

For the

LIFE of the WORLD

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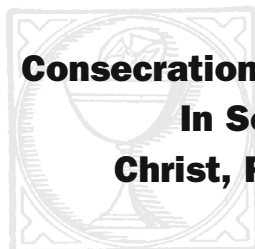


Consecration and Calling of Ministers - p.4

In Search of the True Church - p.7

Christ, Pastor, and Congregation - p.10

Called to Serve - p.14



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CONTENTS



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FEATURES

4 Consecration and Calling of Ministers

By the Rev. Philip G. Meyer, Pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Terre Haute, Ind.

Someone once said that getting married is like putting two dimes together and getting a quarter, the sum being greater than the parts. It has been said that the relationship between pastor and congregation resembles a marriage. If that is so, then the sum of the two must be more than the parts.

7 In Search of the True Church

By the Rev. Dr. Cameron A. MacKenzie, Professor of Historical Theology, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

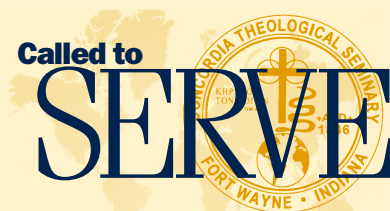
When Christians move into a new community and look for a church to join, they might be confused. The list of different denominations is enormous, and many congregations no longer conform to the traditional teachings of their church body anyway. These days, the name “Methodist” or “Baptist” or “Lutheran” on the signs out front may tell the newcomer very little about the churches in his neighborhood. So the question, “Where is the true Church?” becomes a very practical one.

10 Christ, Pastor, and Congregation

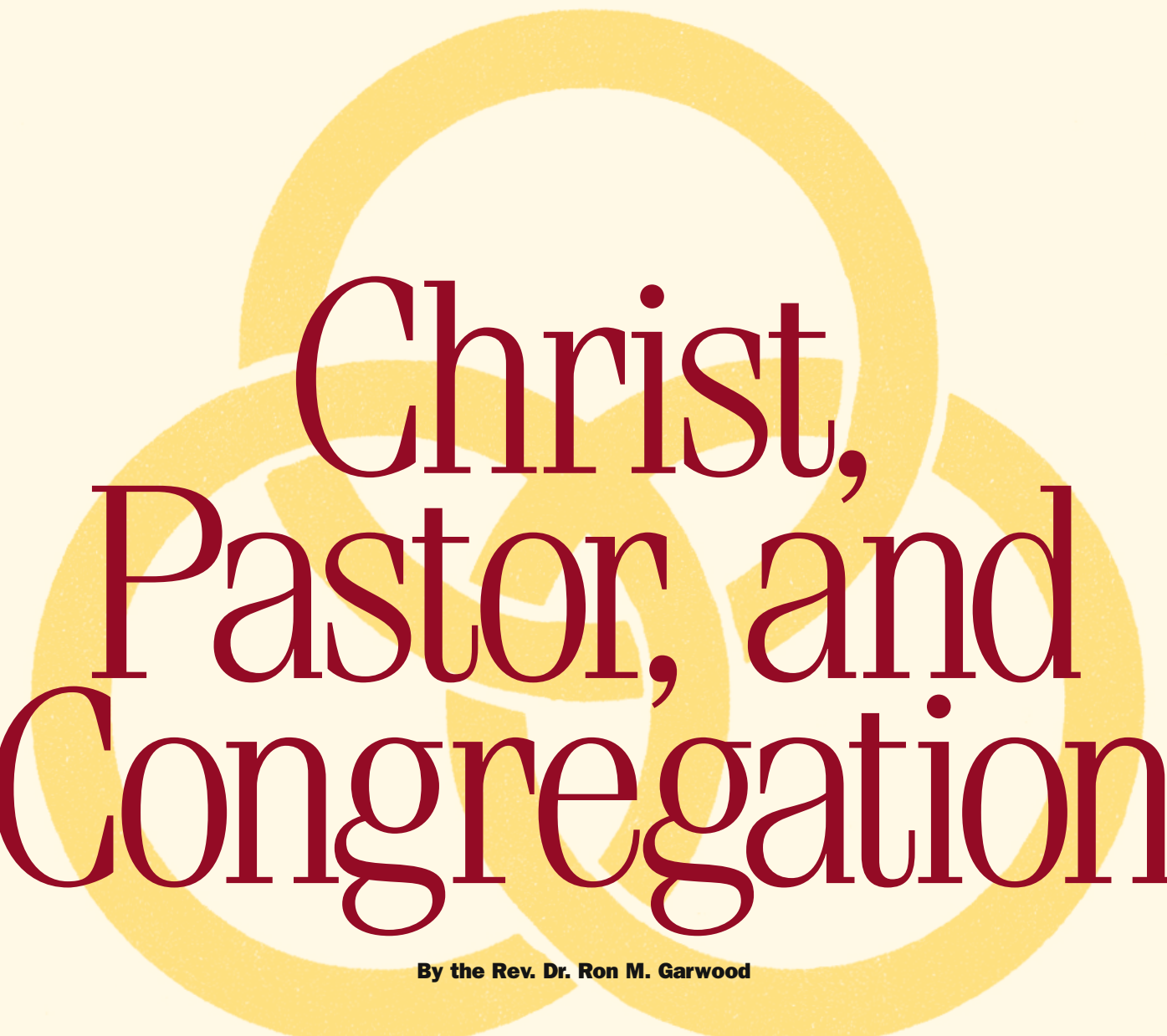
By the Rev. Dr. Ron M. Garwood, President, Wyoming District

