

# COMMITMENTS OF THE SHEPHERD: PRINCIPLES OF CONDUCT FOR ORDAINED MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL

## Introduction

The need for some sort of principles of conduct for ministers of the Gospel in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has been apparent to many in the Synod, including the pastors themselves. Laity, circuit counselors, district presidents, seminary faculties, and others concerned with the preparation and supervision, directly or indirectly, of the clergy of the LCMS have been especially aware of the need for ministerial guidelines.

This is not to say that the clergy of today are less ethical than the clergy of the past. Far from it! Given the tremendous pressures placed upon clergy today, LCMS pastors in general are better equipped than ever before, are found to be faithful to their calling, and follow the highest ethical standards.

Yet if one were to ask our clergy what standards they follow, they would be hard pressed to produce a systematic and accepted set of standards. Many clergy who responded to a survey concerning pastoral standards warned against producing something that rested on anything other than a biblical base and worried that a "code" of "standards" for pastors could be used legalistically and moralistically. At the same time many of those same pastors perceived that they and their peers were being hurt by a lack of consensus about biblical standards for pastoral behavior.

If there is anything that is clear about the office of the ministry, it is that the pastor is called to be a shepherd under the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ (1 Peter 5:2-4). The very fact that Holy Scripture singles out the pastor for special treatment with regard to the conduct of his ministry (1 Peter 5:1-4; 1 Tim. 3:1-7, 1 Tim. 4:16; 2 Tim. 2:24-25a; 2 Tim. 4:2,5; Titus 1:7-9, Titus 2:1,7-8) apart from what is normally expected of any Christian underscores this special relationship with and unique responsibility toward the Good Shepherd.

The pastor's conduct, his "ethic," his bearing, his choices and professionalism and relationships, all must finally and faithfully reflect his being a shepherd of a flock under the Shepherd. It is that relationship and commitment that makes the conduct of his office so unique and so vital.

Today's pastor lives in a world of increasing changes, pressures, and temptations. Secular America has entered the sanctuary. People's expectations of pastors have grown quantitatively and qualitatively. Trends and movements do make strong impacts upon the parish and its pastor. The biblical models and descriptions of who a pastor is to be and what he is to do are being seriously questioned, or, if not questioned, are being expanded by demanding parishioners. The pastor feels pressure on the pastoral office while at the same time his relationships with wife and children are also influenced by social trends and pressures. While rejecting a legalistic straitjacket, pastors seem to be asking for help in identifying principles that can serve to guide them in the conduct of their shepherd ministry. And they are asking for this not for the sake of their professional standing and understanding, but for the sake of the Gospel that they and their fellow clergy have been called to proclaim.

## The Purpose

How, then, should this document be used? The basic question that prompted and informed the writing of this document is: Of what benefit will this be for the pastor shepherd? Thus, it is written brother-to-brother, as one forgiven sinner to another. It is not written to be a moralistic code. It is not written to be a club in the hands of one's district president or congregation. It is written to provide a helpful look at our commitments as shepherds. It is written with each of the following purposes in mind, with special emphasis on #4 below, a reaffirmation of our dependence on the grace and power of God.

- 1. Examination of biblically mandated principles for shepherds.** None of the Scriptural references will be new for the reader. But juxtaposing them in a new context, we hope, will enable the pastor to take a fresh and deeper look into what the Lord says about the conduct of his ministry. The **Oratio** of Luther's three-fold elements of a true theologian – **Oratio** (prayer), **Meditatio** (study), and **Tentatio** (religious experience) – surely must be brought to bear here. Fritz writes of Oratio: "Since the sufficiency of the minister of the Gospel is not of himself, but of God alone, he should not fail diligently to call upon God to enlighten the eyes of his understanding, Eph. 1:18... (John H. C. Fritz, **Pastoral Theology**, CPH, 1932, page 3.)
- 2. Personal evaluation, examination, and reflection.** Whenever the shepherd preaches or teaches God's Word, he expects and prays that the Word will "achieve the purpose for which (God) sent it" (Is. 55:11). That is a major purpose of this paper – to let the Word do its Spirit-breathed task of "teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). This process may lead to personal confrontation – over what God expects, over where God's Word ends and human opinion begins (and some of the guidelines, for example, regarding "appropriate" dress are just that), and over how to deal with some of the discoveries and insights regarding one's life or that of a fellow pastor. It may also lead to a realization of having sinned against God – either blatantly and even consciously or by a forgetful, thoughtless, or misinformed spirit. The Law of God is powerful, and it may lead the reader to a sense of sin, guilt, and shame.
- 3. The encouragement of continuing dialogue and actual ministry among the shepherds.** The chief mark of the church is the forgiveness of sins (Jn. 20:21-23). Thus, it ought to be a most natural and obvious response to the discovery of failure that a pastor share this with his brethren, especially the brethren of his circuit. One of the reasons for requesting input from the circuits of the LCMS in preparation for this study was that they engage in discussing together the subject of pastoral behavior, conduct, and ethics. Insofar as failure is confessed and the word of forgiveness is spoken, blessings will be bestowed upon the "mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren" (Smalcald Articles Part III, Art. IV.).
- 4. Reaffirming one's dependence on the grace and power of God.** The pastor shepherd who takes his work seriously realizes that there are never enough hours in any day to get his work done. There are far more requirements in the ministry than he can possibly fulfill faithfully and well. There are many times when he has had to neglect his marriage and family (and when he wasn't neglecting them he felt guilty about "neglecting" church work). There are many ways to answer an unfair criticism

and too often he has chosen the worst one. In other words, pastors are sinners – and not just pretend sinners, but real sinners who have plenty to repent!

