

## *Smoky Mountain Reflections*

*August 2014 #151 (This is included because biology has a bearing on the pastoral vocation)*

Why does it matter who does what a pastor does? Couldn't any competent lay person fill his role? In order to explore this question, we first need to explore the meaning of a couple of words: "*laity*" and "*expert*".

**"Laity"** is a term often used in religious circles to differentiate clergy (pastors) from everyone else. However, a broader understanding of the term will be helpful in answering this question. The word "*lay*" derives from the Anglo-French "*lai*" (influenced by Latin and Greek) meaning basically, "of the people", or "the people at large". So by this general definition, everyone is a lay person, even pastors, depending on the context. A pastor is a lay person in relation to a pilot on an airplane, a cook in a kitchen, a lawyer in a court room, a doctor in a hospital, a sanitation engineer on the back of a garbage collection truck, and a milk maid delivering a pail of fresh milk. So, you get the point that laity is "everyone else" in relation to a group of experts with regard to a particular occupation that requires some level of training, if you want it done well.

**"Expert"** is a term rarely used in reference to pastors, and in some cases justifiably so. The requirements for becoming a pastor range widely, because the ways different groups define the role of pastor range widely. For the sake of this article, let's go with the Augsburg Confession article 14 definition of "Order in the Church" as our definition of expert with regard to the pastoral office (which is so short I can quote it here). "*Our churches teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church, or administer the Sacraments, without a rightly ordered call.*" A rightly ordered call in normal cases assumes a proper amount of training, (to follow the apostolic model, about three and a half years at the foot of a master) combined with all the biblical qualifications for an "under-shepherd" found in scripture.

The first reason that only pastors should do what pastors are trained and paid to do is the same practical reason that lay people should not do the work of any given expert; because the work of the pastoral office is what the *pastor* is paid and trained to do. This in no way means that any expert is more important than any lay person, it simply acknowledges that churches, communities, and families all have many parts, and for us to get the most out of these, God ordained structures in which we need to do *our* part, and let others do *their* parts.

I am not against training up young men and women to serve in the church under proper supervision. However, if we encouraged children or inexperienced or untrained individuals to do some of the things that pastors and leaders should be doing (as is done in some churches in the name of maximum participation of the laity) then by the same reasoning, we should have those same inexperienced or untrained novices flying planes, practicing law, doing surgery, and administrating our government. I am not talking about this in a "bring your child to work" sense. I am talking about them performing the regular tasks on a regular basis, while the paid experts sit at a distance nodding and smiling, or they are altogether absent. Please do not tell me that proper worship and right administration of word and sacrament is not life and death business, as practicing medicine or the law or flying a plane are. God's word and sacrament deliver sinners, redeemed from eternal torment. That is serious business.

Our society has come to have a low regard for those in positions of authority, and I think even more so for pastors. But I do not blame our society for this; because many who call themselves pastors are paid to do a job they are ill equipped to do, while watching those *who pay them* do the work instead. There are also many church bodies that set no qualifications for individuals taking on the role of pastor. As a result, the American melting pot has many people wearing the mantle of pastor who do not wear it well.

To compare the occupation of pastor to that of medical doctor shows many similarities. Both occupations are regularly called upon to meet with people to evaluate a situation, present a prognosis, and prescribe effective care or management options based on that prognosis. A pastor or doctor should not try to do the jobs of the other people in the church or hospital. A doctor or pastor should be held responsible by those they serve to provide the best medical or spiritual care possible. And finally, we do not charge untrained quacks with malpractice; we remove them from the roll for the protection of the patients. In the same way, untrained, uncalled, non-ordained theological quacks should not only be corrected, they should be removed for the protection of the flock.

I pray that all your needs for experts in life are covered by well-trained, dedicated individuals.

In Christ,  
Pastor Portier