

## A Word for Sheepdogs

“TEND YOURSELVES AND THE FLOCK in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.” (Acts 20:28) In this his farewell charge to the pastors in Ephesus, St. Paul puts his finger on the mystic wonder of the holy office of the public ministry. To tenderly watch over the sheep and lambs that God has purchased with His own blood is wonder enough, but to be placed into that relationship of responsibility by the Holy Spirit Himself is even more humbling.

The frustrating reality is that the Holy Spirit works through fallible human beings to accomplish His divine will. When it comes time to fill a pastoral vacancy, church leaders certify eligibility of candidates for that office, then lend their counsel and perspective on where those candidates should be placed. Meanwhile congregations voice their preferences and give their consent to the incumbent candidate. Lastly the pastor is placed into office with the blessing of fellow clergy in a rite of ordination and/or installation.

The whole thing is a bit overwhelming, especially for any pastor who receives a call to serve in a particular location. How is he to determine the will of the Holy Spirit when he receives a call to serve in another locale? Humanly speaking there are many factors to consider.

Mark Barz provides a very helpful overview of these human factors that play into decisions in matters of the call. He begins with a solid theological foundation on the doctrine of church and ministry, then systematically explores both the benefits and the limitations of a long pastorate, weaving his own experience together with input and perspective from laity and other pastors. In the process he provides more than enough reason for all of us who serve in this holy office to exult that God in His inexhaustible mercy has given to sinful men like us the grace to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ.

- *Dr. H. L. Senkbeil*



# The Long-Term Pastorate: Blessings and Burdens with Implications for the Care of Souls

*Pastor Mark D. Barz*

*"Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood." Acts 20:28*

*"Blessed are the presbyters who have gone before in the way, who came to a fruitful and perfect end; for they need have no fear lest anyone depose them from their assigned place." Clement of Rome*

## **My Two Calls**

It was late April of 1982. Holding our doubly-newborn daughter, we were excited and expectant in a very different way. It was "Call Day" at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. With 143 of my classmates, I was to learn where I would serve as a new pastor of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

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Thanks to a surname near the front of the alphabet, I was the fourth one standing in line in ancient Wyneken Chapel. Then I heard, “Mark David Barz. Michigan District. Assistant Pastor. Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Saginaw, Michigan.”

In those fleeting seconds I thought: “*Michigan* – I kind of grew up there. *Assistant* – well, that’s not what I thought I wanted, but I’ll only have to preach twice a month. *Bethlehem* – I like the sound of that; it’s a bit different. *Saginaw* – wait, I think I’ve been there, to that city, to that congregation, when I was in college!”

I graduated, we packed, we moved, and on Sunday, July 18, 1982, I was ordained into the Office of the Holy Ministry and installed as assistant pastor of Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church. And I thought I might be there a fair amount of time.

No professor that I recall ever advised us on how long a pastor should stay in his assigned Call. Sanctified common sense told me that I would need and want to stay in this first Call for a reasonable amount of time – to learn to know God’s people and to learn what being a pastor really meant. But, then ...

On a Sunday evening in late November of 1986 I was at a rehearsal for Bethlehem’s still-new Boar’s Head Festival. And I received a phone call about a second Call.

“Mark? This is Henry Biar from San Antonio, the circuit counselor and vacancy pastor at Crown of Life Lutheran Church. The congregation has just voted to call you as its new pastor. I’ll be praying for you as you consider this Call from the Lord of the Church.”

San Antonio? The only two things I knew about San Antonio were that the Alamo was there (it still is!) and that there must be an Army base in that city (I’ve learned that it’s actually a “post”).

And I was aware of that only because Colonel Sherman Potter had once greeted a fellow doctor on M\*A\*S\*H by saying, “I haven’t seen you since we trained together back in San Antone!”

Now I had two Calls. The first was to stay and continue to serve our Lord and His people at Bethlehem. Though it wasn’t a perfect place, there was much joy and there were many challenges in this ministry. I don’t think I was tempted – at that time – to look and long for *my own parish*. That would probably happen, I thought, at some point in the future. But I had not requested that my name be on any Call Lists, nor did I know that my name was on the Call List for Crown of Life.

Saginaw – simple, solid, stolid, blue-collar as it was – had become our home. My wife and our then three children were cared for as part of a church family, a new experience for us. Leaving Bethlehem would mean leaving what we knew for what we didn’t know.

After a visit to San Antonio, many conversations with Connie, with parents and siblings, with pastors and with members and leaders of both congregations, and prayer alone and with others, the wrestling ended when I decided to say “yes” to the new Call.

On a cold January evening, we finished loading our chocolate-brown Dodge Caravan, painted “G.T.T.”<sup>1</sup> on its side and, in the middle of a snowstorm, began the long drive south by southwest to a new home and a new ministry.

Not to belabor the point, but we were leaving the known for the unknown. You see, I thought St. Louis was pretty far south; I had no idea how far you must drive once you cross the Red River to get “deep in the heart of Texas”! We left a long-established congregation of 2,000+ baptized members and multiple staff members; I was to be the pastor of a

<sup>1</sup> G.T.T. means “Gone To Texas.” According to folklore, it was painted on cabin doors in the Eastern United States when early settlers moved to that distant land which was not yet a republic or a state. (We didn’t really paint this on our van back in 1987; I hadn’t yet learned this tidbit of Americana/Texicana.)

still-in-infancy mission congregation of about 200 members.

And, to be truthful, I said to myself (but not often and never publicly), “We’ll be here for seven or eight years, then we’ll be back in the Midwest, back where our roots and our families are.” Little did I know that a word my three brothers invented for some now-forgotten reason (it’s spelled “k-i-n-a-r-d-l-e-e”) would become a key word for me: “I kinardlee believe I’ve been in one parish, in the same parish, for over 29 years!”

This paper is meant to offer one pastor’s perspectives on the long-term pastorate. There are certainly blessings; there are certainly burdens. There have been and there continue to be wonderful surprises and dismaying struggles.

My prayer is that each pastor or pastor’s wife or future pastor layperson who reads this will gain both understanding and appreciation for those men who remain in a Call as faithful servants of Christ and of His saints for a number of years, and that congregations served by pastors for 20 or 25 years or more will also discover the potential blessings and burdens they share.

Finally, as a learning participant in DOXOLOGY and as a member of the DOXOLOGY Collegium, I hope to offer some insights as to how the “care of souls” is different in and because of a long-term pastorate.

### The Call: Lutheran Perspectives

Christ Jesus calls the first disciples. And our Lord also calls these followers to be apostles, sent out by Him for His Kingdom’s care and growth.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Church<sup>2</sup> in Rome — and to the Church of all time:

How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of

whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? [Rom. 10:14-15a]

To take it from the end to the beginning (which is really the end, the telos), it works this way: the Church sends men to preach so that people hear the Good News of Jesus the Christ and, by the Holy Spirit’s power, believe in the crucified and risen One and so call on the name of the Lord for eternal salvation.

In each of his thirteen epistles, Paul refers in some way to the calling and the service of ministers, pastors, teachers, elders, and/or overseers.<sup>3</sup>

While, in many settings, Paul and his “assistants” took the initiative in choosing those who would carry on the pastoral ministry, the church in a certain place had the role of testifying to the character of those selected. Indeed, the whole church — missionaries and apostles, pastors and people — was involved and included in the designating of those who would be ministers of the Word.<sup>4</sup>

The Church selects. The Church calls. The Church sends. And these selected, called, and sent pastors preach and teach and care for souls.

Our Lutheran Confessions make strong assertions about the necessity of pastors in the Church, the visible Body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As many readers already know (and subscribe), The Augsburg Confession states:

So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. [Article V:1]<sup>5</sup>

Concerning church order they teach that no one should teach publically in the church or administer the Sac-

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<sup>2</sup> I have chosen to capitalize “Church” when in my text — but not in the quotations of Scripture or from other sources.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, the “Pastoral Epistles” are clear evidence of this, but consider also that Paul, in his first-person greetings, calls himself an “apostle” in all but Philippians, I & II Thessalonians, and Philemon. Even more, the Apostle uses autobio-

graphical details (“When I came to Troas to preach the Gospel...” [2 Cor. 2:12] and “...though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the Gospel of God...” [1 Thess. 2:2]), somewhat subtle asides (“One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches” [Gal. 6:6]), and clear description of the Lord’s design for His Church (“And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ ...” [Eph. 4:11,12]) to speak of the pastoral office. While this is certainly worthy of greater treatment, I’ll leave that to other writers!

<sup>4</sup> The Theology and Practice of the Divine Call, CTCR, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Excerpts from the *Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* are from the Kolb-Wengert edition, Fortress Press: Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2000. The Augsburg Confession is quoted from the translation out of Latin.

raments unless properly called.  
[Article XIV]

In addition, The Apology of the Augsburg Confession affirms:

For the church has the mandate to appoint ministers, which ought to please us greatly because we know that God approves this ministry and is present in it. [Article XIII:12]

Furthermore, The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope asserts:

... wherever the Church exists, the right to administer the Gospel also exists. Wherefore it is necessary for the Church to retain the right of calling, electing, and ordaining ministers. [69]

More recent writings in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (often hereafter, the LCMS) include *The Theology and Practice of the Divine Call*. This document, a Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, states:

A man may aspire to the pastoral office and prepare himself with a view to presenting himself as ready for service in that office, but he cannot place himself into the office. The office of preaching the Gospel belongs to Christ. One may not usurp what is only Christ's to give. Rather, God identifies and selects an individual through the church for a particular location. This too has remained a *sine qua non* for the theology of the call in the history of our church. One can see this in chapters 1, 6, and 14 of Acts.<sup>6</sup>

Here is another expression of the doctrines of the Pastoral Office and of the Divine Call as found in an earlier Report of the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations:

On the basis of the Scriptural evidence and corroborating statements

of the Lutheran Confessions, the office of the public ministry, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments in the church, is divinely mandated. It may exist in various forms, that is, the "flocks" to which a man ministers may have various forms, and the office may be designated by a number of names, but it remains an office mandated by God for the good of the church. It is not enough to say that God commands that the Gospel be preached and that the sacraments be administered. God has ordained a specific office. The duty of those who hold the office by God's call through the prayerful summons ("call") of the church is to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments in the church and to supervise the flock committed to their care.<sup>7</sup>

Martin Luther, in his 1533 tract, *The Private Mass and the Consecration of Priests*, clarifies the nature of "Church" (which he calls an "abomination" under the papacy). He then states one of the reasons for Christ's design of the Church and the pastoral office. The Church exists because of and remains for "calling or ordaining the pastoral office, the preaching office, or the care of souls." The Office cannot be defined with a single purpose; *seelsorge* is part of its definition and purpose.<sup>8</sup>

### The Called One

What is a newly-called man asked? And what does the congregation in which he is ordained and/or installed hear him reply? These questions are asked and answered in the current Rite of Ordination<sup>9</sup> of the LCMS:

Will you faithfully instruct both young and old in the chief articles of the Christian doctrine, will you forgive the sins of those who repent, and will you promise never to divulge the sins confessed to you?

