

A Word for Sheepdogs

“BUT WITH ME IT IS A VERY SMALL THING that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself,” St. Paul wrote (1 Cor 4:3). He’s a better man than most pastors I know. In our narcissistic era, we all spend a lot of time looking in the mirror, checking on how we measure up to our own expectations – or how we compare with our peers. Add in the expectations of scores of parishioners, and things get complicated. That’s why the word “evaluation” strikes terror in the hearts of many pastors. They’re afraid of congregational scrutiny or the judgment of their ecclesiastical supervisors.

Pastors Barz and Wurm shine the bright light of the Word of God on the complicated topic of pastoral evaluation. They know what they are talking about both theologically and practically; collectively, they’ve served more than 44 years in the Office of the Holy Ministry. Best of all, they have a heart for the sheep and lambs of Jesus. They know how vital it is that each flock’s shepherd serves both faithfully and diligently in his God-given Office. I think you’ll find their paper both candid and practical; it’s a great tool to help pastors and lay leaders reflect together on how to do the Lord’s work more intentionally and faithfully.

You’ll also find several useful templates for evaluation that can be adapted and implemented in your parish. Let’s talk to each other; mutual conversation and consolation is one of the many ways God is superabundantly rich in His grace. What a blessing it is when brothers dwell together in unity!

- *H. L. Senkbeil*



Pastoral Evaluation & Encouragement as Pastoral Care: A Process for Pastors and Congregations with Suggested Templates

Pastors Mark D. Barz & Matthew E. Wurm

Questions to be Pondered

METRICS AND ASSESSMENTS are part and parcel of businesses, governments and educational systems; increasingly, they have been introduced into the life of the church. Given, however, that pastoral care and the labors of the church are carried out by faith, the use of such measurements raises questions:

Evaluation: When and where does it begin? When and how does it happen? How are pastors and congregations to be evaluated? How, and by whom, is the evaluator to be evaluated?

Assessment: How good are pastors at meeting the expectations of others and the expectations of self? Who assesses a congregation and by what criteria?

Measurement: What standard is used to measure a pastor's worth and performance? What effective length, width, volume, weight, and mass does a congregation possess?

Evaluation, assessment, and measurement may all be helpful and necessary within the secular world to build up businesses, improve efficiency, and

We have deliberately determined not to take the approach of a top-down critique of deficiency, but to offer a Christ-like model of love and service to the other.

design better products. However, within the church, they often result in the opposite of the intended. These can be far from “good, right, and salutary.”

When performance and outcome-based tools are employed to measure, diagnose, and improve “divine production,”¹ spiritual tragedy may occur. Congregations are measured and found wanting — only to receive a label and minimal spiritual help to improve. Pastors are evaluated and found deficient in too many areas and begin to despair of godly hope and satisfaction — or they are commended for doing all things well and satanic pride wins the day.

All too often, hurting congregations that have passed their golden years become resigned to numeric decline and hope decays. Pastors past their “prime” may glide toward the sunny shore of retirement because there, on the brighter bank, they won’t be held responsible for their lack of “divine production.”

Much of what pastors and congregations, districts and seminaries, have put forth as evaluations and assessments are highly subjective in nature. Rather than improving and refining pastoral practice and ministry focus, the evaluation tool often reveals more about the evaluator(s) who designed it than the one evaluated. In other words, the subjective nature of the tools does more to reveal the opinion or mindset of the makers

¹ This term strikes the writers as a total contradiction in terms. As the inspired apostle Paul writes: “What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth” (1 Cor 3:5-7, ESV).

than it does to lead and encourage the takers to reflect or change.

Our goal is not to denigrate the efforts of others who have attempted and are attempting to offer resources for pastoral evaluation. Nor have we chosen to devise a new-and-improved multi-page inventory of a pastor’s quantitative effectiveness. Rather, we will propose several simpler forms of evaluation and encouragement for both pastors and congregations.

We have deliberately determined not to take the approach of a top-down critique of deficiency, but to offer a Christ-like model of love and service to the other.

The aim will not be merely to uncover the areas where either pastors or congregations are deficient in their ability to win souls for Christ or to care for the souls of the redeemed, but to hold forth the torch of the eternal gospel in hope until our Lord returns.

Required? Expected?

Assessment is part of the vicarage experience, during which vicars, their supervisors and a cross section of lay people in that congregation complete a “Vicar Evaluation Inventory.”² Both seminaries of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (hereafter, LCMS) currently use this identical form with 120 evaluative

² Not everyone who reads this paper has experienced the residential seminary model of the LCMS. The usual sequence of residential theological education is this: two years of academics are followed by an assigned internship (known as vicarage) in a congregation under the supervision and mentorship of an experienced pastor. The fourth year of classroom study completes the master of divinity program.

statements. The responses are noted by shading an appropriately-numbered sphere.

This inventory is both qualitative and quantitative. At the end of the day, it serves as a contributing criterion for the pastor-in-training. He will pass, fail, or pass with qualifications. This form seems to work well for the majority of students but, on occasion, it is possible — even likely — that a qualitative question in the evaluation inventory is answered with an ill-informed bias. Instead of producing helpful feedback and offering encouragement toward improvement, the result is a candidate embittered to a portion of the flock and discouraged from tending his future flock faithfully.

Certainly, it is hoped that this process — guided by each seminary's vicarage director — serves the pastor-in-formation, the seminary faculty and placement process, and also this student's future congregations! This means that it serves the church, the visible and active Body of Christ.