It’s been said that every pastor ought to have six weeks of vacation each year, because if he is a real good pastor, he deserves it; and if he is not a very good pastor, his congregation deserves it. This is intended to be a joke, but in fact it reflects very real concerns about the relationship between congregations and their pastors.

13 What Does This Mean?



From Kinesiology to Technology to Theology	p.14
Preaching Christ Crucified	p.16
Vicarage Assignments/Calls	p.18
Donation Day for Guild/LWML	p.19
2003 Symposia Schedule	p.20
Seminary Guild Enjoys Support	p.22
Campus Happenings	p.24
IRA’s Make a Great Gift	p.26



Christ, Pastor, and Congregation

By the Rev. Dr. Ron M. Garwood

It's been said that every pastor ought to have six weeks of vacation each year, because if he is a real good pastor, he deserves it; and if he is not a very good pastor, his congregation deserves it. This is intended to be a joke, but in fact it reflects very real concerns about the relationship between congregations and their pastors.

When a congregation has elected a new pastor, they await his coming with great expectation. And the pastor, too, is looking forward with good and positive expectations as he prepares to begin service to the new congregation. Then, after the new relationship has begun between a pastor and the congregation, the question is often asked among the membership of the parish, "What do you think of our new pastor?" And a district president often hears comments from members of a congregation about what they think of their new pastor, be it in negative or positive terms. The district president may also hear from the pastor about how he is being received in his congregation and what he thinks of the people of his parish.

In hearing these comments, and in having dealt with tensions between a pastor and a congregation, I have come to the opinion that two features in the developing relationship between the pastor and congregation are very important. One deals with the pastor and the other deals with the congregation.

In regard to the pastor, he must love the members of the congregation, and so serve them faithfully. If the pastor feels that the people of the parish are his enemies or that they are mostly troublemakers and ingrates, the people soon sense this very

negative attitude, and the relationship between themselves and their pastor will not develop as it should. I have noted in the relationship between a pastor and his congregation that when the congregation believes that the pastor really loves and cares for them, that no matter what other circumstances may exist in the parish, the congregation will be patient and accommodating with their pastor, and the health of the ministry in that place in general is good. However, in a congregation where the people do not believe that the pastor loves them, every little circumstance seems to become a major issue or problem, and the mission and ministry of that congregation and pastor is greatly distracted.