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<sup>6</sup> The Divine Call, p. 32.

<sup>7</sup> The Divine Call, p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> From "Luther on the Calling of Ministri Ecclesiae" by Lee Maxwell, in *Shepherd the Church: Essays in Pastoral Theology Honoring Bishop Roger D. Pittelko*, 2002, p. 168.

<sup>9</sup> *Lutheran Service Book: Agenda*, 2007, p. 166. Emphasis is mine.

*Will you minister faithfully to the sick and dying, and will you demonstrate to the Church a constant and ready ministry centered in the Gospel? Will you admonish and encourage the people to a lively confidence in Christ and in holy living?*

**Yes, I will, with the help of God.**

Finally, will you honor and adorn the Office of the Holy Ministry with a holy life? Will you be diligent in the study of Holy Scripture and the Confessions? And will you be constant in prayer for those under your pastoral care?

**I will, the Lord helping me through the power and grace of His Holy Spirit.**

This is important theology, and it is theology made tangible. Above all, it is theology for the sake of the Gospel. Dean Lueking anchored his affirmation of the Divine Call in the visible presence of the pastor. He wrote, “[There is ... ] the awesome calling to stand before God in their behalf and to stand before people on His behalf.”<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, there is no ministry unless there are pastors. Unless someone is present in-the-flesh, the Word and Sacraments are not given out. For when the pastors of the Church stand in the place of Christ, then the Lord is preaching and baptizing and forgiving and serving the Supper.

### How Long? The Rule of Benedict

How long do pastors stay? How long should pastors stay? How many pastors stay in a parish five years? How many pastors stay 25 years or more in the same parish? And do some pastors stay too long?

The ‘Rule of Benedict’ deserves pon-

dering. Benedict of Nursia lived circa A.D. 480 to A.D. 547. As a relatively young man, he left Rome to live a life of labor and reflection in Enfide (Italy). One writer comments that he chose to live with “a company of virtuous men.”<sup>11</sup> At a later point, he became abbot of a monastery at Monte Cassino.

Gregory the Great is the first to refer to a ‘Rule’ written by Benedict; Gregory does so in his *Second Book of Dialogues*. These prescriptions would strongly influence the early medieval monastic communities across Europe.

Rule 58 states: “When he is to be received, he comes before the whole community ... and promises stability.”

Rule 60 states: “Any clerics who wish [may] join the community ... but only if they, too, promise to keep the rule and observe stability.”

The concept of stability was not new to Benedict. *Stabilitas loci* was a well-established tradition of organization and leadership during the peak of Roman culture. However, by Benedict’s time, the family leader acted more like a dictator, not as a concerned and compassionate father. Institutional and political commitment no longer existed. To Benedict, the virtues of *stabilitas loci* seemed completely lost.

Abbot Benedict saw that the traditional family model provided a clear organizational commitment within an uncertain and fragmented world. Benedict’s ‘Rule’ reestablished stability as a pillar of strength in the newly-legal Christian Church.<sup>12</sup>

But what is the state of the modern, western Church regarding *stabilitas loci*? Which of the following scenarios is more likely or unlikely?

A certain congregation in the Texas District, which — at its 125th anniversary — presented a program that listed the 30

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<sup>10</sup> *The Last Long Pastorate: A Journey of Grace*, F. Dean Lueking, p. 195.

<sup>11</sup> “St. Benedict of Nursia,” Catholic Encyclopedia website: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02467b.htm>

<sup>12</sup> “St. Benedict and His Rules,” a blog post on The Benedictines: An Introduction – [www.osb.com](http://www.osb.com).

different pastors called by that parish over its history?<sup>13</sup> Or the ministry story of Alfred Doerffler, called from the seminary to plant a new congregation on the west side of St. Louis, who ended up serving as the sole pastor of Pilgrim Lutheran Church from 1907 to 1957? This was his comment upon his retirement at the age of 73: "That was the way I wanted it. When I dedicated the church that day, I felt that here was where I would stay."<sup>14</sup>

### Observations from Across the Broader Church

It must be stated that the data are limited. Most of what I have observed or discovered is anecdotal. The "conventional wisdom"<sup>15</sup> frequently noted is that many pastors across many denominations stay in a parish a maximum of three years.

Various contacts and conversations in the past year have led me to the conclusion that no definitive research on this has been carried out or published in the LCMS.<sup>16</sup>

Church sociologist and researcher George Barna's research of more than 1,000 senior pastors has found that the average tenure has dropped to about four years from seven.<sup>17</sup> According to Jerry Scruggs, with forced terminations on the increase, the median tenure for Southern Baptist Convention pastors is barely three years.<sup>18</sup>

Why is it difficult to stay for even this length of time, much less for a longer term? Lynn Anderson, a Church of Christ pastor who served more than sixteen years in the same church, offers this scenario:

The first two years you can do nothing wrong. The second two years you can do nothing right. The fifth and sixth years of a ministry, either you leave or the people who think you can do nothing right leave. Or you change, or they change, or you

both change. Productive ministry emerges somewhere in the seventh year or beyond.<sup>19</sup>

Again, an observation by George Barna:

The smaller the church, the more likely the pastor is to spend a few years in that pulpit. Perhaps this is one of the ramifications of the numbers-crazed, upwardly-mobile mentality that plagues the pastorate. Failing to accomplish the numerical growth with which the profession is enamored, pastors move on to other congregations in hopes of finding a setting more responsive to their efforts. The revolving door syndrome begs the question of whether God really calls most pastors to spend only a few years in each church before moving to new (and, presumably, greener) pastures.<sup>20</sup>

My most significant models — though I'm sure every pastor has had many models from whom he learned how (and how not!) to be pastor — have been my father and my father-in-law. Their varied settings and experiences in parish ministry were different in numerous respects. But the most significant difference may have been in their different tenures.<sup>21</sup>

And then there are the times when a pastor stays too long. Here's an anecdotal (and likely apocryphal) story that has been making the rounds for many years. It was shared by Lueking in the introduction of *The Last Long Pastorate*:

My favorite story about long pastorates is about a crusty preacher who had tested a long-suffering congregation for years with his gruff manner in and out of the pulpit. One Sunday he startled the congregation by making an altogether unexpected announcement. After the Benediction, he told the people to take their seats again to hear what he had to say. Striking his customary pose, hands on hips, brows knit in a

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<sup>13</sup> In striving to follow the Eighth Commandment, I will not name this congregation. But this is what we learned at the anniversary event: in the succession of a multitude of pastors in the early history of this parish, the ninth man finally stayed four years! And the fifteenth pastor trumped that by serving for six-and-a-half-years. I will also note that in the more recent past, the tenure of called pastors has been significantly longer than in the earliest years.

<sup>14</sup> St. Louis Post-Dispatch, October 22, 1957.

<sup>15</sup> A series of books was co-published by Christianity Today and Word Books in the 1980s. They were presented as *The Leadership Library*. At the time, this focus on dealing with specific problems and being offered particular strategies appealed to me. (That this is no longer true is a much more involved story, and not the issue I'm addressing in this paper.) But here's something I observed: *When It's Time to Move: A Guide to Changing Churches* (1985) was the fourth book in the series. (The second half of the title obviously betrays the

"evangelical" mindset.) Remarkably, it took until the fourteenth book in this library to speak to long(er) term pastors and pastorates with the publication of *Secrets of Staying Power: Overcoming Discouragements of Ministry* (1988).

<sup>16</sup> However, I did discover — relatively late in my research — some work by Allen Nauss. One article seems to be of particular relevance: "The Relation of Pastoral Mobility to Effectiveness" (Review of Religious Research, Vol. 15, No. 2 [Winter 1974]). This statement was in the opening paragraph: "A study by Nauss and Coiner (in 1971) indicated that Lutheran pastors who stay less than three and a half years in their first placement after seminary graduation provide less value to their parishioners than those who remain for at least the three and a half year period." In addition, "The Springfielder" (predecessor of the "Concordia Theological Quarterly") of January 1974, also published this article by Nauss: "The Effective Minister: Scriptural Criteria, Individual Observation, and Practical Research."

frown, he fairly bellowed the news: "The Lord Jesus who brought me here thirty-four years ago is the same Lord Jesus who is calling me to another parish. I'm leaving!" He was hardly out of the chancel before the people arose in spontaneous exuberance to sing, "What A Friend We Have in Jesus."<sup>22</sup>

### Short Time or Long-Term?

But why should a pastor stay a short time? And what could and should encourage a pastor — and a congregation — toward a long-term ministry? Researchers from the now-defunct Alban Institute share this insight: "Virtually all the disadvantages of the long-term pastorate can be surmounted, yet few of the advantages are available to clergy who remain in a congregation for only a short period of time."<sup>23</sup>

Though I've mentioned it already, there is — to my knowledge — little or no research concerning the length of pastorates in various Lutheran church bodies in America, much less in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. So what is the history of moving from one Call to another in the past 150 years of Lutheranism in the United States?

G.H. Gerberding, an American Lutheran theologian and writer in the early 20th century, offered: "The pastor is in his present field of labor because he has been rightly called, and because God has placed him there ... Whatever the hardships, the burdens, the privations or sufferings may be, let him never forget his call and ordination."<sup>24</sup>

He also writes that the discouraged pastor

... begins to think that his is the hardest and most ungrateful of all fields. He fears that his people have sinned away their day of grace, and [that] ... he can do no more good. He thinks of other pastorates. Dis-

tance lends enchantment to the view. He hears of vacancies. If only he might get a call. As Van Oosterzee expresses it, 'Unhappy the teacher who weekly enters the pulpit, but daily, in spirit, ascends the balcony of the tower to watch whether he cannot see something better coming ...'<sup>25</sup>

Gerberding continues to state the argument of the discouraged pastor, and to make his own argument in response:

But has he no right to want to get away? Strictly speaking, no. Let him only have the conviction that he is where his Lord has placed him, that his own blunders and sins are not responsible [for his discouragement], and then will he gladly abide and labor ... As Paul loved those fickle, wayward, and vexing Corinthians, so does the ideal pastor love a weak, wayward, and vexatious flock, if only assured that it has been committed to him by God.<sup>26</sup>

### My and Others' Assumptions

As noted in my opening paragraphs, I was quite convinced that I would stay in Texas for at least five years, perhaps for as many as seven or eight. Then I would receive and accept a Call from a congregation somewhere in the Midwest, the heartland of the LCMS, and serve there.

