most cogently in our temptation to be the answer man, in our tendency to think that we must have a solution for most forms of personal distress. This tendency is positive in the sense that it indicates that we have an intense desire to be of help or of service, but there is also a compulsiveness about it that complicates our situation.

A casual look at our daily schedule will indicate that we are pressured from the outside by a diverse multitude of tasks and responsibilities. A second and closer look will expose a second fact. The external pressure on us to perform a multiplicity of obligations is matched and re-enforced by an internal pressure, by a drive within us. That is to say, we generally are a very self-critical and over-conscientious group of people. We demand or expect a tremendous amount of ourselves in terms of time invested and results obtained. In a word, we tend to feel that we should succeed where others have failed.⁸

To what Prof. Aden says, we could add many other items that create for a minister the sense of inadequacy in the modern world. There is a general decline in respect for authority. And this disrespect for authority certainly affects also the pastor who has always been regarded in society as a kind of authority. There was a time when the pastor was regarded as one of the most educated persons in the community. This is no longer true. More of the members of our congregations will be going to college each year and there be exposed to a variety of ideas and attitudes. What people seem to want today, the pastor does not appear to offer. Many people are not asking today, "What must I do to be saved?" Rather they ask, "What must I do to be happy, to be normal or emotionally healthy? What must I do to find health and wholeness?" This is a psychiatric age. We have witnessed a shift from religion to medicine in the ills of the soul. The minister feels he compares unfavorably to the doctor. Today ministers may invite a psychiatrist to teach them how to conduct their own pastoral care. In contrast, it is rare indeed for a minister ever to address a group of physicians. Even if he had the opportunity, he would not be audacious enough to advise them concerning the effective treatment of their patients. The minister is the object of everybody's education program. Too often he hears about what he is not doing. His sins of omission, it seems, are legion.

It is easy for a minister to feel that nobody appreciates him and the work he is doing. This includes also the members of his congregation. Many of them only see what he does on Sunday morning or when he makes a hospital call on them. In a sense the work of a pastor is like that of an iceberg—only a part of what he does is in view. The layman does not appreciate everything that the ministry involves—physical, emotional, spiritual.

The expectations of the people, especially marginal members of the congregation, do not always coincide with the pastor's concept of his calling. The wonderful work of the ministry has been outlined in part one. But for many members it seems that what is most valued in the minister is "being friendly." Along with that goes the ability to be a promoter, to keep things organized and humming. In the science-fiction spoof of the future, *The Big Ball of Wax*, the leading ecclesiastical denomination is called "Yourchurch." Instead of being titled "Reverend" or "pastor," the clergy of Yourchurch are addressed as "Friendly." The founder of Yourchurch is the Right Friendly Harry Wilker Murray, who had previously been a top merchandising man.⁹

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

⁹ Cf. William Hulme, *Your Pastor's Problems* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), pp. 41ff.

In the Mitchell study of the ministry made some years ago it was found that the average American church searching for a new minister felt that “personality is the most important single factor contributing to the success of a minister and his work.” “Successful churches don’t want a man who makes trouble” and “the successful minister is therefore the one who adapts to his parishioners’ prejudices and wishes.”¹⁰

It is of course impossible for the faithful pastor to adapt himself to all his parishioners’ prejudices and wishes. He must preach the truth of God’s Word. And even in matters that are not decided by the Word of God, it will be impossible to please everyone in the congregation. It may often happen that when a problem or misunderstanding arises, the pastor will hear of it only indirectly. It is not unusual for one member to tell another member of the minister’s shortcomings, until a feeling of dissatisfaction flows through an entire congregation. And when a minister begins to feel that his congregation is dissatisfied with him, he will be tempted to feel the same about them. One writer says, “The inactive list is depressing to any minister. But there are times when he wishes it were longer, providing he could name the additions.”¹¹ The writer to the Hebrews expressed dissatisfaction with his readers whom he calls “dull of hearing” (Hebrews 5:11). A minister can also find much about which to be dissatisfied in the present day congregation and this adds to the burden of the ministry.

From all that has been said it is plain that the ministry is work—work with the curse of sin; work with thorns and thistles. It is work that will often discourage the faithful pastor. It is work that will meet opposition. It is work that may cause the pastor or teacher to express the wish that he were doing something else.

In closing this section on the work of the ministry, I want to quote a section from the book of the prophet Jeremiah. He had been called by the Lord to preach judgment upon the city of Jerusalem. And even though the people ridicule him for preaching this word, he cannot stop. He cries out in anguish and utters the wish that the Lord would bring vengeance upon those who oppose him and God’s Word that he speaks. He finally closes with a lament—wishing that he had never been born.