Martin Luther recognized that the love of the pastor for his people is of great importance and wrote: "Men who hold the office of the ministry should have the heart of a mother toward the church; . . . The Lord indicates this very beautifully in John 21 when He makes Peter a preacher and, before doing so, asks him three times: 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' As though He would say:

Unless your heart toward the sheep is like that of a mother toward her children—a mother, who walks through fire to save her children—you will not be fit to be a preacher."¹

Now it is important for the pastor to understand that the love spoken of here is not just emotional fluff or warm feelings but true, substantive love. As noted, Luther equates the love a pastor should have for his people with that of the love of a mother for her children. A good Christian mother loves her children in a giving, sacrificial way, doing what is good and necessary for them, even if that means disciplining them and loving them with what is termed "tough love." So too, the good pastor will love his people in a giving and sacrificial way, being available to them as a shepherd to his flock, serving them in a faithful and true manner. He will bring them the Word of God, both Law and Gospel, ministering to them with that precious Word. By doing

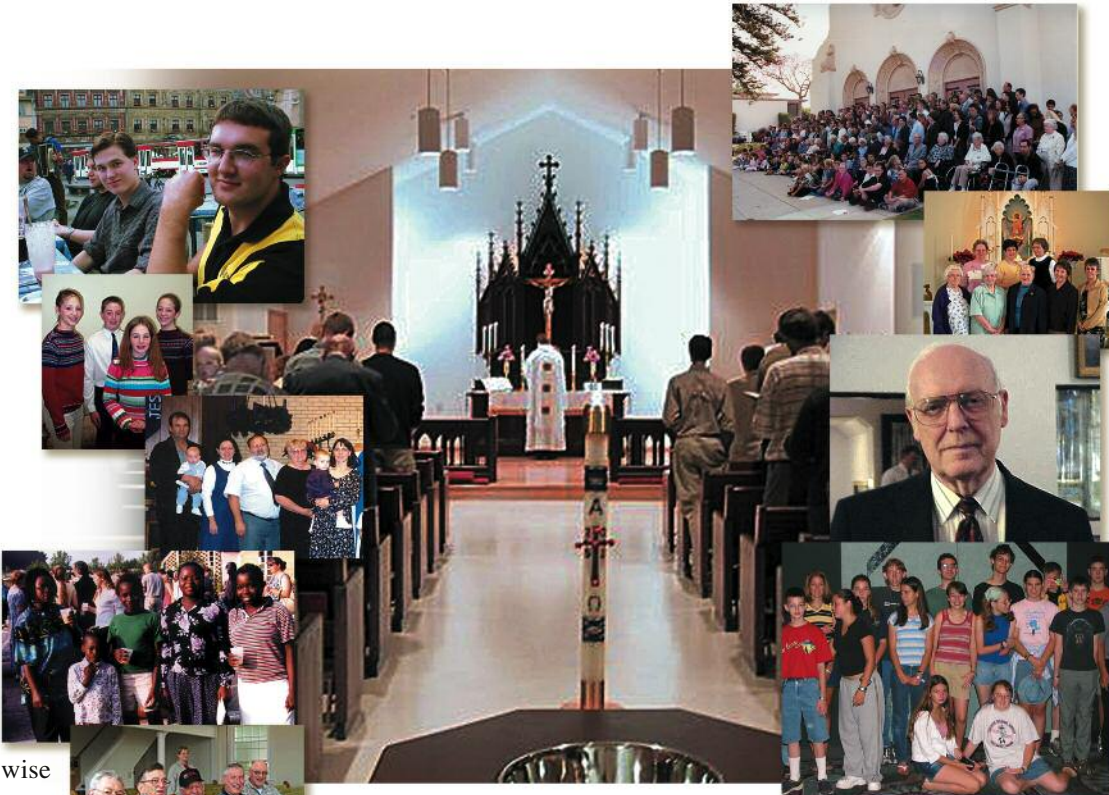
that he will be faithful to his call as a servant of Christ and of the congregation, and will truly love and care for them with the love of Christ. It is God's love for him in Christ that motivates and enables the pastor to love the people of the congregation, and it is the love of God in Christ that he brings to the people as he faithfully preaches and teaches the Word of God and administers the Sacraments.