But pastors live under grace--and not just theoretical grace, but real grace for real sinners who haven't a chance without it (Ro. 5:8). The task of the pastor is impossible. No one can do it completely and fully. The task of a husband is impossible. No one can do it completely and fully. The task of a Christian is impossible. No one can do it completely and fully. But we are not called to live by our "doing." We are called to live under grace by faith (Eph. 2:8-9).

Further, we are not called to believe in the grace of God through Jesus Christ and then turned loose from that grace to make our own way back into the ministry. The Gospel that forgives us is the Gospel that equips. We are turned loose by the grace of God to minister (Ro. 12:1).

Thus, the examination of the conduct of one's ministry is not intended to lead one to guilt and despair (the faithful pastor knows enough of that temptation and that load), but is intended to lead us to humble dependence on the grace and power of God. In other words, "Principles of Conduct for Ministers of the Gospel" will not save. Only Christ can through the Gospel.

5. **Claiming new possibilities for growth in the conduct of one's ministry.** There is an intended outcome to confession and absolution. That which is confessed is confessed because of failure seen and of a new and different life that is desired. That new life in the context of the principles that follow does not come automatically just because we want it to, nor will it necessarily come (except in a superficial way) because we will it or work at it. The new life flows from the dying with Christ and rising with Christ, as our Holy Baptism daily reminds us (Ro. 6:4).
6. **For the sake of the Gospel, the Church, and its mission.** That is the ultimate purpose of this study – that the pastor will grow by the Gospel's power into a more principled, committed, and grace-filled shepherd of Christ.

As a shepherd under the Good Shepherd, the clergyman knows that his growth in the conduct of his ministry is not ultimately for his sake or for the sake of the reputation of the ministerium. It is for the sake of Christ's mission. It is for the sake of the Church. It is for the sake of the precious Gospel. It is for the sake of all of this that he has been called into the ministry. And it is for all of this that "Commitments of the Shepherd: Principles of Conduct for Ministers of the Gospel" has been prepared.

## **PRINCIPLES OF CONDUCT FOR MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL**

### **1. COMMITMENT TO PERSONAL AND PASTORAL LIFE**

*"Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers." (1 Tim. 4:16).*

#### **A. Spirituality of the shepherd**

St. Paul was concerned both about the pastor ("save ... yourself") and about those to whom the pastor ministered ("save ... your hearers"). Before ministry to

others can begin, ministry to the pastor must happen. It is no accident that St. Paul, in addressing the essentials of the ministry, said first to the Ephesus elders (Acts 20:28): "Take heed to yourselves." Only when the pastor has taken heed to himself can he proceed with Paul's further words, "And to all the flock."

The pastor is first a Christian, a blood-bought child of God (1 Peter 1:18-19). He is a sinner who is by nature lost in his sin, a victim of sin, a participant in sin, and condemned by sin. Without the intervention of the God of all grace, he is lost forever and bound for hell. But by the grace of God he has been rescued by the perfect life and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, God's Son. His life is *en Christo*, and his death leads to eternal life *en Christo*.

The pastor, then, is loved by his Savior God, and he in turn loves the Lord. Because this is so, he lives the disciplined life of faith active in love.

The pastor will be a man of the Word, of faith, of prayer, and of love. He will live in a close and personal relationship with his Lord. He will spend time in prayer, and his prayer will include petitions on behalf of his people. He will be a man of the Bible, and the Word will be for him a "lamp to my feet and a light to my path." He will not only be a preacher and teacher of the Word, he will also faithfully and devoutly, as the Holy Spirit empowers him, live out the implications of that Word. He will do all of this, not "to be seen of men," but because he is a dear child of the heavenly Father. Although no one can determine how much time a pastor should spend in personal and private prayer, reading of Scripture, and meditation, one should be able to expect that a pastor will spend quality, regular, and planned time for his own personal spiritual growth.

### ***Warning signs for the Pastor***

Laxity in spiritual nurturing evidences itself very quickly by warning signs of spiritual anemia. They may include:

- A feeling of hypocrisy, of merely "going through the motions."
- A sense that the "well has run dry."
- The constant complaint that there is no time for one's devotional life, or that when one takes the time it is difficult to concentrate because of a busy schedule.
- An awareness of often feeling angry and frustrated.
- The sense that the ministry is merely a job or profession with certain expectations that can be met in a minimal way.
- Taking ourselves too seriously and God not seriously enough.

## **B. Modeling the servant/shepherd role**

It was among the twelve disciples that the subject of "roles" was addressed, but the disciples had things all wrong. Jesus set them straight: "Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave--just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:26-28). Just in case they didn't get the point, Jesus demonstrated it in the Upper Room. *"Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power, and that He had come from God and was returning to God; so He got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel*

*around His waist. After that he poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around Him" (Jn. 13:3-5).*

Servanthood for any Christian including the pastor is an impossible task, for it bumps against our selfish, self-centered nature, and it flies in the face of the success assumptions of this fallen world. "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them" (Mt. 20:25). That is, the world does so if we don't know – or forget – where we have come from and where we are going. Jesus knew. He had come from God and was returning to God. When you know that, it appears from John 13:4, the result is becoming a footwasher, a servant. The pastor (and any Christian) knows by faith what his Baptism has bestowed--death with Christ and resurrection with Christ (Ro. 6:4). When you've come from that and are going toward that, the result is servanthood.

It is in this context that some specific words about the pastor as servant shepherd are written: "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be, not greedy for money, but eager to serve, not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" (1 Pe. 5:2-3). The servant shepherd enters the ministry not because he seeks the power inherent in a leadership position, but because he can serve by leading and lead by serving. The servant shepherd examines, evaluates, and develops his ministry according to the servant shepherd criterion and not merely on the basis of job descriptions, performance reviews, and statistical criteria of success. The Good Shepherd develops within the servant shepherd and his flock the servant attitude of John the Baptizer who said that Jesus "must become greater, I must become less" (Jn. 3.30).