O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived;
 thou art stronger than I, and thou hast prevailed.
 I have become a laughingstock all the day; every one mocks me.
 For whenever I speak, I cry out, I shout, “Violence and destruction!”
 For the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all day long.
 If I say, “I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,”
 there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones
 and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.
 For I hear many whispering. Terror is on every side!
 “Denounce him! Let us denounce him!” say all my familiar friends, watching for my fall.
 “Perhaps he will be deceived, then we can overcome him, and take our revenge on him.”
 But the Lord is with me as a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble, they will not
 overcome me.
 They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed.
 Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten.
 O Lord of hosts, who triest the righteous, who seest the heart and the mind
 let me see thy vengeance upon them, for to thee have I committed my cause.
 Sing to the Lord; praise the Lord!
 For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hand of evildoers.
 Cursed be the day on which I was born!
 The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed!

¹⁰ *Redbook*, “The Conflict between Church-goers and their Ministers,” January 1963.

¹¹ Hulme, *op cit.*, p. 44.

Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father, “A son is born to you,” making him very glad.

Let that man be like the cities which the Lord overthrew without pity;
let him hear a cry in the morning and an alarm at noon
because he did not kill me in the womb; so my mother would have been my grave, and her womb
for ever great.

Why did I come forth from the womb to see toil and sorrow and spend my days in shame? (Jer. 20:7–18)

III. Toward a Wonderful Ministry

In the anthology of John Doberstein’s *Minister’s Prayer Book*, there is this quotation:

Whenever we are together we ought to magnify not only the mercy of God that has forgiven us, but also his goodness in using us for his work. I hope there are among us many brethren, who, though they may have been led into the ministry through various accidents, nevertheless gain the courage to say, “I have been called,” or at least, “This has been committed to me.” We should strengthen and encourage one another in this. Often we are such timid-hearted persons, and the burden of the ministry lies heavy upon us. Many a time we would be glad to shake it off and take leave of the ministry, and yet, inwardly, we cannot take leave, and we go on, groaning and grieving. I meet many a whimpering brother, members of the church’s troop of groaning laborers. They surely cannot exert much attractive force in the community. Is the reason for much of the fruitlessness of our preaching that we appear in the pulpit and in the congregation with such gloomy faces? Is not this so often a hindrance for the children and young people of our congregations? I trust that we give them faithful and stout instruction; but surely much of what we say to them will be forgotten. Much would be gained if they simply took with them this impression: A young man, or an old man, stood up before us; what he told us we did not always understand; but there must be something wonderfully lovely about the gospel if a person can talk about it so joyfully!¹²

But how can we talk about the Gospel joyfully? How can we overcome our feelings of being inadequate, of being quite useless, of having anything but a wonderful ministry? There can be only one answer: God alone is our strength. It is God’s Spirit alone who can sustain us and lift us up and guide us toward a wonderful ministry. We can learn from the Apostle Paul.

Paul experienced tremendous difficulties in his ministry. He met the opposition of the Judaizers and of the heathen Greeks. He had trouble in his congregations, especially in Corinth and among the Galatians. Paul was stoned, imprisoned, shipwrecked, beaten, and finally died for the sake of the ministry of the Gospel. Paul worked hard, and he found the ministry to be hard work.

What kept Paul going? What enabled him to work harder than any of the apostles? Paul certainly does not take the credit. In fact he says that it was not really he who was working at all but the grace of God. “I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me” (I Corinthians 15:10). Paul depended totally upon the help, mercy, and love of God. God strengthened him and enabled him to work hard. Paul had a wonderful ministry because of the sustaining power of God’s grace.

You and I will never have a wonderful ministry and will not be happy in our work unless we depend upon the grace of God to sustain us. God has been gracious to us in forgiving our sins and receiving us into His kingdom. And it is His continuing grace that alone will enable us to work hard for Him.

¹² Doberstein. *op. cit.*, p. 190.