Luther equates the love a pastor should have for his people with that of the love of a mother for her children. A good Christian mother loves her children in a giving, sacrificial way, doing what is good and necessary for them, even if that means disciplining them and loving them with what is termed "tough love." So too, the good pastor will love his people in a giving and sacrificial way, being available to them as a shepherd to his flock, serving them in a faithful and true manner.

The congregation on its part has the obligation to receive their pastor as God's man, sent to them by God through their call to be their shepherd. They can and should see him as their servant, but first and foremost as the servant of Christ, a servant of the Word. He is not the employee of the parish, nor a hired man, who is to serve them just as the congregation, from a human perspective, wants him to. Rather he is accountable to them as the servant of Christ, and is responsible to God for his work among them. They need to expect that he should, and indeed must, be faithful to his call, faithful to the Word, faithful to his ordination vows, and faithful to the Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ.

In this regard, Luther writes to congregations, "You are not lords over preachers and the ministry; you have not established the office. God's Son alone has done so. Nor have you contributed anything to it. You have far less right to it than the devil to the kingdom of heaven. You should not lord it over the ministry or give it directions. Nor should you keep it from rebuking."²



So the wise Christian congregation receives the pastor as God's man, and expects him faithfully to preach and teach the Word of God, to lead and guide them with the Word of God, to counsel and advise them with the Word of God, and in general feed the flock with the Word of God. St. Paul advised Timothy to "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction,"³ and that is what the congregation should expect, and even demand, from their pastor.

Then, as the pastor loves and cares for the congregation by faithfully serving them with God's Word and administering the Sacraments according to the Lord's institution, and as the congregation receives the pastor's ministry as from the Lord, God will bless the pastor and parish. Problems may come about in the relationship between the pastor and people, but because both pastor and people have their focus on Christ and are committed to each other in Him, the problems are worked through in a successful and God-pleasing way, and the mission and ministry in that place is blessed.

On February 14 of 1546, Martin Luther, in the last sermon he preached, spoke about the relationship that should exist between the pastor and a congregation. He said, "True preachers must carefully and faithfully teach only God's Word and must seek its honor and praise alone. In like manner, the hearers must say:

The wise Christian congregation receives the pastor as God's man, and expects him faithfully to preach and teach the Word of God, to lead and guide them with the Word of God, to counsel and advise them with the Word of God, and in general feed the flock with the Word of God. St. Paul advised Timothy to "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction," and that is what the congregation should expect, and even demand, from their pastor.

'We do not believe in our pastor; but he tells us of another Master, One named Christ. To Him he directs us; what His lips say we shall heed. And we shall heed our pastor insofar as he directs us to this true Master and Teacher, the Son of God.'⁴

In this comment in his last sermon, Luther gives us the formula for beginning and maintaining a good relationship between the people of a congregation and their pastor. The pastor must love his people and sincerely care for them with the Word of God, and the people must receive him as Christ's representative; and so both people and pastor are focused on Christ and following Him. With such a focus, the pastor and the people of a congregation will have a good and positive relationship, internal problems will be dealt with in successful and helpful ways, and the parish will grow in spiritual strength and outreach in Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory!

successful and helpful ways, and the parish will grow in spiritual strength and outreach in Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory!

¹ Martin Luther, *What Luther Says*, Ewald M. Plass, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 932.

² *Ibid.*, p. 926.

³ 2 Timothy 4:2 (NASB).

⁴ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 51. John W. Doberstein, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 388.

The Rev. Dr. Ron Garwood is President of the Wyoming District.