### ***Warning signs for the Pastor***

The pastor will know that he may no longer be modeling the servant shepherd role when:

- His people attach themselves to his person and personality and not to Christ--and he enjoys this.
- He finds himself trying to live up to the expectations of any other criteria or persons than that of Jesus Christ.
- He begins to direct the congregation's affairs on the basis of manipulation, persuasion, personality, legalism, or power maneuvers.
- The weaker members of the congregation – those who are poor, the children, the feeble – no longer appear to be comfortable in his presence or seek him out, and he prefers it that way.
- He begins to isolate himself from "people ministry" and chooses to be "above the fray," separated by paper work, committees, and meetings.

### ***A Scriptural directive***

The Apostle Paul, concerned for the personal and pastoral life of his "son in the faith," Timothy, wrote to him and also to us "sons in the faith": *"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus ... But you, keep your*

*head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry" (2 Tim. 3:14-15; 4:5).*

## **2. COMMITMENT TO SPOUSE AND FAMILY**

*"Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, ... he must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)" (1 Tim. 3:2,4,5).*

The "self" in Paul's words to the Ephesus elders ("Take heed to yourselves," Acts 20:28) includes more than one's self as an individual. It also includes the "self" that we become through our relationships.

- A. The pastor who is single and may perhaps remain so still finds his life filled with commitments--to parents, brothers, sisters, and other close relatives, to friends within the congregation and without, and often to and with other singles. Because he is a pastor to whom much has been given, especially the oversight of the flock, much is also required of him. Whether single, married, or parent, he is to be "above reproach," which means his life and conduct must be shaped by his commitment to Christ.

It is unwise and insensitive for the church to imply that a single pastor is inferior or not "whole" because of his singleness (1 Cor. 7:7). The church must be willing to accept and welcome without question or reservation the unique ministry the single pastor can provide. It should go without saying that his fellow pastors should commit themselves to affirming and supporting him as a single pastor.

- B. The married pastor also has unique blessings and responsibilities because he is married. He has the privilege of sharing his life with his wife and doing this within the context of servanthood and of the "mystery" that the life in Christ brings to the relationship between a husband and wife because they are "as Christ" and "as the church" to each other (Eph. 5:21-33). It is because Christian marriage is as strong as its foundation in Christ and as fragile as its fleshly weakness that the pastor must "take heed" to the marriage relationship. When there is failure in the pastor's marriage, the consequences are multiplied in the parish, and when there is a solid example of joy, forgiveness, spontaneity, and acceptance in the pastor's marriage, those blessings too are multiplied.
- C. The same can be said of the pastor's family. For the sake of his family the pastor must be a responsible, loving, Gospel-centered, caring father. The consequences of neglect, coldness, irresponsibility, legalism, and hypocrisy on the part of the pastor toward his children are devastating – toward them and toward the whole flock. The admonition of Saint Paul to "manage" one's family is not intended to make the pastor/parent into a resident policeman who must monitor every activity of his children lest they fail and he lose his job! Instead, it is a strong encouragement to the pastor/parent to be a faithful steward of the gift that God has given him. That stewardship should include encouraging the congregation to respect the privacy of the family and to avoid unwholesome and unfair expectations of the children regarding behavior, dress, and achievements.

One could make a strong case for the priorities of the pastor to be that of a Christian husband, parent, and pastor in that order. This has less to do with time spent (although no one can be a good and faithful steward without spending time at it!) than it has to do with setting priorities. Pastors, wives, and children need to communicate and share their expectations and needs, forgive each other, and joyfully pursue their life together under grace. The Word of God shared in family devotions and lived through formal worship with the congregation and through informal sharing and celebrating of the Gospel in every corner of life – should be as natural for the pastor's family as food, clothing, and shelter are.

Commitment to spouse and family places a responsibility on the pastor. Like the disciples who saw the rich young man depart and heard Jesus describe the "eye of the needle," we ask, "Who then can be saved?" The answer must be that of the One who responds: "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God" (Mk. 10:26-27). The strength and "possibility" of the Gospel are found by going regularly and often to the Lord (Mt. 11:28-30).

- D. One of the great difficulties in dealing with one's marriage or family is that we can be deceived by a seeming excess of time. It is easy to procrastinate, for there is always tomorrow, and the problems have been present for a long time. Suddenly, and often without warning, we realize that there is no more time, and we live with regret over lost opportunities and not spending time when we still had the time. One of the most powerful thieves of time for the pastor is the pastoral ministry – or what we allow it to become. Instead of a life that is whole and filled with shalom, we allow our lives to be divided up into segments that compete with one another. Often, the losers in the "competition" are our marriages and families.

### ***Warning signs for the Pastor***

The pastor should pay strict attention to his marriage and family relationships when:

- He consistently has time for everyone and everything else but his wife or children. (Perhaps he needs to examine how he manages his time, or he needs to talk to his congregational leaders about this.)
  - He is not "in love" with his wife and is not deeply interested in his children and shows it.
  - He uses the ministry as an escape from responsibilities at home.
  - He is attracted toward other females for companionship and begins to fantasize.
  - His wife and children no longer appear to be disappointed by his absences and begin to voice resentment over his being a pastor.
- E. One would hope that the pastor would prayerfully heed any warning signs and be recommitted to his marriage and family. Sometimes, however, this does not happen, or other factors intrude. Here we would direct the pastor to the very same spiritual resources to which he points others and to the counsel and aid of his peers and other trusted helpers. He should also be thoroughly acquainted with and fully aware of the implications of the Council of Presidents' document, "Guidelines for Dealing with Marital Crisis Involving Separation and Divorce of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Clergy" (available from the Office of the Secretary of the Synod).