Why? This is where my roots were. No one would expect me to say "Howdy!" instead of "The Lord be with you" or to include "The Lord bless ya'll!"<sup>27</sup> in the Benediction or to wear cowboy boots up in Iowa (my parents' birth state) or Minnesota (my birth state) or Michigan (my high school and college state).

LCMS pastors now in their 80s or 90s — and my father and my father-in-law (referred to previously) would be part of this cohort — might say something like this: "When we graduated from the seminary, it was understood that a pas-

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<sup>17</sup> Barna here refers to another paper or study with no reference or page number.

<sup>18</sup> Jerry Scruggs in "The Flexible Leader," in *Search*, Winter 1991, p. 30 [both notes from "The Long-term Pastorate," Paul Beasley-Murray, *Ministry Today* 10, June 1997].

<sup>19</sup> *Secrets of Staying Power: Overcoming the Discouragements of Ministry*, Kevin A. Miller, pp. 136-137.

<sup>20</sup> *Today's Pastors*, Regal Books, Ventura, California, 1993. Page unknown.

<sup>21</sup> See Appendix A for a review — from my perspective — of each man's pastoral ministry.

<sup>22</sup> *The Last Long Pastorate*, Lueking, p. vii.

<sup>23</sup> *New Visions for the Long Pastorate*, Oswald & Hinard & Hobgood & Lloyd. The Alban Institute, 1983, p. 40.

<sup>24</sup> *The Lutheran Pastor*, G.H. Gerberding, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1915, p. 121.

<sup>25</sup> Gerberding, p. 126, quoting Van Oosterzee's *Practical Theology*, p. 548.

<sup>26</sup> Gerberding, p. 127.

<sup>27</sup> I'll leave the argument to the native-Texas linguists as to whether the proper plural is "All-Y'all!"

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tor would stay in his first Call for at least two years, and would then accept a new Call — perhaps the first one received after his ‘assigned’ Call.” This might happen two or three times in the earlier years of ministry: receiving, pondering, accepting, and moving to a new parish. It was, as I have heard from some, almost expected — if not encouraged — to follow this pattern.

As mentioned earlier, while I don’t recall any specific instruction or advice about staying in our first Calls when I was at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, I do remember hints that, unless there were issues that couldn’t be resolved, it would be good to stay for at least five years in the place where you were beginning pastoral ministry.

My involvement with PALS<sup>28</sup> from 2005 to 2015 allowed my wife and me to hear from almost every first-Call man (about forty of them in that time) across South Texas that he had every expectation of a long-term — if not a life-long — pastorate in the congregation to which he was assigned by “the Church’s usual practice.”

Some of these new pastors are able to quote C.F.W. Walther’s comment verbatim: “When a place has been assigned to a Lutheran candidate of theology ... that place ought to be to him the dearest, most beautiful, and most precious spot on earth. ... to him it should be a miniature paradise.”<sup>29</sup>

At one point, in my early years of ministry, this attitude would have both surprised and puzzled me. Now — after a first shorter-term (was it too short?) pastorate and while still in a long-term pastorate — it both heartens and encourages me to listen to these newly called and ordained servants of the Word.

I’ll offer here some additional commentary from Walther’s *Theology and Practice of the Divine Call*. This is from a section dealing with *The Local Pastor*

(*Pastor ‘Locī’*):

The normal practice within the history of Lutheranism has been to treat the call of the local pastor (*pastor loci*) as open-ended. Certainly this has also been the regular practice throughout the history of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. There have been good and solid reasons for regarding the calls of parish pastors as open-ended or of unspecified duration. ... an open-ended call serves best, and this for three reasons.

First, the ‘divine call’ of a pastor is usually spoken of in a way that emphasizes the divine institution and work of the pastoral office. Any discussion of pre-determined time limitations for a call has been tempered by the recognition that the man whom the congregation calls is God’s man in that particular location summoned to carry out God’s work.<sup>30</sup>

Certainly, the “divine institution” of the pastoral office must trump any cultural practice, any human inclination and, yes, any synod’s polity and practice.

My personal experience is seconded by the Alban Institute study of long-term pastors and pastorates undertaken in the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>31</sup> Here is one observation of the researchers: “We were surprised and impressed early in the study that the majority of the participants were in what appeared to be healthy long pastorates. Thus, the potential and promise of long pastorates surfaced immediately.”<sup>32</sup>

Eugene Peterson, in his inimitable way, describes what is happening — or, to be more precise, what he hopes to happen — at the ordination of a new pastor. Note that this is not directly about Benedict’s vow of stability, but the promise demanded (you may decide if that is the correct verb) by this congrega-

<sup>28</sup> PALS is Post-Seminary Applied Learning & Support — a program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod for first Call pastors and their wives, particularly for those who are graduates of residential theological education (i.e. one of the two LCMS seminaries). The expectation and hope is that they remain in PALS for the first three years of parish ministry. This service within and to the LCMS was shared with my wife, Connie.

<sup>29</sup> The entire quotation, the first portion of Walther’s Twentieth Evening Lecture, reads: “When a place has been assigned to a Lutheran candidate of theology where he is to discharge the office of a Lutheran minister, that place ought to be to him the dearest, most beautiful, and most precious spot on earth. He should be unwilling to exchange it for a kingdom. Whether it is in a metropolis or in a small town, on a bleak prairie or in a clearing in the forest, in a flourishing settlement or in a desert, to him it should be a miniature paradise.” *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel: Thirty-Nine*

*Evening Lectures by Dr. C.F.W. Walther*, reproduced from the German Edition of 1897, W.H.T. Dau, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1928, p. 207

<sup>30</sup> *Theology and Practice of the Divine Call*, C.F.W. Walther, pp. 38-39. The reader is encouraged to examine this source to discover Walther’s second and third reasons!

<sup>31</sup> *New Visions for the Long Pastorate* seems to be the only published study of its kind in the Protestant, Evangelical, Roman Catholic, or Orthodox (in the west) spheres.

<sup>32</sup> *New Visions*, p. 28.

tion is meant to be lived out over the many years (this is clearly assumed by Peterson) of that man's ministry among them.

... we are going to ordain you to this ministry and we want your vow that you will stick to it. This is not a temporary job assignment but a way of life that we need lived out in our community. We know that you are launched on the same difficult belief venture in the same dangerous world as we are. We know that your emotions are as fickle as ours, and that your mind can play the same tricks on you as ours. That is why we are going to *ordain* you and why we are going to exact a vow from you. We know that there are going to be days and months, maybe even years, when we won't feel like we are believing anything and won't want to hear it from you. And we know that there will be days and weeks and maybe even years when you won't feel like saying it. It doesn't matter. Do it. You are ordained to this ministry, vowed to it. There may be times when we come to you as a committee or delegation and demand that you tell us something else than what we are telling you now. Promise right now that you won't give in to what we demand of you. You are not the minister of our changing desires, or our time-conditioned understanding of our needs, or our secularized hopes for something better. With these vows of ordination we are lashing you fast to the mast of Word and sacrament so that you will be unable to respond to the siren voices ...<sup>33</sup>

Peterson concludes by saying, "That, or something very much like that, is what I understand the church to say to the people whom it ordains to be its pastors."<sup>34</sup>

However, this fervent hope — some would call it "idealism" — seems to be far

from reality.

Much of what I have discovered about long-term pastorates is anecdotal; it is the sharing of personal experiences and observations. For example, a pastor-friend e-mailed me a link that, first, posed the question: "How long should a pastor stay in his call?" and then included a string of comments and responses.

While one asserted: "I think seven to ten years is the longest they should stay ..." another responded: "I think it's up to God to let a pastor know when it's time for him to move on to a new call. I think it's the worst kind of hubris to think that we ... can make any sort of once-size-fits-all blanket statement about how long any call should be."

The debate raged on!

One asked: "Why would a pastorate longer than ten years be detrimental or undesirable?" Yet, another affirmed: "... We hear more often of the 'good' long-term pastorates than of those which go strange or leave debris."

Then someone else offered:

I have seen long-term pastorates — 20+ years — turn into 'reigns,' where the pastor becomes king and his style gets to be seen as 'the way.' I have seen such pastors virtually 'lock down' a congregation in order to protect and preserve 'their way.' This especially happens as they approach retirement..." He also commented, "... in a very long-term pastorate the congregation might see only one style of church leadership ... This can make it difficult for the next pastor ...

However, by way of contrast, one wrote this illuminating and encouraging comment, applicable to both short-term and long-term pastors:

*"This is not a temporary job assignment but a way of life that we need lived out in our community."*

<sup>33</sup> *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*, Eugene Peterson, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987, pp. 17-18. The words in italics are from the original.

<sup>34</sup> *Working the Angles*, p. 18.

*I wish that I could  
boast of keeping  
my vow of  
stability, but I  
cannot. Three  
times I broke it.  
Three times in the  
past twenty-nine  
years I went to the  
travel agent in  
Joppa and  
purchased a ticket  
for Tarshish.*

... when I was going through a period of grave uncertainty about continuing as a Lutheran pastor, several of my parishioners laid this argument on me. 'You do not have the authority to abandon your call.' That was profoundly helpful. If a congregation does not rightfully and with cause remove a man from the office, or if God does not call the man to serve at another place, by what authority does a pastor (or a congregation) determine that a pastor's 'time' is up?

Finally, a poster added this humorous story:

I've been told numerous and possibly apocryphal stories of some (usually) 19th-/early 20th-century pastors who took every call that came their way. Some supposedly lasted a Sunday or two at their new parishes, until the stagecoach or railroad mail delivery caught up with them from the last parish!<sup>35</sup>

#### **What Happened to Me?**

So, how did I end up staying in the same congregation for more than 29 years?

Perhaps this is the more important question: what *is* happening to me and to my long-term pastorate peers? Because I'm *not* the only one.

