

Getting Personal

About Ministry and Stewardship

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One of the most prominent places that a pastor “models” stewardship is through the Office of the Holy Ministry in the congregation.

From the Ordination and Installation Agendas, we see Scripture identify the pastor’s vocation and responsibilities to “feed, tend, preach repentance and forgiveness of sins, administer Baptism and the Lord’s Supper; to practice, devote yourself, to keep close watch on yourself and your doctrine; to persist, to be servants of Christ, stewards of the mysteries of God, to be found faithful; God making His appeal through us; to preach the Word in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort; do the work of an evangelist, be above reproach, manage one’s own household, shepherd the flock, be examples,” etc.

Furthermore, the ordained or installed pastor promises to “faithfully instruct both young and old ... forgive the sins of those who repent ... never to divulge the sins confessed ... minister faithfully to the sick and dying ... demonstrate to the church a constant and ready ministry centered in the Gospel ... admonish and encourage the people to a lively confidence in Christ and in holy living ... to honor and adorn the Office of the Holy Ministry with a holy life ... to be diligent in the study of Holy Scripture and the confessions ... constant in prayer for those under your pastoral care ...”¹

As you can see, in addition to the five areas of God’s blessings given to all believers, the pastor is charged with greater responsibilities (James 3:1) and is wise to consider his stewardship “of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor. 4:1-2 ESV) when he shepherds the flock God entrusted to his pastoral care and attention. To that end, J. E. Herrmann, author of *The Chief Steward*, includes a section on “pastor self analysis” with an extensive list of questions for the pastor to ask himself in regard to his person, his work, his congregation (Pages 35-37) concluding with this statement: “Unless we measure ourselves occasionally we will shrink in stature as pastors and leaders.”²

Since we have this charge as men called to the Office of the Holy Ministry, we would do well to look at ways to grow in our stewardship of the mysteries of God. This has always been critical as Paul noted

when he spoke to the Ephesian elders, or pastors: “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 ESV). Other Scriptures (1 Tim. 4; 1 Peter 5; James 3:1, etc.) also make important points, teaching us that we as pastors do well to pay careful attention (oversight) to our life and ministry as stewards “of the mysteries of God.”

What then shall we “pay attention to” in regard to our lives? First, how about personal attitudes and the manner in which we conduct ministry? How many times do Paul and the other apostles emphasize not only “what” pastors do, but the way in which (demeanor) one ministers? (Acts 20:19, 2:33-35; Rom. 15:1; 1 Cor. 2:1-5, 9:19, 27, 10:33, 13; 2 Cor. 1:24, 6:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-7, 4:11-16; 2 Tim 2:14-16, 4:1-5; Titus 2; 1 Peter 3:8-9, 5:2-4). Our attitude and demeanor, personal attitude with which we minister, care for the flock, the way we address conflicts and difficulties, teach and preach, go about the work of ministry — all have a significant impact. Even Paul was careful not to put a stumbling block in the way of the Gospel (1 Cor. 8:9, 9:12b). Are we “paying attention” to this aspect of managing well the Office of the Holy Ministry?

Second, what better document can be found for review than the Supplement to the Diploma of Vocation for “paying attention to” a pastor’s duties and responsibilities? On that page the congregation does “authorize and obligate you” to specific responsibilities and duties of the Office of the Holy Ministry. You may recall that you affixed your signature in acceptance of these call documents.

Faithful stewardship would then compel us (“pay attention to yourself and to the flock of God”) to review this document from time to time and pose each statement as a question. Am I administering the Word of God in its full truth and purity? Or not? How will I make it so? And so forth. The same might be posed to the elders of the congregation or a fellow pastor, circuit counselor, etc. In light of your personal stewardship (managing, caring, tending, keeping, etc.) of the Office of the Holy Ministry entrusted to you, here are the responsibilities with suggested questions you might ask yourself.

¹ *Lutheran Service Book Agenda*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 2006, pp. 168-174.

² J.E. Herrmann, *ibid*, p. 37

The Supplement to the Diploma of Vocation says:

We do hereby authorize and obligate you:

To administer to us the Word of God in its full truth and purity as contained in the Sacred Scriptures of the Old and New testaments and as set forth in the confessional writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as found in the Book of Concord.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER: Am I reading Scriptures for my personal devotions and learning or am I just reading them for sermons and Bible studies? Am I including all the doctrines in Scripture (full truth and the full counsel of God) in my preaching over time? Am I preaching and teaching stewardship? Am I checking my sermons and Bible studies, etc., against the Confessions, reading the Confessions myself? Am I using consistent terminology, faithful to Scripture and the Confessions, or am I making things “murky” with other current and faddish terminology?

To administer the holy sacraments in accordance with their divine institution

QUESTIONS: Am I staying with the words of institution consistently or changing them? Same question with Baptism, the dismissal? Do I teach and practice close Communion? Do I help others in the congregation and outside the congregation understand and appreciate this practice?

To demonstrate the mind and spirit of Christ as you serve the members of the congregation and equip them for Christ’s mission to seek and save the lost.