### **3. COMMITMENT TO RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE CONGREGATION**

*"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd comes, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away" (1 Pe. 5:2-4).*

Much can and has been written about the "professional" relationships of a pastor. It is not the intent of this paper to provide a "how to" manual on church administration. There are, however, certain expectations of the pastor in the way he conducts his ministry.

- A. The pastor takes on the role of a shepherd ("Be shepherds of God's flock") which implies that he is to provide leadership. His is not the luxury to pick and choose his involvements or when he can become committed to some program. Pastors may differ from one another in their leadership abilities and their shyness or boldness in certain situations, but they must lead. Without the leadership of the pastor, the congregation will flounder. At the same time the pastor's leadership must be a spiritual leadership that is thoroughly Christ-centered, Biblically based, and Gospel oriented.

When the pastor understands his role as the spiritual leader, he will welcome and undergird the role of the laity – the royal priests – in the congregation. The servant/shepherd will view the role of the laity as one of fellow servants who serve in Christ's name.

- B. Should the pastor have friends in the congregation, and when do friendships interfere with ministry? The general rule and pastoral practice appears to be evenly divided on the question of friendships in the congregation. It is a rare person who can befriend the pastor while still maintaining the "distance" that may be necessary. This "necessary distance" relates to the ministry the pastor must maintain with all the flock (and not giving the impression that friends get special treatment), including the future needs of the friend whose friendship may prevent that person from asking his or her own pastor for help. A true friend in the congregation can, however, be a blessing, if handled with sensitivity. The pastor may also want to seek out the special friendship of a fellow pastor in whom he can confide and with whom he can share mutual support.
- C. Underlying the entire matter of leadership is the danger implied in 1 Peter 5:2-4, that of "lording it over those entrusted to you." There is no doubt that the Lord himself established the pastoral office (Eph. 4:11) and insisted that this "gift" to the church be treated with proper honor and respect (Heb. 13:17). It is true that some pastors are treated with contempt by their parishioners. The solution, however, is not to return evil for evil by "lording it" over the flock by:
- Insisting on one's own way, especially in matters where our opinion is just that – our own opinion.
  - Using the pulpit or other public forums to embarrass or scold individuals instead of going to them privately with a concern.
  - Excluding "trouble makers" from one's circle of friendship, concern, and ministry.
  - Taking criticism or disagreement personally.

- D. Special care must be taken with fellow staff members. The pastor who has no other staff person beyond perhaps a part-time secretary and occasional janitor both avoids many problems as well as misses out on many joys. A staff of ordained and commissioned ministers, other professional church workers, and lay employees can be a tremendous blessing to the church and to the pastor. A staff can plan together, minister to one another, share expertise, and provide enthusiasm for a task. But a staff characterized by suspicion, gossip, ill will, and resentments can cause great harm to God's mission and to His people.

#### **4. COMMITMENT TO RELATIONSHIPS IN THE COMMUNITY AND IN THE WIDER CHURCH**

*"We put no obstacle in any one's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way" (2 Cor. 6:3,4a).*

Although committed to ministry among the flock of his parish, the pastor is not an island to himself. He has relationships to others his community and in the wider church.

- A. The pastor is in a special relationship with his fellow pastors in the LCMS. They are his brethren who share a common confession and view of church and ministry, similar seminary experiences, and the "family spirit" of "Missouri." It is his duty to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). If something breaks that unity – whether it be a matter of doctrine or practice – his first recourse is not publicly to condemn or label the brother or to terminate partaking of Holy Communion with him. It is, rather, to speak to him in an evangelical spirit in order to seek both the brother and the truth of Scripture. If this fails, there are proper procedures to follow for the sake of the truth and of the brother.

The pastor is called to his congregation and to no other. His call is limited to the congregation that called him and to its members. He has no right to counsel other members without their pastor's permission, to perform pastoral functions for them, or to criticize their congregation or pastor. In the same way, he has the right to expect that his fellow pastors will not extend their call to his congregation where they are not called. If there are problems in other congregations, the pastor will apply the 8th Commandment and insist that those who have the oversight – the circuit counselor or district president – carry out their duties unimpeded.

Pastors who have served a congregation and then have accepted a call to serve another congregation as well as pastors who retire from the active ministry should take special note of the principles articulated above. Occasionally, former and/or retired pastors do not realize that they are former and/or retired pastors whose call, influence, and opinions are no longer to be directed to where they no longer have a call.

- B. Congregations vary in age, size, location, economic and social composition, and in many other ways. Indeed, the diversity of the 6,000-plus congregations of the LCMS is one of its strengths. Freedom in the Gospel encourages congregations to use their diverse gifts for the sake of mission and ministry. At the same time, we are a Synod,

literally a "walking together" association of congregations that have banded together in order to be in Christ's mission and ministry as Lutheran Christians. This implies that there are some things that we agree to do together based on our common confession and our common mission.

The pastor needs to interpret this "walking together" concept to his congregation and emphasize the "we" relationship that we have while fighting a we/they tendency to divide the congregation from its sister congregations. The congregations of the LCMS are very emphatic in encouraging each other "to strive for uniformity in church practice, but also to develop an 'appreciation of a variety of responsible practices and customs which are in harmony with our common profession of faith'" (Constitution of The Lutheran Church- -Missouri Synod, Article III, Objectives). The congregations of the Synod are just as emphatic about rejecting unionism. The pastor will face many situations that are clearly contrary to his confession as a Lutheran pastor and will avoid those unionistic practices. At the same time, he will recognize the necessity to affirm the oneness that all professing Christians have and will seek ways to encourage and foster that in a responsible way. In between there are many situations of church fellowship that a pastor faces that he must confront responsibly and faithfully. Here also the pastor must not ignore his fellow clergy and their congregations. His decisions will have an impact on them and ultimately on the cause of the Gospel. Thus the pastor will seek the counsel of his peers, his district president, and others when difficult decisions arise.