I am sure that some of us have had the same feelings and experiences as those reported by a Lutheran pastor in Germany. He writes:

I was a pastor, ministering in a hospital. A patient said to me, “If you were a ditch digger, you’d have a more useful calling than you have now.” That was a long time ago, but I have not forgotten it. I thought so myself many a time as I watched the nurses performing their tasks which are so needed and desired by the sick, and surgeons and doctors performing the most wonderful operations—while I stood there making miserable attempts at pastoral conversation. If I were only a ditch digger! But a pastor? An impossible figure! Impossible before God, the world, and even myself... What do I have to do in my ministry? I have to preach, and we say: Preaching is God’s word. And yet I know how these sermons of mine were produced. Often, it is true, with prayer and fear and trembling; but also by dint of coffee and tobacco, sometimes in a burst of effort, very sketchily and superficially, because I had seemingly more important things to do... In a discussion among young people the question was asked, what did they expect of a pastor? One of them replied, “He himself must be convinced of what he says.” And all the rest agreed. They perhaps did not know what they were saying. For who of us always believes? And who of us can guarantee our faith for even an hour? “I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not”—that is what sustains us.¹³

God alone sustains us in the faith and He alone can help us toward a wonderful ministry.

God sustains us and gives us a wonderful ministry through His Word. Every pastor must deal with God’s Word. But it is so easy to handle the Word of God as a digger might handle a shovel: this is just an implement I work with. The Word must be much more to us than just a tool, something I preach and teach to others. A good sermon must always be preached first of all to ourselves. A lesson in religion is one that we must learn. Luther speaks of being a student of the Catechism all through his life.

Preaching good sermons to oneself and to one’s people begins with thorough preparation. If we find that other things are taking away the time we should be spending on sermon preparation, then we must simply get rid of some of these other things. We cannot have a truly wonderful ministry if we neglect the Word and the continuing study of the Word. We are not only harming our people; we are also harming our own souls. There is nothing which a pastor does during the week which is so important as preaching the Word of God. This is the time when we meet most of the people. This is when we are feeding and leading the sheep and lambs.

In our preaching we must be sure that we have hold of the Gospel and that our sermons are not just lectures in morality or a venting of personal vexations. Our preaching is for the sake of proclaiming Jesus Christ as the hope of the world. If our preaching is not centered in Christ as the Savior, then we not only mislead our people but also deny to ourselves the Word of the Gospel that will sustain our souls.

You are no doubt all familiar with Dr. Walther’s book, *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*. In his 25th and final thesis Walther says, “The Word of God is not rightly divided when the person teaching it does not allow the Gospel to have a general predominance in his teaching.” After presenting some Scripture passages to show this is true, quoting especially the Apostle Paul, Walther continues:

Now, do not merely listen to this statement of the apostle, but think of the time when you will be the pastor of a congregation and make a vow to God that you will adopt the apostle’s method, that you will not stand in your pulpits sad-faced, as if you were bidding men to come to a funeral, but like men that go wooing a bride or announcing a wedding. If you do not mingle Law with the Gospel you will always mount your pulpit with joy. People will notice that you are filled with joy because you are bringing the blessed message of joy to your congregation. They will furthermore notice that wonderful things are happening among them. Alas! Many ministers do

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 228-229.

not meet with these wonderful experiences; their hearers remain sleepy; their misers stay stingy. What is the reason? Not sufficient Gospel has been preached to them. The people who go to church in America really want to hear the Word of God. We are living in a free country, where it is nobody's concern whether one goes to church or not. In accordance with God's will it should be the preacher's aim to proclaim the Gospel to his hearers till their hearts are melted, till they give up their resistance and confess that the Lord has been too strong for them, and henceforth they wish to abide with Jesus. It is not sufficient for you to be conscious of your orthodoxy and your ability to present the pure doctrine correctly. These are, indeed, important matters; however, no one will be benefited by them if you confound Law and Gospel. The very finest form of confounding both occurs when the Gospel is preached *along with* the Law, but is not the predominating element in the sermon. The preacher may think that he has proclaimed the evangelical truth quite often. His hearers, however, remember only that on some occasions he preached quite comfortingly and told them to believe in Jesus Christ. Without telling them how to attain to faith in Christ, your hearers will be spiritually starved to death if you do not allow the Gospel to predominate in your preaching. They will be spiritually underfed because the bread of life is not the Law, but the Gospel.¹⁴

There is no better teacher in preaching the Gospel than Martin Luther. Along with the continuing and thorough study of the Word, we need also to read Luther. We should not read Luther to find out how he interprets this or that passage. We may find that often we will disagree with him on individual interpretations. But we should read Luther in order that we might hear the Gospel. God sustains us and gives us a wonderful ministry through the Word of the Gospel.