We certainly concede that some process of evaluation must be done — and that some portions must be subjective to get an overall picture of the candidate's qualification for the Office of the Holy Ministry. The purpose of the evaluation is to assist those given responsibility (in this case, the seminary faculties) to reach a decision about certification for a Divine Call. Many candidates breathe a great sigh of relief when all of that is accomplished!

Yet it is not good that all evaluation begins and ends at the seminary. Pastors still live in the flesh and are still bent in on themselves.

Therefore, they will be tempted to be lazy and hot-tempered, swayed and swooned to do that which does not build up Christ's church.

After certification for ministry, a Divine Call is assigned. Then comes something with objective standards: the Diploma of Vocation. It's part of the soon-to-graduate seminarian's first set of call documents, and there he reads these words:

In the name of the Triune God and by His authority we ask you to assume the responsibilities of the office to which we have called you and faithfully to perform all the duties of your office according to the Word of God and the confessional standards of the Evangelical Lutheran Church...³

And also these words of commitment from his calling congregation:

To the end that you may be enabled to do this, we pledge you our wholehearted and continuing cooperation and support in word and deed and in our prayers to God in your behalf.

The closing paragraph states:

We pray God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has moved us to extend our call to you, to convince you by His Holy Spirit that it comes from Him, to induce you to accept it, to conduct you safely to your field of labor; and to bless your ministrations to the glory of His Holy name, the building of His Church, the temporal and eternal

³ These quotations from the Diploma of Vocation and the Rite of Ordination (below) are included for two reasons: first, as stated previously, not all readers have had the same experience as those within the LCMS; and, second, those who once read and heard and answered these words may have forgotten them!

welfare of many people, and your own great joy and blessing.

This Divine Call being accepted, the pastor-elect and his first congregation anticipate his ordination and installation.

The Rite of Ordination includes the reading of specific Scriptures that both define the pastoral office and delineate the tasks of a pastor. These commitments are repeated and expanded in Questions and Answers within the Rites of Ordination and Installation.

After the Ordinand has acknowledged that the Lord has called him through His church into the ministry of Word and Sacrament, confessed his confident belief in the Holy Scriptures and his subscription to the ecumenical Creeds and the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, these questions follow:

Do you promise that you will perform the duties of your office in accordance with these Confessions, and that all your preaching and teaching and your administration of the Sacraments will be in conformity with Holy Scripture and with these Confessions?

and:

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

further:

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?

The “Address to the Congregation” in this rite includes two significant questions that reveal the mutual responsibility and concern that the pastor and the flock have for each other:

Will you receive him, show him that love, honor, and obedience in the Lord that you owe to the shepherd and teacher placed over you by your Lord Jesus Christ, and will you support him by your gifts and fervent prayer? If so, then answer: We will, with the help of God.

and (when appropriate):

Will you honor and uphold your pastor as he serves Christ in all his God-pleasing responsibilities? Will you aid him as he cares for his family? Will you be diligent to “put the best construction on everything,” recognizing that “love covers a multitude of sins”? If so, then answer: We will, with the help of God.

Hands are laid on. Scriptural blessings are spoken. The Rite ends. The Benediction is spoken by the newly ordained and installed pastor. Pictures are taken. The dinner is served.

Then ministry begins. Sermons are written and preached. Bible studies are prepared and presented. Hos-

pital calls and nursing home visits are made. Youth and adults are catechized. Baptisms are celebrated. Marriages are solemnized. Saints are buried. Newsletters are printed. Meetings are held.

In addition — and without prompting or the asking of permission — informal judgments that evaluate the pastor (and, often, his family) are made. At the same time — again, without prompting or permission — the pastor forms his opinions of the congregation.

What Pastoral Evaluation is Not

Pastoral evaluation is not to be criticism or fault-finding, nor is it résumé-building for a better call. It is not crisis management, nor is it intervention. It is not labeling. It is certainly not — as some might fear — the “pigeon-holing” of those called into the pastoral office according to specific positions on some continuum of preferences or practices.

Rather, a positive process of evaluation and encouragement is for the good of pastors and their congregations. As such, it has the potential to impact the care of souls. When specific conversations — formal and/or informal, guided and/or spontaneous — can be prompted with mutual encouragement, we are convinced that both pastoral ministry and congregational ministry can be enhanced.

Which leads to a key question: Can one rightly evaluate the work and production of a pastor?

Yes and no. Those who are called and ordained can and should be held accountable to the Word of God and our Lutheran Confessions, but

the production (we use that word cautiously) of the office is the work of the Holy Spirit. Yet working under the Spirit’s life-breathing breath⁴, pastors prepare and practice sermons, visit those in need, console the dying, teach the youth, engage in evangelism, and administer the day-to-day necessities of the visible church. However, not every sermon reaches every soul the same, nor do a pastor’s bedside visits all have the same effect. Youth will still stray. Families will still disappear. Saints will still grieve.

If many disciples of Jesus departed from Him when He taught “hard sayings,” why do laity expect their pastor to surpass the preaching and teaching ability of Christ [John 6:60,66]? If our Lord, who had the Holy Spirit as His constant companion and at His immediate command, suffered numeric losses, why do we turn on one another when our worldly goals miss the mark?

It would be good for us to respond as Simon Peter did and simply confess that we have no other place to go than to Him who possesses and proclaims the words of eternal life [John 6:68]. That word of our Lord grants life, creates and sustains faith entirely apart from our feeble stammering or impeccable prowess, and provides encouragement for pastors and congregations to live together in and under grace in their distinctive yet connected vocations.