Lueking shares the unexpectedness of his many years at Grace Lutheran of River Forest, Ill., which was his first and only Call. He writes:

The joy of Ordination Sunday was no fluke. I would have to meet tests, to be sure, but there was solid ground beneath me that happy August 15 as I began what I thought would be my two-year stint in the procession of Pastor Geiseman's assistants. As it turned out, I was off by forty-two years.<sup>36</sup>

Peterson may be seen by many as the

quintessential model of a long-term parish pastor. However, this man, too, had times and seasons when he wanted to be "untied from the mast." Though he served a single parish in suburban Baltimore for almost 29 years, here is what he writes as honest confession:

I wish that I could boast of keeping my vow of stability, but I cannot. Three times I broke it. Three times in the past twenty-nine years I went to the travel agent in Joppa and purchased a ticket for Tarshish. Each time I had come to a place where I didn't think I could last another week. I was bored. I was depressed. There was no challenge left. There was no stimulus to do my best. The people did not bring out the best in me. The things that I was gifted in were not recognized or valued. Spiritually, I felt that I was in a bog — this suburban culture was a spongy, soggy wasteland. No firm ideas. No passionately held convictions. No sacrificial commitments. Preaching to these people was like talking to my dog — they responded to my voice with gratitude, they nuzzled me, they followed me, they showed me affection. But the *content* of my words meant little.

... So I decided to leave for Tarshish. ... I lined up for the ship to dock in Joppa and take me to Tarshish. I wasn't denying my calling to be a pastor, but I respectfully asserted my right to determine the locale.

... I did that three times. Three times I broke my vow of stability. Each time, after making numerous inquiries and posting urgent letters and getting no response, I gave up and went back to the work to which I had already been assigned, to Nineveh. I never did get to Tarshish, but I can take no credit. ... There was nothing left to do but go back to my place.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Taken from an online forum (2013) on the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau website.

<sup>36</sup> *The Last Long Pastorate*, Lueking, p. 15.

<sup>37</sup> *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness*, Eugene Peterson, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992, pp. 26-28. The single italicized word is in the original.

### But I'm Not the Only Long-Term Pastor

I'm not the only long-term pastor. In fact, this breed may not be as rare as I and many others seem to assume. My story is only my story. It is unique to me, but is it unique to the Church-at-large? How much of my experience, my discoveries, my struggles might be held in common with other men who have served a significant time in the same parish?

In order to test my thoughts about the burdens and the blessings of a long-term pastorate, I decided to listen to others who are presently serving or have served for 22 to 38 years in the same congregation. Four of these pastors are still active in the congregations of their first Calls. (Appendix B is the complete list.)

I attempted to provide a list of questions before our phone conversation (Appendix C). Some chose to prepare quite specific responses to address the areas about which I was curious. Others explored the topic with me, asking me questions even as I questioned them about their experiences.

I expected certain similarities. I also expected distinct differences. However, I was pleasantly surprised that ten journeys had as many commonalities as they did. This discovery was both comforting and encouraging. The expressed benefits were similar, if not almost identical. The expressed burdens showed a little more diversity.

Here are a variety of observations from these conversations:

While some were more inclined (already at graduation from seminary) toward being a long-term pastor, not a single one of these men expected to be in one place for the years that he has served. In different ways, each said, in effect: "It wasn't my plan or my intention. It just happened."

At the same time, not a single pastor expressed regret that he has been (or was) in the same parish for the length of years that he has been. Once more, each man said in these or similar words: "... I'm thankful that this is what happened by God's working, God's doing."

There are more common affirmations:

To a man, each one is convinced that with a long-term pastorate come relationships that are not only long-term, but in-depth. So many life experiences (some more directly connected/related to our faith and discipleship than others) are shared in the context of the pastor-to-people relationship, centered on the Gospel.

As I conducted these interviews and considered these comments, I was also reading and pondering the previously mentioned Alban Institute study. Here is a significant contention made by those researchers: "All the burdens of long pastorates can be managed with skill and training, but few of the blessings of long pastorates are available to pastors and to congregations with shorter ministries."<sup>38</sup>

### Possible Benefits and Blessings of Long-Term Pastorates

*New Visions*, the Alban Institute study noted immediately above, asked these questions: "What are long pastorates, beyond an arbitrary designation of more than ten years in the same local church? ... Why do some long pastorates remain vital and alive, while others deteriorate over time?"<sup>39</sup>

Here is a somewhat edited and condensed list offered under the heading: "*Potential Advantages of a Long Pastorate*" —

1. A long pastorate makes possible deeper knowledge and relationships between pastor, parishioners and the parish as a whole.

*Not a single one of these men expected to be in one place for the years that he has served.*

<sup>38</sup> *New Visions*, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> *New Visions*, p. 17.

*"The norm for pastoral work is stability. Twenty-, thirty-, and forty-year-long pastorates should be typical among us (as they once were) and not exceptional."*

2. A long pastorate makes possible cumulative developing knowledge and experience of each other as both pastor and parish see and participate in each other's growth over time.
3. There is greater continuity and stability of leadership and program in a long-term pastorate, which makes possible things that are not possible in a short-term pastorate.
4. A long pastorate opens up possibilities of greater personal and spiritual growth for both pastor and congregation.
5. A long pastorate can make possible greater, deeper knowledge of and participation by the pastor in the community outside the parish ... and vice versa.
6. A long pastorate may have special benefits for both the pastor and his family.<sup>40</sup>

Although his voice is not to be elevated above all others, Peterson offers his critical diagnosis and prescription for the length and the health of ministries in the churches of North America:

... The norm for pastoral work is stability. Twenty-, thirty-, and forty-year-long pastorates should be typical among us (as they once were) and not exceptional. Far too many pastors change parishes out of adolescent boredom, not as a consequence of mature wisdom. When this happens, neither pastors nor congregations have access to the conditions that are hospitable to maturity in the faith.<sup>41</sup>

#### **Possible Challenges and Burdens of a Long-Term Pastorate**

Just as the *New Visions* research offered a list of possible benefits and blessings — to both a pastor and a congregation — from a long-term pastorate, this study also reviewed potential disadvantages of the long-term service in the same congregation. Here are seven of the possible outcomes —

<sup>40</sup> *New Visions*, pp. 31-34.

<sup>41</sup> *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, Peterson, p. 29.

1. A long tenure under a single pastor limits the congregation's exposure to and experience of ministry.
2. A long tenure may lead to over-identification between a pastor and parishioners, and of the parish with the pastor. This in turn may make the pastor's eventual departure excessively traumatic for all.
3. In a long pastorate, a gap may develop between the pastor and a growing number of parishioners.
4. In a long pastorate, there is the danger that a stagnant ineffective climate can set in. This climate was variously characterized as "getting in a rut," "going stale," "becoming complacent," and "losing flexibility."<sup>42</sup>
5. In a long pastorate, there is a greater danger of experiencing burnout.
6. As negative influences mount and begin to outweigh positive influences, a downward spiral may develop.
7. Where things are not going well, a long pastorate can ultimately lead both pastor and parish to feel that they are hopelessly and helplessly stuck with each other.<sup>43</sup>

The Alban writers then offer this statement, which I find speculative to a certain degree and, at the same time, helpful and optimistic:

Viewed from this perspective, a healthy long-tenured pastorate may be seen as the outcome of a joint pastor/parishioner spiritual pilgrimage, which calls upon all parties for 'eternal vigilance' and for profound mutual caring and commitment to those qualities which make for such a healthy ministry.<sup>44</sup>

#### **Pastoral Care: A Primer**

Prompted by *New Visions for the Long-Term Pastorate*, I will ask this critical question: Is there a difference — and are there blessings and benefits — in the care of souls for both pastor and people when there is a long-term pastorate?

First, I must state the obvious. Pastors

<sup>42</sup> The researchers from the Alban Institute also offered this comment about pastors who overstay: "These clergy usually manifested a mixture of burnout, discouragement and declining self-confidence — emotional and spiritual shackles which stifle healthy initiatives, both in the exercise of ministry and the implementation of a move to another parish. We expected to find a pre-dominance of such clergy in our study" (p. 27). It should be noted that this pre-dominance "was expected" but, blessedly, not discovered.

<sup>43</sup> *New Visions*, pp. 35-40.

<sup>44</sup> *New Visions*, pp 42-43.

are called to care for Christ's Church. Paul's words to the Ephesians elders affirm this most clearly. "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood" (Acts 20:28).

And this same Apostle's words to his "son" Timothy challenge all pastors with the question: "How will he care for God's church?" (1 Tim. 3:5b). While the immediate context is about managing his own household (v 5a), the broader context tells us that the one who cares for God's Church, the *seelsorger*, must be above reproach (v 2a) and well thought of by those outside the Christian community (v 7a).

A wonderful and helpful document has come out of the Lutheran Church of Australia. It is titled, "Pastoral Care and the Ministry of the Church." Early on, this guide reveals both its Scriptural and Lutheran foundations:

... The term 'pastoral care' includes the work entrusted by God to the Church to be exercised through its pastors and through those under their supervision. These pastoral 'carers' bring concrete care to people in the name of the Triune God. Pastoral in this sense is a participation in the gracious movement of God the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit ... That movement finds its culmination in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son — who through the Holy Spirit continues to act as the chief pastor of His body, the Church.<sup>45</sup>

But the issue is not only who does the care (and in response to and for Whom), but what is its setting: "... This care does not take place in a vacuum, but belongs to particular times and places, and is informed and guided by theological and historical criteria. The main context of pastoral care is the congregation."<sup>46</sup>

And, within this setting, there is a singular goal for pastoral care: that the redeemed people of God hear the voice of the Chief Shepherd (and Pastor) of the Church.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, within the congregational setting, the pastoral carers in Christ's Church do their work by directing the souls they care for to the gift-giving of our Incarnate Lord. As this document states, "... because the congregation is a community sustained by [the] Divine Service, pastoral care will always involve directing people to God's appointed means of grace."<sup>48</sup>

Even more pointedly, the care of souls compels pastors, as those called as soul-caregivers, to encourage the men and women and children baptized into God's family

to participate in the sacramental life of the Church. This needs to be one of the goals of pastoral care. ... For the means of grace to be applied in pastoral care, the pastoral carer needs to recognize them as the essential means through which the pastor ministers to the congregation and the individuals within it. However, pastoral care is not evangelism ...<sup>49</sup>

So how do I live out the Scriptural charge given and my vow spoken at my ordination and reaffirmed at my installation? How does any pastor do so, whether in the third year of his first Call, the eighth year of his third Call, or the twenty-ninth year of his second Call?