*For further study, see **The Nature and Implications of the Concept of Fellowship**, produced by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations.*

- C. We live in a time of the anti-hero. No public figure can avoid extreme scrutiny of his public and private life and criticism of his actions and motivations. Those whom the Lord through His church has placed into a supervisory relationship to others are not immune from this.

The pastor has every right to expect that those in a supervisory relationship – especially the circuit counselor, district president, and synodical President – will not use their positions to tyrannize or intimidate. Rather, he can and should expect that they have been elected to serve in the spirit of Christ.

Yet even suggesting that someone has a supervisory relationship can make one uneasy and even defensive – especially if the pastor tends to hide behind his "call," "congregational autonomy," or a worldly aversion to any and all authority. This tendency the pastor must avoid. Those placed over him have been placed over him by his church for the sake of evangelical leadership and the supervision of doctrine and practice. The synodical President, for example, "has and always shall have the power to advise, admonish, and reprove" (Constitution of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Art. XI, Rights and Duties of Officers, Part B.3.). These same rights and duties pertain to the district president and the circuit counselor within the boundaries of their respective areas and callings. The pastor will treat them, even when in disagreement, with the same care and consideration as he would want his members to use in treating him. When he disagrees he will seek out that person in order to attempt to resolve his differences quietly and privately. Because a person has a public, supervisory position does not mean that the disagreement must automatically be aired publicly. If this were so, then the pastor, whose ministry is a

"public ministry," would also be liable to many and varied public attacks by his members. This cannot be tolerated in the church. The pastor must take the lead in applying the 8th Commandment as well as Matthew 18 to any and all concerns he may have with his circuit counselor, district president, synodical President, or anyone else who is in a supervisory relationship.

Further, because a supervisory person is required to evaluate the ministry of the pastor, the pastor should willingly and cheerfully welcome this and cooperate in this, since a proper evaluation is undertaken for his good and the good of the church. The pastor should also be allowed to see and discuss the professional evaluation of him by his district president so that he can understand the evaluation and work on any weaknesses that have been noted.

- D. Pastors often get involved in activities beyond the confines of their parish responsibilities. This may include membership on a community fund-raising board, on a hospital board, in a service club, etc.; involvement with a community sports activity, drama group, social action group, etc., or even running for political office.

Obviously, no one can lay down rules for one's involvement in every opportunity that arises. Yet certain questions must be raised when determining the appropriateness and extent of one's involvement.

1. Will it enhance or hinder one's ministry?
2. Will the time commitments take away from commitment to one's spouse, family, and calling to the congregation?
3. Has the advice and counsel of the elders and/or church council of the congregation been sought?
4. Will this activity lead to a compromise of one's ministry and calling?

## **5. COMMITMENT TO APPROPRIATE SOCIAL BEHAVIOR**

*"He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap" (1 Tim. 3:7).*

St. Paul's words are so very appropriate! We Christians live with an inner discipline of being en Christo (2 Cor. 5:17). Further, pastors have been called out to a special ministry that has special requirements (1 Tim. 3:1-7). The inner discipline and the call into the ministry with its special requirements are not innoculants against evil. The pastor must always be on his guard against the "devil's traps."

- A. One of these has to do with his sexuality. Because this is such a basic human need that can be used for so much good in the intimacy of a loving relationship, it is also a powerful trap that the devil can use to seduce and destroy one's marriage, home, and ministry – and the spiritual lives of many who cannot cope if their pastor should "fall into disgrace." The pastor, whether single or married, must first recognize that he is by nature a sinner and thus completely capable of falling into the devil's trap of adultery or fornication. Unless he is watchful, sexual sin can take him unawares. It

can often be rationalized as "love," "care," and "compassion." It can be excused as so "natural" and "right" that the pastor can continue on with his ministry with hardly a quiver of conscience while consecrating the elements in Holy Communion, preaching the sermon, or teaching the Confirmation class about the 6th Commandment. The pastor will fight temptation with the weapons of God (Eph. 6:13-17). He will consciously not trust his old nature and will avoid compromising situations. The married pastor will work on his marriage and its sexual expression of love and commitment. He will seek counseling if his marriage is in need of repair.

- B. Pornography surrounds us. It beckons from television screen, newsstand, and bookstore. Like the matter of adultery and fornication, it has assumed an almost accepted place in American culture. But it is a poison, for it corrupts sexuality, it exploits those engaged in it, and it provides profits for a huge enterprise of the American underworld. Pornography should not be found in the pastor's possession nor in his speech. (Surely, gutter language and gutter jokes are also sinful.) It doesn't belong there, for it is still a perversion of the gift of sexuality and a denial of "whatever is true, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable" (Phil. 4:8).
- C. Because the pastor must go where his people are and their needs are, his ministry will take him far from the safety of the church and study. This is good, for a caring pastor will be a visiting, visible pastor. The pastor will, however, *use common sense* and care lest he give offense or find himself in compromising situations. These situations might include:
- Calling in the home or being seen in what could be interpreted as "intimate" locations when calling on female members.
  - Having the reputation of "closing the bars" at night.
  - Keeping company on a regular basis with those who have the reputation of being a "fast crowd" or of being loud and boisterous.

This is not to say that a pastor should not make exceptions or take risks for the sake of Gospel ministry. But the exception does not become the rule. Nor is this insisting that a pastor cannot have fun or relax. Yet, as with any Christian and especially one whose office bears great potential for good and evil, he must weigh his actions so that his freedom does not become license.