The apostle Paul knew something about congregations and pastors. He knew that congregations were made up of sinners who would seek to do anything to change, pressure

Both pastoral ministry and congregational ministry can be enhanced.

⁴ A phrase from “Thy Strong Word” by Martin Franzmann [Lutheran Service Book, 578:2].

and sway the pure doctrine of our justification in Christ. He knew that pastors would be seduced by Satan to be lazy and neglect their calling, pressured to change the doctrine handed down to them by the apostles, and tempted to discouragement. So St. Paul charges young Timothy to be in the place where the Holy Spirit works — in the Word — so that souls may be saved and preserved.

*I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*⁵

Why Evaluation?

If you've read this far, you might even ponder: Would a pastor want evaluation? Or should he want evaluation? If so, why?

If the goal is simply to get “better” at doing the things a pastor does (and that may be, when seen in the best possible light, both a worthy and a necessary goal), then we would be tempted to propose a diagnostic review with specified classes to polish the pastoral persona and conform

every pastor to the standardized best practices.⁶

Through this kind of effort, the style and conduct of those within the pastoral office could have the conformity of the military. Our Synod could, by convention vote, adopt standards for three-point 13-minute sermons, prescribed communication at the bedside of the sick, universal confirmation coursework, and the like. Even if this were done, it could not be enforced and would produce limited results. Rather than the metrics of man, may we have the humility and the courage to let the Word and the work of the Holy Spirit bring about the improvement and standardization of our theology and pastoral practice.

This, too, is a better and stronger reason for evaluation: to encourage one another in the Lord.

The New Testament scriptures, in particular, speak to this matter. Jesus, the church's Lord, offers the following imperatives and instructions. “... Abide in My word ...” (John 8:31). “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (John 13:34). “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld” (John 20:22,23). “Go ... and make disciples of all nations, baptizing ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19,20).

⁶ And we might also be tempted to promote DOXOLOGY as a rich resource to provide new insights and renewed skills for those called to the care of souls in Christ's name. Let the reader understand!

⁵ 2 Timothy 4:1-5 ESV.

The apostolic writers also present both encouragement and exhortation. Paul addresses the elders of Ephesus: “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock ...” (Acts 20:28). He states to the Church in Corinth: “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful” (1 Cor 4:1,2). And to a young pastor, Paul writes, “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching” (1 Tim 4:16).

This reminder is given us in Scripture because we should do — or strive to do — what our Old Adam resists. Every Christian pastor can all too easily make Paul’s words his own: “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate ... I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (Rom 7:15,19).

Ah, wretched man he was — and wretched men we are! Yet we don’t and can’t stop there, as the apostle does not and cannot stop there. “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” Paul boldly cries out. And then he dares to answer his own question with this good news: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom 7:24,25). The wretched are redeemed. We are forgiven and set free.

We are set free by the gospel to live under the gospel and through the gospel, to examine and to be examined by parish leaders and by peers, as well as to encourage and to be encouraged. In this way, we affirm

the pastoral care of pastors⁷ — specifically the process of evaluation of a pastor’s experiences and skills and strengths as well as his weaknesses or areas for growth — in order to speak encouragement.

What is Pastoral Evaluation?

As we’ve previously described what pastoral evaluation is not, we now add a positive description.

Pastoral evaluation is a positive process for the good of pastors and their congregations. As such, it has the potential to impact the care of souls. When such conversations — formal and informal, guided and spontaneous — can be prompted (see the Templates at the close of this paper), we are convinced that pastors can be encouraged and congregational ministry can be enhanced.

This leads to a key question: what does it mean to be a called and ordained servant of the Word? Can this role be defined? Can this role be evaluated?

What aspects of the pastoral office can and should be considered or even scrutinized? The pastor’s preaching? His teaching? His visitation? His communication skills? His faithfulness in doctrine? His marriage and family life? His writing skills? His study habits? His continuing education? His results?

Responses in the LCMS

LCMS convention resolutions presented to the Synod Convention in

⁷ Although others likely have used these words previously, this phrase is attributed to the Rev. Prof. John Pless, Assistant Professor of Practical Theology and Missions at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

July 2016 were quite specific in making reference to the need for evaluation of, and by, those called to the pastoral office. Here are two examples:

Resolution 6-01 — To Create a Pastoral Formation Committee

WHEREAS, One of the objectives of the Synod is to “recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers and provide opportunity for their continuing growth” (Constitution Article III 3 [3]); and

WHEREAS, The 2013 Resolution 5-14A Task Force (Convention Workbook, R64 “The Task Force”) undertook a study of the various means by which the Synod prepares, examines, and certifies men for the pastoral office as ministers of religion—ordained of the Synod; and

Resolution 6-02 — To Uphold the Scriptural and Confessional Qualifications for the Office of the Holy Ministry

As part of the sixth “WHEREAS”:

***Examination:** The Scriptures mandate that the candidate for the holy ministry be personally and theologically qualified for the office (1 Tim 3:1–7; 2 Tim 2:24–26; Titus 1:5–9; 1 Pet 5:1–4). The personal qualifications include that the candidate be a biological male (Gen. 1:26; Matt 19:4), above reproach, and the husband of only one wife. The theological qualifications especially include the requirement that he be “able to teach” (2 Tim 2:24), that is, that “he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Ti-*

tus 1:9), along with competence to perform all the tasks mandated to the office. See the Small Catechism, Table of Duties, 2. To this end the faculties of our seminaries have been called to teach the Scriptures and the Confessions to the pastoral candidates and to form their minds and hearts and skills to the pastoral task. The faculties of the seminaries are also called to examine the confession and life of each of the candidates for the office, along with the Colloquy Committee in the cases reserved for it (Bylaw 3.10.2). By this examination the Synod assures itself of the confessional commitment and the personal and theological fitness of its candidates for call and ordination.⁸

We humbly point out that these resolutions are focused on forming men to be pastors.