God sustains us not only in the privacy of our own studies, but also through the service in which we participate on Sunday morning. One writer speaks of the liturgical service as being "genuine recreation." He writes:

It can happen that the pastor at the altar may completely forget not only himself but the external situation, including all that is disappointing and wearisome in his situation, be completely clothed with the glory and mercy of God, wearing Christ himself as light and strength, like a garment that covers and shelters him, so that he is revived, refreshed, nourished, and strengthened even physically. Indeed, it can happen that he may go to the altar fagged, overtaxed, and born down, and all this falls from him; and he goes forth from his service renewed and refreshed, bearing the reflection of heavenly glory, if not upon his countenance, yet in his heart.¹⁵

If we are going to be sustained through the liturgical worship, then it is necessary that as pastors we participate in this service and not stay by ourselves in the sacristy. Our sermons will benefit much more from joining with our people in the singing of the hymns and the liturgy than running through a manuscript before mounting the pulpit.

In this connection we might also add a word concerning the need for receiving the Sacrament regularly. This is a means by which God sustains His people. We have all preached this to our people. Are we practicing it ourselves? If the only opportunity we have for communing is at pastoral conferences, then we are depriving ourselves of wonderful comfort and consolation. I think it is a very important matter that all pastors take steps to receive the Sacrament regularly in their own churches with their people. We will not go into the practical ways in which this might be done except to say that where there is a will, there's a way. The Sacrament is rich

¹⁴ C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), pp. 403-407.

¹⁵ Doberstein. *op. cit.*, p. 223.

Gospel: the body and blood of Christ given to us for the forgiveness of our sins and for the strengthening of our faith. God gives this Sacrament to us and through it would give us a more wonderful ministry.

Our wonderful God has also given us the privilege of prayer. God invites us to take the problems, troubles, and failures of our ministry and express them to Him. Yet it seems to be a common confession of pastors and teachers when they are candid that their devotional prayer life leaves something to be desired. There does not seem to be a quiet time and place for prayer in the midst of the hustle and bustle of this world, amidst the ringing of the telephone and the clatter of the typewriter. We often talk about acquiring a living prayer and devotional life, but too often it remains only a good resolution. Yet by failing to pray and to study the Scriptures devotionally, we are forfeiting an opportunity to have a wonderful ministry. Luther once remarked that he was so busy, he had to take more time for prayer. We often act in an opposite way.

It is simply necessary that we take hold of the problem and seek to do something about finding time for prayer. The story is told of a toad that fell into a rut in the road and could not seem to hop out. He called to a passing toad to assist him. "If I help you," said the toad, "I may fall into the rut with you. Then there would simply be two of us who are trapped." So he hopped on. Later to his surprise he saw the trapped toad hopping down the road. "I thought you couldn't get out of that rut," he said. "I couldn't," said the toad, "but a big truck came along and I had to!" It is amazing what we can do when we are determined to do it. This applies also to an active life of prayer.

I am certainly no expert on this matter but will only say that I have benefited personally from using John Doberstein's *Minister's Prayer Book*. It is the best suggestion I can make to improve one's prayer life. For those who are not familiar with this book, I would like very briefly to describe its contents. There are four parts. The first part consists of a pattern of prayer for the days of the week including a confession, lessons on the ministry, and special intercessory prayers. Part two gives Scripture readings, hymns, Psalms, and collects for all the days of the year. The third part contains many prayers for different occasions and situations that confront a pastor. Part four is a large anthology of readings gleaned from many different sources. One will certainly not have to agree with all that is included in this prayer book to derive great benefit from its use. The confession for Saturday night has always been very meaningful to me. The pastor's prayer on this last night of the week before the services on the morrow is this:

Waken my heart, O Lord, my God; make my heart watchful to serve thee and alert to thy command.

Thou hast created us full of trouble; thou hast made us strangers in this world.

Trouble me with the smallness of my work.

Trouble me with the greatness of thy command.

Trouble me with my unholiness and my slowness to obey.

Trouble me with time running out and every lost hour.

Trouble me with my sins and the sins of all men.

Trouble me with the troubles of thy church which are the work of men.

Trouble me, and make me to watch continually for thy judgment.

Trouble me, O Lord, and let me keep my faith in the midst of my trouble.

Let me go forth desiring the coming of thy glory. Let me go forward; for thy glory shall be revealed.

I thank thee that my work ends and thy work begins.

Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief. Amen.

Before leaving this subject of prayer I should just like to say that we can rejoice in the fact that even if we fail to pray as we should, Jesus is making intercession for us as He did for Peter that our faith fail not. Our wonderful God watches after us.