- D. The church in recent times has had to confront homosexuality and the possibility of homosexuality among its clergy. Based on a careful review of the pertinent Scripture passages, the LCMS considers homosexual propensity to be a result of our fallen nature and has refused to sanction for ministry those who are practicing homosexuals. The pastor who engages in this behavior needs to repent and receive counsel, even if this might mean resigning from the ministry. Those who feel that they may have homosexual tendencies are expected to control their desires by the power of the Gospel and to be celibate. Pastors approached for counsel and help by fellow clergy or by members who have homosexual tendencies or who are practicing homosexuals should minister to them with compassion, concern, sensitivity, and the dynamic of Law/Gospel ministry.
- E. There are times when pastors may engage in behavior which, although not sin, can cause offense to the weak Christian (Ro. 14 and 15) or misunderstanding by the

unbeliever. Examples might include the appropriateness of drinking or dancing at a wedding reception, acting in a community theater play that contains objectionable language, or engaging in debates, demonstrations, or protests about public policy. Here as in everything else the pastor must be willing and able to defend and interpret his actions, be aware that he is never a "private" citizen, consider everything according to the Gospel ministry, and still insist that his actions be bound by the Word of God and not social opinion or convention alone.

## 6. COMMITMENT TO APPROPRIATE SPEECH AND ACTIONS

*"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things" (Phil. 4:8).*

James wrote of the tongue: "All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison" (Ja. 3:7-8). This section deals principally with sins of the tongue that can hurt the pastor, his people, and the cause of the Gospel.

- A. In the Installation Service for a pastor he promises "never to divulge the sins confessed to you." While one might qualify that with regard to heinous crimes or testifying in court, these are the rare occurrences that do not detract from the major directive, that a pastor is to be no tale-bearer. What is spoken to him in confidence, even if not specifically stated as confidential, must remain so. The pastor will not share confidential information in sermon examples or teaching illustrations. He will not identify names when discussing a case in a casuistry situation with his peers. He will spare his wife personal heartache and awkwardness if he will not share these confidences with her.
- B. "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father and with it we curse men ... My brothers, this should not be" (Ja. 3:9-10). Indeed! We know this from the 2nd Commandment, and no amount of explaining will take away the impact of repetitious "Lord!" or "God!" spoken not in prayer or praise, but in exclamation and thoughtless outbursts. Nor can anyone measure the damage done through profanity, vulgar words and phrases, and off color jokes and stories. "My brothers, this should not be."

James also insists: "My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires" (Ja. 1:19-20). The pastor as shepherd must be firm and clear in his leadership. However, losing one's temper, speaking angry and harsh words, and exploding with rage harm the sheep, demean the shepherd, and destroy the pastor's Gospel-motivated leadership. (See also Prov. 15:1; 29:11; 30:33; Eph. 4:26,27.)

- C. On the basis of sex, race, class, age, or religion many crude and hurtful things have been said and done in the past, and the pattern continues.
- We may argue about the use of "generic" words, but a "he" is a "he" and often excludes a "she." Thus, the pastor who cares for the **whole** flock (and certainly about the female majority in most congregations) will examine his language to make it include male and female in sermon, bulletin, and teaching. He will also,

- of course, wholeheartedly honor the biblical language for the Godhead (Father, Son, He, etc.)
- Words like "honey," "sweetie," etc., may be terms of endearment for one's wife, but not for any other woman, and the pastor, regardless of age, should observe that.
  - Racial slurs, jokes, and stories are degrading and dehumanizing. They deny the First Article's insistence on each person's dignity and uniqueness.
  - The pastor will avoid stereotyping people by economic or social class or by age, for in Christ we have been made new (Eph. 4:24).
  - While disagreeing with the content of non-Christian religions, the pastor will be a model of "gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15-16) when discussing these religions or dealing with their adherents.
- D. "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are members of one body" (Eph. 4:25). It is interesting that St. Paul gives the reason for speaking truthfully as relating to the body. District presidents who work directly with conflict between pastors and congregations will testify that too often one or the other or both are not telling the truth. They may not necessarily be consciously lying, but they are seeing and interpreting the truth only from their perspective. In order for admission of wrong absolution, and healing to occur, the truth must be spoken in love. The pastor **must** be truthful, for only by speaking the truth can his word be trusted and the Body of Christ nurtured.
- E. "Besides our own body, our wife or husband, and our temporal property, we have one more treasure which is indispensable to us, namely, our honor and good name," writes Martin Luther in **The Large Catechism**. For the pastor, the matter of relationships with other pastors, especially regarding their call (See Part 4) takes on added meaning. Confidentiality (See 6A above) is part of this use and misuse of the tongue. As Luther points out, unless we have seen a sin and are willing to report it to the proper authority, or if we are that authority, we have no right to speak. We are, in fact, required to put the best construction on the actions of a brother pastor and to assume the best about him. Knowing that something is true does not make the person into the judge. That the pastor is a "moral authority" in his congregation does not qualify him to pass judgment. Matthew 18 is not set aside by one's ordination. The pastor would do well to examine the Council of Presidents' Bible study, "Serving One Another: Principles for Ethical Conduct for Pastors" in this context. (This is available from the Office of the District President.)

