

By Pastor Merv Thompson

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"Grace and peace to you from the God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

For much of the storied history of the Christian church, the role of clergy was clear and unambiguous. Clergy administered the Sacraments and defended the faith. During all of those centuries when the Roman Catholic Church was ubiquitous, the role of the priest was, not surprisingly, to be priestly. That meant administering the Sacraments, (remember there are seven sacraments in Catholicism including marriage, confession and last rites.)

When Martin Luther led the revolution that came to be called the Reformation, clergy took on a quite different role. Clergy were now trained and equipped to lead "Word and Sacrament ministry." In some sense, priestly ministry was somewhat diminished while preaching and teaching of the Word of God were raised up. For instance, in my own seminary education there was infinitely more emphasis given to being a preacher and teacher of the Word than was given to the administration of the Sacraments.

Not much changed in the role of clergy until the modern age. Right after the turbulent period of the 1960's, roles in many areas of life began to change, including the church. Applecart upset was the tenor of the times, so why should the church be excluded? Specifically about 1970 the role of the pastor began to expand from preaching the Word and administering the Sacraments to being highly involved in the delivery of pastoral care. The pastor now became counselor, confidant, chaplain, and spiritual director.

This was reflected both in seminaries and denominations, where clergy were required to enroll in numerous classes in the area of pastoral and spiritual care. In addition, most clergy or clergy-to-be were required to participate in

clinical pastoral education. The ultimate goal for many in leadership in theological education was to prepare "private family chaplains" for parish ministry.

Private family chaplains are pastors who develop an intimacy with members. The role of the pastor is to enter into the private life of individuals and families, to visit in homes, to be present in the hospital rooms, to always be aware of what is happening in their lives. The role of the clergy went from priestly and prophetic to being involved in therapeutic care. The role of clergy in this difficult and evil world was to help people work through their problems, frustrations and challenges. Congregations often looked for the number one gift of their pastor to be that of compassion and pastoral care.

However, the devil is often in the details; this time quite literally. What happened to a large number of private family chaplains is that they began to burn out. Scores of clergy left the ministry for something less encompassing (more than half of the students in Pastor Mike's seminary class have left). Follow-up studies discovered that a pastor really cannot be a private family chaplain to more than 100 or so people at a time. This, of course, is why most congregations in the country average around 100 in worship, which is the optimum number for a pastor to be a private family chaplain.

But the trends have not been good for this emphasis on pastoral care, because statistics show that congregations have been growing larger in the past generation. When a congregation averages 200 or 300 or more in worship on a weekend, it suddenly has outgrown the private family chaplain model. A pastor can no longer be intimate with all of the members, no longer hang

out with all of them, no longer show up at family celebrations and social gatherings. Anyone who tries this over a period of time is in danger of burnout.

When Pastor Mike came to Lutheran of Hope, he had no trouble whatsoever being a private family chaplain to the 15-20 people in worship. Even when it grew to 50 or 75, he was in very good shape. He could easily visit people in their homes, make the hospital visits, have office hours for pastoral counseling and know everyone by name. But when attendance exploded to 500 or 1000 or more, the idea of being a private family chaplain no longer was possible in any way or form.

The strategy which Pastor Mike led was to call additional clergy to the staff, each of whom could take their turn being a private family chaplain. This would be a shared task. For some years the goal was to have a clergy person visit the hospitals every day of the week. That worked for a time, but then the numbers simply overwhelmed all of the pastors, each of whom had a myriad of other responsibilities and ministries.

Finally, one pastor was called to oversee the pastoral care of the congregation, his name was Pastor Pat Quaid. While at the same time that he was asked to be a private family chaplain for part of the week, he also was encouraged to develop new teams of volunteers who could do some of this work. The several clergy on the staff all took turns being a private family chaplain at times, but Pat Quaid primarily was responsible for the administration and delivery of such care.

Pastor Quaid has now announced a new structure for this ministry of pastoral care. Again it is team centered, beginning with a staff team and then extending out to large numbers of volunteers. Let me try and introduce this new team, although a more comprehensive description can be found in the new Winter Catalog, pages 30-36.

Kolette Nelson is the care director for this open door ministry, where anyone can walk in and be

directed to the proper support groups and counseling services. Kolette also directs and leads the lay volunteers who facilitate our support groups. These support communities are not meant to be ends in themselves, but to point people to other resources for healing and renewal, including worship, Alpha, prayer ministry and mission outreach.

Two chaplains are leading the area of spiritual direction and pastoral visitation. Pam Avaux oversees our hospital visitors and those who visit the homebound. Margaret Langpaul coordinates the Hope Care Core (formerly known as Stephen/Care Ministers).

Lisa Davidson continues to oversee the Christ-life program, which seeks to give hope to people who have suffered some kind of loss or crisis in their lives. And then Mike Horstmann, of recent musical fame, will be a new care coordinator providing direct care to people who need encouragement and support.

Pastor Pat also wants to reiterate that the pastors and chaplains at Hope will meet with people for prayer, encouragement, confession and spiritual direction. Those that need more intensive counseling or therapy will be referred to one of the Christian counseling centers in the community.

The challenges to deliver pastoral care in a very large church are often daunting. Someone has said, perhaps with tongue in cheek, perhaps not, that, "The world is making people sick faster than we can make them well." Maybe. But with the growth of the church, the need for pastoral care continues to increase. Thus we hope that by growing and equipping teams of caregivers we will be able to meet the many needs, at least until we must restructure this area again.

Whatever we do, I don't think we will ever ask Pastor Mike to go back to being a private family chaplain.