QUESTIONS: Do I serve as a humble servant, trusting in the Word and its promised power or do I seek to overpower with my “office” and my personality? Do I seek to have my congregation trust God’s Word or me personally? Do I point them to the purposes for their lives as baptized children of God, seeking and saving the lost, while we wait for His return or His call to eternal rest? How am I helping them in that stewardship of the Gospel endeavor? What am I doing to train them for that mission?

To equip and enable the members of the congregation to serve one another and those outside the fellowship of the congregation

QUESTIONS: What can be done by me to preach and teach that God called us into His kingdom so that we might love one another, pray for one another, serve one another, rejoice with one another and all the others in Scripture? In what ways will I promote engaging the community in which our congregation resides for acts of witness and mercy, without thought of reward or benefit to the congregation? What need might our congregation fill that will cover a void in the community right now?

To perform the functions of a pastor in an evangelical manner; to aid, counsel and guide members of all ages and social condition; to visit the sick and the dying; to admonish the indifferent and the erring; to support the members of the congregation as they extend that evangelical ministry to others

QUESTIONS: What does it mean to “perform the functions of a pastor in an evangelical manner to your members? What does it mean to be concerned for members of “all ages and social conditions?” What are the dangers of favoritism (See James)? Am I a “visitor” faithfully for the sake of true soul care (seelsorge)? Even to those who are drifting, straying, wandering or rebelling? Or are they not worth the time and effort? (See Ezek. 34; Jeremiah; John 10:10-14.)

To guard and promote faithfully the spiritual welfare of the members of this congregation, in particular to see to the instruction of the catechumens, both children and adults, in the Word and to prepare them for communicant membership in the church

QUESTIONS: How will I “oversee” the spiritual welfare and condition of each member? To what extent is catechesis sufficient and thorough for communicant membership, children and adults? In what ways might I teach them their place, role and purpose as a member in the congregation?

To guide the congregation in applying the divinely ordained discipline of the church according to the Word of God and to assist and lead the members of the congregation in practicing the forgiven life with one another

QUESTIONS: How might I teach Matt. 18:15-20 along with Gal. 1:4, Matt. 5:23-25, etc., in a way that equips believers to speak to believers for restoration and reconciliation? How might I teach a positive attitude and method for dealing with conflict (1 Cor. 6,

ambassadors of reconciliation) as Christian people, rather than letting unresolved conflict consume the time, energies and resources of people, taking them away from the mission and ministry of the Lord? How will I teach and preach the “forgiven life with one another”?

To promote and guide the mission activity of the congregation as it is related to the local community and to endeavors of the Synod and its districts, in particular to train workers and guide them in evangelism and to enlist the support of the congregation for mission work

QUESTIONS: To use the categories of J. E. Herrmann in *The Chief Steward* (Pages 37-38), to what extent am I helping the congregation visualize the mission and ministry the Lord has given to this congregation? How shall we *organize* to carry it out most effectively? Who has been *deputized* to accomplish specific tasks? How will these endeavors be *supervised*, especially by the one charged with “oversight” (episcopate, shepherding, leading, pastoring)? To what extent do I encourage participation (personal, support, gifts) in the Synod and its districts? What kind of evangelism training and mission involvement is offered to members?

To serve as a resource and guide for members of the congregation as they participate in the ministry of Christian education, and to train parents to teach the Christian faith to their children

QUESTIONS: How involved am I in resourcing, guiding and teaching parents about the education of their children in the truths of God’s Word and in Christian parenting? How might that be done better?

To assist the congregation in adopting administrative policies and procedures that will help it carry out the mission of a Christian congregation

QUESTIONS: What is the role of structure and administration in serving the mission of the congregation? What happens when it is neglected? What structure and administration serves the congregation to carry out its mission best and most effectively? How does the pastor “see to it” that it is accomplished?

To serve the congregation as an example of Christian conduct; to endeavor earnestly to live in Christian unity with the members of the congregation, fellow workers and sister congregations in the Synod; and by the grace of God to do everything possible for the edification of the congregation and the up building of the church in Christ.

QUESTIONS: What kind of example am I? In managing my personal life? Balancing time for wife, family, work, leisure, health? In dealing with difficulties, difficult people, my fellow Christians? How do I model with fellow workers, members of Synod, what I expect from members to me? In what ways do I focus efforts, teaching and preaching on edification and building up instead of tearing down or forcing away?

As you can see, this is a reality check for pastors called to serve in a congregation? And these call document “responsibilities” are derived from Scripture itself when one takes the time to study Scripture closely. Therefore these items are not “options” or “if there is time” or “if I like to pay attention to it” items. It requires faithfulness, stewardship and the Lord’s continual help. Paul made it clear: “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...” (2 Cor. 3:5-6 ESV).

Yet when Paul wrote about being “servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God,” we do not forget that he added, “Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:1-2 ESV). Other translations often use the word “faithful” carrying with it the connotation of “reliable, sure, true to God’s Word, unfailing, conscientious.” Being trustworthy and faithful means “paying attention to yourself” and to the responsibilities of the ministry for the sake of the Gospel and for the growth of the Lord’s mission and ministry carried out in the congregation and by the congregation with the pastor’s shepherding. “Paying attention to oneself” is a needed practice for faithful stewardship of the special trust given and placed upon the pastor in the Office of the Holy Ministry.