We all understand that pastoral care means visiting the sick and the dying, the suffering and the grieving. We all understand that pastoral care takes us to homes and to hospitals, to nursing homes and to hospices.

But it's more. The care of souls is preaching the Gospel, teaching and catechizing, preparing for and celebrat-

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<sup>45</sup> "Pastoral Care and the Ministry of the Church" from *Rites & Resources for Pastoral Care*, edited by David Schubert, Adelaide, Australia: Openbook Publishers, 1998, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6. The Scriptural allusion is to 1 Peter 5:2-4a.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3.

*There are  
experiences and  
struggles — some  
borne alone and  
some shared  
within and by the  
Body of Christ.  
There are joys and  
blessings — some  
celebrated alone  
and some shared  
within and by the  
Body of Christ.*

ing Holy Baptism, instructing for and saying, “Welcome to the Lord’s Table,” hearing confession and speaking absolution in the assembly of God’s people and one-on-one in the quiet corner of his study, witnessing to the unsaved and the undisciplined. It is building relationships with the saints of God and, in those relationships, being a shepherd of the sheep of the Good Shepherd.<sup>50</sup>

### **Pastoral Care in a Long-Term Pastorate**

What is it like? What is the same? What is different?

Dean Lueking asserts and writes this: “... the congregation itself is the primary place for pastoral growth in the art and skills of ministry of the Word, through the ordinariness and the extraordinariness of the daily rounds, through conflict and reconciliation, through failure and success ...”<sup>51</sup>

The extended pastorate is, to borrow from Eugene Peterson, an exercise in pastoral maturity. It is also a matter of life and death: continued and renewed life in a place of death and dying, the real world of sin and disease (physical and spiritual) in which pastors are called to serve.

I often find it baffling to believe that I have been the pastor of the same congregation for more than 29 years. But, then, I realize — and rejoice — that this is not the same congregation it was in February of 1987. It’s not the same congregation it was in December of 1992, or in July of 1995, or in October 2007.<sup>52</sup>

Some people (souls) leave. Some arrive. Some remain.

And we all change. There are experiences and struggles — some borne alone and some shared within and by the Body of Christ. There are joys and blessings — some celebrated alone and some shared

within and by the Body of Christ.

Even more, we are all changed. This pastor is changed, and the souls cared for by this pastor are changed. We are changed, we are constantly being changed, by the freedom-granting, life-giving Gospel.

### **Reflections on My Long-Term Pastorate**

It has been a blessing, an undeserved blessing, to grow in faith and in ministry with a growing congregation, a parish that has not only grown in numbers but, I pray, in depth of faith and discipleship because of the Gospel.

Crown of Life is a constantly-changing congregation.<sup>53</sup> San Antonio is a very transient city. New people move here; faithful members move away. New disciples are catechized and confirmed. Long-time members are now homebound or in care centers and no longer able to attend the Divine Service. Yet the Lord of the Church continues to surprise me — and us — by taking care of His visible Body in bringing new souls into this community of faith.

In particular, it is both a blessing and a burden to preach to these same people Sunday after Sunday, preaching both Law and Gospel to those who need to hear it — Sunday after Sunday, season after season, (Church) year after (Church) year.

It is both a blessing and a burden to give them our Lord’s gifts in His Holy Supper week after week, year after year, saying, “Winifred, the body of Christ for you.” And, even as I speak these words of grace, I think to myself, “If I stay here much longer I’m going to bury you. I need to decide what text to use for your funeral sermon.”

It is both a blessing and a burden to hear their stories, to know their stories of joy and of heartbreak, to live their stories

<sup>50</sup> My setting, my situation, is no different from hundreds, if not thousands, of other pastors in the LCMS, of other Lutheran bodies, or, for that matter, of the larger and broader visible Church. In the week in which I was finishing this paper, my pastoral care involved and included: visiting both a member and a non-member in the hospital, taking the Lord’s Supper to a home for a member recovering from surgery, meeting with a young couple for new-marriage counseling, hearing an individual confession, catechizing youth and adults on four different occasions, preaching twice on Sunday morning and twice on a Lenten Wednesday, calling a member whose father had died suddenly and making phone calls to members to wish them “Happy Birthday” (my custom each week), writing an e-mail to a member who presented questions about her struggles, greeting new and returning guests at worship, listening to the story of a non-member man who has dealt with numerous financial, physical, and spiritual issues, visiting in the home of a couple curious about our

congregation’s confession and mission, leading a “Blessing of the School” for Lutheran Schools Week, and visiting with parents and children — almost all of them are non-members — of our preschool and Mothers Day Out program.

<sup>51</sup> *The Last Long Pastorate*, p. 196.

<sup>52</sup> Those are not random dates; they all have significance to this pastor and to this Crown of Life congregation.

<sup>53</sup> There are, at this writing, only seven present members of Crown of Life (out of just over 600 baptized souls) who were worshipping here in February of 1987 when my family and I moved to San Antonio. Though many other congregations likely deal with significant movement in and out, this aspect of ministry at Crown of Life (saying “God-speed” and saying “Welcome!” all-too-frequently) are an ongoing burden and blessing.

with them. In truth, their stories and my story have become our stories, shared under the Gospel of Christ.

There is another perspective that reflects both the length of ministry in this place, my own advancing years, and changes in my family.

It has been a great blessing to be part of a congregation that has become a family to me and to my family. Members of Crown of Life have shared in our family's journey of life and faith, celebrating births and birthdays, Baptisms and confirmations, graduations and weddings, transition for and maturation of and the moving away of our children, the beginning of the adventure of grandparenting, and the not-frequent-enough visits to and of grandchildren.

They have prayed for us and with us as our family has faced challenges and as our extended families have dealt with struggles and sorrows. These gifts of care have often been parallel to the rich and undeserved blessing of acceptance of my weaknesses, forgiveness for my failures, and encouragement in my struggles.

But alongside these blessings come certain burdens.

Preaching Sunday after Sunday, season after season, (Church) year after (Church) year, brings with it the desire and necessity of being faithful and fresh at the same time. I doubt that I'm the only long-term pastor who wonders if God's people must be tired of my voice — because there are times that I am!

While this challenge is before every pastor, the long(er)-term pastor is, from my perspective, particularly burdened with not being trite and repetitive in "rightly dividing the Word of truth," burdened by being boring and predictable in telling the life-giving, life-restoring Good News of salvation through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

An aspect of preaching is knowing your listeners — just as the listening congregation learns to know her pastor (both from his words in the pulpit and his words outside the pulpit and, perhaps, outside the sphere of ministry).<sup>54</sup>

Knowing people well is good. Knowing people too well can be a problem and a burden. So I must ask myself these questions:

- Do some retreat from me and from their involvement in this congregation because they think I know too much about their weaknesses and failures?
- Do they know me too well? Have they listened to me — or attempted to listen to me — for too long? Do they see my weaknesses too clearly?
- Do I know them too well so that I take them for granted, assuming certain things, not spending time in caring for them, visiting them, getting to know them even more deeply?
- Do I assume that I know people well enough so that I don't invest time and energy in those I have known longer? Or do I tend to ignore (some of) them out of attraction for the individuals and families who are new to our congregation?
- Are we too comfortable with each other? Are the boundaries between shepherd and sheep blurred because of our longer familiarity? Am I still a pastor and not just a buddy or a friend?

### **Must. Keep. Growing.**

If there is one challenge above all others that I have experienced in this long-term pastorate, it is this: have I become bored with the people of and the ministry at Crown of Life? And, if or because I have, have I been unfaithful to my Call from them?

Peterson confesses that he bought a ticket for Tarshish on several occasions. I'll use a different metaphor for my confession.

*"Winifred, the body of Christ for you." And, even as I speak these words of grace, I think to myself, "If I stay here much longer I'm going to bury you. I need to decide what text to use for your funeral sermon."*

<sup>54</sup> Over the years I have been — for better or for worse — the soccer or the golf coach to some of the young people here at Crown of Life who attend our local Lutheran High School. They see a different side of me, and I have a different, but not — I hope — un-pastoral, relationship with them.

*Knowing people  
well is good.  
Knowing people  
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burden.*

Have I taken a mistress? Have I given time and attention to activities that give me more affirmation, that build up my ego? Have I told myself (I have!) — and our congregation's lay leaders (I have!) — that I must also be serving the larger Church, when I am really retreating from caring for the souls given to me by the Divine Call? <sup>55</sup>

Or, and this is also a significant part of the equation, have these been ways to stay fresh and to be renewed for the only Call I have had for more than 29 years?

Here's my perspective: I must keep growing.

Some fifteen years ago I was told by a former member, "You've changed." This was the reason he gave to request a Transfer of Membership to a different congregation. (He had been a faithful member and a strong leader at Crown of Life, but had moved away from San Antonio for a length of time because of his work.)

I was disappointed by his statement. I was confused by his observation. I wanted him and his wife to stay. I wanted to say, "No, I haven't changed! You're the ones who have changed." (And there was some element of truth to that.)

But I should have thanked him. I should have acknowledged that he had made an astute and accurate assessment.

Lueking reflects upon his years as a student at St. John's Junior College of Winfield (Kansas), writing of a particular professor who shaped within him a desire to keep learning and growing:

... from the first hour of my first day of classes at St. John's, I was gaining a major foundation stone for a long-term pastorate: growing in mind and soul through forty-four years rather than repeating one year's worth forty-four times over in a stagnation that suffo-

cates both mind and soul. <sup>56</sup>

I must keep growing. I must keep changing.

No, not in the essentials. Not in my commitment to be a faithful witness of the Gospel, to be a student of the Holy Scriptures, to be grounded in and by the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, to be a receiver and a sharer of our Lord's gifts in His Sacraments, and to be faithful in caring for the souls entrusted to me.

But I must keep on growing and changing.

Another perspective on this is to ask the question: "How can a congregation continue to grow spiritually over the years?" One obvious answer is either to have a succession of spiritually mature pastors or to have one who is always pursuing his spiritual growing edge.<sup>57</sup> I am biased, but I contend that the latter is better than the former.

I am convinced that this especially applies to preaching. Growing is a necessity. I must grow in my study of and meditation on God's Word. I must grow in my skills of writing and delivery. And, as I grow in these ways, I must also grow in my desire to speak the Good News of forgiveness and life, peace and hope for the care of the souls entrusted to me by my Call.

### Responses From the Souls Under My Care

As part of this project, I created and distributed a simple questionnaire to members of Crown of Life in July of 2015. I asked for their responses to three statements. [See Appendix E.]