God not only helps us in our ministry through the Word, worship, Sacrament, and privilege of prayer; He also helps us through other people. One of these other people who are of greatest blessing to a pastor or

teacher is his wife. God created a helpmeet and companion for Adam. And it is a blessing of the Lord and gift from Him to have a helpmeet and companion by one's side to share the burdens and joys of the ministry. Luther said of Katie, "When I look at all the women in the world, I find none of whom I could boast as I boast with joyful conscience of my own. This one God himself gave to me, and I know that He and all the angels are pleased when I hold fast to her in love and fidelity."

To say that a wife is a great blessing of the Lord does not mean that the work of the ministry places no special burdens on the marriage relationship. One pastor's wife said:

My husband expects a great deal of me because he is a minister. He expects me to listen to him, day or night, to entertain for him, to always "be there" when he needs reassuring, to shoulder 80 percent of the care of the house and children, in order to leave him completely free for his work... It may be true that he would expect this of me no matter what his work might be, but because he is around so much, I notice it more.¹⁶

A pastor dare not take his wife and family for granted. They need him as much as he needs them, and there must be a sharing of time and activities. There are times when a pastor must make a choice in favor of his family rather than his work in the church. Sometimes we should be too busy going on a picnic with our family to attend a meeting or make a visit. A happy wife and family has helped many a pastor to a more wonderful ministry.

God also blesses us with many wonderful helpers in our congregation. There is sometimes a tendency to think only of the inactive members and those who seem to be creating problems for the minister. We forget to give thanks for the many faithful people who support us with their help and prayers. A congregation will very often display much more patience with their pastor than he displays with them.

The Apostle Paul writes that one purpose of the ministry is "the equipment of the saints" (Ephesians 4:12). The pastor is to help people to become better equipped to serve. This is where his role as administrator is so important. Sometimes the pastor's work as an administrator is downgraded as being trivial and unimportant. We should not be ashamed to administrate. One job of an administrator is to get other people to work. Getting other people to do work in the church may sometimes be threatening to us. The other person might do a better job than we are able to do. Or people may find out that we aren't quite so indispensable as we think. Or perhaps the person who does the job will make such a mess of it that we have more problems than less. All of these reasons—plus others—might make us hesitate to turn over too much work to other people in our parish.

But isn't this the solution to many of our problems with lack of time? We need to let others help us. Figure out what takes time during the week. Then ask which of the tasks someone else could do. It is easier to train a group of men to go out and make visits than to make them all yourself. Just being well organized for the sake of organization is no virtue. But to be organized in order to accomplish a greater amount of work in the service of the Lord is certainly a task to be pursued. Letting others in the congregation share your burdens and your joys will make for a more wonderful ministry.

God also helps us through our fellow pastors. I am certain that all of us have had this experience. Through our conferences and circuit meetings, not only through the formal presentations but also through the informal recess chats, we have been encouraged and informed. We find out we aren't the only person with some particular problem; that it isn't only our congregation which has divorce cases; that there are other people who are discouraged about the work of the ministry

But what if we have a special problem, something that you would not want to bring up in a conference or even talk with a fellow pastor about? What if it is a family problem? The pastor does not really have a pastor to whom he can go. Recently I read of one attempt at a solution to this problem. Lutheran Family and Child Service of Washington has hired a full-time consultant to the clergy, a pastor with counseling credentials. For three years he'll be in this position testing whether this is the answer to the problem of the pastor's pastor.

¹⁶ William Douglas, *Ministers' Wives* (New York, Evanston and London: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 53.

During the first year of this program it became clear that one of the great needs is for parsonage couples to enrich their own marriages. He says parsonage couples need to communicate better with one another. Pastors and their wives have to find time to live as Christian married couples.¹⁷

In our Synod the visiting elder has at times been assigned the role of the pastor's pastor. For example in 1958 the Western Wisconsin District convention passed the following resolution as guidelines for the work of the visiting elder:

The visiting elder should 1. Call on each pastor in his circuit at least once every two to four years depending on area and size of circuit. 2. Be visited by a brother elder whom the District President is to appoint. 3. Make a biennial report of his visits (noting special problems, needs, etc.) to the District President on report forms provided by the District President. 4. Serve as the District President's representative at call meetings or conferences when so desired by the District President. 5. Counsel the pastor, his family, or the congregation in time of trouble and distress. 6. Provide pastors and congregations with available information on our synodical problems, activities, etc.¹⁸

Our Synod has also adopted guidelines for the visiting elders. These are found in the 1961 *Proceedings*, pp. 250–251. It is one thing to pass resolutions of this sort and another to carry them out.