But what of those already formed by training, inside and outside of the classrooms, at and through our seminaries? What of those who are in the early or the middle or the later years of parish ministry? What of those who are newer in a Call to a congregation, and what of those who have served that congregation for a greater number of years?

Why Would a Congregation Desire a Process of Evaluation?

Would a congregation choose evaluation for the best of reasons?

Might it act to get more out of the man called to be the pastor in that place? Might it act so that the pastor will do more of what they want and less of what he tries to tell them he

⁸ Today’s Business, LCMS Convention Proceedings 2016, pages 165-168.

should be doing? Might it act to push out the man they have called to be Christ among and for them? These are certainly possibilities in our sin-sickened world.

Or does a congregation act because the redeemed people of God, who gather on the Lord's Day to receive His gifts, consider that one of those gifts is the called, ordained, and installed man who stands before them Sunday after Sunday? And who stands with them — in struggles and sickness, in sorrow and grief, in vocations and celebrations — from Monday to Saturday?

Pastoral evaluation is good for pastors. And it is good for those pastored. It is good for the church. It is good, because the church needs whole and healthy pastors; and it is good because pastors need to talk to and with the souls they serve, just as the saints of God need to talk with and offer encouragement to the one who serves them.

Why Not?

We'll ask the question again: does a pastor want evaluation? Perhaps he does; perhaps he doesn't. But the better question might be: does a pastor need evaluation?

Why are we who are called by our Lord to serve His people cautious and concerned in approaching pastoral evaluation? Why are we who are called by our Lord to serve His people afraid of or anxious about pastoral evaluation?

The first table of the Ten Commandments will suffice to condemn us.

We are often prideful and vulnerable, arrogant and idolatrous.

We are good at pretending to be humble, but are much, much better at praising ourselves and criticizing our brother pastors.

We violate the First Commandment, making ourselves — and our ministries — into our gods.

We misuse God's holy name, not praying and praising and giving thanks as we should, compelled by the gospel.

While we keep the Sabbath as part of our maintaining our status (and our Calls!), we fail to honor God's Word in our daily lives of prayer and study and worship.

Distinctive Vocations

In approaching any attempt at a process of pastoral evaluation, we assert that the differing and distinct vocations given by the Lord to the pastor and to the people must be understood and maintained.

One is given the vocation of proclaimer; others are given the vocation of listeners.

One is given the vocation of catechist; others are given the vocation of catechumen.

One is given the vocation of under-shepherd; others are given the vocation of sheep attentive to the Shepherd's voice, a voice sometimes strident and sometimes comforting.

While these vocations are different and distinct, they are joined together, wedded by the Bridegroom for the sake of His Bride, the church. And there is the blessedness of a shared concern for the faithful ministry of

While these vocations are different and distinct, they are joined together, wedded by the Bridegroom for the sake of His Bride, the church.

Word and Sacraments that happens within that specific parish.

What Happens When Evaluation Happens?

Is the purpose of pastoral evaluation to discover if a pastor is doing the work he has been given to do? And what if he is not? Is he benched or demoted to the minors, placed on the waiver wire — hoping another congregation (even more desperate) will pick up his contract? Is he traded for a fourth-round pick in next year's draft of rookie seminarians?

In all seriousness, the shortcomings of one formed, examined, called, and ordained must not be ignored, but addressed.

Larry Peters, senior pastor of Grace Lutheran Church of Clarksville, Tennessee, offered these thoughts on the possibilities — both positive and negative — when a pastor and his congregation have deliberate conversation about the pastoral office:

On the whole I think it is a good thing when a congregation's lay leadership enters into a discussion of what the Office of Pastor is and what the Ministry of Word and Sacrament is about. I think it can be a positive thing when this discussion revolves around the specific authority and responsibilities of the Pastoral Office — since this is so prone to distortion or misinformation. I welcome the opportunity to dialog with my lay leadership about what I have been called and installed here to do.

On the other hand, if this is a performance evaluation based upon goals and duties not specifically outlined in this call, I think this can be a prelude to great misunder-

standing. The Pastor is not some CEO or COO who runs the corporate show and is accountable to the folks in the pew through their Board of Directors (both people and leaders acting as shareholders in this entity). The Pastor is not some hireling who is employed to boost sales, help promote market brand or market share. When we confuse the business model with the churchly nature of the Pastor's office and calling, we are destined for trouble.⁹

Challenges

We are aware that there are real challenges to any process of evaluation or whatever title it is given. One challenge is when the church council, district official, or senior pastor chooses to use a business model to define and dictate this process. The two operative questions quickly become: "How is he doing in the doing of what we think he should be doing?" and "Is he getting the results that I am or we are expecting?"