## 7. COMMITMENT TO THE STEWARDSHIP OF ONE'S BODY

*"Now the overseer must be above reproach, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, not given to drunkenness" (1 Tim. 3:2).*

St. Paul's words speak particularly to the actions of the pastor that, while they may in themselves appear to be one's own business, nevertheless can adversely affect the Gospel ministry. When this happens they are no longer just one's business and must be dealt with. "Temperate, self-controlled, respectable, . . . not given to drunkenness" might involve at least the following:

- A. Cleanliness and one's attire. The LCMS has always left up to the individual's choice and Christian freedom the matter of whether or not to wear clerical clothing. It is not even insistent on any particular style or type of "civilian" clothing. While our ancestors would probably be shocked by the sport coats and slacks worn today, the contemporary pastor would feel just as uncomfortable, perhaps, wearing, the somber black of the clergy of 100 years ago. Today's pastor making calls on his members on a cattle ranch in Wyoming is not going to wear the same attire as his counterpart making a call on a member in an office tower in New York City. If they were to wear the same clothing in the reverse situation, their attire might be deemed at least peculiar if not offensive. Thus, a "dress code" for pastors is neither wise nor practical. This does not prevent the pastor from being wise about wearing appropriate clothing where he is. His members in Wyoming and in New York City expect it and deserve it. Sunday morning worship in particular, or any other formal and official parish function, will require that the pastor wear a certain type of clothing. A helpful signal to him may be what is appropriate to other professionals in the community.

Regardless of what he wears, the pastor will wear clean and neat clothing. The pastor will also care for his body. This means he will pay attention to bodily cleanliness, the use of deodorants, oral hygiene, etc. In addition, the pastor will care for his general bodily health and well being, including regular exercise and proper diet, for his body is a gift from God to be managed to His glory, for one's own welfare, and for the benefit of those who depend upon the pastor.

- B. Substance abuse. Pastors can be prime candidates for using drugs in excess--whether alcohol, nicotine, prescription drugs, or even illegal drugs. The pressures of the ministry, the acceptance of alcoholic beverages in the contemporary culture, and the need to "unwind" or "get going" can lead one into substance abuse. The pastor needs to have enough self knowledge to know what his limits are, what his warning signs are, and where he can go for help. Pastors must be willing lovingly to confront their fellow pastors when substance abuse appears to be a real possibility.
- C. Excesses in behavior. How many football games should one watch on television? How often should one golf in one week? How much time should one have of f each week? How many evenings should the pastor be home? How much time and effort should be put into his hobby? How often should the pastor "run errands" for his wife or babysit the children? When these questions are asked in one's congregation, it is apparent that some people at least feel that the pastor is "overdoing it a bit, don't you think? Sports, recreation, relaxation, hobbies, and even family obligations must always be examined in light of one's ministry. It is even possible for a pastor, since he is generally unsupervised and usually works alone, to become lazy. Thus, there is such a thing as "overdoing it a bit"--and sometimes more than a bit--so that the ministry suffers and the people become resentful.

The pastor who is sensitive to this will. anticipate the problem, examine his needs and priorities, and communicate with his leaders and members.

- D. Being a "workaholic." Instead of being criticized for neglecting his calling, the workaholic neglects everything except his work, including his physical and emotional health, marriage, and family. There is no end to the work a pastor could be doing. Even in a small congregation, his sermon could be better, his teaching far more

effective, his calls much more productive if he spent more time and effort on them. One wonders whether the workaholic pastor truly lives by grace and under forgiveness. Rather, he may be trying either to please God or to replace God in his ministry. The pastor would do well to examine the theology, the motives, and the needs that drive him into the trap of being a workaholic. The pastor should develop the ability to bring each day and each week to a closure and do it without guilt or fear. Time off, time with family, vacations, physical exercise, hobbies and avocations, are not a waste of time. They may take the pastor away from the busyness of the formal ministry, but they also serve to enable him to be a more refreshed and productive minister.

## 8. COMMITMENT TO THE STEWARDSHIP OF POSSESSIONS

*"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness" (1 Tim. 6:10,11).*

The love of money can be a great problem for the pastor. Because of this possibility the Lord requires that the pastor not be a "lover of money" (1 Tim. 3:3). One way to counter this is to learn the grace and the joy of sacrificial giving.

The pastor should be an example to the flock of how properly to handle one's income. It is not to handle us; we are to handle it. The first check the pastor writes from his paycheck should be for the Lord's work. The first check insures that he has his priorities straight. What remains is **also** part of his stewardship to be used wisely and prayerfully. If the pastor does not give a joyful first fruit offering, he will eventually end up giving a grudging "leftover" offering. How much he gives cannot be prescribed. However, it should be **from** God's blessings and **in proportion** to God's blessings.

He should also work with his congregation and circuit counselor so that his congregation pays him in a cheerful, generous, and timely fashion.

### ***Warning signs for the pastor***

There are many ways that money can become our master rather than our servant for the Gospel's sake.

- A. Undue and offensive dependence on material objects. There is obviously nothing wrong with wanting nice things--a nice home and furniture, clothing, auto, education for one's children. But there is an invisible line where the pastor begins to notice that he is coveting more and better things, is resentful toward those who appear to have more, and begins to show where his heart is--on material things (Mt. 6:24). It is a spiritual matter that must be dealt with, for it eventually leads to loss of faith (Mt. 6:19-21).
- B. Inaccurate and unscrupulous reporting of income. Most pastors receive extra honoraria for special services rendered, such as from funerals and weddings. Although no one keeps a record of this, the pastor must. This is income that is liable

to taxation. The pastor as a responsible citizen (Ro. 13:1-7) will scrupulously record and report all income.

- C. Indifference and neglect toward personal obligations and debts. Some pastors simply cannot handle debt, do not know their financial limitations, and do not repay their debts. Those persons should never borrow. If they do, they leave behind anger, resentment, an embarrassed congregation and an offended community, and a mark against the Gospel ministry. We must be responsible, mature stewards of money.
- D. Inappropriate use of another's property. This includes borrowing money from congregational members, not returning borrowed objects (from lawn edgers to typewriters to books), and considering the church's property one's own (including tables, paper, lawn mowers, etc.). It can also include abusive use of the parsonage, carelessness with regard to the use of utilities, and a general disregard for care and courtesy in the use of what does not belong to us. In addition the pastor should not be placed into a situation where his integrity and honesty could be questioned. Thus, for example, he should not count the offering or serve as the congregational treasurer.

