The Parsonage is not just a home
“In 1923, Ladies Aid began in our church. The first monthly meetings were in the parsonage. The ladies quilted in our parlor. During the hot summer months, they met in the church basement. Later, a member permitted the ladies to come to her home during the winter months. My sister and I babysat while the mothers sewed.

“Brides used the parsonage to dress for their wedding in our front room. For about two days ahead of the wedding, we had a wedding gown hanging over our kitchen door.

“Sunday School classes were held in the parsonage front room, study, and dining room. Family furniture was used, as well as folding chairs tucked behind doors during the week. One problem with this arrangement was the disappearance of candy canes from the family Christmas tree — they proved too tempting for some Sunday school boys to resist.

“Because heating the church in winter was expensive, the front room of our home served as a parish hall annex for junior choir practice, private instruction, and general parishioner visits, with my mother offering coffee and cookies as amenities.”

Interesting visitors
“I remember gypsies coming by in wagons; my sister and I were afraid and hid in the outhouse. Tramps also stopped by for a handout, going east in the fall and west in the spring. Sometimes they would add coal to the stove in the school house and stay overnight. One morning, when my father led us school children into church for Christmas practice, a hobo sat up in a pew. I can still see him walk away, bundles tied to his waist.”

Family celebrations
“Many parishioners’ birthdays were celebrated on Sunday afternoon and evening, and we were often invited. We had meals at noon and in the evening, and we played cards. Later we had coffee cake. Ladies Aid met in homes. Members were very kind and gave many dressed ducks to eat.”

My grandfather’s sermon for my parent’s marriage was based upon the Aaronic blessing, found in Numbers 6:24–26: “The Lord bless you and keep you,” accompanied by the words, “Silver and gold have I none, but this blessing I give to you.” When I think of my mother, I think of these words of the Lord’s blessing reflected in her life, leading her to respond by seeking to be a blessing to others who came into her parsonage home.

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SECRET #5
Ministry is lonely sometimes.
When we moved to Montana straight out of seminary, my mother (who lives in Wisconsin) optimistically said, “I’ll never see you again.” While that certainly wasn’t the case, we don’t get to visit our families as much as we would like. As a ministry family, we are busy Sundays and holidays when everyone else is off work. Sometimes we welcome an invitation to a Sunday dinner or a Christmas get-together. Oh, and I’d love to have coffee with you sometime.

SECRET #6
There is a right way and a wrong way to criticize.
I remember the Sunday when I was playing the piano at the front of the church, and I noticed a certain member enter the sanctuary after the first hymn. I was puzzled when she left half-way through the service and even more puzzled when the usher relayed a message from her, “You win.” I had no idea we were in a battle or what I had won. On the other hand, I had no problem understanding what my transgressions were when another member called me on the phone and spent fifteen minutes telling me everything I had done wrong. Neither of these methods was effective. I am hopeful, if I have offended you, that you can find a loving way to tell me and give me a chance to ask for forgiveness and make it right. Remember — I already know I’m not perfect!

SECRET #7
I love my church family.
Life in ministry isn’t always easy. But I wouldn’t trade it for anything. God has blessed us immeasurably through the love of our brothers and sisters in Christ. When we moved here, we felt the blessing of instant family. When we were blessed with children, you showered us with love and gifts. When we experienced loss, you supported us with hugs and prayers.

Last year was a scary time, but your love helped us through it. When my healthy-as-a-horse pastor husband received a cancer diagnosis, you cried with us. You gave him the grace to cut back on his schedule during chemotherapy. You even helped us with some of the medical bills. We saw the Father’s love through the hands of His children.

So, thank you for letting me be a part of this church family and for the opportunity to serve our heavenly Father alongside you. Thank you for teaching Sunday School and polishing communion ware. Thank you for serving as a greeter and as secretary of the congregation. Thank you for making me laugh until I cry and for sharing your heart in Bible study.

Thank you for being a precious sister in Christ.

Sharla Fritz is a member of Hope Lutheran Church in Aurora, Illinois.

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Pastor’s Daughter/Pastor’s Wife
As the daughter of a pastor, I also have many memories growing up in a parsonage. My father spent a lot of time visiting members in their homes, with my mother often accompanying him. I remember coming along on some of these visits, playing with the family children when younger, or sitting with a book when older. I remember the smell of burning wood stoves in some of these homes as well as the lack of indoor plumbing in others. Years later, as a pastor’s wife, I often joined my husband on such visits.

I have fond memories of circuit pastoral conferences in the 1950s, with the wives chatting in the parsonage, the children running wild around the church yard, and the pastors meeting in a smoke-filled church basement. When I think of these women, preachers’ and teachers’ wives, I realize they too were a blessing to those who came within their “church family” circle.

One of the greatest blessings of living in a parsonage is the extraordinary opportunity to get to know God’s people of faith at such a personal level — to hear and respond to their story and, in return, to be touched back by their witness.

Anita Reith Stohs is a member of Hope Lutheran Church, Shawnee, Kansas. Her mother, Elsie Roschke Reith (pictured), was a member of St. John Lutheran Church, Seward, Nebraska, and passed away at age 100 just before this article went to print.