Yet the business model is appealing. It's appealing because it offers measurable markers. Is membership growing? Is attendance up or, at least, holding steady? Is giving better than last year? Is our website getting more hits than it was 18 months ago? Is there a clear vision for the congregation's mission and ministry? Is there unity or dissention among the people?

The temptation to count isn't a new challenge to the church, but it is certainly pervasive. And it's not limited to big-box non-denominational behav-

⁹From "Pastoral Meanderings" on "Pastoral Evaluation" by Pastor Larry Peters (blog-post on 6 April 2010).

"When we confuse the business model with the churchly nature of the Pastor's office and calling, we are destined for trouble."

moths. It's the way the world thinks and counts and thinks things count.

And it's not just synodical and district executives who are tempted to use these standards. It's the way pastors boast about how many baptisms and confirmations, and how packed the sanctuary was on Christmas Eve or Easter morning.

Then our Lord speaks. Then our Lord needs to speak. "Not so with you," Jesus told the Twelve. "For this is the way of the kings of the Gentiles; this is not the way of those who follow the Christ" (Luke 22:25-26, paraphrased).

But there's another barrier to humble reflection and helpful evaluation. Just as there are pastors who are all-too-ready to "baptize" a corporate tool and attempt to apply it to the ministry of word and sacraments, there are pastors who are committed to hiding behind "The Call."

Possibly we have heard of a brother pastor who said: "The Lord Jesus Christ has called me to serve in this place. That's all I need to cling to. I'm here because of Him. I'm here to serve Him. I'm not to be evaluated or criticized or corrected. I have a Call."

We certainly affirm the divine institution of the pastoral office; our desire is not to debate the validity of a Divine Call. We affirm that this mediate manner is how the Lord of the church places His servants in the settings where He desires. We affirm that there can be great danger in using a secular tool to judge those who possess this holy office. Yet, we also affirm, that pastoral evaluation can be an appropriate, necessary part of the life of the visible church.

When Should Evaluation and Encouragement Happen?

Regularly. Frequently. Although the frequency may certainly vary from one pastor to another, or from one congregation to another.

To state it differently, we realize that "regularly" could mean once after seven years in that parish, and then again in seven more years! This is not what we intend or endorse!

We also realize that "frequently" could mean — to some pastors and to some congregations — at least twice a year. That, too, is not our intention. The timeline will need to be part of the mutual planning. Some situations will require both a frequent and a regular process. For others it will be appropriate if the conversation(s) are infrequent and irregular.

Speaking to Failures

We'll state it again: our desire is to provide Lutheran congregations and pastors with evaluative tools useful for the building of the body of Christ in the bond of peace. These are designed to enhance the care and the cure of all souls within the church.

With this reciprocal responsibility — of pastor to people to pastor, of shepherd to sheep to shepherd — any process of evaluation must include not only a review of what the pastor is doing (and how well), but of what the people of the parish are doing (and how well).

What happens when I have failed and that failure is identified? After all, every pastor must confess the multiple times and ways he has negated the vows of his ordination.

Our desire is not to debate the validity of a Divine Call.

“What has proven to be most helpful is a regular sit down”

If our desire is to care for the pastor’s soul also — and it must be, then we must speak caution to the pastor himself, lest he be overwhelmed by despair even as others (members of the parish, pastoral peers, and those in the church body’s structural hierarchy) are ready to judge and condemn, berate, and belittle the pastor’s failures and shortcomings.

Pastors need affirmation and support. They need to hear the genuine thanks of those who receive the Lord’s gifts from their lips and hands. Foremost, they need to hear that their sins are forgiven.

They need honesty in care and conversation about their weakness, but as stewards of the mysteries of God, pastors are called to be faithful (1 Cor 4:1). This longing to be faithful, however, must not become an excuse to resist or refuse a process of evaluation. Nor must the reaction to forms, which are truly disguised attempts to measure “success,” keep pastors from engaging in careful, thoughtful conversation about how well they are doing what they are called to be doing.

Did We Convince You?

Can we convince you? Did we convince you? That wasn’t our goal.

Our goal has not been to convince you, and certainly not to coerce you.

It has been to entice and encourage you to ponder, to plan and to begin (or begin again,) a process of pastoral evaluation and encouragement that can — by God’s grace — be of blessing to you and to those you are (or yet will be) called to serve.

As John Kleinig has stated it: “What has proven to be most helpful is a regular sit down”¹⁰ — a chat about ministry by the pastor and those he serves.

And do be aware that this model (with its suggested templates) isn’t reserved for when there is a crash or a crisis. It is also to be utilized when all is well, when the pastor is rejoicing in his Call, when the ministry is humming and the relationships are strong.

What “Outcomes” Do We Hope For?

First, we ask our readers — both ordained and lay — to consider again the words of promise spoken by a congregation at the installation of her pastor. The members of the congregation, the souls under his care, promised to “receive him, [and to] show him that love, honor, and obedience in the Lord that you owe to the shepherd and teacher placed over you by your Lord Jesus Christ, and [to] support him by your gifts and pray for him always.”¹¹

There is more! That question/charge to the congregation regarding her care for her newly-called pastor ends in this way: “that in his labors he may retain a cheerful spirit ... that his ministry among you may be abundantly blessed.”¹²

To repeat words used earlier (borrowed from the Diploma of Vocation), our hope is that pastors would thank our Lord for the privilege of being His

¹⁰ Conversation at the DOXOLOGY Collegium gathering in St. Louis, Missouri (September 2016).

¹¹ *Lutheran Service Book Agenda*, page 180.

