SECRET #1
I’m not perfect.
Yeah, that’s not much of a secret. But maybe you didn’t know that I feel pressure to look like I have it all together. I certainly don’t consider myself better than any of the other women in our church, but I sense that maybe some of you are looking to me to be an example of a Christian woman. And I think: If you only knew my struggles. So when I forget your name, or say something stupid, or show up at church in a stained outfit (because the laundry isn’t done and the baby spit up on my one clean dress), please give me grace.

SECRET #2
Our kids are not perfect.
Some days they will sit nicely in church and play with their books. But sometimes the baby will crawl under the pew, and the two-year-old will announce a tremendous poop production in the middle of the Old Testament lesson. Our children are human. Although we read Scripture at home and pray that they will always love the Lord, they won’t always make the best choices. We hope you’ll love them anyway.

SECRET #3
I don’t want to be pigeon-holed.
OK, I happen to fit the stereotype of the church organist married to the pastor. As a musician, I’m happy to contribute my talents, playing for services and directing the choir. But maybe I don’t want to be on the altar guild or president of the women’s group. We’re all part of the body of Christ. Help me to discover how I can use my gifts and personality as I help you to use yours.

SECRET #4
I don’t want to be a messenger for my husband.
Often Sunday morning means singlehandedly wrestling the kids into their church clothes and snow suits only to have the baby mess the diaper and have to start all over again. At church I’m trying to corral the kids, direct the choir, and perhaps catch a bit of the sermon. It’s not that I refuse to take your message to my husband, it’s that I’m afraid I’ll forget. Please talk to him directly.

Dear sisters in Christ,
We’ve known each other a long time. We’ve sat in the same pews and attended Bible studies together. But I’ve kept some secrets from you. Maybe it’s time to tell all. Now, you may be hoping that I will share my secret recipe for the Apple Kuchen I brought to the last potluck or the mystery of what pastor does on his day off. Sorry. These secrets are more personal. I’ve been too timid to say these things out loud, so I’m sharing them in a letter.

Here goes.

Seven Secrets
YOUR PASTOR’S WIFE WISHES YOU KNEW

By Sharla Fritz

Seven Secrets

TOP SECRET

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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.

A Glimpse Into the Parsonage continued from page 5

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. Q

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.