The fact that we do pass resolutions which direct the visiting elder to call on the pastors of the circuit shows that we feel the need for some such program of counseling and encouragement. An effective program of this sort could make for a more wonderful ministry. Perhaps it is something that we should seek more faithfully and systematically to implement.

Besides our wife and family, the members of the congregation, and our fellow pastors, there is one other group of people who can help us in our ministry. I am thinking of the professionals in our community: doctor, lawyer, social worker etc. There are times when through referral or consultation we can do more to help one of our members than by seeking to help them ourselves. A pastor is a person who needs to know a little bit about a lot of things. But we are certainly not experts in many areas affecting the lives of our people. Directing our people to competent professions for help is a service we can render and will allow us more time to do those things so essential in our ministry.

In addition to the help of the Lord and the help of other people in doing the work of the ministry, we can perhaps also move in the direction of a wonderful ministry by a few other suggestions. First there is the matter of good physical condition. A healthy body makes a sound mind. It appears to me that a pastor is pursuing a wise course by having a yearly physical examination and then following the directions of his doctor. A person who does not feel well physically is not likely to experience as much joy in the ministry as when his body is in good condition.

Good physical health is nurtured through proper rest, relaxation, and nourishment. Even the Lord Jesus found the need to get off by himself for some rest. And he told his disciples after the missionary journey, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while" (Mark 6:31). The pastor who brags that he has not taken a day off for six months or had a vacation in five years is not necessarily serving the Lord more faithfully than someone who makes a point of taking time for relaxation and recreation. Of course we will not have a wonderful ministry if the pursuit of relaxation and recreation is the main order of business. The same might be said for taking a part-time job. The pastor who is considering taking part-time employment would be advised to seek the counsel of the members of his congregation and his brethren in the ministry before taking such a step.

Another suggestion that might lead to a more wonderful ministry is the use of music. You know how highly Luther valued music. He regarded music as a God-given means of arousing gladness. When the devil

¹⁷ *Lutheran Witness Reporter*, April 20, 1969.

¹⁸ Western Wisconsin District, *Proceedings*, 1958, pp. 14, 45.

makes you sad, say, “Away with you, devil. I must now sing and play to my Lord Christ.” “Music is the best cordial to a person in sadness,” he wrote; “it soothes, quickens, and refreshes the heart.” And again, “Satan is a great enemy of music. It is a good antidote against temptation and evil thoughts.”¹⁹ A person who can sit down at the piano and play some hymns has a way of overcoming the burdens of the ministry.

As pastors and teachers we should also be constantly seeking to improve ourselves through reading and study. Perhaps it will be possible for some of us to take select courses of study at our seminary, a college, or a university that would be beneficial in our work. Of course here again we must seek to do that which will truly add to our ministry and not simply give us personal satisfaction. I think that we can especially benefit by study in the area of pastoral counseling and dealing with the many modern problems that constantly confront us. This kind of study is of course secondary to the study of the Word of God and the theology of our Lutheran Church mentioned earlier. It does us no good to understand man if we do not have a message to proclaim.

Along with positive suggestions for a more wonderful ministry, it might be well to throw in a few negatives. A pastor and teacher should certainly avoid discussing the troubles in the congregation with everyone and anyone. There may be certain individuals within the church in whom you have confidence with whom you might share some of the burdens of your ministry. But one must beware of the dangers here. We should certainly also seek to avoid activities that give offense. A pastor or teacher who is going through a lot of trouble might seek to relieve his tensions with alcohol. If one finds that alcohol is the best solution to the burdens of the ministry, then he is advised to counsel with his brethren at once. For alcohol does not solve any real problems.

Disraeli once said, “Nobody should ever look anxious except those who have no anxiety.” And Luther said, “No temptation is the worst temptation.” To have temptations, to have anxieties, to have a feeling of inadequacy, to be burdened—none of these need necessarily destroy the wonderful ministry a wonderful God has given to us. For not only has God given us a ministry; He has also given us the means to make ours a truly wonderful ministry. That means is above all the sustaining power of His Word and sacraments. Along with this He gives us the privilege of prayer, the help of many people, and other blessings of the creation. May we wisely use what God has given to us that ours might be a truly wonderful ministry.

¹⁹ John McNeill, *A History of the Cure of Souls* (New York, Evanston and London: Harper Torchbook, 1965), p. 174.