¹² *Ibid*, page 180.

instruments for “the temporal and eternal welfare of many people, and [their] own great joy and blessing.”

Here is what we hope can and will happen when pastors and congregations engage in a healthy and honest process of pastoral evaluation. We hope there will be more interaction. More listening. More conversation. More consideration (of each other’s perspectives and challenges). More concern. More clarity. More reflection. More encouragement.

What could happen if pastoral evaluation as pastoral care became more common, even — may God be praised! — the norm across the Evangelical Lutheran Church and beyond? We believe that these could be some of God’s blessings to and between pastors and congregations:

- ◇ Greater honesty in speaking and greater empathy in listening.
- ◇ Increased trust because of the speaking and listening.
- ◇ Increased support because of the speaking and listening.
- ◇ Healthier accountability by a pastor toward his congregation.
- ◇ Healthier accountability by a congregation toward her pastor.

An Additional Insight...

James Bachmann, in a perceptive and thought-provoking essay¹³ offered nearly ten years ago, contends that “left-hand” tasks have become a higher and higher priority in pasto-

ral ministry. While they are not wrong — in fact, he asserts, that they are “necessary” for building a community — these law-oriented techniques are not to be confused with the “essential” task: gospel-centered preaching and teaching delivered by Word and Sacraments.

Bachmann asserts that the all-too-common and all-but-expected practice of interviewing candidates prior to a Call is evidence that lay leaders sense their need to examine how well a potential pastor has gifts in “left-hand” leadership.

This may well stand behind pre-Call assessment as well as the post-Call desire to evaluate a pastor’s work (and his results). It is evident, however, that the “left-hand,” not the “right-hand” (with gospel-focus and gospel-power,) might well be taking center stage.

Why “Yes” to Pastoral Evaluation?

So what will encourage a pastor — and a congregation — to give time and energy to engage in this process?

We want to be clear: we do not expect that this process takes a trained facilitator or contend that it requires a professional counselor. While those with such skills may be called upon in certain circumstances, our hope is that consecrated laypeople will gladly give their energies to parish-based pastoral evaluation and that peers of the pastor will be such a resource to their brothers, listening and responding well to the one who is asking for their assistance.

Our desire and our hope are to provide resources that facilitate fair and

¹³ “The Pastor’s Call and the Pastor’s Contract: A Two Kingdom Perspective on Contemporary Congregational Life” — James Bachmann, Concordia University, Irvine, California. This essay was presented to the theological professors of the LCMS gathered in Dallas, Texas, in March 2007.

clear and precise evaluation, honest and heartfelt appreciation, and helpful encouragement.

Our desire and our hope are that this evaluative process (yes, that language is chosen over simply “evaluation”) moving toward appreciation and encouragement will happen in a threefold combination of the pastor in personal reflection, in conversation with certain parish leaders and representatives, and in collegial and collaborative sharing with peers in the pastoral office.

The interaction with congregational leaders and with pastoral peers will help the minister of Word and Sacraments to consider his own observations and reflections. The process will, in turn, assist the pastor in reflecting on what he has learned (about himself) from his congregation.

We offer this model and these templates to the pastors and congregations of the LCMS — and to the church-at-large — with the prayer that the care of souls, those redeemed by Christ and gathered into the flock served by one of our Lord’s undershepherds, would be strengthened by careful and caring pastoral evaluation and encouragement. We hope that this process will take hold, that it will find significant — if not widespread — use in the larger church!

Conclusion

While Paul’s letters to the Church in Corinth must be read in appropriate context, addressing the diverse problems and difficult challenges of these first century disciples, portions of 2 Corinthians also speak to those who are “called and ordained servants of the Word.”

This is particularly so when the spirit-inspired apostle writes of *ἰκανοί* and *ἡ ἰκανότης*, “sufficient” and “the sufficiency.” These words from the Word should be considered by pastors, by those given the care of redeemed and gathered souls.

Pastors carry the aroma of Christ within the church that it might waft everywhere. Yet in this triumphal procession, the scent is “to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Cor. 2:16).¹⁴

Further, in 2 Corinthians 3:5,6, Paul writes, “Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit.”

The question remains: who is sufficient for this task? Who is capable to proclaim the new covenant of grace and truth revealed in the saving person and work of Jesus the Christ? Who can bear the burdens of this ministry? Who can worthily give out the gifts?

What was clear for Paul in the first century is clear for pastors of the twenty-first century: our sufficiency is from God. He has cleansed us in baptismal water and Word. He has called us to be His servants for the sake of the gospel.

¹⁴ John Chrysostom uses this rich language: “We are then, as it were, a Royal censer, breathing withersoever we go of the heavenly ointment and the spiritual sweet savor.” Schaff, Philip, ed. *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Series 1. New York: The Christian Literature Series, 1886-89. Reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956, 12:301.

May every consecrated attempt at pastoral evaluation and encouragement be used and blessed by the Lord of the church for the good of Christ's shepherds and Christ's sheep. ☩

FROM THE EDITOR: For further reading on the advantages and disadvantages of the longer pastorate, together with some excellent vignettes of pastoral care, see Glenn Obenberger's "Until I Finally Please Everyone... Or Non Nobis Domine, Non Nobis!" in LOGIA, Vol XXVI #2, 19-24.