As noted in my introduction to Appendix D, this attempt was not meant to be "scientific" or scholarly. Perhaps I was seeking some self-affirmation. Perhaps I was hoping for some insights into or

<sup>55</sup> Choices I have made include (as noted above) coaching at Lutheran High School (although I often rationalized the role of soccer coach as being a way to spend more time with three of my children — and to stay in better shape!), being a PALS facilitator with my wife (already noted), involvement in Texas District matters (Continuing Education Task Force, now an Area Vice President), volunteering when San Antonio was the host city for the National Youth Gatherings in 1995 and 2013, serving as a Community Life Builder for two other National Youth Gatherings, being a Doctrinal Reviewer for the President's Office of the LCMS, writing for Concordia Pulpit Resources and The Lutheran Witness, and, yes, even DOXOLOGY — as a student/participant, as a Chaplain, and as part of the Collegium. Have these taken me away (or have I wanted to be taken away) from my "first love"?

<sup>56</sup> *The Last Long Pastorate*, p. 30.

<sup>57</sup> *New Visions*, p. 60.

clarification of how my ministry was both perceived and received.

But, without (too much) prompting, it is gratifying to read these words from a member I will simply call “B”: “You are spot on with your focus being on Jesus Christ — and on His love for us. And that is felt by me always at Crown of Life.”

### **Why Has My Long-Term Ministry Remained Healthy at Crown of Life?**

First, it is only because of the mercy and grace of the Lord of the Church.

Second, there have been struggles<sup>58</sup> and, it's quite likely — as both this pastor and the members of this congregation are fallen, broken, stubborn, prideful sinners — that conflicts will arise in the future, whether I am still serving here or not.

Third, over time — time spent together in worship, in study of the Word, in prayer, in conversation, in confession, in counsel, in working side-by-side, and, yes, in play — relationships grow and deepen. This takes effort and energy. It's not an automatic result of sharing membership in the same congregation.

So I'll simply suggest that there is a model for under-shepherds of the Good Shepherd to follow. When Jesus used the imagery of the shepherd and the sheep, I'm convinced that He implies a long-term commitment. The shepherd knows the sheep, but this takes time and effort. And the sheep know the shepherd's voice (John 10:3); they may hear a different voice, but they don't recognize it immediately as “their” shepherd's voice and not the voice of a stranger. Yet, when they learn their shepherd's voice, they follow him and not the strange voice (10:4,5).

Why is this so? How does this happen? Because of the time they spend together.

By way of contrast, this question should also be asked: why does the hired man not care for the sheep (John 10:12-13, paraphrased)? It's not only that they are not his that he can't claim ownership. They are not his because he has not spent time with them.

Further questions can be asked: “How can a shepherd serve sheep that are always new to him? How can sheep follow a different shepherd every season? And how can a shepherd be trusted and followed if he seems to be continually seeking a different or better flock?”

I'm reluctant to push this image too far (maybe I already have!), but I'm convinced that the shepherd/sheep model is a dynamic way to understand the pastoral office.

### **Other Areas To Be Explored**

As I've wrestled with the dynamics of the long-term pastorate, I've perhaps found more questions than answers! Here are some that might be explored by other servants of the Church. (These could certainly be explored outside or inside the DOXOLOGY community as well as outside or inside The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.)

- What are the dynamics of which a long-term pastor needs to be aware, particularly in regard to the care of souls?
- How is a long-term pastorate different when the congregation is static or dynamic (in terms of new members and in terms of the community in which it is set)?
- What about the pastor who follows the long-term pastor—whether he was formerly an associate pastor in that same parish, or a new pastor called to continue the congregation's ministry? How will (should) the congregation receive this man?
- And how will (should) this man look at his predecessor and his predecessor's ministry? What might he learn about the care of souls from humbly listening

*When Jesus used the imagery of the shepherd and the sheep, I'm convinced that He implies a long-term commitment.*

<sup>58</sup> The most significant and personally painful conflict was from October 2007 to March 2008. Though the instigating event was serious, the ripples of anger and accusation were more-so. Fifty-plus members left this congregation, but many more showed care to me (and to my bride) as well as care for this miniature of the Body of Christ. Another DOXOLOGY project might be to examine the role of conflict in pastoral health, congregational health, and the care of souls.

to the members who have been served by the previously called pastor?

- How helpful — even necessary — for the long-term pastor and his congregation are sabbaticals or study leaves?
- How helpful — even necessary — for the long-term pastor and for the congregation he serves are planned times of reflection and renewal?

I assure you, it has not been my intent to offer more questions than answers! However, the dynamics of a long-term pastorate — for both the pastor and the souls he is called to care for — seem to create challenging questions that are worthy of pondering.

### What Next?

What can and should be done to strengthen all pastors that they might serve long and faithfully in a specific Call? Short of commissioning an extensive — and expensive! — study across the LCMS or all the Lutheran bodies of North America, I will suggest:

- Conversations — which must begin at the seminaries of various Lutheran church bodies — concerning and affirming “*stabilitas loci*.”
- Conversations by and among pastors who have chosen a long-term pastorate (not merely “sticking it out” because of stubbornness or because of a martyr-complex) concerning their common and distinctive burdens and blessings.
- Conversations by and among congregations (perhaps congregational leaders is more realistic) served by long-term pastors concerning their common and distinctive burdens and blessings, especially regarding the care of souls among them.
- Asserting and affirming that the care of souls is the primary task of both a long-term pastor and one who serves a short(er) ministry in his parish.
- Again, these are possibly topics and concerns for DOXOLOGY (or a DOXOLOGY Collegium Fellow) to

address. Perhaps a “think tank” of parish pastors, seminary professors (and students?), church leaders, and lay people could discuss these or other issues and offer counsel and encouragement to the Church-at-large.

### Epilogue

Many readers are familiar with Bo Giertz’s *The Hammer of God*, a series of stories of ministry that are never out-of-date.

I’ll close with words from the first novella, which — far better than my own — express the care of a pastor for the souls given to Him by the Lord of the Church:

The dean, who had distributed the bread, had now mounted to the altar, and stood looking out over the people. A tear was beginning to shine in the corner of his eye. The congregation had just begun to sing the communion hymn, “Jesu, Priceless Treasure.” One could feel the surge of joy and the feeling of reverence as they sang.

For thirty years he had had occasion to see how much feuding and drunkenness, how much hardness of heart and bitter defiance of both God and man, prevailed in the parish. Still he felt overwhelmed at this moment by the divine power of redemption which, despite all, was at work year after year, so that in spite of everything there were many who lived the hidden life with Christ in God, and so many, too, in which the work of the Spirit was gradually progressing. Just as the sun streamed in with its warmth and gave color and brightness to the dark garments on the men’s side of the nave, so the sunshine of grace fell upon hard hearts, so that there was hardly a soul who was not aware of something of its glory, and very few who would not sooner or later be led to seek forgiveness.

*As I’ve wrestled  
with the dynamics  
of the long-term  
pastorate, I’ve  
perhaps found  
more questions  
than answers!  
Here are some that  
might be explored  
by other servants  
of the Church.*

He thanked the Lord who did not weary in His labors with this stiff and stubborn people. He thanked God for every worship service that again brought the stamp of heavy boots and the creaking of the pews and that gave another opportunity for the struggle between the Word of God and the sinful nature of man. He thanked God for the church itself, standing like a fortress in the village, a mighty storehouse of heavenly treasure, where Sunday after Sunday he could stand and pour out the heavenly seed,... In quiet joy he returned to the altar rail to serve the next table of communicants.<sup>59</sup> ■■

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<sup>59</sup> *The Hammer of God*, Bo Gertz, Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960, pp. 99-100.

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## Appendix A: Two Models for Ministry

The contrast between my father and my father-in-law is interesting. Though they are of the same era, formed and trained at the same seminary, their lives of parish ministry were very different.

My dad is Marvin Barz. Raised as an Iowa farm boy, he graduated from Concordia Theological Seminary of Springfield, Ill. in 1957. His first Call, his assigned Call, was to a two-and-a-third-point parish in the Ottawa Valley of northeastern Ontario. We lived in the parsonage at Grace, Locksley, while he also preached every week at St. Stephen, Alice and, because of a rotation with two other pastors of the Circuit, on every third Sunday afternoon at Zion, Silver Lake.

He served there until he accepted the Call to be pastor of St. Luke of Worland, Wyo. We were there from July 1960 to October 1962. He next received and accepted the Call from/to Zion of rural Bancroft, Neb. In April 1968, we moved to rural St. Johns, Michigan, as my dad had accepted the Call to be pastor of St. Peter Lutheran Church.

We returned to Canada in 1974 as dad was called to be mission developer for a congregation, which became Berea-by-the-Water Lutheran Church in Goderich, Ontario. His next move was to Vernon, British Columbia in January 1983 to be senior pastor of St. John Lutheran Church.

I will note that my dad resigned this Call in November 1988 after months and months of conflict. A major factor was that dad had followed a sole (and very long-term) pastor who had served St. John for 33 years. This man actually said in my father's installation sermon: "You'll have to care for these people because they're my people ..."

After a few months out of the parish —

at the age of 59 — dad and mom moved across Canada a second time in 1989 as he accepted the Call to serve Risen Christ in Mississauga, Ontario. His final Divine Call was a return to the States when he was installed at St. Paul's Lutheran Church of rural Clarks Creek, Kan. in July 1993.

My dad retired from every-Sunday ministry in August 2002. He and my mother now reside in Cheney, Kan. Dad is still — at the age of 85 — serving as a rather frequent vacancy pastor and "supply preacher" in and around Wichita.

My other model is my father-in-law, Paul Lehenbauer, a graduate of Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield in 1953. His assigned Call was to southern Brazil, the country of his birth and early childhood. For various reasons, that field of service was short-lived. He then was called to St. Paul of Bridger, Mont. with a preaching station in nearby Belfry that became Our Savior Lutheran Church.

After serving here from 1954 to 1957, he and his family moved to Ephrata, Wash. where he served Our Savior Lutheran Church, with outreach and preaching in George and Quincy. However, after, these three relatively short-term pastorates, he received and accepted the Call from/to Peace Lutheran Church of rural Deshler, Ohio.

He was installed there in November 1960 and was the sole pastor of this congregation until June 1992. While in Deshler, he was also pastor of Grace of Weston from 1960 to 1986 and served Abiding Word, a mission congregation in Bowling Green, in the late 1960s and early 1970s. (It is worth noting that, after his 32-year-pastorate at Peace, four different called pastors have served this congregation from the summer of 1992 until the present.)