The pastor may need to seek professional counsel if material objects become for him a hindrance to effective ministry.

## **9. COMMITMENT TO COMPETENCY IN MINISTRY**

*"In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Tim. 4:1,2).*

"Principles of Conduct for Ministers of the Gospel" certainly does not address the intellectual and professional pursuits of the clergy. That is not its intent. But the general area of continuing to be the best informed, best equipped, best functioning pastor that one can be certainly is.

The pastor who is committed to his ministry, to being "prepared in season and out of season," will be aware of certain principles of conduct.

- A. He will continue to study and pursue his education for the sake of the ministry. A well informed, well prepared pastor who constantly upgrades his intellect and understanding is one who is "prepared in season and out of season." Continuing study and education are pursued through self-selected and self-directed study, through circuit and district pastoral conferences, and through extension and on-site formal course work.
- B. He will manage his time properly. Boring, irrelevant sermons; obviously poorly prepared Bible classes; lack of punctuality; a lack of organization and direction all harm ministry. Much of this can be attributed to poor time management. The pastor as a steward of time will work on proper time management.
- C. He will welcome the evaluation of his ministry so that he can recognize and build on his God-given strengths and improve on his weaknesses. He will ask that his peers,

selected members of his congregation, and his district president help with the evaluation process.

- D. He will try to maintain a realistic view of his counseling skills and of his limitations. Pastors will be called upon to counsel simply because they are trusted, caring people. The pastor will maintain and build up his counseling skills so that he can truly help people. He will also recognize that he is a pastor, not a trained psychologist or psychiatrist, and he will know his limitations and refer people to others when helpful and necessary.
- E. The pastor will take the time and effort necessary to prepare adequately for the preaching, teaching, and visitation ministry. Under the pressure of time and other commitments, it is understandable that the pastor might occasionally be ill prepared for preaching, teaching, visiting or other aspects of the ministry. Unfortunately, the exception can become the rule, and the ministry then can become shallow and appear inept. The pastor will commit himself to the time required to be competent in the ministry of preaching, teaching, and visitations.
- F. The pastor will prayerfully and enthusiastically do the whole ministry to which he has been called (1 Cor. 4:2). The pastor who may not feel he has the "gift" of evangelism must still be an evangelist, if that is part of his call, just as much as someone who does not feel he has the "gift" for preaching must still preach and preach as well as he possibly can. In other words, the pastor who is committed to competency must be committed to the whole ministry, even those areas of ministry where he does not consider himself to be particularly gifted.
- G. The pastor will be intellectually honest. This means he will observe copyright laws, avoid any hint of plagiarism, and will give credit where credit is due.
- H. The competent pastor will apply the Word not only to "agreeable issues" (family life, pornography, etc.). He will also apply the Word to "sensitive" areas and issues. These may include AIDS, abortion, gambling (lotteries, raffles, etc.)- The pastor is called to a prophetic ministry of applying Law and Gospel to real issues in real life. To do so, he must be well informed, direct, and not merely argumentative. His ultimate goal must be repentance and the "yes" of the Gospel (2 Cor. 1:20).

## **Conclusion**

The introduction to this paper stated that the overriding question that prompted and informed the preparation of this document was; Of what benefit will this be for the pastor shepherd? Now that we have come to the conclusion, that question still lingers and must be answered by you. At this point you are strongly urged to re-read and reflect upon the six purpose statements in the introduction to this document.

The first was "Examination of biblically mandated principles for shepherds." We have attempted to highlight and examine those areas of concern for the committed shepherd

pastor that have been revealed by God's Word. We have done this from the context of the question: What does this mean in the life and ministry of the pastor?

The second purpose was to provide an opportunity for "Personal evaluation, examination, and reflection." It is one thing to debate and examine the Word and what it says in general about general principles. It is another to experience the debate and examination **within**. Yet that is what "Commitments of the Shepherd" is about. It is about **you and your** ministry. It is about the Bible's witness about your ministry and your response to it. And because we are frail human beings, we will uncover areas where we may feel very uncommitted, unworthy, and unprincipled. The Law does that.

That is why the third, and especially the fourth, purposes are so important. The third is: "The encouragement of continuing dialogue and mutual ministry among the shepherds." We would strongly urge this. The Body of Christ functions well when it functions as the **Body of Christ**. Seek out a person who can or already does serve as your father confessor or mentor. Some have found it helpful to work with a group of two or three others with whom they covenant to help each other in reflecting, growing, and caring for each other.

The fourth purpose, "Reaffirming one's dependence on the grace and power of God," is the key to understanding the intent of this document. Many pastors will feel that this paper is too "heavy" on the Law. Since it deals with "principles of conduct," it is not surprising that the Law is so prominent. This is not, after all, intended to be a Law/Gospel sermon. But we are people of the Gospel, the only power that will cleanse us, renew us, and change us – things the Law cannot do. We are not alone with our failures and shortcomings. We are not helpless or hopeless. We are not left to our own devices. God is the God of grace! Jesus Christ died for shepherds, too! He rose to give new life to shepherds also! That's more important than our ministry, our successes or failures, our commitments and principles, for Jesus Christ is our life and our salvation!

Finally, the fifth purpose looks to the future with hope and confidence, for as shepherds under the Shepherd we can claim "New possibilities for growth in the conduct of one's ministry," for with St. Paul we can affirm, "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).

God grant this for Jesus' sake.

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