*The Rev. Mark D. Barz
is pastor of Crown of
Life Lutheran Church in
San Antonio, TX
pastor@crownoflifesa.org*

*The Rev. Matthew E.
Wurm is Senior Pastor
of Mt. Calvary Lutheran
Church in Brookings, SD
pastormc@swiftel.net*

www.doxology.us

A Word about the Suggested Templates:

Each pastor is different. Each pastor's personality and setting are different. For that reason, we're reluctant to propose a "one-size-fits-all" template. Instead, we offer you three options. Our primary concern (regardless of the template chosen) is that the goal is clear and understood: encouragement rather than an evaluation of performance and/or results.

Template #1: Self-Reflection & Conversation

Step One: Self-Reflection by a Pastor

[To be shared in conversation with a pastoral peer and then with a congregational leader or a small group of congregational leaders.]

These are three aspects of pastoral ministry in which I feel most competent and confident:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

These are three aspects of pastoral ministry about which I feel most challenged to carry out eagerly and effectively:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Here are three options for reading or learning, training or assistance that

could be helpful to me to address those areas of ministry in which I'm most challenged:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

These are three of my expectations of what my pastoral ministry should offer to the people of God at _____:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

These are three of my perceived expectations of what the people of God at _____ want from me as their pastor:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

This is how I can encourage those I serve to live their vocation as hearers and doers of the Word without "guilting" or shaming them in the areas they seem to be lacking:

This is how I presently receive encouragement from those I serve at _____:

This is the encouragement I would appreciate receiving so that I can better care for the souls of those at _____:

Step Two: Conversation with a Congregational Leader (or Leaders)

[To be planned and prayed for by all involved to offer mutual encouragement in their respective vocations.]

These are three aspects of pastoral ministry in which I/we feel you are most competent and confident:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

These are three aspects of pastoral ministry which I/we feel you are most challenged to carry out eagerly and effectively:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What encouragement can I/we give you to better and more joyfully care for the souls at _____?

This is how you can encourage us to live our vocation as hearers and doers of the Word without “guilting” or shaming us:

Template #2: Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio

Oratio leads to *meditatio* which prepares us to face *tentatio*.

Oratio is not a simplistic encouragement to pray more! Luther sees *oratio* quite differently. As John Pless writes, “It is here that we learn how to listen to God [in His Word] and to call upon Him.”¹⁵

The Holy Spirit, who breathed life into Adam and Eve, also breathed life into the words and writings of the prophets and the apostles scratched on to vellum and parchment. Indeed, the Spirit of God continues to breathe through the Word to make it living and life-giving.

First, we listen to God in His Word. *Oratio* is anchored in the reading, the hearing, the listening to God speak in Holy Scripture. Prayer is always our response to the One who first (“In the beginning,” Genesis 1 and John 1) speaks and acts, calls and claims.

Just as a young child echoes back to his parents what he has first heard from their mouths, so we don’t speak back to God until we first hear and listen to His voice.

Reflection on *oratio* can and should lead to reflection upon and conversation about a pastor’s and a congregation’s life of prayer. These prayers are always in response to our Lord’s written and revealed Word.

◇ How are my/our pastor’s prayers expressed in corporate and solo worship?

¹⁵ “Luther and the Shape of Care for Pastors.” John Pless, *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Volume 80:1,2, January/April 2016, page 48.

◇ Is praying frequently and fervently for the souls under my/his care a priority for me/our pastor?

◇ Is praying for our pastor — the man called to be the shepherd — by members of our congregation a frequent and fervent action?

Meditatio is focused attention to the Word. It's not just in preparation for sermonizing or catechizing, but the disciple's need to "read, mark, learn, and take to heart" the Word of God — particularly the Psalms.

"Evangelical meditation"¹⁶ is not inward. For the pastor/preacher doesn't meditate just for his own spiritual well-being, "but for those placed under his curacy in the church."¹⁷

Thus, *meditatio* first focuses on Christ and His salvific Word and, second, on the opportunities to show mercy to our neighbors because of their needs.

Meditatio is our response to the heard Word. (How and when do most pastors — especially "solo" pastors — "hear" the Word of God read and preached from the mouths of others?)

◇ When does my/your/our pastor's *meditatio* most often take place?

◇ Where does my/your/our pastor's *meditatio* most often take place?

◇ What seems to most often stand in the way of my/your/our pastor's *meditatio*?

◇ How could you/others/we help you give more attention to meditation?

Tentatio is facing and not fleeing from testing and trials.

◇ Where are the struggles — for this pastor and the redeemed people of God?

◇ Where are the challenges — for this pastor and the redeemed people of God?

◇ How is God at work correcting and condemning with the law and shaping and renewing with the gospel this pastor and this congregation?

Could these three be reversed? Could the process of reflection then move from *tentatio* to *meditatio* to *oratio*? The answer is "Yes!" (We encourage you to read the entire Pless article.)

¹⁶ Pless, p. 40.

¹⁷ Pless, p. 42.

Template #3: Ten Questions from Luther

In a simple but stimulating article written in 2015, Luther scholar Oswald Bayer responded to the charge to give German pastors “something brief on Luther’s significance for today.” His decision was to pose twenty questions specific to the pastoral office.¹⁸

In order to make them, in our opinion, a bit more accessible, we have chosen to reduce the questions to ten, omitting some and combining others. We have also cast them in the first person, though Bayer wrote them in the second person.

1. Do I exercise my ministry in the name of – hence on behalf of – the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit for the purpose of sharpening and comforting consciences in view of the final judgment, and so for the purpose of preaching law and gospel?