So, were these men my models? They were certainly influences — and mostly positive ones, at that.

I watched Marvin Barz serve faithfully in a variety of settings — rural and small towns, larger and smaller, established and brand-new, including a suburban congregation near Toronto that sang several hymns in German on Christmas Eve and then used a translator into Chinese for his sermon on the Christmas festival. I continue to observe — mostly at a distance, but sometimes firsthand — his support and encouragement to young(er) pastors in central Kansas.

I also observed the faithful service of Paul Lehenbauer, my father-in-law. (I only knew him and his ministry in north-west Ohio.) I must say that — as a seminarian and then a new pastor — I was positively impressed by his commitment to visit every one of his shut-ins, if possible, every week. When I asked about this on one occasion, his reply was: “If I expect people to be in church every Sunday, shouldn’t those who can’t be here have the right to expect me to see them every week?”

**Appendix B: Long-Term Pastors  
Interviewed**

*Notes: All are on the roster as 'Ministers of Religion: Ordained' of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. They are listed in alphabetical order, not by length of service.*

Charles (Carlos) Boerger [1977–2015; first Call]

Associate / Missionary, then Senior Pastor  
St. Paul Lutheran Church, San Antonio, Texas

David Ebs

Visitation Pastor [1978–1994 (full-time); 1997–2013 (part-time); fourth Call]  
Concordia Lutheran Church, San Antonio, Texas

James Erickson

Associate, then Senior Pastor [1982–2015; first Call]  
Immanuel Lutheran Church, Alpena, Michigan

Scott Goltl

Associate / Church Planter [1993–2015; first Call]  
Ascension Lutheran Church (Two Campuses), Wichita, Kansas

Ralph Hobratschk

Sole, then Senior Pastor [1982–2015; second Call]  
Hope Lutheran Church, Friendswood, Texas

Daniel Mueller

Sole, then Senior, then Associate Pastor [1975–2014; second Call]  
Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, San Antonio, Texas

David Nehrenz

Sole Pastor [1988–2015; second Call]  
Trinity Lutheran Church (& Campus Ministry), Norman, Oklahoma

David Rohde

Sole Pastor [1984–2015; first Call]  
St. Paul Lutheran Church, Wilson, Texas

John Stube

Sole Pastor [1989–2015; third Call]  
Ascension Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana

**Appendix C: Questions for  
Interviews of Long-Term Pastors**

What did you hear at the seminary about the length of a pastorate?

Why have you stayed so long?

Was this an expectation in our LCMS?

When and why did you think you would leave?

When and why were you tempted to leave?

Have you ever regretted staying as long as you did?

What are two blessings you have experienced in (or because of) this long-term pastorate?

What are two burdens you have experienced in (or because of) this long-term pastorate?

What has changed in your pastoral care (the care of souls) throughout the years you have been at \_\_\_\_\_?

Note: this could be about what you have learned about pastoral care

...it could be about what you have taught the congregation about pastoral care

...it could be about the ways you have approached pastoral care

...it could be about specific things you did, or began to do, or no longer did in your pastoral care.

What benefits for the souls under your care have been realized because of your long-term pastorate at \_\_\_\_\_?

Anything else...

## Appendix D: Responses from Interviews of Long-Term Pastors

### Overview...

I recognize that this was not a scientifically reliable sample, however, these conversations were an attempt (a valid attempt, I believe) to discover if my experiences are common to other long-term pastors. A future project for another servant of the Church would be to use the same questions to survey and compare short- and long-term pastors and their congregations.

Several expressed, in different ways, the “spiritual gift” of stubbornness. Meaning, a common statement feeling of a long-term pastor (although it may never be spoken publicly) is: “I will stick this out. I’ll hold on for a little while longer.” The “this” might be a specific conflict, a season of discouragement, a sense of inadequacy, or other realities of pastoral ministry.

One man commented, “I wanted to leave at certain times. But, when I desired to do so, a Call never came. As a result, I have heard people say, ‘He’s still here’ — some with surprise (even dismay), but others with affirmation.

A relevant observation: “When I have messed up, or messed up enough, there is always the temptation to leave. That would be easier than confessing to and asking for forgiveness from God’s people.”

### Blessings of long-term ministry in the same parish ...

Serving God’s people from generation to generation (which may also mean serving the same extended family cross-generationally). However, in my setting, there has been so much transition over the years with so few connected families that I have not had many opportunities to serve single families from generation to generation. Though I have been at

Crown of Life for 29 years, I only have one member whom I confirmed, married, and baptized her children. But long-term ministry does often mean deep connections to the individuals who form families: births and baptisms, confirmations and graduations, success and struggles, joys and celebrations, transitions and tragedies.

“I never planned to stay this long at \_\_\_\_\_. Now I realize that starting over in a different congregation would be huge challenge. Do I want this at this point in my ministry?”

“Long-term ministry should lead to long-term stability. This comes from all that we have shared together. Our lives have become integrated.”

“There can be new ministry in the same place. This might happen every five to eight years. The other option is the same ministry in a new place repeated every five to eight years.”

“A neighboring pastor — of another denomination — observed to me at one time: ‘They never call you by your first name; they always call you “Pastor.”’”

“The members change over the years. Some move; some leave; some die. I’m the one who holds the congregation’s story.”

“My wife has said, ‘This church is more family than our family.’”

“You get to share in people’s lives. That’s one of the best things; and that’s one of the worst things. It ultimately means this: you don’t just bury your members, you bury your friends.”

[This may seem a contradiction to those who have served a shorter time in one or more congregations, but funerals are actually easier when you don’t know the person who died — or that person’s family — as well.]

Another: It's good that I don't have to justify the direction in which I'm leading the ministry. Trust has been built in moving the congregation from where we were to where we are.

Another: People in the community know me. Relationships and trust have been built. And people also know that this congregation is a place they can turn to for care.

Another: I have become assimilated in this community (I can't tell you how long that took), although I was, at first, perceived as an outsider. [One of this man's activities was — earlier in his ministry — to work as an announcer for games at the local high school.]

Jesus uses the language of "one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16b). He also asserts that "the sheep know the voice of their shepherd" (10:3b-5, 16a). How good it is when the sheep of the flock I serve know their shepherd's (their pastor's) voice as they hear it in preaching and praying, in teaching and caregiving.

The value of stability: "These people know both my strengths and my weaknesses. Strong and supportive lay leadership have helped me and us affirm and address them."

When someone says, "Pastor," that means I can tell you the story (and the stories) of our interaction(s), of their journey, their joys, their struggles, their growth in faith."

"Stability and continuity mean that mission and ministry can be accomplished with trust and with internal peace."

"I think that people gave me more feedback the longer I was there. Perhaps in a short-term pastorate, we would never get there." (Or the feedback would be less than honest and less than helpful.)

"There is appreciation (although sometimes grudging!) for the pastor who stays, who sticks it out. He can be the constant. This seems to be more true — the appreciation and affirmation — as in our rapidly-changing world less and less people are anchored to one place or one parish."

### **Burdens of long-term ministry in the same parish ...**

"Everyone knows that some members are closer to me than others. But they also know that no one gets special treatment." This can't only be said (but that might be necessary); it needs to be made visible.

"Every pastor relates better to a certain segment of the congregation. A long-term pastor can't help but wonder — and ask, in an appropriate way, lay leaders: can a different pastor connect with a different audience (or connect differently with the same ones I have connected with)?"

A long-term pastorate forces you to deal with issues: yours, theirs, ours.

"Maturity in ministry has allowed me to step back and see the 'big picture' — which is really to let our Lord do the work of ministry."

"I was told early on that pastors can't have friends in the congregation. Pastoral ministry can be a very lonely existence. And long-term ministry in the same parish can mean long-term loneliness."

"Because I have served this long with many of the same people, some have found me wanting and they have left. They (and I) moved from infatuation to reality. (My prayer is that they don't leave Christ or His Church even when they leave me.)

### **Pastoral Care...**

"My people have come to expect that the sick and the dying will be cared for by their pastor." (And they observe that this is not true in every congregation.)

This includes walking with and watching over those who have come (back) through the death of a loved one with a matured faith.

"The sheep need to know their shepherd's voice. They hear it in times of calmness so that they will respond to it in times of crisis."

"This congregation has learned (from and through me) to welcome those who are outcasts: e.g. street-people, outcasts, addicts, those with tattoos and piercings."

"I have learned (slowly and gradually) that my job is not to fill the pews. (Although I sometimes am tempted to feel that way!) It's too easy to succumb to the measurable ways — or the ways we think are measurable — rather than to struggle to measure the care of the soul. My framework has become: how is God using me to be with His people in the brokenness?"

The care of souls is not rocket science: preach, teach, care, visit, pray. People want (and expect?) their pastor to be there when they are (or when a loved one is) dying.

"I've always asked the question: 'How would I want to be treated if I were in the hospital or shut-in at my home?'"

My approach to the people of God was, initially, giving them the right answer(s). Now I tend to approach the care of souls in this way: "Am I preparing them to that time when they will face their death?"

Sometimes certain people expect the pastor to be there "for me." They can be

selfish! (And not realize it.) Though I strive to be impartial, I know that I may be inclined to put myself out for the faithful more than for those on the fringe. Yet I strive to serve them all the same, with unconditional commitment.

You rarely (even never) know the immediate benefit of what you are doing in pastoral care. Only (much) later will someone say, "You really helped me when ..."

The things that *most* people remember are the positives, the affirmatives.

### **Challenges:**

The shaping of a congregation to be truly Lutheran doesn't just happen. It happens over the long haul.

"One can build and maintain a façade for only so long. A building that has been constructed over great time will keep on standing. But that's not a testament to me, but to the Lord of the Church who is its foundation."

"I've changed my approach. It used to be: I would welcome people, build somewhat of a relationship, then move on to the next ones. Now I strive to move toward building and maintaining relationships which result in fully-formed disciples."

"There is both a tendency and a temptation to fall into a comfortable routine (especially in preaching?). Sometimes I need to change — or be changed. Sometimes the congregation needs to change — or be changed."

Remaining fresh: for my own sake; for the congregation's sake.

How to keep proclamation and instruction fresh?

There is a constant need to seek new challenges within the same parish.

As a preacher: to remain faithful and also strive to be fresh. One said, "I think I've been compelled to become a better preacher. I chose not to go into the recycling mode (OK, every once in a while!), but committed to keep studying and wrestling with God's Word."

Even as marriages go through stages or seasons of struggle and growth, of stagnation and discovery.

Sometimes I long for "holy discontent" that will move the congregation in a new or different direction.

It's possible to run out of ideas and out of energy. I need to keep asking: "Is it time to leave? Is it time to retire?"

"Just as you (think you) know your family too well, you may (think you) know your congregation too well. Then you may stop listening. Or they may stop listening."

It's possible that the long-term pastor's strengths — and his weaknesses — become institutionalized.

MDB: I both smiled and cringed when I heard this. I'm reminded and reflect often on "my quirks." Even more, I've pondered why "The Troubles" happened here at Crown of Life (in late 2007). How much of it was a reflection of my approach to ministry, particularly to pastoral ministry?

"The growth I needed happened when I worked on and completed an advanced degree. Yet, when I was in this program, I was clear with my congregation: 'If it becomes obvious that this [degree process] is getting in the way of pastoral ministry, I will leave the program.'"

#### **Other observations/comments:**

You're not going to be there a long time if they don't trust you.

"I don't get bored. I have never had a boring day in ministry."

"If we believe in the Divine Call, we should be installed with this mindset: 'I'm here for the rest of my ministry. I had no intention of leaving my first (Assigned Call) parish, but this Call had my name written all over it.'"

"I came to this congregation as a new graduate. But I never looked at this first Call as a stepping stone to anything or any place else. (Although some members of this congregation may have thought that I did/would.)"

There is (often) great importance in the stability of the pastor (MDB: not simply the same pastor, but a 'stable' pastor) in an unstable setting ... or, perhaps, in a congregation that has had a succession of short-term pastors.

Some congregations expect that their pastors will be long-term pastors. (Why is this so?)

I have fought the idea of being considered a CEO. I feel that this robs the pastoral office of servanthood.

Over the years I've grown to come to enjoy more aspects of pastoral ministry, including some for which I never thought I was "gifted." (Would this have happened if I had moved on to another Call or Calls?)

**Appendix E: A Survey re: The 'Care of Souls' at Crown of Life Lutheran Church**

DOXOLOGY, the Care of Souls, and Crown of Life

Friday afternoon ✚ 17 July 2015

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Lord be with you. Some of you have heard of DOXOLOGY. Some of you have experienced DOXOLOGY. Some of you don't (yet) know much about DOXOLOGY.

First, right now I don't mean when we stand to sing a hymn stanza of praise to the Holy Trinity – which we'll do twice this coming Sunday! Nor is it (in my present usage) another name for *"Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow"* – which the VBS children sang so wonderfully last week.

DOXOLOGY is the Lutheran Center for Spiritual Care and Counsel. If you haven't ever done so, I'd encourage you to visit [www.doxology.us](http://www.doxology.us) to learn more.

Early in 2011, Crown of Life enrolled in DOXOLOGY. I participated in 'The Gathering' (this first session is for pastors only) in June of that year up in Buffalo, Minnesota. Connie and I attended 'The Grand Reunion' in August of that year near Bellville, Illinois. And Bill Fuller and I traveled back to Minnesota in February of 2012 for 'The Encore' (for pastors and lay people).

In addition, five other Crown of Life members attended a DOXOLOGY 'Encore' weekend up in Lake Dallas in November of 2013. These were: Kurt Nestman, Sonia & Wayn Nelson, and Patty & John McCauley. Furthermore, many of you served as hosts and drivers

and servants and musicians at the 'Grand Reunion' here in San Antonio last August.

As worship is a key part of the DOXOLOGY experience, I've also been privileged to be the Chaplain for two 'Gatherings' and two 'Encores' (in San Antonio, in Lake Dallas, and in Donaldson, Indiana). My present involvement in DOXOLOGY is with the Collegium. Seven LCMS pastors serve in this capacity. Our primary role is to assist the DOXOLOGY leadership as a "think tank" on the "care of souls."

Our appointment happened in the fall of 2013. Our first assignment was to research and write a paper on some aspect of the "care of souls." I wrote and presented (last August) to the Collegium "You Came To Me: The Care of the Soul of A Prisoner and A Prisoner's Family."

This year – at the urging of Dr. John Kleinig, a pastor, professor, and writer from the Lutheran Church of Australia – my topic is "The Long-Term Pastorate: Burdens & Blessings – with Implications for the Care of Souls." I've been reading and researching and surveying in order to prepare my paper for the Collegium gathering near Kansas City in early August. A significant portion of my research has been in conducting phone interviews with nine pastors who have served in the same parish from 22 to 38 years.

Well, that's a quite long introduction! And now I have a request. I'd like to hear your perspectives on the "care of souls," especially as it happens here at Crown of Life and, particularly, as I have served as pastor here for 28-and-a-half years.

So, please see the 'Survey' I've prepared. It's brief. I hope it's understandable. (I've printed it below and I've attached it as a MS Word document.)

I'd request your help by responding to the three statements on the Survey. If

you can bring them on Sunday, great! If you e-mail them to me, that works, too! (But the deadline is 10:00 pm on Monday.)

Thanks for reading this. Know that I thank the Lord of the Church for the souls given to my care – and now shared with Pastor Nuttelman – here at Crown of Life Lutheran Church.

In His peace,

Pastor Mark Barz



I would very much appreciate your help with my 2015 DOXOLOGY Collegium project. My theme this year is The Long Term Pastorate: Burdens & Blessings – with Implications for the Care of Souls.

Here's what I'm asking from you, the members of Crown of Life Evangelical Lutheran Church: please respond to the following three statements with as much or as little as you choose. (Husbands and wives may complete the same sheet, or offer separate comments.)

You may give me your responses on Sunday morning, 19 July, or you may e-mail your responses to me by 10:00 pm on Monday, 20 July. Please do sign below. I may need to clarify responses as I write my paper.

Thank you! In Christ's name,

Pastor Mark Barz

1) Tell me what you consider the “care of souls” (pastoral care) to mean or to look like...

2) Tell me how you think the “care of souls” might be different (for better or for worse) when a Pastor has been serving in the same congregation for more than twenty years...

3) Tell me what you would consider two or three blessings or benefits to a congregation – particularly as it applies to the “care of souls” – that might happen because a Pastor serves the same congregation for twenty years or more...

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

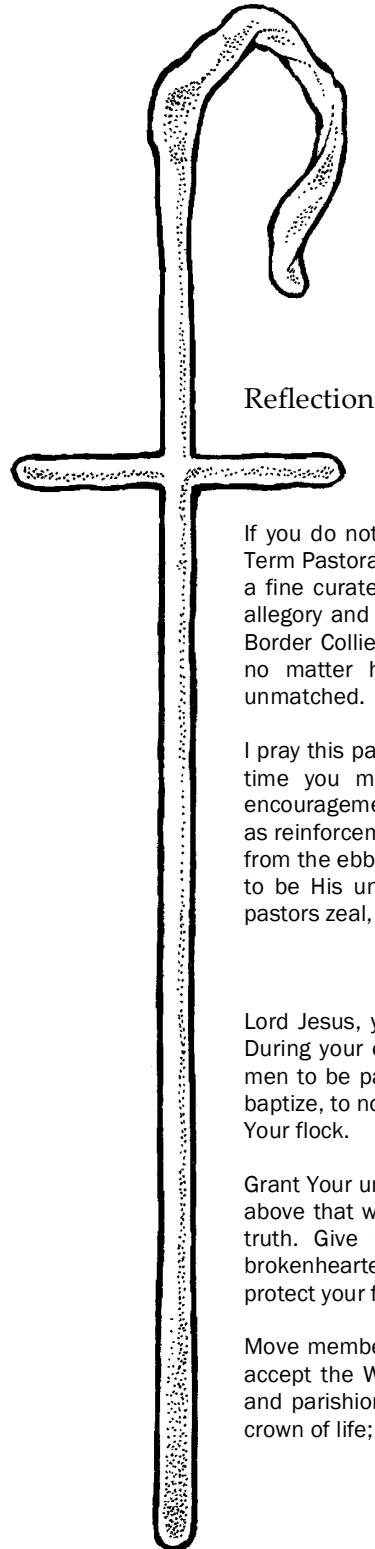
E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

I (we) have been a member(s) of Crown of Life since \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ I was (we were) new to the LCMS when I (we) joined Crown of Life.

I (we) have been members of \_\_\_\_\_ different congregations (of any denomination) since I (we) graduated from high school.

\_\_\_\_\_ I (we) have spent at least ten years in \_\_\_\_\_ congregation(s) which had one and the same Pastor during that time. (You may check this if you've been at Crown of Life for ten years!)



## Reflection

If you do not know the man, Pastor Mark Barz, then this loquacious paper on the Long-Term Pastorate might make you think him a literary renegade. He is anything but that. He is a fine curate of souls and presents the Gospel and its unending joy through continuous allegory and anecdotes. Following his lead, if Barz were a dog, he would be an energetic Border Collie or a faithful Australian Shepherd constantly finding joy in his master's work no matter how intriguing or mundane. Barz's zeal and faithfulness are practically unmatched.

I pray this paper has blessed you as it has me and gives you clear points to recall the next time you must consider two divine calls at once. His work elucidated here gives encouragement to the pastor disillusioned in his call, pining for a ticket to Tarshish as well as reinforcement to the pastor of long tenure. All validity and authority of his call comes not from the ebbing and flowing expectations of those 'in the know', but from Him who calls us to be His under-shepherds and sheepdogs of the flock. God grant Pastor Barz and all pastors zeal, faithfulness, and joy in their pastorate no matter how long the stay.



Lord Jesus, you are my great High Priest, who intercedes with the Father on my behalf. During your earthly ministry You called men to be Your apostles, and still today You call men to be pastors in Your Church — to proclaim the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins, to baptize, to nourish Your people with Your Holy Supper, and to minister in countless ways to Your flock.

Grant Your under-shepherds fidelity to Your Word, wisdom by Your Spirit, and strength from above that we might carry out our callings faithfully. Make us fearless confessors of Your truth. Give us courage to admonish those who stray, compassion to bind up the brokenhearted, and discernment to apply the Law and Gospel to all appropriately. May we protect your flock from the ravaging wolves and shepherd Your lambs to green pastures.

Move members to have proper care and respect for their pastor(s), to obey, and to gladly accept the Word that is preached and the sacraments administered. Keep both pastors and parishioners alike faithful until death, that together they may receive the everlasting crown of life; In Your name, O Jesus, the only Savior of the world. Amen.

*-Pastor Matt Wurm*