2. Does the message of the cross make me feel apathetic or does it make me feel that “nowhere to date has there been such a bold inversion of anything quite as horrible, questioning, and questionable,”¹⁹ so that its rejection as something foolish and scandalous²⁰ is entirely understandable from a human point of view (even though it is “satanic” all the same, per Mark 8:33); while

¹⁸ “Twenty Questions on the Relevance of Luther for Today,” Oswald Bayer (translated by Jeffrey G. Silcock), *Lutheran Quarterly*, Volume XXIX, 2015, pages 439-443.

¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), p. 44.

²⁰ “But we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Cor 1:23).

its acceptance as the power and wisdom of God is due to none other than the miracle of the Holy Spirit?

3. Am I bold to believe and teach that the promise of freedom that I speak in God’s name is God’s own Word and that “we receive the Absolution, that is, forgiveness from the confessor as from God Himself and by no means doubt but firmly believe that our sins are thereby forgiven before God in heaven” (BC 360)?

4. Am I aware that the preaching of the gospel is, or should be, the same speech act as Holy Baptism, Absolution, and the Lord’s Supper? Do I realize, then, that it is not meant to inform, demand, or represent, so that it cannot be a statement, appeal, or emotional expression, but that it is meant to promise and to give, and to keep on giving?

5. Do I realize that it is only when I understand that the Word is promise and gift that faith can be truly faith?

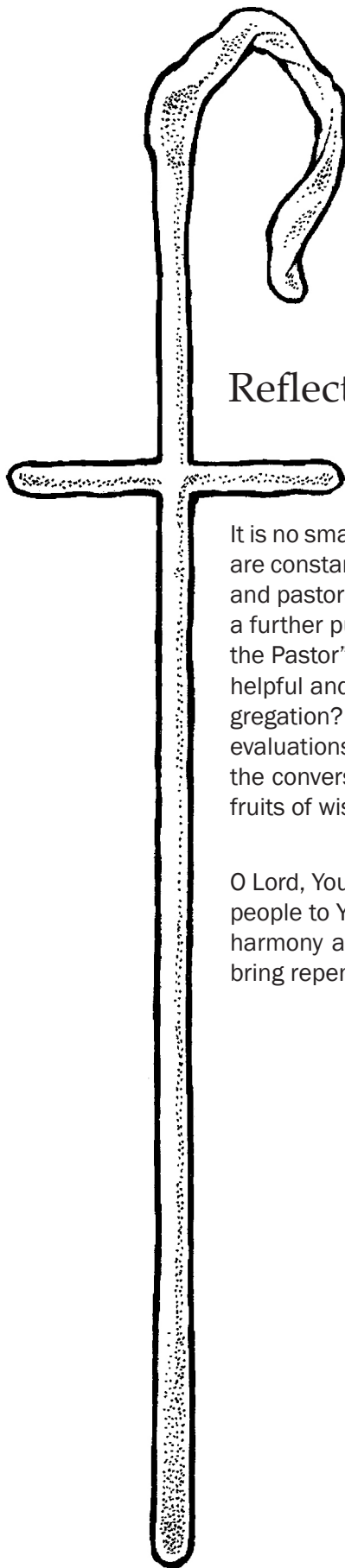
6. In the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, do I continue to distinguish between God’s promise, which comes before faith, and the prayer of thanksgiving that follows, which is the answer of faith (LW 36:50-51)? Consequently, do I refrain from turning the Lord’s Supper as a whole into a Eucharist, thereby collapsing the *katabatic* (the downward movement) into the *anabatic* (the upward movement)?

7. Am I comforted by a humble anti-Donatism that stresses that the validity and efficacy of God’s Word “does not rest upon the worthiness of the minister who distributes the Sacrament, nor upon the worthiness of the one who receives it” (BC 596, trans. alt.)?

8. Is my theological existence determined by prayer (*oratio*), meditation (*meditation*), and attack (*tentatio*); that is, by the fact that, driven as I am by *Anfechtung*, I enter prayerfully into Holy Scripture and am interpreted by it, in order that I can interpret it for others who are under spiritual attack, so that they too enter prayerfully into Holy Scripture and be interpreted by it?

9. Is pastoral care constitutive for my theological existence and, therefore, is it characterized by the mutual conversation, and the mutual strengthening, of fellow Christians to help them live confidently (BC, 319) in view of the final judgement (see question 1)?

10. Since faith comes through hearing, has the joy of language and concern for it become second nature for me, so that questions of education and culture are vitally important for me?



Reflection

It is no small thing to stand before God and man as a preacher of the gospel. Pastors are constantly tempted to both pride and despair, especially in regards to their office and pastoral work. The idea of “evaluation,” then, is normally a frightful proposition, a further push down the path to pride and despair, like placing a “Complaints about the Pastor” box in the narthex. How, then, can a pastor and his congregation have a helpful and godly conversation about the work of the pastor and the life of the congregation? Pr. Wurm and Pr. Barz offer an apology and three suggestions for pastoral evaluations that keep the biblical shape of the office of the ministry in the minds of the conversants. May God grant that these suggestions would bring forth the godly fruits of wisdom and joy in the Lord’s Word.

✠

O Lord, You have given the gift of pastors to Your congregations, and You have given people to Your pastors. Grant that congregations and pastors would live together in harmony and joy, and that the constant conversation of pastor and people would bring repentance, faith, and joy in His gifts. Amen.

- *Pastor Tyler C Arnold*